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Guido Möllering

Inviting or Avoiding Deception through Trust?

Conceptual Exploration of an Ambivalent Relationship

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for the Study of Societies

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Guido Möllering is a researcher at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies.

moellering@mpifg.de

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Max-Planck-Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung
Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies
Paulstr. 3 | 50676 Cologne | Germany

Tel. +49 221 2767-0
Fax +49 221 2767-555

www.mpifg.de
info@mpifg.de

Abstract

The paper explores conceptually the relationship between trust and deception. The author advances five main propositions, which concern deceptive signals of trustworthiness, the suspension of uncertainty in trust, the moral implications of trusting and deceiving, the trustor's self-deception, and the reversibility of trust. The overall conclusion is that trust and deception both enable and prevent one another and that this ambivalent relationship is due to the leaps and lapses of faith that characterize trust and distrust. Beyond implications for further research on trust and deception, the trust–deception ambivalence is practically relevant for making better sense of cases of deception in private and public life against the background of trust relationships that enable, prevent, require, and prohibit deception – all at the same time.

Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag erörtert konzeptionell das Verhältnis zwischen Vertrauen und Täuschung. Der Autor schlägt fünf allgemeine Thesen zu täuschenden Signalen der Vertrauenswürdigkeit, dem Aufheben von Ungewissheit im Vertrauen, den moralischen Implikationen von Vertrauen und Täuschen, der Selbsttäuschung im Vertrauen und der Reversibilität von Vertrauen vor. Die allgemeine Schlussfolgerung lautet, dass Vertrauen und Täuschung sich gegenseitig sowohl ermöglichen als auch verhindern und dass diese ambivalente Beziehung auf dem für Vertrauen und Misstrauen charakteristischen Schenken und Entziehen von Glauben beruht. Die Ambivalenz zwischen Vertrauen und Täuschung ist nicht nur für die weitere Forschung von Belang, sondern sie ist auch praktisch relevant, um Fälle von Täuschung im privaten wie im öffentlichen Leben besser verstehen zu können, indem man sie vor dem Hintergrund von Vertrauensbeziehungen betrachtet, welche Täuschung – gleichzeitig – ermöglichen, verhindern, erfordern und verbieten.

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Introduction

Deception is always topical and interesting, touching on very basic social foundations, temptations, and emotions. In times when phrases like "weapons of mass deception" (Rampton/Stauber 2003; see also O'Shaughnessy 2004) evoke cynicism and anger around the world, we may easily believe that contemporary politicians, journalists, managers, scientists, lovers, and others are particularly deceptive, but the prevalence of deception is hard to compare historically in empirical terms. We do not know if we are deceived more frequently or extensively than before. Arguably, the occurrence of deception as such is mostly less noteworthy than the meaning and implications of specific cases.

We only need to look around us to identify the most recent incidents of deception, but some cases from antiquity are at least as exciting: for example, Zeus, who was both deceived and seduced by Hera, his own wife in disguise. This example from Greek mythology and countless other stories of sexual masquerades and amorous identity games over the centuries (see, for example, Doniger 1996) bring out basic questions about the skills and, more importantly, the motives of both the deceiver and the deceived. How is deception achieved? How can it be recognized? Why is it committed? And why is it uncovered or, rather, not? Deception can occur for better or worse, knowingly or unknowingly, with relief or with regret. Whether it is seen as harmless or disastrous, commendable or outrageous depends on the relationship between the deceiver and the deceived, the nature of their mutual trust, and their place in society. Anyhow, it is a key characteristic of human agency and vulnerability that one can mislead the other.

Before engaging in a more detached conceptual analysis, it is important to note that deception involves some of the strongest experiences in social life for the deceiver, the deceived, and their social networks, too. For example, Werth and Flaherty (1986) describe vividly the emotional turmoil that is common for all parties involved in cases of infidelity. Generally, every case of suspected or detected deception goes beyond the deception itself. It "may be a threat to the whole relationship" (Goffman 1959: 71) between the deceiver and the deceived, and it may cast doubt on their mutual obligations and membership of the same community within a society. Once deception is present in any

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way, trust is usually disturbed and trustworthiness is reconsidered, too, when the act of deception is seen as a betrayal of the trustor's positive expectations and willingness to be vulnerable.

Yet surprisingly, there has been very little systematic research on the relationship between trust and deception (Robinson/Dirks/Ozcelik 2004).[1] About a hundred years ago, Simmel (1950[1908]: 313) pointed out that "modern life is based to a much larger extent than is usually realized upon the faith in the honesty of the other" and that, under modern conditions, the lie becomes particularly devastating as "something which questions the very foundations of our life." Later on, Goffman (1959) noted that trust makes us prone to being duped and misled, but these classic sources contain remarks that, in the end, are just as casual as those of recent authors such as Hamlin (2005: 219) who states that "[t]he issue of trust and honesty may be seen as strongly (inversely) related to the issue of deception," but who does not explore the relationship between trust and deception in any detail. Therefore, it is the aim of this paper to propose fundamental connections between the two concepts, bringing together key ideas from the enormous literature on trust and the less extensive but equally diverse literature on deception.

