

The categorical imperative and the ethics of trust

Bjørn K. Myskja

Department of Philosophy Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU, 7491 Trondheim, Norway
E-mail: bjorn.myskja@hf.ntnu.no

Abstract. Trust can be understood as a precondition for a well-functioning society or as a way to handle complexities of living in a risk society, but also as a fundamental aspect of human morality. Interactions on the Internet pose some new challenges to issues of trust, especially connected to disembodiedness. Mistrust may be an important obstacle to Internet use, which is problematic as the Internet becomes a significant arena for political, social and commercial activities necessary for full participation in a liberal democracy. The Categorical Imperative lifts up *trust* as a fundamental component of human ethical virtues – first of all, because deception and coercion, the antitheses of trust, cannot be universalized. Mistrust is, according to Kant, a natural component of human nature, as we are social beings dependent on recognition by others but also prone to deceiving others. Only in true friendships can this tendency be overcome and give room for unconditional trust. Still we can argue that Kant must hold that trustworthy behaviour as well as trust in others is obligatory, as expressions of *respect* for humanity. The Kantian approach integrates political and ethical aspects of trust, showing that protecting the external activities of citizens is required in order to act morally. This means that security measures, combined with specific regulations are important preconditions for building online trust, providing an environment enabling people to act morally and for trust-based relationships.

Key words: deception, ethics, Internet, Kant, trust

Introduction

Trust is a vague concept that has been understood in a number of different ways, from the functionalistic account of Luhmann (1968) to the phenomenological approach of Løgstrup (1956). Luhmann sees trust primarily as a way to reduce complexity in a situation of risk and uncertainty, simplifying the number of choices we have to face and expanding our possibilities of action. One related observation by Fukuyama (1995) is that without trust, the cost for society would be immense, both socially and economically. This approach is relevant for two related aspects of Internet trust that often are highlighted in the discussion, namely trust in the technical stability as well as in the security arrangements of websites where people submit valuable personal information concerning identity (e.g., social security numbers) and credit card information (Nissenbaum 2001, p. 102). As “trust” is a vague concept, I will not spend time discussing to what extent it is meaningful to say that we can trust non-intentional systems (see e.g. Corritore

et al. 2003), or whether it is more appropriate to say that we rely on these systems to function properly, in order to describe our attitude to this kind of non-moral entities.

My concern in this paper is with trust placed in other people encountered on the Internet, where crucial trust-fostering aspects of direct interpersonal meetings are lacking, in particular communication connected to body language. Under such circumstances we are particularly vulnerable, and may either become victim to fraud and deception or may develop mistrust in other people, contrary to morality (Dreyfus 2001, 70f). Examples of situations where interpersonal trust is essential for successful interactions include e-commerce where we submit credit card information and hope to receive the goods we paid for, as well as chat room interactions where we give and receive personal and sensitive information as part of building friendships. Trust is also essential for a well-functioning cyberdemocracy, such as participation in political debates and decision making using information and communications technology.

Trust, ethics and embodiedness

It is reasonable to assume that Internet communication poses some genuinely new challenges for the moral philosophy of trust. But we should be aware that an *ethical* concept of trust is significantly different from the functionalist approach predominant in political and sociological approaches (e.g. Luhmann 1968; Giddens 1990 and Sztompka 1999). In two independent, but thematically related phenomenological approaches (Løgstrup 1956 and Levinas 1969) that put trust at the centre of morality, or even at the centre of the human condition as such, we find that the bodily presence in the encounter appears to be essential for understanding the relation of trust. Presumably, our embodiedness is crucial in establishing trust as well. Løgstrup (1956) emphasises that humans, as a matter of fact, are vulnerable and that this is the basis for morality. Trust is on the receiving end of ethical behaviour in the sense that trusting someone involves an appeal that they take responsibility for our well-being – but without any guarantee that they actually will, according to Løgstrup. We trust each other and lay our lives in the hands of the people we meet. The personal meeting is essential for the ethical demand issued by human vulnerability, since we tend to form particular pictures and expectations of people we do not know, and are wary of them. These judgements will normally break down in the presence of the other, and this proximity is essential for the eradication of these preconceptions (*Ibid.*, 22f).

