

The Roots of Governmental Mistrust Inside Ourselves

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Abstract

Many perceive that the problem of waning trust in government is rooted in a breakdown of ethics. Though commentators try to identify the source of this growing mistrust, it seems likely that multiple factors contribute to the erosion of this trust. I assume that trust in government is related in part to deeper fundamental processes of the human condition. These processes may not be causative in mistrusting government, but I am of the opinion that they play a central role in shaping a person's basic inclination toward trusting and more particularly influence one's general orientation in regard to mistrusting government.

I start with some basic purposes and the social necessity for government. After suggesting criteria for reviewing criteria for good rule-making, identification of how statutes are applied and the consequences of their enforcement are considered. This leads to awareness of the central role that reason and logic occupies in the evolution of society and human development. Hints of the development of mistrust in government can be seen from the interplay of reason and logic, application of law, and the individual's conduct of life. I summarize aspects of human development from three analytic perspectives. Finally, I attempt to weave a tapestry that shows how these fundamental processes imbue individuals with a basic inclination toward trusting or mistrusting government. These factors are not proposed as the definitive explanation for waning trust in government, but they do play an influential role that may be overlooked or underestimated as foundations on which such trust/mistrust rests.

Prologue

The perspective described in this paper is not intended as a critique of other viewpoints. Rather this paper invites the reader to take a glimpse at an additional viewpoint through a psychological filter. This lens is not proposed as an all encompassing overlay to account for waning trust in government, but is offered as a perspective that may help to understand this trust/mistrust. This perspective does not attempt to answer such questions as: Is trust in government declining today? If so, is this trust sinking more rapidly than in previous epochs? Is mistrust in government greater today than in prior eras? If trust in government is waning in our time, against what period are we gauging this deterioration? Such questions are left for other perspectives and disciplines to explore.

The approach in this paper digresses from the usual way social science arrives at and generates new knowledge. The typical way in that paradigm considers the process of conducting a scientific inquiry that involves contriving a situation, placing individuals in it, and observing how they behave. Replication of the behavior between the structured situation and resulting responses provides increasing confidence in any relationships discovered. Invoking this model social science strives to arrive at valid conclusions that can be generalized to a larger population of individuals.

The phenomena and dynamics discussed below are not radically new and probably everyone has experience with them. For various reasons, this paper does not attempt to document the issues raised with scientifically established facts. For one, the writer remains less certain what scientific evidence exists that would provide unequivocal support for the author's expressed views. Second, it is supposed that one perceives and makes sense of the world and other phenomena from a unique perspective – which is called the “self”. Theorists regard this “self” as a presupposed, organizing function by which one has understanding of one's own experiences. Sharing encounters with others does contribute to the development of confidence in what we experience. If one attends a football game with friends, he can experience exhilaration like his companions when the home team scores a goal. Comparison of this feeling state with others' reactions validates one's own emotional excitement. Internal awareness that one feels emotionally also contributes to this validation. Psychoanalytic writers distinguish between the experiencing-ego and observing-ego. One can be aware of having excited feeling, but the part of the “self” doing the observing is not the same as the excitement that is experienced. Evidence for this observing-self is neither scientifically nor directly accessible to others. From the base of human experience the “self” is accepted as real and as a starting point for making sense of and evaluating one's own functioning as well as things outside oneself. Freud¹ held the opinion that all the world knows the dynamics of life's fundamental phenomena and lives life accordingly. But he observed that science is too refined to confess or acknowledge the obvious without evidence meeting its standards of sureness. The observations put forward below are grounded more from this sense of self-awareness emanating from the observing-ego. While lacking scientific evidence, most individuals will likely relate to these observations and confirm through reflecting on their own experience.

Government Functioning

The basic function of government is to assure equity and safety. With these assurances government's goal is to promote happiness among its citizenry. Legislative bodies create rules that establish boundaries. Statutes are written for a reason, mostly due to perceived or real need to establish order or control to foster equity and safety. As societies evolve and develop, they come to rely upon an ever increasing use of reason and logic to address issues. To prevent chaos

¹ S. Freud, “Further Recommendations in the Technique of Psychoanalysis” (1914), in *Freud: Therapy and Technique* ed. with introduction by P. Reiff (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1963)

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in mobility for example, laws were established to regulate the speed at which one could travel, how much alcohol one could consume and still drive, and so on. These rules are intended to facilitate freedom of movement and provide assurance that everyone can move about with minimal inconvenience and the lowest risk of injury.

The application and administration of legal rules also relies upon reason. When designated authorities observe someone traveling too fast or operating an automobile after drinking too much alcohol, they interrupt the individual's freedom of movement. While individuals may know what the law requires and understand the rationale behind it, they still find themselves experiencing difficulty with the established boundaries. The boundaries are figurative "lines in the sand" which, lacking authorized exemption, persons cannot cross. Negative consequences confront the boundary violator.