Looking at trust and deception, it appears intuitively that the former is "good" and the latter is "bad."[2] This intuition matches the primary moral connotations of trust and deception, but we have to be careful and distinguish between acts, intentions, and outcomes. The normative content lies mainly in the intentions and outcomes, while acts of trusting (accepting evidence) and deceiving (faking evidence) per se are relatively neutral operations. It is possible that deception is socially desirable, a recognized skill, well intentioned or even an entertaining pleasure (Goffman 1959; Vasek 1986; Chandler/Afifi 1996; Hollander 1996; Ryan 1996; Croson 2005; Dumouchel 2005; Shulman 2007). And if there is a bright side to deception, there is also a dark side to trust (McAllister 1997). Gambetta (1988), for example, asks whether we can trust trust, and many others point to the potentially negative motives and consequences of trust (Langfred 2004; Gargiulo/Ertuk 2006). Moreover, the first normative impressions start to blur when we ask how trust and deception influence each other. Consider, for example, Ekman (1996: 806), who notes: "Trust makes one vulnerable to being misled, as usual levels of wariness are reduced and the benefit of the doubt is routinely given." Clearly, this should make trust just as suspicious as deception. Hence, the positive bias of trust and the negative bias of deception are really just biases, and the attributes "harmful" and "beneficial" can be attached to both trust and deception. This is why it is interesting to analyze the relationship between the two concepts and to ask how far trust and decep-

1 The work reported in Castelfranchi and Tan (2001) is an exception, but it is limited due to its focus on "virtual societies", which the authors define broadly as including any computer-based form of networked communication from multi-agent systems with artificial agents to online communities connecting real human actors.

2 In her seminal book on lying, Bok (1978), for example, argues strongly that lying is morally wrong; Hamlin (2005) remarks that deception is considered a "bad" thing in itself; and Hosmer (1995) presents trust as a desirable ethical bond.

tion enable or prevent each other. Is deception invited or avoided through trust? Is trust destroyed by deception or is there an element of deception in all trust?

The following considerations are intended to explore the characteristics of the relationship between trust and deception in more detail.[3] After outlining some conceptual foundations, I first discuss how trustors can be deceived about the trustworthiness of others. I then argue that trust always involves a leap of faith, which increases the opportunities for the trustee to deceive the trustor. However, because this leap implies moral obligations, trust may reduce the threat of deception by the trustee. I then turn to the trustor and discuss the *self*-deception involved in all forms of trusting which, as I note subsequently, does not mean that trust is irreversible or unconditional. I conclude the paper by summarizing my main points and highlighting the implications for further conceptual and empirical research. The overall picture points to an ambivalent relationship between trust and deception: they simultaneously enable and prevent each other.

Conceptual foundations

In order to explore the relationship between trust and deception fruitfully, it is necessary to lay down some conceptual foundations. If we look at trust first, Rousseau and her colleagues (1998: 395) offer a widely supported definition of trust as "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another." From this we can already derive that trust is essentially the state of expectation of a trustor, and it must not be confounded with the bases from which it is reached (antecedents), nor with the trusting actions (enactments) resulting from trustful expectations (Hardin 2001). Manifestations of trust are any empirical incidents in which this state of expectation is reached, irrespective of whether the trustor is conscious of this or whether it is directly observable by others in any way.

The carrier of trust is the actor as an entity that can have expectations and refer to them in action (Bachmann 1998). The trustor expects favorable intentions and actions on the part of the object of trust – another actor referred to as the trustee (Baier 1986; Gambetta 1988).[4] In short, we need to be able to identify trustors and trustees in order to speak of trust.

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3 The perspective adopted is mainly that of trust research, but with the aim of a balanced analysis with implications for further research on deception as well as trust.

4 Going beyond Rousseau et al.'s (1998) strictly psychological definition, it is not only individual persons but also collective or even nonhuman entities that could be classified as trusting or trusted actors as long as it is possible to ascribe expectations and actions to them meaningfully (Nooteboom 2002).

The general problem of trust arises due to the principal vulnerability and uncertainty of the trustor toward the trustee (Luhmann 1979; Rousseau et al. 1998). The trustee can harm the trustor, who cannot be absolutely sure whether this will happen, but who can be aware of and influence the extent to which s/he is vulnerable to harm (Luhmann 1979; Dasgupta 1988; Gambetta 1988). The actions of the trustor and the trustee are therefore interdependent.

Moreover, the social vulnerability and uncertainty underlying the problem of trust reflect the agency of both trustor and trustee, who are autonomous in that their states of mind and actions are not fully determined. Neither trust as a state of mind nor genuinely trustworthy behavior can ultimately be forced or guaranteed (Gambetta 1988; Bachmann 1998). Trustors and trustees have a choice. If they had not, we would not need the concept of trust. Hence, trust is indeed "risky" (Luhmann 1979: 24) in the general sense of the word, but it is irreducible to calculation.[5] Therefore, as I discuss below, it is more than a probabilistic investment decision under risk.

It is also important to note exactly how vulnerability is understood in the context of trust. Vulnerability is a precondition for trust: that is, the trustor can always be harmed in principle, but in reaching a state of trust, the trustor no longer expects to be harmed. The definition of trust by Rousseau et al. (1998) is sometimes misunderstood in this respect, as is the following definition by Mayer and his colleagues (1995: 712), who propose that trust is "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the action of another party based on an expectation that the other party will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party." The "intention to accept vulnerability" (Rousseau et al. 1998) and the "willingness to be vulnerable" (Mayer/Davis/Schoorman 1995) should not to be understood as the "willingness to be hurt," but as highly optimistic expectations that vulnerability is not a problem and no harm will be done. Trust is not about avoiding or eliminating vulnerability, or resigning to it, but about positively accepting it.

Often, trusting and being trustworthy are not so much conscious decisions, but rather a matter of taken-for-grantedness and routine (Möllering 2006). Building on Schütz's (1967[1932]: 98) concept of "natural attitude," authors such as Garfinkel (1963) and Zucker (1986) point out that in many contexts it is normal to trust in the sense of relying on others to respect the rules and play their roles. It is only when actors deviate from this normality that trust – or rather distrust – becomes an explicit issue. Vulnerability is always present, though, and it depends on the circumstances whether actors will tend to trust routinely or whether they will take it for granted that others generally cannot be trusted.

5 Note that uncertainty is used here in the sense introduced by Knight (1971[1921]), who distinguished between "risk-as-randomness," in which the probabilities of alternative outcomes can be assigned, and "risk-as-uncertainty," in which neither the alternatives nor the probabilities are known by the actor.

