

DISTINGUISHING ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF TRUST FROM GENERAL PHILOSOPHY OF TRUST

Ash Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri and Mir Habeebullah Quadri

Citation format: Ash Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri, Mir Habeebullah Quadri, "Distinguishing Islamic concept of trust from general philosophy of trust", CIFIA Global Journal, Vol 5, June 2022

Abstract

There are differences of opinions among philosophers about the meaning of 'trust'. Various opinions have been offered in this regard, such as trust is, (i) hope, (ii) optimism, (iii) reliance, (iv) expectation, (v) agreement, (vi) confidence, (vii) belief, (viii) assurance, (ix) trustworthiness, etc. Some philosophers say that trust is important as well as dangerous and risky, therefore, it is necessary to know when trust is reasonable, substantiated, believable and warranted. Trust may not be warranted in certain situations because the conditions necessary for it do not exist. The things important in trust are, (i) the nature of trust, (ii) the value of trust, and (iii) the rationality of trust. Many related issues have been discussed in this paper. A brief account of Islamic perspective of 'trust' is also provided. It is hoped that this research will benefit people in their day to day lives.

Keywords – Trust, Belief, Sociology, Philosophy, Islam

Features of trust in general philosophy

Defining trust is challenging. This is the reason many philosophers ignored this topic and when they tried to explain it, they struggled, and mixed it with other issues. A close study of the opinions of some well-known philosophers in this context brings to light some important features of trust. We have described these features briefly in the following.

(i) Nature of Trust

Some philosophers argue that trust is interpersonal. Meaning it is interactive and shared. However, others claim that 'trust' is not interpersonal, rather is individual, and collective in some cases, like trust in Government, trust in institutions, trust in science, etc.

A notational representation of trust between two entities X and Y can be given as:

$$T_X(Y, S)$$

Where:

T_X is the measure of trust that X has in Y given a situation S.

$T_X(Y, S)$ can be further elaborated as:

$$T_X(Y, S) = T_X(Y) U_X(S) I_X(S)$$

Where:

$T_X(Y)$ is the general measure of trust that X has in Y prior to the occurrence of the situation S.

$U_X(S)$ is the measure of utility that the situation S has for X.

$I_X(S)$ is the measure of how important the situation S is for X.

(ii) Why trust could be dangerous

Trust is a common phenomenon in our lives. We trust people in our society to not harm us. We trust our family and friends to help us in times of need. We trust politicians to honor their election promises. But our trust comes at a high cost as we become vulnerable to lies, deception and even blackmail. Trusting someone means you are relying on him/her without any guarantees. Sometimes you could be naive in doing so. A question that arises here is, can we quantify the

risk in a trusted relationship? While there is no clear answer to this question, one marker could be to measure reliability instead. Because the danger in trusting someone or something is inversely proportional to its measure of reliability, i.e., the more reliable an entity, the less dangerous it is trust. Therefore, it could be said that given two entities X and Y have a bond of trust, then the measure of danger that Y poses to X given a situation S is inversely proportional to the reliability of Y in the given situation. This can be denoted as:

$$D_Y(X, S) \propto 1/R_Y(S)$$

Where:

$D_Y(X, S)$ is the danger that Y poses to X in a situation S.

$R_Y(S)$ is the measure of reliability of Y in a situation S.

(iii) When can we trust a person?

In his famous treatise, 'The Republic', Greek philosopher Plato (427-347 BC) has mentioned a dialogue between Socrates (470-399 BC) and Glaucon, Plato's elder brother, in which Glaucon argues that the fear of detection and subsequent punishment prevents human beings from breaking the law or doing evil. Glaucon cites the example of a shepherd whose name was Gyges. Gyges found a gold ring that made him invisible whenever he twisted it on his finger. He used it to seduce the queen, then he murdered the king and took over the throne. Glaucon argues that every human being works in his self-interest and is not bothered about justice or morality.

The above story raises a question as to why we should trust others when we know that it is the fear of detection and punishment that prevents people from doing evil? Therefore, we can trust a person only when we know that he is sufficiently afraid of being exposed of any evil doing and will be punished for it.

Glaucon's argument has been accepted by many philosophers and criticized by others. The critics say that if we consider human beings to act only in self-interest, or love, or sympathy, or morality, then the rationality of trust will become vague and many of our cooperative activities will be treated as irrational.

(iv) Trust, hope and optimism

Hope and optimism are distinct from each other. A person can hope for a miraculous cure to his illness while not being optimistic about it. Similar is the case with trust and hope. Trust is based on reliability, self-confidence, and faith in someone else, while hope is a simple wish or expectation for a certain desired thing to happen. In the same way, optimism cannot be treated as trust. The reason being that optimism and pessimism are both catalytic by nature, i.e., can influence a decision but are not the decision by an on itself. A pessimistic person can look at a piece of data and make a risk averse decision while an optimist might look at the same data and make a decision that is more open to risk.