One goal of government and law is to clearly establish these boundaries and to apply them. The need for social authority is readily recognized by civilized people owing to our reliance on others and realization of the difficulty most individuals have in forming independent opinions². As individuals, we want to know just how fast we can travel or progress. Though the consequence for exceeding the speed limit has been established *a priori*, the reason and logic used to create law (e.g., speed limits) are also employed to diminish an established regulation when a boundary is violated (e.g., exceeding speed limits) as well as to justify exemption from any negative consequence. The speed violator may claim that exceeding the limit by a seemingly inconsequential deviation (e.g., only 3 – 5 mph) is not sufficient to warrant sanction or a citation. To annul the consequence for violating the speed limit, one might retain an attorney to redress the boundary in court. Considering what is reasonable, defendant's counsel may argue that the small deviation from the limit created no threat under the specific circumstances, appealing to the notion that "the punishment doesn't fit the crime" in this situation. If relevant, counsel might argue how new replacement tires result in mis-calibration of the speedometer, making it illogical to hold the unwitting violator culpable. The traffic officer may not appear in court to testify on the day the case is heard giving cause for dismissal. In the end, logic is called upon to justify deviation from the established boundary.

²S. Freud, "The Future Prospects of Psychoanalytic Therapy" (1910), in *Freud: Therapy and Technique* ed. with introduction by P. Reiff (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1963)

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Government's fidelity to boundaries creates an additional quandary. Government enforcement can involve discretion regarding the relevance of the established boundary (e.g., the officer observing someone driving 3 – 5 mph over the limit may neither regard the speed as excessive nor an endangerment to public safety given the pattern of the surrounding flow of traffic). Rebutting existing regulations as well as permitting government to exercise discretion in boundary enforcement compromises equity. In further refinement, the law might be changed to be more precise in its application (e.g., operating a vehicle without being informed that replacement tires result in mis-calibration of the speedometer could be made an affirmative defense). When a logical rationale leads to amending the existing rules, greater precision is achieved. But the rules become more intricate for individuals subject to them as well as for persons charged with enforcing the laws, as in the example of dealing with the speeding violation.

Law becomes social theory and is the fundamental glue holding orderly society together. Meta-rules for good sound social science theory place a premium on: (a) relevance to life and real behavior, (b) precision and clarity to dispel ambiguity, (c) parsimony and simplicity to minimize complexity, (d) comprehensiveness for wide application, (d) operationality such that behavior referred to can be easily assessed, and (e) practicality for organizing and thinking about everyday behavior and habits³. Considering law as a theory, we constantly hone and re-work its principles so that a structure emerges which renders a more perfect and accurate roadmap for how to conduct life. Many of the meta-rules for good social science theory are applicable to the creation of statutory law.

The role of government in creating and applying law draws attention to a central role of reason and logic. When someone says he “loves the law” or that “my passion is law”, we conjure the law as a metaphoric mistress whom the person regards with an intense feeling. One suspects the individual is confessing a strong affinity for the reasoning and logical processes that form the basis of law. To cope with the quandaries of boundary violations, both offenders and enforcers can be heard to justify their actions in terms that his or her behavior fell within the spirit (if not within the letter) of the law.

³ C. H. Patterson, *Theories of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 3rd Edition (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1980).

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Looking at the thinking process behind the rules government adopts and how individuals deal with the laws enacted, a visitor from another world might consider that we humans are obsessed with reason and logic. The visitor might be struck by: (a) a preoccupation with details, rules, order, organization, or schedules; (b) an insistence on perfectionism such that pursuit of flawlessness interferes with completing the job; (c) a rigidity and scrupulosity regarding technicalities of ethics or values; (d) an inability or great difficulty in abandoning worn-out or worthless rules; (e) a miserliness in spending; and (f) a rigidity and stubbornness in one's outlook toward others and their behavior. The visitor's observations would actually coincide with some of the diagnostic criteria for obsessive-compulsive personalities⁴. Considering these characteristics in the context of government and law, our visitor might observe such things as: (a) complex codes describing every conceivable method of accounting for what is and is not characterized as taxable earnings; (b) overturning of trial decisions on virtual technicalities that have little or no impact on an outcome at re-trial; (c) lawmakers accepting employment as handsomely compensated lobbyists (but only following a prescribed minimal hiatus upon conclusion of their legislative term) for pharmaceutical firms over which they previously exercised authority to regulate; (d) maintaining "blue law" statutes introduced in colonial times to regulate present day entertainment activities, work, and commerce on Sundays; (e) requiring bids for government contracts projects but generally with priority assigned to acceptance of the least expensive proposal; and (f) insistence that one's philosophy of government or trade policy is more valid and logical than that of a neighboring nation. Admittedly these examples from government are selective and may be subject to alternative explanations. But at some level they embody elements of an obsessive-compulsive style of behavior.