We do not trust each other for a particular reason and it is not a feeling or attitude we choose to have. It is a fact of the human condition that we trust each other, and mistrust must be understood as a result of a failure of the normal condition and, unlike trust, needs to be justified (*Ibid.*, 27f). On Løgstrup's account, it appears as if bodily proximity is essential for trust-based morality, and we may assume that the virtual proximity of cyberspace is insufficient for establishing the ethical demand in the same way. Levinas (1969, 187ff), emphasises the experience of the *face* of the other as basis for human responsibility, and connects this to human vulnerability. These approaches are related in that both of them indicate the significance of physical proximity as essential for establishing ethics, and connect this to the asymmetrical relation of trust and responsibility. The relation is asymmetrical because I experience myself as responsible for the other regardless of her ability to treat me likewise. Thus this approach differs from contract theories of ethics and other moral theories that take morality to be dependent on reciprocity (Gauthier 1986, 1ff). But Levinas' and Løgstrup's

moral theories admit that there may be *apparent* symmetry in ethical relationships between equals; we trust and take responsibility for each other simultaneously.

This concern with embodiedness as fundamental in trust-based relationships, and thus problematic in Internet communication, has been pointed out by several authors. Nissenbaum (2001, 113f) points out that both the identities and personal characteristics of the people we encounter may be false, and we have less means of checking their credibility and trustworthiness. Weckert (2005), referring to Hubert Dreyfus, connects the issues of identity and personal characteristics to communication and vulnerability in a way that echoes Løgstrup and Levinas. As trust-based relations are established through bodily proximity, online relations lack crucial conditions for trust. It seems to follow that we cannot establish real trust in this context, but also that it is easier to be deceived. He adds that the online context leaves less room for harm than a bodily encounter. The result of this account is quite confusing: the disembodied online communication prevents the establishment of real trust, but the conditional trust we place in others in this context makes us more vulnerable to deception and harm. This is, however, not too bad since the harm we may suffer then is insignificant compared to the potential harm in embodied communication. The reason for this apparent confusion may be due to a mix-up of different levels of trust. The fundamental – ontological, as Levinas would say – level of trust is difficult to establish in a disembodied relation exactly because we are not presented to each other as truly vulnerable and in need of protection. Still we may place pragmatic trust in others in the same way we do trust the mailman or the plumber to do their job. If they fail, we lose some money and get some extra work, but we are not harmed in a fundamental sense.

But is it really the case that embodied encounters are essential for establishing fundamental trust? Both Løgstrup and Levinas put language-based communication at the centre of the experience of trust and responsibility, indicating that trust understood as a fundamental part of our moral life does not necessarily build on physical proximity. If the fundamental experience of responsibility in the encounter with our fellow human being as vulnerable and trusting is as much a matter of discourse as of physical encounters, their analysis of trust is equally relevant for the challenges of online communication. This is supported by some evidence and analyses pointing out that establishing trust may take longer time online than offline, but may result in equally valuable and harmful relationships (Weckert 2005, 110ff).

The necessity of online trust

If we assume that trust and responsibility should be regarded as fundamental moral facts also in cyberspace, we may still wonder whether this helps us in understanding the particular challenges for trust posed by the Internet. If we accept the claim that trust is a fundamental part of human interaction and need not be justified, and that our foremost ethical challenge is to act on the ethical demand raised by the trust shown to us by the people we communicate with, the issue of trust in cyberspace is merely an extension of the issue of trust in general. Given the assumption of trust as an irreducible human phenomenon, issues as whether we should trust those we encounter on the net or how to foster trust seems to be beside the point, at least as moral questions. They are merely pragmatic issues, relevant to the extent that people wish to use the opportunity provided by Internet communication.

On the other hand, there are issues related to trust in cyberspace that are genuine normative issues. The use of Internet communication has arguably become more than merely an option in our modern society. There are several benefits connected to using the Internet “from wide-ranging access to information and communication to enhancement of community and politics to stimulation of commerce and scientific collaboration” (Nissenbaum 2004, p. 155), and at least some of these require trust-based interactions. One can argue that these benefits are rapidly becoming necessities for citizens of “the information society”. When Internet use is necessary in order to gain access to information, for political participation and for economic growth (Moss 2002, p. 162), it is a political duty to ensure that we have reason to trust online relations to the same degree or even more than we trust offline interactions. Even if creating online trust is irrelevant considered as an ethical question, it is crucial as a normative political question. Given that online interaction expands the public sphere, increases the opportunity for political participation and is beneficial for increased welfare and knowledge, it contributes to a well-functioning democracy. But the Internet can only serve this function to the extent that people have the same opportunity to build trust online as offline.