It follows that it is also important to recognize that the trustor and the trustee are embedded in a social context which influences how they can define themselves as actors and enact their agency (Meyer/Jepperson 2000). Networks of social relationships (Granovetter 1985) and institutionalized rules (Berger/Luckmann 1966) are particularly important in setting the context for trust. Trust is in practice never a purely dyadic phenomenon between isolated actors; there is always a context, a history, and the influence of other actors.

In sum, without actors, expectations, vulnerability, uncertainty, agency, and social embeddedness, the problem of trust does not arise. I will discuss in later sections how this problem is dealt with when it arises. Overall, I will use the following definition: "trust is an ongoing process of building on reason, routine, and reflexivity, suspending irreducible social vulnerability and uncertainty *as if* they were favorably resolved, and maintaining thereby a state of favorable expectation toward the actions and intentions of more or less specific others" (Möllering 2006: 111, emphasis in the original). In comparison to other works on trust, this definition emphasizes that trust is not static and that it requires leaps of faith.

The notion of deception certainly warrants a detailed discussion in itself (see, for example, Mitchell 1986; Shulman 2007). For the purposes of this paper I propose to apply the same conditions to the concept of deception that I have outlined for the notion of trust above: there have to be at least two actors (Chandler/Afifi 1996), one of whom can deceive the other and both of whom play their part in whether deception occurs. Deception also requires standards of truth and honesty from which a deceiver deviates. This deviation has to make a difference; it must have the potential to cause (or prevent) damage to a vulnerable other. The precondition of uncertainty – especially in the sense of asymmetric information – enters the picture because deception would not be an issue if all actors possessed the same knowledge and were able to know with certainty who will (try to) deceive whom, when, where, and how. Moreover, actors have to have a choice as to whether they deceive the other party in a dyadic relationship, as well as whether to trust the other party or suspect deception. Finally, it is hard to imagine deception in a context-free environment: the context (such as institutions and networks) will always have an influence on the meaning and form of deception and its consequences. At a minimum, the deceiver's reputation may be at stake, and this is a concern that actors take into account.

I define deception as the deliberate misrepresentation of an actor's identity, intentions, or behaviors, as well as the distortion of any facts relevant to the relationship between actors. This captures the gist of other definitions, but with less emphasis on the element of opportunism and guile, because the deceiver's motives may well be laudable. Focusing on the act of deception, not its motives and consequences, Axelrod (1979: 391), for example, refers to deception as "deliberate attempts to mislead" (see also DePaulo et al. 2003). Dictionaries state that deceiving means misleading, and it is commonly assumed that deception is intentional and not just accidental. Ekman (2001[1985]: 41) adds that

deception, in contrast to obvious irony or parody, involves misleading others "without giving any notification of the intent to do so." Hence, the deceived is not simply given wrong information, but also "kept deceived about the private opinion of the *liar*," who knows the correct information (Simmel 1950[1908]: 312, emphasis in the original). Rizvi (2005: 26) sees deception in a somewhat more competitive light as "an attempt to gain the upper hand," and Dumouchel (2005: 56) observes more normatively that deception moves the deceived "to act in ways that contradict their best interests." Similarly, Hamlin's comprehensive definition (2005: 205) stipulates that "deception occurs whenever an individual deliberately uses or reveals false information, or omits using or revealing true information," adding that this implies "an attempt to influence beliefs or behavior to the advantage of the deceiver." Whatever definition is applied, the act of misleading should not be confounded with its intentions and consequences.

The conceptual foundations of deception presented here build on and relate back to three main streams of deception research.[6] First, psychological work on deception works with similar conceptualizations and devotes most of its efforts to measuring the frequency and typology of lies and to understanding how deception can be performed and detected, paying particular attention to the verbal and non-verbal tricks and clues of deception (see, for example, Mitchell 1996; Ekman 2001[1985]; DePaulo et al. 2003). Second, deception has been studied in economics, especially from game-theoretical perspectives, where the focus of inquiry is on whether deception pays off and which structural conditions promote or deter deception (see, for example, Akerlof 1970; Axelrod 1979; Gerschlager 2005). Third, in social psychology and sociology, many classic authors such as Simmel have been concerned with the problem of lying, as noted above, often in close correspondence with moral philosophy (Bok 1978). Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective gives an unusual view of "misrepresentations" in that he demonstrates that people always present but a part of themselves, that they have to manage the impressions they give, and that in most encounters the issue is not so much about what is true or false, but more about what is appropriate and acceptable role behavior. This view is still very topical as can be seen, for example, in Shulman's (2007) recent work on the role of deception in the workplace. I will draw on the diverse prior literature on deception again in the next sections.[7]

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6 Deception is also a topic in the deeply philosophical literature on epistemology, with questions revolving around the concepts of truth and self, which can only be hinted at in this paper in passing (see, for example, Haight 1980; Elster 1986). The concept of deception rests on the modern notion that there are selves who can know to some extent what is true or false, but who can still be misled, because they cannot have perfect knowledge.

7 My definitions of trust and deception reflect that I am interested in social relationships, and the definitions may therefore be either broader or narrower than definitions used outside of the social sciences. For example, whether it makes sense to speak of trust and deception in relation to animals and very young children partly depends on whether we believe that animals and very young children are able to have social relationships and refer to their own and others' interests and intentions (see, for example, Mitchell 1996; Vasek 1986; Chandler/Afifi 1996).

Signals and other (deceptive) bases of trust

Although key properties of trust cannot be fully accounted for in rational choice terms, it is a useful starting point for trust research generally – and for this exploration of trust and deception in particular – to consider the problem from the focal point of rational choice approaches to trust: How can the trustor recognize a trustworthy trustee? Conversely, how can the trustor identify an untrustworthy trustee and, more dramatically, avoid a trustee who only pretends to be trustworthy and wants to deceive the trustor?