The Common Man and Government

Reason and logic facilitated the human progression from living in clans and caves to dwelling in societies and structured cities. Through the various stages of the development of groups, social organizations emerged to deal with the evolving complexities of living together. Social evolution and inventiveness lifted the burden of the necessary day-to-day preoccupation with food and survival. The increased specialization and honing of human skills into occupations

⁴ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM IV*, 4th Edition (Washington, D.C.: Author, 1994).

and the invention of bartering and money raised standards of living as well as expectations for daily conveniences.

When people living in more rural settings learned to use horses to transport themselves and to harness animals to pull wagons, there was little need for road rules (or for a proliferation of roads). As people began to gather in urban areas designed with streets and with the invention and proliferation of automobiles, setting rules regarding whether we drive on the right- or left-side of the road made practical sense for the sake of facilitating mobility and safety. Continual societal evolution and increased population demanded greater regulations to provide for practicality and security of the citizenry.

Building an equitable and safe world required thinking rationally and analytically, not emotionally. Governing and resolving disputes depended heavily on the authority of precedent and logic to determine the correct remedies⁵. Relying on past experience as a guiding strategy, human society has evolved over time and continues to progress forward, although with seeming slowness.

Using Reason and Logic

Government aims to enact laws, to apply regulations equitably, and to resolve disputes fairly. Achieving these objectives is not haphazard and rarely serendipitous. For example, to enact legislative regulations hearings are conducted on proposed rules, drafts are revised, and multiple readings are typically required. Interpolating new statutes into the existing codex requires complex and intentional thinking, ideally leading to an internally consistent and theoretically coherent framework of law. The demands required for constructing, construing, and perfecting the theoretical abstraction of law may have prompted Aristotle's observation that law is reason free of passion. Mr. Spock from the television series *Star Trek* may be the twentieth century icon of approaching and resolving issues dispassionately through exercising reason, but his character is fictional.

The thesis proposed here is that a contributing factor to mistrust in government springs from the use of reason and logic. These mental operations take on the color of an obsession-compulsion through their relentless usage in building and administering of governmental rules and regulations. These same mental operations are also the instruments by which precedents are

⁵ L. C. Swenson, *Psychology and Law*, 2nd Edition (Pacific Grove, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1997).

established and the principal tool for countering, undoing, or revising existing regulations. But the incessant cognitive operations may not give sufficient recognition to emotional affect.

The primacy given to using reason and logic comes as no surprise. It is part of the human condition and experienced by virtually everyone inside their selves. In infancy, a parent cues reason and logic when asking his or her offspring to explain “why” the child committed some act, such as striking one’s sibling or consuming some treat when told not to do so. Very early on, the child may give a primitive reply such as “I don’t know” or deny the action altogether. Anna Freud⁶(1936) proposed that the child resorts to denial as a way to handle unpleasant feelings in the situation. While a parent may be frustrated by the child’s response, many parents recognize the child’s lack of mental development to adequately address their questioning of the child’s behavior and that there is not much to be done at this stage. But some parents may regard a young child’s self-explanation as deficient in reason and logical justification, impute other motives to the child’s behavior, and administer consequences. At times a subset of such parents may be abusive to their offspring.

At a later stage in development, the child begins to acquire understanding of relationships between actions and consequences, responsibility, and self-justification. Striking a sibling may result in being isolated in one’s room or consuming a forbidden treat may lead to deprivation of some desired pleasure later. The child’s self begins to grapple with the realization that while a particular behavior is expected, he or she pursued some other course of action. At about or simultaneous with this stage of development, self-introspection begins and the youngster justifies his action and /or provides an affirmative defense to shield himself. The child may assert the sibling took an object belonging to the child requiring that he take action to protect his own possessions or the child might claim that the forbidden snack was the only object available to satisfy his hunger. The child’s self-justifications start to be grounded in exercising the logic of his life stage, though the justifications may appear unreasonable to a parent. The preeminent use of reason and logic continues throughout the remainder of life. Individuals and societies rely on these faculties in the search for truth and principles as well as for grounds to justify their actions.

Like a parent, government creates rules intended to promote happiness by ensuring equity (for example, mandatory sentencing guidelines in the judiciary) and safety (for example, setting standards for building construction). Enacted laws generally make sense in light of some specific

⁶ A. Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanism of Defense* (New York: International Universities Press, 1936).

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purpose for which they were created and in the context of the times in which they were enacted. Over time, however, the historic purposes and setting may shift or no longer be in synchrony with the present day.

Though the complexity of government regulations astounds us, we remain confident that each law and regulation was formulated with the intent to clarify some ambiguous boundary. Although the number of legal boundaries overwhelms individuals and poses a significant challenge to comprehension for the ordinary person subject to them, the citizenry expects decent and even application of the rules.

Government acts through its legislative, executive, and judicial arms to provide for the citizenry's safety and security. Some actions of these branches impact all citizens while other regulations may affect particular individuals or subsets of the population. Involvements with government become increasingly complex when taking into account that engagement occurs at the federal, state, and local levels. Turning to consider the level of government and the kinds of contact citizens encounter, several combinations emerge. The following Figure presents a schematization of events that bring people into contact with government.