An optimistic bond of trust could be represented as:

$$T_x(Y, S) = T_x(Y) U_x(S) I_x(S)$$

Where:

$$T_x(Y) = \max_{S \in A} (T_x(Y, S))$$

Where A is a collection of situations like S or all situations and X is an optimist and Y's predisposition does not matter.

Similarly, a pessimistic bond of trust could be represented as:

$$T_x(Y, S) = T_x(Y) U_x(S) I_x(S)$$

Where:

$$T_x(Y) = \min_{S \in A} (T_x(Y, S))$$

Where A is a collection of situations like S or all situations and X is a pessimist and Y's predisposition does not matter.

(v) Trust and reliance

British Philosopher Katherine Hawley (1971-2021) argues that people rely on many things, like bus, train, or plane schedules. If a scheduled flight is cancelled in view of some reason, we do not say that the airline has betrayed us even though we relied on their flight schedule. But this is not the case with our friends and family members. If our friends and family members do not come forward in times of need, we say that they have betrayed us. This shows we trusted our family members to help us in times of need, in the absence of which we feel betrayed. Reliance is something we expect from someone that he will behave in a certain way, and we rely on many things without trusting them.

(vi) Trust and expectation

Trust can be thought of as a bond between two entities which can exist in a formalized written form or an informalized mutual understanding. An important aspect of trust is the expectation of outcome. If two entities, X and Y, are said to trust each other, then there exists an explicit or implicit expectation of outcome between the two.

An expectation can be a spontaneous impulsive strong belief in an outcome. But it can also be a strong belief in an outcome based on historical data. For instance, say a person Y visits a bookstore every Friday at 2 pm and a person X is privy to this information. In such a scenario, if X wanted to meet Y on a Friday, then X would visit the bookstore at 2 pm in the expectation of meeting Y. The point to be considered here is that X did not have to trust Y to find him at the bookstore. Instead, X simply expected to find Y based on historical evidence. X could also randomly visit the bookstore any day of the week in the expectation of finding Y. This substantiates the fact that an expectation can be both impulsive

or evidence based and does not require a prior bond of trust between two entities.

However, trust requires an expectation of outcome which forms the very basis on which trust is formed. The actions of Y in relation to the needs of X given a situation S results in an outcome. As these outcomes cumulate over a set of similar situations to S, and Y caters to the needs of X satisfactorily, the bond of trust becomes stronger. This can be formulated as:

$$B_T(X, Y) = T_X(Y) \sum(O_x(Y, S))$$

Where $B_T(X, Y)$ represents the bond of trust between X and Y.

$\sum(O_x(Y, S))$ represents a cumulative measure of all outcomes that came because of S and situations like S.

It can therefore be said that for the trust to become stronger, the expectations of the parties involved must be met frequently. As the parties keep living up to each other's promises and expectations, trust becomes stronger over time.

(vii) Trust and agreement

In trusting someone, it is observed that agreement plays an important role. Human memory is not reliable; therefore, these agreements are made on paper in front of credible witnesses. Sometimes, the agreements contain the clauses of carrot (reward) and stick (penalty). When an agreement is made with all specific clauses, it is difficult to be broken. If someone breaks it, it is treated that trust has been broken.

(viii) Trust and confidence

People use the words trust and confidence interchangeably, however, there is a distinction between the two. Confidence is a kind of assurance that a person will behave in a specific way while trust is a higher degree of confidence which is built over time. Initially what develops

from the past experiences is the confidence, followed by trust in that person. The difference between confidence and trust is, in having confidence, we are not sure of the outcome, but having a trust means we are sure in the ability of that person to fulfill the required objective.

(ix) Trust and belief

Trust and belief are two words that are generally associated with faith but have varying degree of meanings. Belief is a noun, meaning an acceptance that something is true. Belief is an opinion or conviction. Trust can either be noun or verb. As a noun, trust also means a belief in reliability and ability of someone or something. These meanings are similar. However, philosophically speaking belief holds greater weight than Trust. Some people say that trust is the product of mind while belief is the product of heart. When a person trusts, he expects something, some value out of it. But if he believes, he surrenders himself, no matter what the outcome is. Thus, it can be said that trust is halfway to belief.

(x) Trust and assurance

The difference between trust and assurance is that trust is the confidence in, or reliance on, some person or the quality of a product, while assurance is the action of assuring or declaring to a person about trustworthiness of the person or product. Assuring people to have trust in you is to show them that you are reliable and trustworthy and to do that you need some evidence. A person or an entity is trustworthy if there are credible evidence leading others to have trust in them. Thus, it can be said that trust is a measure of trustworthiness based on the evidence provided.

(xi) Trust and trustworthiness

In a broader sense, trust and distrust are treated as reliance and non-reliance. However, distrust is non-reliance based on evaluating the trustworthiness of the person. The conditions of evaluating the trustworthiness of a person or a thing are briefly described below.