The most straightforward rational choice answer to this question is that a trustee is trustworthy when it is not in his/her interest to be untrustworthy toward the trustor. In other words, trustworthiness depends on the payoffs in a given trust game. This implies that, if necessary, a trustee can be *made* trustworthy by modifying the payoffs, ideally in such a way that, by exploiting trust, the trustee will harm himself/herself (Hardin 2001). Similarly, the incentives for deception decrease severely when actors share goals, such as increased efficiency from coordination (Croson 2005). However, this approach hinges on the trustor's ability to estimate net payoffs reliably, which makes this a dubious heuristic in reality (Kee/Knox 1970). Trustors can be deceived by trustees and other parties about the true payoff structure of the game, which exacerbates the danger of trusting on the basis of this kind of analysis.

Nevertheless, this approach is very much mainstream, and it is refined further by introducing a probabilistic element, whereby it is assumed that a trustee is sometimes trustworthy and sometimes untrustworthy or, more precisely, that a certain number of trustees in a given population are trustworthy while the rest are untrustworthy (Dasgupta 1988; Coleman 1990). If the probability of meeting either type is known, the trustor can apply it to the payoff structure of a given trust game and determine whether trusting has a positive expected value or not. As much as this approach with its numerous further refinements has to offer, it cannot resolve the problems of (self-)deception in the generation of reliable estimates for payoffs, probabilities, and other assumptions.

The same applies to the literature that looks for indicators of trustworthiness that are not primarily a matter of payoff and probability in a particular situation, but capture relatively stable characteristics of a trustee. The trust literature features a number of such indicators of trustworthiness. To some extent they are derived empirically, as in the studies by Henslin (1968) or Gambetta and Hamill (2005), both of which describe, based on ethnographic fieldwork, the various criteria that taxi drivers use in order to discriminate between trustworthy and untrustworthy passengers. In a more abstract model, Mayer et al. (1995) propose ability, benevolence, and integrity as the main indicators of trustworthiness. Despite some variation on the labels, definitions, and operationalizations, such indicators are widely accepted and used in trust research to explain why people trust.

The indicators may be commonsensical, but so is the possibility that – due to asymmetric information – they may be misinterpreted by the trustor or deliberately faked by the trustee (Akerlof 1970; Axelrod 1979). This is where signaling theory (Spence 1974) comes in and, according to Bacharach and Gambetta (2001: 159), only those signals of trustworthiness are reliable that would be too costly for an inherently untrustworthy trustee to fake: "No poisoner seeks to demonstrate his honesty by drinking from the poisoned chalice." Specifically, while Dasgupta (1988) has argued that an inherently untrustworthy trustee has an even bigger incentive to send (fake) signals of trustworthiness than the inherently trustworthy trustee – which means that the signals are actually useless per se – Bacharach and Gambetta (2001) point out that it may take substantially more effort to mimic a signal than to send it naturally. The greater this difference is, the more reliable the signal is but, in line with Dasgupta, it still holds that the bigger the payoff from deceiving a trustor, the more likely it is that an untrustworthy trustee will incur the costs of mimicking the signal.[8]

However, research also shows that actors are "poor deception-detectors and yet are overconfident of their abilities to detect deception" (Croson 2005: 113; see also Ekman 1996). This introduces the additional complication that, beyond the question of which signals of trustworthiness are reliable, actors should also pay attention to signals of deceit. Theoretical and practical work on deception detection identifies, for example, physical, behavioral, and logical patterns that can indicate deception.[9] Specialist literature in this area discusses, for example, how human resource managers can train themselves to be more alert to a candidate's deception in selection processes and how they can organize these processes to reduce the risk of falling for a cheat (Walley/Smith 1998). Ultimately, though, this creates further signaling games – this time about masking signals of deception – which a deceiver will be willing to play if the incentives are attractive. And somewhat ironically, according to Shulman (2007), the new hires then become liars in the workplace anyway, because organizational reality encourages, requires, or even forces them to use deception.

Hence, although signaling theory introduces the notion that deception may be costly – which is an important insight – it boils down to estimates of net payoffs and probabilities that are hard to ascertain in practice due to limitations on the trustor's part and the semiotic chaos and ambiguity in most real-life situations. As Frank (2007) puts it, there is no "Pinocchio response" in the sense of a single, unambiguous clue to deception.

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8 Goffman (1959: 73) notes, however, that "while the performance offered by impostors and liars is quite flagrantly false and differs in this respect from ordinary performances, both are similar in the care their performers must exert in order to maintain the impression that is fostered." In other words, even genuinely honest people must make sure that they are being seen as honest and not mistaken for liars.

9 These patterns can be observed more or less reliably using lie detectors, standardized tests, or perceptive observation; about which see the classic book by Ekman (2001[1985]) and the meta-analysis by DePaulo et al. (2003).

However, the core problem with research that looks for reliable bases of trust is not simply that this quest is futile, but, more seriously, that it misses the point that trust occurs when the trustor makes a leap of faith, takes the trustworthiness of others for granted, and does not keep on looking for evidence and safeguards. In other words, when we talk about trust bases, we are still in the realm of decisions under risk, subsuming the risk of deception, but we are not yet considering the essence of trust, which sets trust apart from mere risk assessment. In exploring the relationship between trust and deception, it is less interesting to analyze how trustors can be (or can avoid being) deceived about bases for their trust than it is to discuss how trust in itself both increases and decreases the threat of deception, and how trust and deception both enable and destroy each other.