	Governmental Level		
Contact Event	Federal	State	Local/Municipal
Direct	A	C	E
Indirect	B	D	F

Figure 1

These events occur at the federal, state, and local levels. At each level, the events bring individuals into direct or indirect contact with government. While the definition of the two types of events attempts to maximize the distinction between direct and indirect government contacts, the range of possible contacts probably falls upon a continuum rather than into two discreet categories. Depending upon the examples one considers, the line between direct and indirect can become blurry. *Direct* contact events involve interactions having immediate consequences that are economic in nature or affect one's freedom of choice with regard to the quality of one's personal life or how one conducts his or her occupation. These are the ways that government touches the vast majority of people and in a psychological sense, perhaps, these direct contacts

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give meaning to the aphorism “all politics are local”. *Indirect* contact events often arouse one’s curiosity or provide impetus to reflect on ideals. Their influence on one’s everyday life business is more distal, and they have less impact on the quality of everyday life for most individuals. But given the passage of time or shifting circumstances indirect contact events may have potential to impact one’s personal life. Depending on fluctuations in the state of personal introspection, our “self” is more or less aware of the influence of these *direct* and *indirect* interactions.

Before posing examples of the events fitting into the Figure above, two points are noteworthy. First, while each example is conceptualized as belonging to a specific category, the illustration might bridge across multiple levels of government. This can create increased complexity for the conceptual scheme as well as for dealing with government. Second, an individual’s contact with government may involve any of its three branches: legislative, judicial, or executive. For brevity, no attempt is made to restrict the Figure to one branch or to provide an example in all categories for every government arm (i.e., legislative, executive, and judicial). The selected illustrations assume that everyone has some awareness of them through experience or from recent publicized events.

Category A. Federal, direct. Everyone in the United States is familiar with social security and virtually every citizen has a social security number assigned to them by the government. Since its inception in 1935 in the United States, Social Security has evolved and expanded. Most citizens are actively engaged in the program through required payroll deductions.

At the end of the working day, the Social Security levy reduces one’s expendable take-home income. Virtually all citizens (and many non-citizens) have no choice to opt out of the system. Social Security was devised to serve a particular function. All who contribute to the fund anticipate drawing some benefit at a future point in time for themselves or their survivors. Concerns for the sustainability of Social Security as it has existed over the years, expansions of its coverage beyond its original intended purpose, and escalation of its costs generate feelings of uneasiness about our ability to rely upon this government institution when we become eligible for its promised and expected benefits.

Category B. Federal, indirect. Most everyone knows that on July 2, 2007, President Bush commuted the 30-month prison term of I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, Vice President Cheney’s former chief of staff. Reactions to the decision were varied, some favoring and others opposing

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the President's action. Many are curious and speculate about the motives behind the President's decision.

The incident may stimulate individuals' concerns over the wisdom and propriety of the decision. The possibility of favoritism may cause individuals to wonder whether they would receive comparable consideration. But one can argue that the matter has no immediate impact on or carries remote implications for almost anyone's individual daily life. Few everyday citizens have or will have any contact with Mr. Libby. An infinitesimal number of individuals have careers that will rise to such heights of federal power. Further, only a very small proportion of the population will ever face allegations of illegal behavior which will require them to answer in federal court.

Category C. State, direct. Concern for consumer protection leads legislative bodies to create licensing and regulatory boards. A search on the State of Texas website for licensing boards yields over 2,000 hits. If one can conceive of an occupation, Texas likely has a board or commission regulating its practitioners – one speculates that every state has a similar infrastructure of regulatory bodies. Rules adopted by these boards and the meaningful power vested in them have personal consequences and the reach of these boards can evoke strong reaction.

A visit to a local barber whose shop had just undergone state inspection illustrates this contact event. Display of the state inspection certificate in a prominent place was ordered as well as all of the 13 licenses required of the five individuals who work on the premises. Among other changes, new or proposed state licensing regulations banned the re-use of several items in the barber's everyday practice (e.g., forbidding use of the same horsehair brush the barber had used on all customers for over 30 years), mandated continuing education, and set new standards on the minimum number of completed hours of training to be licensed as a barber.

While licensing of highly educated professions has become a common expectation, the number and reach of state boards and commissions effecting the lives of tradesmen whose skill preparation may not require significant amounts of formal education continues to expand. While the barber readily acceded to the intent behind the regulations, to improve health and safety standards was acknowledged, he took issue with the regulators' inability or unwillingness to enforce compliance in the quarters where it was most needed. Shops located in less desirable

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areas of the community go unregulated which led the barber to question the equity of and to revile government licensure efforts in general.

Category D. State, indirect. In May, 2007, a judge in Los Angeles sentenced Paris Hilton to serve 30 days in county jail for driving while intoxicated and driving without a license. Controversy erupted over whether or not her case was handled the same as others accused of like violations, that is, whether her treatment was too harsh or too lenient.