There are many different normative approaches that deal with the connections and disconnections between ethics and normative politics that could be used as a perspective to highlight the challenges of online trust as a simultaneous ethical and political challenge. I will use the Kantian approach here, for several reasons. His political theory is compatible with liberal democracies predominant in the Western

world and therefore relevant for a significant number of Internet users. In addition, trust is a fundamental aspect of his moral philosophy (O’Neill 2002, 86ff). Furthermore, his theory makes available a distinction between trust as a moral demand and a pragmatic approach to trust that is appropriate in a society where deception and coercion are open possibilities in areas not regulated by enforced laws. This is related to his understanding of law as a way of ensuring the opportunity for exercising morality. We need the constraints of law to enable us to practice morality. Hence, we need regulations of online interactions in order to enable people to establish trust-based relationships.

The categorical imperative and trust

Interpretations of Kant’s moral philosophy usually focus on the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1965 [1785]), the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1993 [1788]), and the Categorical Imperative (CI) as expressing the core of morality. Few interpreters have explored the significance of trust in this part of his moral philosophy, with Onora O’Neill as one important exception. O’Neill contrasts the Kantian notion of autonomy, which she calls principled autonomy with the individualistic understanding of autonomy predominant in modern bioethics (*Ibid.*, 73 ff.). In the individual autonomy approach, it is sufficient that the choice is free from constraints by others, regardless of its content, but the CI states that we should act according to principles that could be adopted by everyone. (Kant 1965 [1785], p. 42) Principled autonomy requires that we must be able to communicate the reasons for our actions to others, effectively ruling out arbitrary and irrational actions as well as actions that could harm others. As O’Neill points out, the direct implications of adopting the CI are that any kind of deception or coercion of others is ruled out, as these cannot be universalised. Trusting others is primarily a matter of not being deceived or coerced, which means that the essence of the CI is to act in a trustworthy way.

The second formulation of the CI – which says that we should never treat persons as mere means but also as ends in themselves (Kant 1965 [1785], p. 52) – likewise amounts to a prohibition of deception and coercion. Thus it is our basic moral duty according to the Kantian moral philosophy to act in accordance with the trust others place in us. But we can also turn this around and say that we have a duty to trust other people. We see this clearly from both formulations of the CI: (1) We cannot universalise acting according to a principle of mistrust, because we cannot will a

world of general mistrust. Trust is a basic condition of becoming an autonomous person, because we are dependent on others during the first part of our lives. In a world of universal mistrust we could never become autonomous people, able to choose whether we ought to trust or mistrust others. (2) Mistrust is also contrary to the respect we owe others as ends in themselves, because it implies that the other is a person not acting according to the moral law. But being an end in itself means acting according to the moral law and not according to other commands. Through our mistrust we refuse to treat the other as worthy of respect.

One of the most famous or infamous examples of Kant's idealist ethics expressed in the CI is his discussion of the duty to refrain from lying. Even if you hide a person from a murderer, it is morally wrong to lie when asked whether the intended victim is at home. Many have argued that this shows how wrong the theory may turn out in practice, but Korsgaard (1996, 133ff) argues – in keeping with O'Neill's interpretation – that lying to an ill-intended agent is still expressive of deception and thus contrary to the ideal of a moral community of shared goals as expressed in the CI. But she also argues that it is reasonable to say that when we are faced with evil, acting as though we were part of an ideal moral community makes us unwilling tools of evil. There are circumstances where we ought to lie in order to prevent a greater evil, even if that breaks with the general tenor of Kant's moral philosophy. And Korsgaard argues that developing a non-ideal moral philosophy is not contrary to everything Kant writes on ethics:

Throughout this essay I have portrayed Kant as an uncompromising idealist, and there is much to support this view. But in the historical and political writings, as well as in the *Lectures on Ethics*, we find a somewhat different attitude (*Ibid.*, p. 154).

I believe that this more pragmatic attitude in Kant's later works is worth exploring further regarding the moral significance of trust, which is thematised both directly and indirectly, often in connection with a non-ideal approach to human interaction highly relevant for online communication.