The leap of faith: Suspension of doubt and suspicion

Simmel (1990[1907]) does not regard mere weak inductive knowledge – that is, inferences from prior observations – as proper trust (see also Möllering 2001). Trust goes beyond simply predicting that the future will be like the past, because the conviction that the future can be known has to be produced as well. Simmel recognizes that within trust there is a "further element of socio-psychological quasi-religious faith" (179). In the same source, Simmel expresses that he finds this element "hard to describe" and thinks of it as "a state of mind which has nothing to do with knowledge, which is both less and more than knowledge."[10]

In another source, interestingly right after a short discussion of lying, Simmel (1950 [1908]: 318) describes trust as "an antecedent or subsequent form of knowledge" that is "intermediate between knowledge and ignorance about a man." Complete knowledge or ignorance would eliminate the need for or possibility of trust. Accordingly, trust combines weak inductive knowledge with some mysterious, unaccountable faith: "On the other hand, even in the social forms of confidence, no matter how exactly and intellectually grounded they may appear to be, there may yet be some additional affective, even mystical, 'faith' of man in man." Giddens (1990) recognizes that Simmel believes trust differs from weak inductive knowledge and he strongly supports the view that trust "presumes a leap to commitment, a quality of 'faith' which is irreducible" (Giddens 1991).

The leap of faith connotes agency without suggesting perfect control or certainty. I introduce the term "suspension" (Möllering 2001: 414) to capture the underlying process that enables actors to deal with irreducible uncertainty and vulnerability. First, to say

10 Simmel (1990[1907]: 179) expresses this element of faith as "the feeling that there exists between our idea of a being and the being itself a definite connection and unity, a certain consistency in our conception of it, an assurance and lack of resistance in the surrender of the Ego to this conception, which may rest upon particular reasons, but is not explained by them."

that trust involves the suspension of uncertainty and vulnerability implies an "as if" attitude on the part of the trustor. Trusting involves "a movement toward *indifference*: by introducing trust, certain possibilities of development can be excluded from consideration. Certain dangers which cannot be removed but which should not disrupt action are neutralized" (Luhmann 1979: 25, emphasis in the original). However – and this is perhaps the most important point to note since it is easily misunderstood – suspension in the true Hegelian sense of *Aufheben* means that vulnerability, doubt, and uncertainty are not eliminated. Rather, following Hegel (1973[1807]: 94), "*Aufheben*" captures the dialectical principle of synthesis transcending thesis and antithesis, thereby simultaneously preserving and rescinding them. Hence, when actors achieve suspension for trust, they treat uncertainty and vulnerability as unproblematic, even if it could still turn out that they are problematic. Leaps of faith enable trust to take place, but this does not rule out lapses of faith later on.

For the discussion about deception, this has the following implications. First, we might say that someone who begins to trust stops worrying about deception (and other things that would jeopardize positive expectations). For example, when people use digital media and communicate using technologically mediated messages, they can frequently reach a point where their wariness about deception leads to paralysis and certainly not to the desired in-person date or to further digital exchanges. Only when they trust *beyond* the potentially false information on their screen are they able to interact – for better or worse. More clearly, people who still worry about deception are not really trusting, because they have not achieved suspension yet. They may be willing to take a risk and cooperate nevertheless, but they do not really trust.

Second, when trust is reached and the danger of deception is suspended, this actually opens the door to deception. In Goffman's (1959: 65) terms, when an audience accepts cues on faith, "this sign-accepting tendency puts the audience in a position to be duped and misled." In a theater this is the basis of much entertainment, but in real-life "performances" it is more of a threat. Granovetter (1985) also notes that placing trust creates an enhanced opportunity for malfeasance on the part of the trustee. The trustee could deceive the trustor and display trust-honoring behavior while actually exploiting the trust behind the trustor's back. The trustor, having positive, trusting expectations, would not monitor the trustee to the same extent as a distrusting actor would. Again, we can imagine very well how information given truthfully and trustfully can be abused by a recipient or, in return, how deliberately incorrect information can mislead a trusting recipient for better or worse.

Jones (1996: 4) conceptualizes trust "in terms of a distinctive, and affectively loaded, way of seeing the one trusted" and what I call suspension matches the special twist of her definition whereby positive feelings – or, generally, firm positive expectations – become an interpretative lens that interferes with the trustor's assessment of the other's trustworthiness: "The harms they might cause through failure of goodwill are not in view because the possibility that their will is other than good is not in view" (12). More-

over, inasmuch as trust means a willingness to be vulnerable, the trustor may even fuel his/her vulnerability, and thus the incentives for deception and the potential damage (or good) that could be done increase, too. Overall, when actors trust they accept the possibility of being deceived and the impossibility of completely avoiding deception and its desirable or harmful outcomes.

Acceptance does not mean denial or capitulation, nor does it rule out that trust is withdrawn later on when positive expectations are disappointed. However, trust does not anticipate deception, which is why the trustee is able to carry it out unnoticed by the trustor. To make matters worse, one act of unnoticed deception often triggers further such acts and possibly an escalation of deception, because the deceiver wants to conceal the initial deception and/or has self-reinforcing incentives to exploit the situation further and further (Fleming/Zyglidopoulos 2006).[11]

Overall, if trust opens the door to potentially harmful deception, this makes trust appear foolish and dangerous. Should we not be very careful whom we trust and perhaps prefer to cooperate without trust (Cook/Hardin/Levi 2005)? Following Walley and Smith's (1998) advice, we should be more alert and informed, arming ourselves with techniques and technologies that discourage and detect deception. However, this kind of thinking misses the crucial point that it is the leap of faith in trust which enables positive social interaction with great potential benefits to take place instead of falling into a paralyzing paranoia of opportunism. Trustors are, by definition, vulnerable to deception, but could not this also be the root of a norm of special protection for trustors? If trust as the willingness to be vulnerable is desirable, should not those who trust and make themselves vulnerable enjoy the social support of others in the same way that children are saved from harm? Should not malevolently deceiving someone who trusted be punished much more severely than deceiving someone who distrusted or merely gambled? If this logic is accepted, then conveying trust could actually reduce the threat of harmful deception.