While her circumstances received notice nationwide, most observers had little personal vested interest in the case. Few individuals have backgrounds similar to her wealth and privilege. Ms. Hilton's notoriety aroused attention to disposal of the charges in her case, the dispute over her initial detention and quick release, and the eventual treatment she received while incarcerated. Many may wonder what treatment they would receive for similar offenses. But the vast majority of drivers will never confront state sanctions resulting from multiple incidents of driving while intoxicated or driving with a suspended license.

Category E. Local, direct. In Texas (as in many states), property owners are taxed annually on their real estate holdings. Entities such as city governments, school districts, community colleges, and public hospital districts hold taxing authority. Property assessments which will determine one's tax liability are manipulated annually. Property owners face several alternatives. They can protest and appeal their property assessment values, divest themselves of their holdings, or pay the annual tax. If assessed values and taxes increase, mortgage escrow payments rise and expendable incomes at the end of the working day may decrease. The financial impact on one's personal life is immediate and consequential.

Category F. Local, indirect. Municipal ordinances exercise control over neighborhood regulations and quality of life. But not all local ordinances impact everyone. Billboards announce the availability of goods and services. Placement and size of these signs along urban thoroughfares is of interest to a limited number of parties -- merchants and their enterprises. From a business perspective, placing such an advertisement on a residential street where it will have limited exposure to consumers would be an uneconomical expense. But restrictions are written into billboard ordinances just to cover the eventuality that the character and/or zoning of neighboring properties might shift.

A few individuals in the community may have concern over the placement, size, and number of billboards allowed for aesthetic reasons or residential property values. Other

businesses may have interest in the ordinance for reasons of competition. But by and large, the issue attracts little interest from most local residents, is of no immediate concern, and does not touch their lives.

Origins of Trust and Self

Human beings are aware that they cannot achieve happiness and safety except in a society that provides equity and consistency. C.S. Lewis⁷ (1943) noted that this was one of the most fundamental realities. These attributes contribute to establishing trust while lack of safety and inconsistency erode trust development.

To further understanding the waning trust in government, it is helpful to consider human development from the beginning of life. Analytic theories have long been interested in mapping human development⁸. Elements of three theories are briefly considered here. While they may take somewhat different approaches technically, clearly they are woven from common experiential threads.

Mahler, Pine, and Bergman⁹ elaborated a theory of separation-individuation in conceptualizing trust and its role in orienting humans to life. Briefly, early in life infants begin to deal with the dual unity with their mothers when they begin to push away. At first a maturation of bodily senses appears focused on proprioception of the infant's own inner sensory experiences. This increases consciousness of oneself without awareness of distinction from the other (mother). When infants begin using their arms and legs to push themselves against their holding mother as if to gain a perspective of her from a distance, they begin to sense that mother is not part of their own self. In the early stages of development of individuation-separation this period represents a kind of "hatching out". The infant begins to derive some pleasure from awareness of perceiving objects outside its self.

As infants begin to separate from their mothers psychologically and encounter interesting new persons, they tend to look back and compare the new stranger against the image or schema of the mother. They become aware of other persons. Later as infants develop the ability to move under their own power by crawling and walking, they venture away a short distance physically from their mothers. Infants experience the glee and pleasure of independence and exploration of

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1943).

⁸ I. L. Janis, G. F. Mahl, J. Kagan, and R. R. Holt, *Personality: Dynamics, Development, and Assessment* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1969)

⁹ M. S. Mahler, M. M. Pine, and A. Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Infant* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

a new, wider world. However, there are optimal limits to this exploration and the child manages the anxieties of going solo as he discovers new modalities for maintaining contact with “home base”. Maintaining a visual line of contact or remaining in earshot of the sound of her voice serves this purpose. In the first months of the freedom of movement, the child will still return to have physical contact with its mother to confirm that she is really there. Then the child will venture out again to experience new and stimulating delights of sight, sound, and touch in the outside environment.

This early “differentiation” phase slides and melds into the “practicing” stage from 10-12 to 16-18 months. In the early subphase of “practicing”, crawling assists growth of the sense of autonomy as the child exercises more independence in exploring the expanding human and inanimate environment. In the later substage of “practicing”, the ability to pull oneself up and walk contributes to pride in making discoveries about his own body and functional capabilities. A preoccupation with fantasies of power and success gives a narcissistic color to the toddler’s investment in its own functional capabilities and the objects of an ever widening environment. At times the child seems unphased by knocks and falls and other frustrations such as another child taking a toy away. Adult substitute care-givers (e.g., daycare workers) are easily accepted. Focus on practicing the mastery of his own skills and autonomy appears dominant and exercises greater sway than any needed solace for minimal threats of object loss or minor physical discomfort. Increasing self-capacity and discoveries of an expanding world adequately compensate for minimal aversions. In seeking to actively cast off residuals of the engulfing symbiotic pull from the mother, a certain elation is achieved. The child’s *modus operandi* turns into an active game of distancing himself from the mother in order to seek the exhilaration of exploring the environment and alternately to remain assured that he is wanted and loved by his primary first relation--mother.