Civilised mistrust, trust and friendship

Kant is well aware of the frailty of human goodness, and his analysis of radical evil as part of human nature is not only based on theoretical arguments, but is supported with empirical examples. He starts out with rejecting any idea of a noble savage by

referring to descriptions of unnecessary cruelty among the people of the Pacific islands as well as among American natives. But we are no better off in the “civilised state” where we should have the best chances of develop our moral dispositions. Here, we still may hear numerous complaints, Kant says, for example

of secret falsity even in the closest friendship, so that a limit upon trust in the mutual confidences of even the best friends is reckoned a universal maxim of prudence in intercourse; of a propensity to hate him to whom one is indebted, for which a benefactor always must be prepared; of a hearty well-wishing which yet allows the remark that “in the misfortunes of our best friends there is something which is not altogether displeasing to us” and of many other vices still concealed under the cloak of virtue. (Kant 1960 [1793], 28f)

This is not a result of Kant growing misanthropic in later years, nor particularly related to his focus on evil in his work on rational religion. This is Kant's realistic view of the nature of human beings; we are not pure moral beings and even when we act in accordance with morality we still cannot know what our deepest motives are (Kant 1996 [1797], p. 196). We find similar expressions in his works on anthropology where he says that in the civilised state man tends to become more of an actor, pretending to be better than he really is but he also adds that no-one is fooled by these deceptions; we expect each other to pretend to be better than we really are (Kant 1983 [1798], p. 67). But then *mistrust* is an integral part of human interaction and communication, and not, as Løgstrup assumes, a deviation from fundamental aspects of the human condition. The downside of this is of course that we cannot wholly trust each other, and the ones who do not participate in this play-acting, i.e. the truthful among us, will appear as morally worse than his fellow citizens.

Even if Kant says that without truthfulness, “social intercourse ceases to be of any value,” and that the “liar destroys this fellowship” among men (Kant 1997, 200f)¹, he continues in the same lecture by stating that we feel a need to deceive others about our true nature:

Man holds back in regard to his weaknesses and transgressions, and can also pretend and adopt an appearance. The proclivity for reserve and concealment rests on this, that providence has willed

¹ The citations in this paragraph are based on student notes from Kant's lectures, and one can discuss how well they represent Kant's teachings.

that man should not be wholly open, since he is full of iniquity; because we have so many characteristics and tendencies that are objectionable to others, we would be liable to appear before them in a foolish and hateful life. But the result, in that case, might be this, that people would tend to grow accustomed to such bad points, since they would see the same in everyone (*Ibid.*, p. 201).

Deception seems to be acceptable to Kant when it is done as part of the social game, and in order to hide our moral weaknesses. If others saw us as those villains we all really are, this would only serve to corrupt everyone; simply, we would get used to bad and immoral behaviour as normal. Pretending to be better than we really are is not only deception; it makes us *act* as better humans. Even if such action in accordance with duty but motivated by non-moral reasons has no true moral worth (Kant 1965 [1785], p. 398), it has a positive potential. In the end we may even develop true virtues based on our pretended virtuous behaviour, Kant seems to assume: “So by this endeavour to look well we actually end up doing so, later on” (Kant 1997, p. 201). This is not deception in the way outright lie for own benefit is, but necessary both for our own social preservation and for creating a morally better community. It is also necessary for our self-preservation, even among friends: “We must so conduct ourselves to a friend, that it does us no harm if he were to become our enemy; we must give him nothing to use against us” (*Ibid.*, p. 189). Others can misuse information we give them, intentionally or by accident. Thus we can call this well-intentioned deception, and regard it as part of social conventions that everybody accepts. We even think truthfulness in such matters is morally dubious, for example if one of your colleagues insists on telling about his envy of your professional success.²

The control we have over how we present ourselves online, makes ideal conditions for these kinds of well-intentioned deceptions. We should assume that people who struggle with being recognised due to their physical appearance may find this an ideal environment for building good relationships, and there exists empirical support for this assumption:

At the keyboard you can concentrate only on yourself, your words, and the feelings you *want* to convey. You don't have to worry about how you look, what you're wearing, on those extra pounds you meant to shed. [Emphasis added] (Wallace 1999, p. 151, cited from Weckert 2005, p. 111)

² See Wood (1999, 250ff) for a fuller discussion of Kant's ethical and anthropological work on friendship and trust.