Trust's compulsory power against harmful deception

While the above considerations have been mainly analytical, the moral connotations of trust and deception can hardly be ignored (Bok 1978; Hosmer 1995). Simmel (1950[1908]: 348) attributes an "almost compulsory power" to trust and claims that "to betray it requires thoroughly positive meanness." Interestingly, Simmel makes these statements in the context of an analysis of secret societies, which are particularly reliant

11 Well-intentioned deception can spiral out of control, too, as in the German movie "Good Bye Lenin!" where the East German character Alex has a hard time, a few months after the fall of the Berlin Wall, pretending to his sick mother (a devoted socialist) that nothing has changed in the German Democratic Republic.

on trust among their members – and which may resort to drastic, immoral sanctions when this trust is broken. But we do not need to consider mafia practices in order to appreciate that betrayals of trust can cause damage – and outrage – beyond the ordinary losses of resources and opportunities. In the trust literature, addressing Simmel's basic concerns even if not always citing him, authors such as Uslaner (2002) present trust as a moral value within societies. This perspective raises obvious questions about how strong the moral value of trust is in different social circles at different times and in different places. The moral power of trust is also limited by the somewhat tautological requirement that trust must not be given blindly or lightly.[12] Moreover, there are many grey areas where it is difficult to establish if deception has actually occurred and if moral consequences should follow. Nevertheless, within limits, those who make themselves more vulnerable by trusting might also expect a higher level of protection and those who deceive might expect more severe punishment because (and as long as) trust is seen as a public good protected by moral norms within a given community (see, for example, the experiment by Brandts/Charness 2003).

With specific reference to deception, we can therefore recognize the possibility that trust opens the door to deception, but, inasmuch as deception implies the harmful betrayal of trust, the door is not just open but has a highly visible "Friends only!" sign above it. This may be a more effective strategy for preventing deception than to keep the door closed or even locked with a "Keep out!" sign attached. We know that deception surrounding infidelity, for example, usually triggers highly negative moral and emotional reactions on the part of the deceiver and the deceived (Werth/Flaherty 1986) and, I would add, within their social networks, too. And Goffman (1959: 65) remarks that it is "only shame, guilt, or fear" that prevents actors from opportunistically deceiving trusting others.[13]

At any rate, when trust is highly valued and the deception of trustors is strongly condemned, the overall effect of trust may well be a reduction in the actual occurrence of deception. This is not the first strategy that comes to mind when we think about reducing deception. It is also a strategy with severe boundary conditions, but it is not completely unrealistic. After all, we all trust lots of other people every day – it is a natural attitude in the Schützian sense – and usually we believe, more or less explicitly, that our trust induces others to be trustworthy. It does not always work, since trust can always be disappointed. And trust may not always be welcome by the trustee, because of the obligations it entails, which might become too much or simply be unwanted and untenable for the trustee. Nevertheless, trust always presents deception in a different light or, in

12 The notion of "optimal trust" (Wicks/Berman/Jones 1999) appears equally absurd, since trust entails positive expectations without perfect knowledge of future outcomes.

13 Moreover, distrust – rather than trust – might encourage deception. For example, (excessive) control produces reduced effort and shirking, which may induce a spiral of ever-greater control, distrust, and malfeasance (Zand 1972; Sitkin/Stickel 1996; Shulman 2007).

any case, it frames the moral context in which deception occurs (Robinson/Dirks/Ozcelik 2004).

Living as if the future were known: Trust as (self-)deception?

In the previous sections, I have looked at how trust enables and prevents deception. However, we need to ask whether, in return, deception might also both sustain and destroy trust. Let us take a closer look at the trustor and his/her leap of faith. If trust means that people have positive expectations despite some irreducible uncertainty, are they not deceiving themselves in their trust? Lewis and Weigert (1985) express this most clearly when they state that "to trust is to live *as if* certain rationally possible futures will not occur" (ibid.: 969, emphasis in the original) and that "to trust is to act as if the uncertain future actions of others were indeed certain" (ibid.: 971). For Luhmann (1979: 10), to show trust is "to behave as though the future were certain." The power, but also the fragility, of the "as if" must not be underestimated. Trust does not rest on objective certainty but on "illusion" (ibid.: 32). It rests on the fiction of a reality in which social uncertainty and vulnerability are unproblematic. This matches findings in deception research: for example, Mitchell's (1996: 840) observation that "a victim's wanting to believe in the deception comes up repeatedly in deception scenarios."

The fiction of trust needs to be achieved and sustained psychologically by the individual, and this fiction of trust is also a "socially constructed fiction of trust" (Beckert 2005: 19), produced intersubjectively through interaction with others and through institutionalized practices. It is striking that, because social uncertainty and vulnerability are only *suspended* in trust, the actors can remain aware that they are deceiving themselves, for the better or worse, as long as the fiction of trust and trustworthiness is upheld.

The notion of self-deception raises difficult philosophical and psychological questions about multiple selves as well as the relationship between cognition and affect (Haight 1980; Elster 1986; Shapiro 1996). However, the problem is mitigated in the case of trust because trustors are not assumed to make themselves believe something that they know to be wrong. They (merely) reach positive expectations by suspending the doubts that they might still have.[14] Hence, the main inconsistency trustors bear is that trust "risks defining the future" (Luhmann 1979: 20) although trustors know that the future is ultimately unknowable.

How do actors create the fiction that enables them to trust? As a first attempt at answering this question, let us consider the concept of "overdrawn information" *(überzogene Information)* introduced by Luhmann (1979: 32). When actors "overdraw" information

14 See also the references below to William James's "will to believe" and the "sentiment of rationality."

they make inferences beyond what the underlying information can actually support. In the face of a deficit of information, they deliberately overinterpret whatever information is available to "serve as a springboard into uncertainty" (33). We are reminded of the search for indicators of trustworthiness discussed at the beginning of this paper and the signals perceived by taxi drivers (Henslin 1968; Gambetta/Hamill 2005). However, while "overdrawn information" is a plausible idea that confirms the need for at least some kind of basis for trust, we still need to be able to specify the conditions under which actors come to not only accept but also go beyond a given level of information and construct a fictional version of reality that allows them to trust.