From roughly 15 to 24 months and often far beyond that timeframe, a “rapprochement” phase begins generally coinciding with mastery of upward locomotion. The prior imperviousness to frustration (e.g., knocks, falls, other children taking one’s possessions) and obliviousness to mother’s presence diminishes. Anxiety over separateness increases when the child discovers that mother is not automatically accessible when he wants her. If hurt, the child prefers and actively seeks his mother. Few other adults can allay the child’s distress as quickly. The relative lack of concern about mother’s presence becomes replaced by active approach behavior and increasing

need and desire to share his every experience and newly acquired skill with her. The child gradually or abruptly begins to become aware of obstacles in his way where in the previous stage the expectation of success and sense of omnipotent exhilaration blotted out concern over barriers. The child may now attempt to woo his mother to provide relief or assistance to maintain his prior sense of self-importance (or try to command such responses from his mother).

On the other side of this relationship, various maternal prototypic patterns begin to take shape. To one mother the toddler's wooing or demand for her constant attention and participation may seem excessive. If the mother expects her child to become less dependent and helpless, she may not accept the child's demanding behavior and insist that the child make efforts at task mastery. Another mother may be unable to face the reality that the child is becoming increasingly independent of and separate from her. Faced with the prospect that the child is slipping away or may not need her, this mother may discourage or subvert the child's initiative. The emerging emotional and behavioral life of the child and the mother's response to the child sets up patterns of interactional synchrony¹⁰. As the child develops, other caretakers participate in this interactional dance contributing to the child's internal working models about relationships.

Ideally these maternal patterns do not become rigid and hopefully somewhere between these two prototypes (the distant, unavailable vs. the overly solicitous) an appropriate balance or compromise is forged. The child becomes more aware of his separateness and develops coping mechanisms allowing him to abandon the wish to get his mother to participate in his maintained delusion of her omnipotence and his powerlessness. In the opposite extreme, the mother abandons the desire to keep the child subservient to her preferences and wishes. In the extreme prototypic patterns, one can anticipate dramatic fights and arguments between mother and child. For the struggle between mother and child in less extreme situations, development progresses with less intensity and drama.

To assist the child to obtain autonomy and optimal functional capacity, balance between the extreme prototypic positions and continued emotional availability of the mother is crucial. This availability often continues on well beyond the generally accepted two year benchmark for this developmental period. While attachment theory was conceptualized primarily within the

¹⁰ D. Shaffer, *Developmental Psychology: Childhood and Adolescence*, Revised Edition (Belmont, California: Wadsworth/Thomson, 2002).

context of the mother-child relationship, much of this theoretical understanding of parent-child dynamics is relevant to the paternal relationship.

Time moves everyone out of the infant-parent physical realities. However, the imprinted child-parent relational patterns laid down in the emotional and reasoning interaction between parent and offspring may persist throughout life. (For the member of the pair who outlives the other, the relational patterns may remain active even in the absence of the other member.)

A second analytic approach formulated by Erickson¹¹ conceptualizes eight stages of human development. His theory has perhaps received wider attention in the literature and is probably more familiar to the general public. Erickson focused on elaborating how emergence of a healthy individual ego requires integration of the timetable of the organism with the structure of social institutions. The infant encounters the stress of immaturity of his own natural state of bodily homeostasis when he emerges from the womb. Among neonates a wide range of variation exists in the ease and rapidity with which a baby feeds, sleeps, and relaxes its bowels. The infant's first experiences with trust depend upon the child's receptive capacities, comfort, and interaction with maternal behaviors as the infant acquires familiarity with the cyclic nature of homeostatic regulation.

According to Erickson, the infant's first social achievement is willingness or tolerance of the experience of his mother being out of sight without reacting with undue anxiety or rage. The infant feels assured of her re-appearance. The inner consistency, continuity, and sameness of these experiences of mother coalesce into a crude early ego identity. As the collection of these remembered and anticipated sensations and images become more firmly associated with familiar and predictable things and people in the outer world, the primitive ego begins to coalesce. For Erickson the solution of this nuclear experience of consistency, constancy and sameness impacts the development of trust. The conflict of trust versus mistrust is first a task of maternal care and the first task of the new infant's ego. The solution of this trust versus mistrust dilemma is the first of Erickson's eight life stages and forms the foundation of the remaining stages of human development. "The general state of trust furthermore implies not only that one has learned to rely on the sameness and continuity of the outer providers, but also that one may trust oneself

¹¹ E. H. Erickson, *Childhood and Society*, Revised Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1963).

and the capacity of one's own organs to cope with urges; and that one is able to consider oneself trustworthy enough so that the providers will not need to be on guard lest they be nipped"¹².

