While Trudy Govier’s book, *Dilemmas of Trust*, is directed mostly at the lay reader, it does contain some insights of interest to the academic reader on the nature of trust. Govier contends that trust is pervasive in all facets of the human experience. From trusting ourselves, to trusting various public institutions and professions, we are a society whose collective and individual conduct is based on what we expect others to do. Govier restricts the scope of the discussion in this book to inter-personal relationships. In addition to being a more manageable context for a discussion of trust, this restriction in scope allows her to focus on the primary individual relationships that are usually the most important in people’s lives – namely, relationships of friendship, family, and romance. It should be noted that this book is not about defining or exploring these relationships. Instead Govier assumes standard, if somewhat romanticized, definitions of these relationships and examines the function of trust within their machinations.

Govier begins by making several general and introductory comments about trust which help define and contextualize her discussion. First, trust can be described, on a fundamental level, in terms of both its function (within a relationship or with the self) and its affect (how the person who is trusting feels). Basically, a person who trusts functions with the confidence that an other will generally and in most circumstances act with caring, kindness, loyalty, honesty, and so on. A person who trusts feels comfortable and relaxed, able to open up and feel vulnerable with the person who is trusted. Of course, from this description of trust we can extrapolate the definitions of distrust and being worth of trust. Second, Govier discusses certain trends in the personal and academic treatment of trust. For example, trust tends to be overlooked as a topic, or taken for granted, until or unless it has been misplaced and something goes wrong. Third, and perhaps most interestingly, Govier contends that trust is not pure (and certainly not blind) faith. Trust is established or given based on evidence of trustworthiness, and is revoked with betrayal or evidence of untrustworthiness.

Roughly half the book is spent working through the various relationships (friendship, family, romantic, self) to sketch out the role played by trust. What
is common to all of the relationships discussed by Govier is intimacy. Necessary for intimacy is trust. Intimacy is built on, according to Govier, communication and knowledge. A person has to know herself; that is, listen to her instincts, assess her own character, and communicate this knowledge to an other. A person has to know an other to have a relationship (of any kind) with her. Knowing and communicating personal knowledge is what creates vulnerability and it is through this vulnerability or openness that intimacy is established. Trust – that is, relying on the other person to treat you and your communications of self with care and kindness and to not act so as to use that information to betray you – is what allows one to be vulnerable and open with an other. If you trust an other, you will be able to tell the truth about yourself, without risk of brutal judgement or wicked intentions on the part of the person trusted. Knowing yourself, and trusting yourself are essential to picking out others who are trustworthy. The “evidence” that is used to determine trustworthiness varies from person to person and from situation to situation, but in all cases, knowledge of the person – the whole person and not just isolated incidences – is used as the basis of judgement. In order to trust, one must have – insofar as it is possible – some knowledge of the other’s intentions. If those intentions are good, the person is trustworthy; if those intentions are bad (i.e., harmful to us) then the person is not trustworthy.

While the basic role of trust in relationships is clear (establishing intimacy), it manifests itself slightly differently corresponding to those characteristics which define the relationships themselves. For example, part of what characterizes a friendship as opposed to a familial relationship is that friendships are chosen relationships and familial relationships are not. In a chosen relationship there is less of an assumption of trust. We tend to think that we ought to have a high degree of prima facie trust in members of our family. Consequently, betrayal of a familial relationship can be much more devastating than other forms of betrayal. To use another example, one of the main differences between a friendship relationship and a romantic relationship is that the latter usually involve a higher level of intimacy (both mental and physical) which of course, requires a special kind of vulnerability and trust. So while trust is important and fundamental in all relationships, the role of trust, or the nature of how trust becomes established, can vary depending on the kind of relationship in question.

Another important variable in the role trust plays in various relationships concerns the degree of trust initially granted, and the degree of trust ultimately established. As mentioned above, we approach different people with different degrees of prima facie trust. Family members usually get the highest degree, friends, pals, co-workers, and acquaintances (in descending order) come next, with strangers coming in at the lowest end of the scale. Notice however, that
Govier is advocating some measure of *prima facie* trust even to strangers. The role that the relationship plays in one's life usually identifies the level of trust to be established. For example, co-workers do not need to be depended upon to help one deal with a personal crisis, but they do have to be trusted to competently complete their portion of a business project. The level of trust established correlates with the level of harm caused by a possible betrayal.

Perhaps the most interesting section of the book deals with this issue of betrayal and its aftermath. Govier discusses at length the notions of forgiveness and re-establishing trust. According to Govier, forgiveness and regaining trust are usually positive things for a person who has been betrayed. If the betrayer has shown remorse and has indicated regret and a willingness to guard against future betrayal, it seems that it is in the best interest of the person betrayed (in terms of closure, and re-establishing the self) to forgive. Govier does discuss what might constitute the unforgivable, but in the end seems to think that, if for no other reason than peace of mind and closure, forgiveness is usually the best choice for a person betrayed. It is at this point that she draws a line between forgiveness and re-establishing trust/relationship. It is one thing to forgive a betrayal, but it may be another thing to re-enter a relationship with someone who is, say, abusive. How exactly we are to draw this line, or what it might mean to forgive but sever a relationship, are issues not pointedly discussed.

If there is a weakness to be found it is in the tone of the book which is, in places, preachy. Descriptions instead of arguments are often offered, even though conclusions are reached, and advice is given. A rather floral picture of inter-personal relationships is drawn, even while topics such as betrayal, abuse, and violence are discussed. To be fair, however, the book is not intended to be a scholarly-type thesis on trust.

The strengths of the book are its accessibility and readability. Govier approaches her discussion of the importance of trust from a real-world perspective and speaks informatively to the reader, whether the reader has a philosophical background or not. The book is more than interesting; it gently encourages one to examine one's own relationships – the successful and the failed alike.

While probably not appropriate as a primary text, this book would make excellent supplementary reading in a graduate level course. Additionally, anyone – academic or not – interested in inter-personal trust would thoroughly enjoy this book.

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