Beckert (2005) reminds us that the trustee plays a very important part in creating the trustor's fiction. The trustee offers "a definition of himself" (Henslin 1968: 54) as well as a definition of the situation and does so with empathy for the trustor's needs, "creating the impression of trustworthiness" (Beckert 2005: 19). Such an approach is more easily said than done and goes beyond the mechanistic signaling games suggested by Bacharach and Gambetta (2001). The trustee's performative acts require impression management (Goffman 1959), self-confidence and ontological security (Erikson 1965), and an active engagement in social relations: "Whoever wants to win trust must take part in social life and be in a position to build the expectations of others into his own self-presentation" (Luhmann 1979: 62; see also Giddens 1994). Trustors and trustees build and maintain their positive fiction. In deception research this might be referred to as "a shared delusional system" (Mitchell 1996: 841).

In sum, trustors rely to a great extent on trustees when constructing an image of those trustees as being worthy of trust or not. Nevertheless, the fiction co-produced by trustor and trustee remains a fiction, potentially a dangerous sham, and it is still up to the trustor to suspend uncertainty and vulnerability. The trustee's performative (potentially deceptive) acts and a high level of (potentially self-deceiving) familiarity with the situation merely assist the trustor in making the leap of faith. Countless daily activities and interactions rely on fictions and only become possible because people act as if they were possible (Ortmann 2004). The "as if" can have a number of different meanings. First, the "as if" in the sense of the Schützian "natural attitude" (Schütz 1967[1932]: 98) refers to the action-enabling qualities of taken-for-grantedness and continuity. Second, "as if" can also refer to the more performative "taking something for something" or "defining something as something." For example, by addressing somebody as if s/he were a friend, s/he becomes a friend. With reference to trust, this comes close to Hardin's (1993) "as-if trust," where an actor becomes trustworthy because others treat him/her more or less deliberately as if s/he were trustworthy. They take him/her for a trustworthy person and in so doing *make* him/her a trustworthy person. Note the "almost compulsory power" (Simmel 1950[1908]: 348) attributed to trust as outlined above.

Third, the concept of "as if" can also refer to the construction of unrealistic but nevertheless helpful idealizations. For example, the image of an ideal institution, organization, person, or practice as being trustful and trustworthy may never be realized fully in

reality; yet, by actors behaving as if it were reality or, at least, as if the ideal were being seriously pursued, trust is facilitated. It is worth exploring this interesting conjunction and peculiar linguistic trick of "as if" further. I propose that it enables us to understand the relationship between trust and deception better, because it suggests that trust and deception do not always work against each other but can complement each other in creating and maintaining a common understanding of social reality. This is not a value in itself, however, if it allows some to prosper and causes others to suffer. Trust and deception will be revised in the light of their outcomes.

Lapses of faith: Trust is no license to deceive

While trust opens the door to deception and involves a kind of self-deception by the trustor, the positive expectations at the heart of trust must be realized in order for trust to endure over time. Trustors who make a leap of faith still monitor the outcomes of their trust and usually notice when their expectations are disappointed. To be sure, trustees may enjoy the benefit of the doubt, and trust is not easily broken; on the contrary, it can be quite robust, because trustors seek to confirm their positive expectations (Good 1988). Numerous empirical studies in psychology illustrate this confirmation bias, and there are many anecdotal examples of the strength of self-deception: for example, people are frightened after watching a horror movie, although they (should) know that it was only a movie; or television viewers grieve over the death of Lassie, although they (should) know that the dog playing the role is actually fine in reality; or mothers refuse to believe that their "good son" is actually a criminal, despite the facts presented to them (see, for example, Schelling 1986).

Continued self-deception in the form of denial, as a first response to suspected or detected deception, gives the deceived time to come to terms with the deception and with the imminent loss and emotional turmoil that it triggers (Werth/Flaherty 1986). However, when the evidence is irrefutable, self-deception will end. As Shapiro (1996: 799) writes, "there are limits to self-deception in the specific sense that it is never completely successful … genuine belief remains present, only for the time being out of reach." When things go unmistakably wrong in trust relationships, trustors feel betrayed and the leap of faith will quickly turn into a lapse of faith (Robinson/Dirks/Ozcelik 2004).

After all, trust is an idiosyncratic achievement on the part of the trustor, which ultimately "cannot be requested" (Simmel 1950[1908]: 348), but must come from within, and cannot be sustained if the trustor's faith is lost. This brings us to Luhmann's (1979: 32) observation that trust is an "operation of the will" where "the actor willingly surmounts this deficit of information." Trust transcends that which can be justified by the actor in any terms, but the actor exercises agency through his/her will to either suspend uncertainty and vulnerability or not. Luhmann's reference to "will" in the context of

trust and suspension inspires a closer look at James's essay on "The Will to Believe" (1948[1896]), a pragmatist approach to the theme of faith, which Beckert (2005) has also identified as highly instructive for understanding trust.

In this essay, James defends the actor's right to believe – in religious matters, but also generally: for instance, in social relations – even when there is no conclusive evidence. Such a belief would be called faith: "we have the right to believe at our own risk any hypothesis that is live enough to tempt our will" (1948[1896]: 107). Note that by introducing the condition that the hypothesis has to be "live enough," James points out that actors only believe that "which appeals as a real possibility to him[/her] to whom it is proposed" (ibid.: 89).

Implicitly, he thus refers back to his earlier essay, "The Sentiment of Rationality" (James 1948[1879]), and to the major principles of his pragmatist philosophy. In the earlier source, he says that faith is "synonymous with working hypothesis" (ibid.: 25). According to James, the ability to have faith is distinctly human. He defines faith as follows: "Faith means belief in something concerning which doubt is still possible; and as the test of belief is willingness to act, one may say that faith is the readiness to act in a cause the prosperous issue of which is not certified to us in advance" (ibid.: 22).

