Dissertation Abstract: *A Relational Theory of Trust*

We use trust to express love and commitment to a romantic partner, to assure a friend that we will act as they expect us to, to build on the knowledge of experts across various subjects, and to pursue the lives we want to live. Trust is thus an attitude of great interpersonal and social significance. Yet, due to the plurality of forms in which it occurs, it is difficult to identify what is shared by all the apparently different attitudes we call trust. At its core, trust allows us to reason and act based on the assertions and actions of others, influenced by their reliability, predictability, and the expectations we hold toward them. But this is not the whole story, because even when things don't go as expected—when a trusted expert's claim proves wrong or when a friend cannot fulfill their commitment due to changing circumstances—the people we trust still have ways to honor our trust that extend beyond explicitly set expectations. On the other hand, "meaning well" is often insufficient, and we maintain clear intuitions about which actions fulfill trust and which constitute violations. Thus, trust appears to target something more general and binding between trustor and trustee than particular expected behaviors or dispositions.

If we cannot reduce trust to particular expected actions, nor to the feelings it elicits, what is it that we trust others with? How is it that we often disagree about the terms of trust and about what constitutes a violation? In my dissertation, I answer these questions by developing a relational theory of trust, arguing that *to trust someone is to rely on them to follow the norms constitutive of our relationship*. This theory stems from the basic insight that *trust doesn't happen in a vacuum, but is grounded in our relationships*, ranging from relationships with family, friends, and other loved ones to colleagues, fellow citizens, or fellow moral agents. Each of these relationships carries its own special norms and expectations. These are defined both socially, by what it means to be a lover, friend, or citizen in our society, and also personalized by the participants. In the context of trust, I argue, these relationship norms provide the attitude with its normative content, and explain how trust may take many forms through the plurality of relationships themselves. This framework grants participants agency in both shaping their relationships and determining appropriate actions within them, illuminating central aspects of trust's phenomenology, including its characteristic second-personal character.

Each chapter of this dissertation focuses on a different puzzle in the literature on trust, demonstrating the advantages of my relational theory. The first, **"Navigating Vagueness: Rule-Following and the Scope of Trust"** (forthcoming, *The Philosophical Quarterly*) focuses on trust in discretionary scenarios—situations where trustees must exercise judgment beyond explicitly defined expectations. I argue that these scenarios reveal an inherent vagueness in trusting relationships that often leads to disagreements between trustors and trustees about the scope of trust. After showing how current action-based and domain-based models fail to address these problems, I propose and defend my relational framework. This solution shifts the object of trust from particular actions to adherence to norms constitutive of relationships, and proposes that disagreements over the enactment of those norms can be resolved through communication and engaged practice.

The second chapter, **"'I Trust You!' Sure, But With What? Understanding Broad Trust,"** examines the phenomenon of broad trust—instances where we trust someone in open-ended ways that seem unconditional yet clearly have implicit terms and limits. Broad trust includes both trust across domains (like trusting your mechanic with car repairs) and general trust (like infant trust or trust in God), contrasted with action-specific trust. I argue that current accounts fail to capture this phenomenon adequately, as they cannot explain how trust can feel unconditional while maintaining clear boundaries. My relational framework resolves this apparent tension by showing that when we say, "I trust you," the "you" implies their participation in the relationship, while the relationship's normative content provides the particular expectations and limits.

The third chapter, **"Breaking Trust: Relocating Disappointment and Betrayal"** (*under review*) challenges the prevalent view that reactive feelings such as betrayal and personal disappointment are inherent to trust. I argue instead that trust is a fully doxastic phenomenon that fundamentally consists in the belief that the trustee will follow the norms constitutive of the relationship. Violations of trust, therefore, directly call only for epistemic reassessment of the trustee's trustworthiness. I demonstrate that reactive feelings are better understood as responses to relationship impairments rather than trust violations. What warrants reactive feelings is not the mere fact of trust being broken, but whether the violation reveals a disregard for the relationship itself. This relocation of reactive attitudes to the relationship sheds light on why some breaches warrant feelings of betrayal while others warrant mere disappointment, depending on how the violation affects the relationship's integrity.