(a) Trusting someone requires that the trustee has a commitment to do the thing required of him. Distrust is that the person had earlier committed to do a thing but failed to do so. Therefore, he is not reliable. Like politicians who commit many things during their election campaign, but after they win, they ignore all those promises and involve in the same old corrupt practices. Therefore, it is said that the obligation of being trusted is, one must make sure that he honors his commitments. In this case, trust is interpersonal.

(b) There should be some optimism about the ability of the person who is trusted.

(c) Expectation about the trustee should be well grounded while determining that he is trustworthy.

(d) Trust should be justified in the sense that some value emerges out of the trust.

(e) Trust should be credible in view of the circumstances prevailing around the trustee.

Concept of trust in Islam

Belief in Allah is the corner stone of Islamic faith. Muslims believe in the Quran which was revealed to Prophet Mohammad (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم). They believe in the explanation of the Quran and in the Islamic teachings of Prophet Mohammad (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم). Muslims' faith (الايمان) covers all possible meanings of trust described above.

The Quran teaches Muslims to have absolute trust (توكل) in Allah.

It is in Quran – وَيَزُرُّهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ ۚ وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَىٰ – [And (Allah) provides for them (the people) from the sources they could never imagine. And whoever puts their trust in Allah, then He (Allah) is sufficient for them.] (At-Talaq – 3)

Tawakkul (توكل) is an Arabic word that defines the Islamic concept of absolute trust in Allah's plan in this Cosmos. When a person faces trials and challenges in life, he surrenders to Allah having absolute trust in Him that He will take him out of the troubles.

With the above explanation, someone may question that when you have absolute trust in Allah to provide you everything, then where is the need to take initiative or work.

Prophet Mohammad (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) explained the meanings of tawakkal (توكل) saying that 'trust in Allah but tie your camel'. This saying of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) explains that people should not sit idle doing nothing by having trust in Allah thinking that Allah will magically solve their problems. The fact is that the power of trust in Allah gives Muslims the strength to take appropriate action. Therefore, they do not sit idle and make all possible efforts appropriate to alleviate their problems. Muslims believe that their strength is derived from the unlimited strength of Allah. Having strong trust in Allah frees Muslims from fear and negativity in life.

Thus, in Islamic literature 'belief in Allah' and 'trust in Allah' are distinct from each other. Islamic concept of belief (certitude or certainty) in Allah has three elements, as follows.

(i) Certitude of knowing (علم اليقين). Like we know that fire burns, this is 'certitude of knowing' (علم اليقين).

(ii) Certitude of seeing (عين اليقين). Suppose we have seen something burning in fire, this is 'Certitude of seeing' (عين اليقين).

(iii) Certitude of realizing (حق اليقين). Suppose our finger was burnt accidentally, this is 'Certitude of Realizing' (حق اليقين).

A Muslim's belief in Allah relates to 'certitude of realizing'. They trust in Allah, in His absolute power and they draw their strength from Allah's absolute power in all their affairs in this world.

Conclusion

Defining trust has been an arduous task for philosophers. Their opinions are varied on this subject. This paper discusses various features of Trust based on the opinions of scholars. The paper also describes various conditions of trustworthiness of a person. In the end, Islamic perspective of trust has been described in which it is explained that Muslims' trust in Allah is of

highest form of absolute Trust in His power. They draw their strength from Allah's absolute power in all their affairs in this world.

Bibliography

1. Trust: A Very Short Introduction, Katherine Hawley, Oxford University Press, 2012
2. The philosophy of trust, Paul Faulkner and Thomas Simpson (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2016
3. Trust and mistrust, philosophytalk.org
4. The ethics and epistemology of trust, J. Adam Carter and Mona Simion, Internet encyclopedia of philosophy
5. On trust and philosophy, open.edu
6. Difference between belief and trust, differencebetween.net
7. Difference between trust and confidence, differencebetween.com
8. Trust vs expectations, Manish Agarwal
9. Trust: Agreement Vs expectation, Randy Scott
10. The Liberating Principle of Tawakkul in Islam or Complete Trust and Reliance on God, Paola Garcia
11. Trust in God, an Islamic perspective, Anees Azeez
12. Belief in Allah, Ash Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri
13. Optimism and Pessimism in Trust, Stephen Marsh, University of Sterling, Scotland

About the Author



Ash Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri is well known all over the world for his explanation of Islamic Tawheed, Sahih Iman, Sahih Islam and Sahih Ihsan. He is a scholar, historian, and poet. He is the author of Tafseer-e-Asedi, Irshad Al Asedi, Fusus Al-Iman and over 1000 books on various Islamic subjects. He has written many research articles on religion, history, and other subjects. He is also the Editor in Chief of CIFIA Global Journal.