Thus, from the standpoint of James's pragmatism, faith requires the "sentiment of rationality" – in other words, the actor genuinely believes something to be true without conclusive justification, but based on the pragmatic qualities of the belief, such as being useful, giving expectations, and enabling action. This sentiment produces the will to believe. Faith in these terms matches exactly that element in trust which – like a "tranquilizer" (Beckert 2005: 18) – allows the trustor to have favorable expectations toward the actions and intentions of others whose behavior cannot be fully known or controlled. From a different perspective, this faith might look like the "overconfidence" (Coval/Hirshleifer/Teoh 2005) discussed in parts of the (self-)deception literature, except that faith and trust are vested in others and not just in one's own capabilities.

Overall, James does not assume that actors take leaps of faith lightly or foolishly. Faith as a part of trust has to resonate with the actor's experience. It has to feel right, true, plausible, and so on, in spite of inconclusive evidence. It follows that trust rests on a kind of "will to trust," but trust cannot be willed against the trustor's very personal and private sentiments. This means that lapses of faith will occur when the trustor has clear evidence of deception or betrayal. In sum, to say that trust entails a leap of faith is not to say that trust is irreversible or unconditional. Trust is not trust if it cannot be broken or withdrawn. Hence, practices of deception that exploit trust and harm the trustor are only sustainable as long as the trustor believes (or can be misled to believe) that no harm is done.

Summary and implications for further research

In this paper, I have outlined five main points for discussion and further research into the relationship between trust and deception:

1. Trustors can be deceived when interpreting signals of trustworthiness, but some signals are more reliable than others because they cannot easily be faked.
2. Trust always involves a leap of faith, and hence goes beyond "good reasons," which opens the door to deception.
3. Trust bestows a moral obligation on the trustee, which reduces the threat of deception.
4. Trust requires some degree of self-deception on the part of the trustor, who creates an "as if" scenario, a kind of fiction that vulnerability and uncertainty are unproblematic.
5. Trust is not irreversible or unconditional; the leap of faith turns into a lapse of faith when the trustor recognizes deception and unfulfilled expectations.

Overall, these propositions demonstrate that trust and deception both enable and prevent one another, and that this ambivalent relationship is due to the leaps and lapses of faith that characterize trust and distrust. This is clearly a preliminary conclusion and a long way from operationalization and empirical validation. It is also selective, for there are other issues in the relationship between trust and deception that I have not yet explored and which should be addressed in future research. For example, trust research has recently turned to the question of how trust can be repaired after it has been broken (Lewicki/Bunker 1996; Kim et al. 2004).[15] Deception is a special form of breach of trust, and further research should devise specific propositions as to how repairing trust following deception differs from repairing trust after other kinds of breach or mere "trouble" (Six 2005). Moreover, the ideas offered here are rather undifferentiated in the sense that we might distinguish between different forms of deception (see Anderson 1986 for a typology) and how actors respond to them, as well as between different forms of trust, yielding a matrix of numerous, more precise trust–deception relationships (Robinson/Dirks/Ozcelik 2004).

If trust and deception, so far, have been treated mainly in separate research streams, what is the benefit of joining these streams and using the conceptual insights presented in this paper? For trust research, integrating the problem of deception should mean a reinterpretation of the trustors' and trustees' roles. For example, in empirical work on trust and trustworthiness, we cannot take responses in surveys and interviews at face value in case the respondent might be subject to (self-)deception. We can refer to deception as an explanation not only for why trust is withdrawn but also for why it endures.

15 See also the Special Topic Forum on "Repairing Relationships Within and Between Organizations" forthcoming in *Academy of Management Review* 34(1).

And the ambivalent nature of the trust–deception relationship should lead us to be careful with general normative statements about trust and deception.

Research on deception can benefit from recognizing the relevance of trust because this will extend the analysis from very technical concerns about acts of deception to the social contexts in which deception occurs. As I have argued, trust relationships can explain not only why deception is possible – and sometimes necessary – but also why actors choose not to deceive or why trustors collude with the deceiver. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective can be reinterpreted as a collective effort at maintaining an "as if" scenario for trust that allows for, and requires, a certain amount of deception. Hence deception will be seen not so much in terms of what is true or false, but in terms of the benefit or harm it produces for social relationships.

The empirical relevance of the ambivalent relationship between trust and deception can only be hinted at here, but let us consider two examples. First, "trust in food" (Kjærnes/Harvey/Warde 2007) is a hot and recurrent topic with disgusting cases of producers deceiving consumers by selling adulterated wines and mislabeled meat, for example. There is no doubt that these are harmful criminal acts. Their implications clearly reach beyond individual incidents, destroying much of the consumer's trust in wine and meat producers and regulatory systems more generally. At the same time, consumers have to ask themselves why they trusted in the first place and whether it is not all too convenient to believe in the safety of (suspiciously cheap) food. Overall, modern life seems impossible without trust in food, which makes deception possible, but the consequences of exposed deception and a loss of trust are so severe that most producers will abstain from opportunism and invest in their reputation – and they will assist consumers in maintaining the fiction that food is safe.

Second, deception by politicians is the object of so much public outrage that it is surprising that people still trust them at all. If trust means living as if the future were bright and certain, then politicians deliver just that: promises that they know what is good for us, that we will be better off, and that our soldiers will only engage in clean, justified acts of war. People are more than willing to accept these convenient but unrealistic promises until the outcomes are undeniably poor or even catastrophic. Hence, trust in politicians not only enables deception but even calls for it. This does not make deception morally acceptable, though, which is why politicians have to hide their deceptions and get used to losing peoples' trust eventually and then regaining it by making new, convenient promises which people are happy to accept. In the relationships between politicians and voters – and within political coalitions – many strange episodes are stories of how trust and deception both enable and prevent one another.

Thus, the trust–deception ambivalence that has been explored conceptually in this paper is practically relevant for making better sense of cases of deception in private and public life against the background of trust relationships that enable, prevent, require, and prohibit deception – all at the same time.

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