
Piotr Sztompka here presents a major work of social theory, which gives a comprehensive theoretical account of trust as a fundamental component of human actions. Professor Sztompka's detailed and systematic study takes account of the rich evolving research on trust, and provides conceptual and typological clarifications and explanations of the notion itself, its meaning, foundations, and functions. He offers an explanatory model of the emergence (or decay) of trust cultures, and relates the theoretical to the historical by examining the collapse of communism in 1989 and the emergence of a postcommunist social order. Piotr Sztompka illustrates and supports his claims with statistical data and his own impressive empirical study of trust, carried out in Poland at the end of the nineties. *Trust* is a conceptually creative and elegant work in which scholars and students of sociology, political science, and social philosophy will find much of interest.

Piotr Sztompka is Professor of Sociology at Jagiellonian University, Krakow, and has also been a visiting professor many times at Columbia University, New York, and UCLA. He is the author of twelve books, including *The Sociology of Social Change* (1993) and *Agency and Structure: Reorienting Sociological Theory* (1994).

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Preface

For the last decade or so the problem of trust has come to the fore of sociological attention. Seemingly marginal and idiosyncratic concerns of some individual scholars at the beginning of the eighties – Niklas Luhmann in 1979, Bernard Barber in 1983 – have turned into rich intellectual enterprise with a large and constantly growing number of contributions. Sociological studies of trust have acquired considerable autonomy in comparison to the concerns of social psychology, economics, or political science. The field has diversified in theoretical and empirical directions. And it has been investigated from various theoretical and methodological perspectives: rational-choice, culturalist, functionalist, symbolic-interactionist, phenomenological, and others. Cutting across all those differences there is the emerging recognition of “the necessity for and the ubiquity of trust in human relations and the impossibility of building continuing social relations without some element of trust and common meaning” (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984: 16–17). The sociologists have finally discovered “the clear and simple fact that, without trust, the everyday social life which we take for granted is simply not possible” (Good 1988: 32). Most would now agree that “the existence of trust is an essential component of all enduring social relationships” (Seligman 1997: 13).

As is usually the case in intellectual history, the career of the concept of trust has double sources. One has to do with immanent developments in the realm of ideas. In sociological thinking we have witnessed, to some extent, a depletion of the potential of organicist, systemic, or structural images of society, and a turn toward “soft variables,” the domain of “intangibles and imponderables,” or to define it more substantively – the mental and cultural dimensions of social reality. As Ulf Hannerz proclaims, “culture is everywhere” (Hannerz 1993: 95). The concern with

trust fits squarely within this wider paradigmatic shift and the current focus on culture.

There are also numerous social reasons, which raise the relevance of cultural factors and particularly the salience of the problematics of trust. They relate to the peculiar features of human society at the end of the twentieth century, the dilemmas and challenges of our phase of modernity. “While some form of trust . . . among social actors is necessary for the continued operation of any social order (at any and all levels of differentiation), the issue of trust as a solution to a particular type of risk is a decidedly modern phenomenon, linked to the nature of the division of labor in modern, market economies” (Seligman 1997: 7–8). “Trust becomes a more urgent and central concern in today’s contingent, uncertain and global conditions” (Misztal 1996: 9). If sociology’s ambition is to become the reflexive awareness of society, then the current interest in trust seems to be wholly warranted. The focus on trust is a sign that sociology has not lost sensitivity to significant social issues and has not abandoned its calling to discover truths that are also socially relevant.

The present book is intended as a contribution to the cumulative, ongoing effort to disentangle the problematics of trust and apply the concept to the study of contemporary society. It attempts to take stock of the evolving investigations of trust, particularly those with theoretical implications, and to explicate, clarify, systematize, but also elaborate and synthesize, their findings. To use a famous metaphor: I try to “stand on the shoulders of giants” in order to see further and better (Merton 1965). My main ambition is theoretical: to provide conceptual and typological clarifications and explications of the notion of trust, and then to propose an explanatory model of the emergence (or decay) of trust cultures. In due course I shall also deal with the foundations and justifications of trust, functions and dysfunctions of trust, and the functional substitutes for trust.