Throughout infancy (and throughout life) the testing of the relationships between internal sensations and wishes and outside objects and sources of satisfaction continues. Psychoanalysis considers the early infantile differentiation of inside and outside to be at the root of the projection and introjection defense mechanisms. Assuming, feeling, or acting as if an outside goodness has become an inner certainty and source of satisfaction constitutes the nature of introjection. Projection is experiencing an inner evil or tension as having its source in others outside oneself. The infant delegates or projects this evil or tension to significant others outside himself. These two mechanisms are assumed to model what is going on inside infants when they want to internalize pleasure and externalize pain. The pleasure and pain span the physical, cognitive, and affective spheres. It is considered that times of crises involving love, trust, and faith in adulthood can activate these mechanisms and can infuse irrational attitudes toward perceived adversities and enemies. Erickson thought that there were few frustrations a child or anyone could not weather so long as the frustration led "to the ever-renewed experience of greater sameness and strong continuity of development, toward a final integration of the individual life cycle with some meaningful wider belongingness"¹³. In the aftermath of a crisis or tragedy it is a positive indicator if the individual adopts the view that it is a springboard for learning, making one stronger, improving oneself, renewing some striving, and so forth. Freud¹⁴ shared this view noting that only by dire experience do we ever acquire sense.

Erickson believed that each of his developmental stages had a special relation to one of the basic elements of society. This was because the human life cycle and man's institutions evolved together. For individual human development to unfold and for society to evolve progressively, a fundamental relation underlies all the crises in each of Erickson's eight stages. That is the twofold relation in which man brings to social institutions the remnants of his infantile mentality and zestful independence to explore his human and inanimate environment, and in return to receive back from the social structures some reinforcement for his infantile gains.

¹² Ibid., 248.

¹³ Ibid., 249.

¹⁴ S. Freud, "Further Recommendations in the Technique of Psychoanalysis" (1914), in *Freud: Therapy and Technique* ed. with introduction by P. Reiff (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1963)

Throughout history, Erickson¹⁵ asserts one sees that humans have worked to extend and safeguard the development of trust between child and mother (as well as child and other caretakers) in devolving social institutions (e.g., government). At times, governments assume parent-surrogate roles and require citizenry submission in exchange for dispensing basic necessities. Like turning back the hands of time to an earlier developmental stage, a person senses himself re-living a part of the individuation process—re-experiencing a feeling of relative impotence and smallness juxtaposed against the parent caretaker and struggling to establish differentiated independence.

A final analytic consideration draws on the Freud's views of early development as the foundation for transference behavior. Freud defined transference as: "a special individuality in the exercise of his [every human being's] capacity to love—that is, in the conditions which he sets up for loving, in the impulses he gratifies by it, and the aims he sets out to achieve in it. This forms a cliché or stereotype in him . . . which perpetually repeats and reproduces itself as life goes on, in so far as external circumstances and the nature of the accessible love-objects permit . . ."¹⁶ While analytic approaches recognize that there are genetic influences for the variability in this "individuality", foremost interest rests in considering how the environment influences its expression. This "individuality" is composed of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral attributes that provide personality constancy and consistency. These are the things that define and keep acquaintances recognizable when one encounters a former classmate at a fortieth or fiftieth reunion. The "love-objects" are not restricted to persons; the individual's uniqueness in exercising his own capacity to love is capable of generalizing to non-human species, other inanimate things, and concepts encountered in life. As an inanimate thing, government can be understood as a "love-object" with which a person interacts—with definite ideas about how to proceed in relating to government, anticipating certain satisfactions, and wanting to achieve certain goals.

Transference is purposeful; it is designed to elicit a reaction from others that is consistent with prior experiences with others. In transference theory, the "individuality" that people exercise in their adult relationships can be seen as partly composed of vestiges of the interactional synchrony with their mothers and other primary caretakers. The child-caretaker

¹⁵ E. H. Erickson, *Childhood and Society*, Revised Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1963).

¹⁶ S. Freud, "The Dynamics of Transference" (1912), in *Freud: Therapy and Technique* ed. with introduction by P. Reiff (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1963), 105-106.

interactions revolve around the experience of love and feeling safe. The remnants of these experiences (both the resolved and unresolved portions) remain and contribute to the “individuality” in each person as he or she goes about exercising his or her capacity to love. Each new object encountered and each old object encountered again rouses expectations for how one goes about giving to and getting from the encountered object the things the individual prizes and desires. This individuality in each person is reflected in his or her attitudes toward and approach to government and its embodiments (e.g., government employees, programs).

Understanding transference set in motion in early basic attachments to caregivers can shed light on reactions to “love-objects” in adulthood. Psychoanalytic theory holds that in early life a child develops a sense of his separateness from mother (or other caretaker such as father). Enjoying an initial sense of exhilaration that accompanies the dawning of awareness of himself and his surroundings, the child vacillates between spheres of elation and re-unification with his mother and caretaker. Next, experience of anxiety and longing for connection with the caretaker in times of need or crisis starts to undermine the child’s sense of ability to explore with unrestrained feeling of confidence and safeness. The child looks to home base for assurance that the foundation still exists and for provision of comfort or other aid.

Some Psychological Roots of Government Mistrust

An infant’s earliest challenge is establishing his or her separate existence from that of the mother. Repetition of consistency and sameness in encounters with objects that reside in the outside world leads to the formation of boundaries that separate observation of external people, things, and events from unique and disparate internal reactions and mental images of these external objects. Infants seek outside objects that lead to pleasurable experience and internally value these objects as good. This process is conceptualized as introjection. On the opposite side of the coin, infants attempt to discard unpleasurable experiences and events which arise primarily from noxious internal sensations. This leads to projecting intolerable thoughts, sensations, cognitions, and so forth on to others. The matching of internal representations with external objects is crucial to the formation of internal structures (e.g., ego) and leads to the development of basic trust. Upon the infant’s birth this function starts with the mother-child interaction. The mother’s synchronous abilities to fulfill the internal felt needs of the infant in a consistent and constant manner become the building blocks of trust. Within the confines of the early infant-mother caretaker bond and without any requirement of reciprocal obligation, the child has the

luxury of experiencing the glee and pleasure of exploring a new and wider world as well as acquiring familiarity with the biorhythms of homeostatic regulation of its own physical functions. The early infant is shielded from anything negative or harmful. Deviations from an optimal infant-mother caretaker model can have major consequences later. This can be considered analogous to launching a space probe. A very small error in the trajectory of a space probe as it leaves earth's orbit results in expanding the deviation as the probe moves away from earth, causing the vehicle to fail to rendezvous and to insert into successful orbit around a distant stellar object.

The consistency, constancy, and sameness experienced in the prototypic child-mother interaction becomes the launching model. This prototype of trust is carried forward as the individual moves through later stages of development. Freud used the analogy of typesetting. Once the typeset is fixed, each rendition faithfully replicates the first copy. With increasing age, the child moves beyond the mother-child boundaries and carries forward a *modus operandi* designed to draw out reactions from others that mimic prior experience with significant caretakers in his life. Therapists regularly encounter this in marriage counseling when one partner proclaims that "He expects me to pick up after him just like his mother" or "She expects me to treat her like a princess just like her father did".

Humans continually match their internal representations of objects against outside realities. An optimal match that results in satisfying pleasurable feelings facilitates trust and is readily incorporated and valued. Any unpleasant internal experiences are projected outward and associated with available external objects as the source and cause of dysphoria. In the course of development individuals graduate from infancy and must accommodate to the larger society and interact with its collective representations. They must deal with government which replaces the mother and other significant care-givers. At times government may adopt a stance that a particular individual (child) or group (children) is demanding or requiring too much and insist individuals provide for themselves. At other times, government exerts more control to deal with a particular individual or group that is perceived as becoming too independent and unruly. Either pattern of governing may give rise to the individual or member of a group having to deal with unpleasant internal experiences that prime the process for projection to external objects.

As a collective representation of society, government institutions function as caregivers and rely on reason and logic to create boundaries intended to provide maximum safety and

equity for all citizens. As surrogates mimicking maternal and significant others' caretaking interactions, government institutions energize the individual's prototype learned and launched much earlier. Individuals orient themselves and respond to government and its institutions in ways to elicit reactions that are consistent with the prior responses they elicited from others significant in their lives. With safety and equity in mind as top considerations, government institutions set arbitrary boundaries that citizens may not cross without invoking repercussions. New and novel situations challenge arbitrary boundaries and government modifies boundaries to make appropriate accommodation to reasonable exceptions. The parsing of boundary rules (due to unforeseen novel circumstances or protests) incessantly moves on and resembles attributes of obsessive-compulsive behavior. Logical modifications of existing boundaries reinforce the idea that society, government, and individuals are searching for perfect equity and safety. Such actions promote the belief or fantasy that a real equity and safety exists and is enscribed on the universe as a genuine reality.

The notion of equity and safety as genuine realities is incorporated just as an infant is disposed to feel like an outer goodness is an inner certainty. The matching of internal object representations or images with external objects mimics the process of trust formation. Individuals' level of trust in government is associated with their ability to introject the equity and safety they crave as genuine realities existing independently in the universe and beyond. Citizens introject government institutions as surrogate caretakers that exist to assure, warranty, and deliver this absolute equity and safety. Without existence and belief in the genuine reality of equity and safety, a terrible anxiety and sense of vulnerability arises. Individuals will project the source of these inner felt evils to objects outside themselves, namely to government and its institutions. The notion that equity and safety are evanescent or capricious realities does not provide individuals protection from feelings of vulnerability to fate or accident or from the idea that we do not live in a just world^{17, 18}. In the end, one's approach to trusting government will be slanted by developmental influences which shaped the idiosyncratic formation of the individual schemas of trust that reside inside each and every individual.

¹⁷ M. J. Lerner and D. T. Miller, "Just World Research and the Attribution Process: Looking Back and Ahead," *Psychological Bulletin* 85 (1978), 1030-1051.

¹⁸ E. G. Shaver, "Defensive Attribution: Effects of Severity and Relevance on the Responsibility for an Accident," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 14 (1970), 101-113.

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