In the reconstructive and synthesizing parts of the book I adopt the approach of “disciplined eclecticism”: “the controlled and systematic use of complementary ideas drawn from differing orientations” (Merton 1976: 169). I refuse to be dogmatically one-sided and try to draw inspirations and insights from multiple sources in the attempt to integrate them into a coherent framework. In the elaborating parts I use, in a rather loose fashion, a combination of phenomenological and ethnographic methods. I try to figure out, phenomenologically, how trust could possibly operate, without contradicting our general sociological knowledge about human action, social structures, and social processes.¹

But this imaginative reconstruction needs some raw materials to process. And here ethnography enters. Herbert Gans defines the approach in a general way: “Ethnography is now becoming an umbrella term to cover fieldwork, participant observation and informal interviewing. To me, it means being with and talking to people, especially those whose activities are not newsworthy, asking them thoughtful and empathic questions, and analyzing the resulting data” (Gans, in Wolfe 1991: xi). And he adds: “This method I consider the most scientific for understanding social life” (xii).² My ethnographic basis for concepts and models is found in the analysis of multiple and diverse illustrations: drawn from common sense observations, personal experience, historical accounts, sociological books, literature, newspapers, and journals. By playing with them imaginatively, using counterfactual arguments and thought experiments, testing tentative conclusions against those illustrations, I hope to arrive at coherent, unambiguous concepts, and comprehensive but parsimonious models.

Once this is achieved, I submit the results to confrontation with one selected historical case: the collapse of communism and emergence of a postcommunist social order, basing the analysis on the recent history of Poland. Here I enter the realm of empirical facts, supporting the claims by received historical accounts, existing sociological researches, but also the results of my own empirical study of trust, carried out in Poland at the end of the nineties. In this study³ I carried out 403 in-depth interviews with a selected sample of respondents in five Polish cities.⁴ In the search for heuristic and interpretative insights I have also conducted seven extended discussions in focus groups representing various occupational categories.

The vicissitudes and fluctuations of trust and distrust during the last fifty years of Polish history, as well as the condition of trust in the present turbulent period of postcommunist transformations have proven to be an excellent “strategic research site” (Merton 1973: 373), a kind of useful laboratory for applying and testing the viability of theoretical concepts and models.

I am a lonely writer, a strong believer in solitary, individual effort. Hence, regrettably, I cannot put here the typical long list of those who have read, commented, and improved the manuscript. Nobody did, except the co-editor of the series, Jeffrey C. Alexander, who does not need any perfunctory thanks on my part, as our friendship of almost thirty years allows me to take his generous help for granted. Therefore, the only people who are due my special gratitude are those many students of trust, whose work I quote profusely in the book. They may also be

owed my apologies if I occasionally happen to misunderstand, misrepresent, stretch, or squeeze their ideas to fit my preconceived framework.

This book has been brewing for a long time. As is inevitable when one is working within the rich and evolving field of research, several times I have experienced that frustrating feeling of being beaten to the finish line by other authors publishing their accounts of trust.⁵ Hence, the completed fragments of my work were rushed to publication, by means of articles, conference papers, or occasional lectures. The list of these is given below. But I have finally convinced myself that putting my thoughts together in book form and publishing yet another volume on trust will not necessarily be redundant. It is not for me to judge if I was right.

The final version of the manuscript was written in the friendly and cozy environment supplied generously by the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin – Institute for Advanced Study, where I stayed as a Fellow in the spring of 1998. There are few places in the world that would provide a scholar with an equally stimulating habitat for academic work. I am indebted for the opportunity of having been there.

The early formulations of some basic ideas for this book have appeared in the following publications:

- Sztompka, P. 1995, “Vertrauen: Die fehlende Ressource in der postkommunistischen Gesellschaft,” in: *Kolner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft 35/1995 “Politische Institutionen in Wandel,” ed. by B. Nedelmann, September 1995, pp. 254–276.
- Sztompka, P. 1996a, *La fiducia nelle società post-comuniste*, Messina: Rubbettino Editore.
- Sztompka, P. 1996b, “Trust and emerging democracy: lessons from Poland,” in: *International Sociology*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 37–62.
- Sztompka, P. 1996c, “Introduzione alla teoria della fiducia,” in: F. Crespi and R. Segatori (eds.), *Multiculturalismo e democrazia*, Rome: Donzelli Editore, pp. 49–72.
- Sztompka, P. 1998a, “Trust, distrust and two dilemmas of democracy,” in: *European Journal of Social Theory*, No. 1, pp. 19–32.
- Sztompka, P. 1998b, “Mistrusting civility: predicament of a post-communist society,” in: J. C. Alexander (ed.), *Real Civil Societies*, London: Sage, pp. 191–210.