There exists a kind of trust online that depends on the fact that we exercise this self-censorship or deception. The fact that we deceive and know that those we communicate with know that we deceive and *vice versa* contributes to an open communication on subjects that both parties find important. The implicit reciprocal acknowledgement that we are not completely honest in all respects may promote reciprocal trust. We know that we communicate with the other not as he is, but as he wants to be (or as he wants to be perceived to be), because we present ourselves in the same way. On this non-ideal Kantian morality we may deceive others both in order to protect ourselves against their negative judgement, but also in order to promote moral improvement in the society. Deception is an integral part of social intercourse and mistrust is prudential.

There seems to be an irresolvable tension between Kant's ideal moral theory where being trustworthy and trusting others become perfect duties, i.e. duties that admit of no exception (Kant 1965 [1785], p. 421), and his pragmatic application of this theory in civilised society, where deception and mistrust are both necessary and beneficial. We should also note his warning that this benign deception may not always lead to moral improvement – acting may easily lead to deception and outright lies, too (Kant 1983 [1798], p. 291).

If mistrust is required in civilised society, it is still the case that this is contrary to the ideal moral theory, and Kant risks providing support for those numerous critics from Hegel onwards who claim that the principles of his moral theory are too far removed from the complexities of the empirical reality of human life. His acceptance of mistrust seems to be too cynical as well as too arbitrary to be useful for moral advice. But there is one relationship where we are free from the pretensions and deceptions of social life – namely in a true friendship. Despite Kant's warning against openness even towards friends, he calls perfect friendship

the union of two persons through equal mutual love and respect ... each participating and sharing sympathetically in the other's well-being through the morally good will that unites them. (Kant 1996 [1797], p. 215)

This perfect friendship is an ideal and necessary for happiness, and as such it is a moral duty. It cannot be based on feelings of sympathy only, because it “is the complete confidence of two persons in revealing their secret judgments and feelings to each other, as far as such disclosures are consistent with mutual respect” (*Ibid.*, p. 216). This is certainly a description of a trust-based relationship, but the problem with this

kind of relationship is that it is rare as “black swans” (*Ibid.*, p. 217). We cannot build a moral theory for trust on the Internet on an ideal kind of relationship that functions merely as a regulative idea for most of us, i.e. as mere guidance for thought (Kant 1976 [1787], A671ff/B699ff). If we were able to form these kinds of trust-based relationships on a regular basis, trust on the Internet would be a minor problem. As long as such relationships are exceptions, but still a moral duty, people should at least not be prevented from forming such relationships. If we want people to use the Internet, they must be able to realise their moral duties also in this environment. But this is only possible if the Internet is structured in a way that enables us to trust others and act trustworthy, i.e. as long as it makes it possible for those who want to act morally to do so without having to fear losing because they have behaved morally.

But as we saw above, the main problem is political in its nature. We need to structure the interactions on the Internet in a way that enables people to form trust-based relationships, either the kind where we reciprocally know or suspect that we deceive each other in a well-intentioned way or the true trust-based relationship of perfect friendships. But regulation of interactions on the Internet is a political task, and as such not part of ethics in a narrow sense.

Politics, ethics and trust

Trust is an essential condition for fulfilling the potential of the online world, but we cannot create trustworthy partners merely by choosing to trust them – or perhaps we can? Weckert (2005, p. 113) suggests that in many instances “[t]rust can emerge when I choose to act as if I trust, that is, choose to make myself vulnerable to others, and find that nothing ill happen to me.” This is part of his understanding of trust neither as a belief nor a feeling but as a matter of “seeing as” or an attitude we take to others (*Ibid.*, 102ff). This squares well with the moral theories of Løgstrup and Levinas, as well as with Kant’s ideal theory, but is more at odds with his non-ideal, pragmatic approach. When you act according to moral ideals and trust people you do not know, you are easily betrayed or become a tool in the hands of evil. You may find that bad things *do* happen to you. Under such non-ideal conditions, a strategy of reciprocity avoiding any need for trust or altruism can be a sound way to establish stable non-moral cooperation, as is argued by Axelrod (1984). But the success of this strategy is dependent on an expectation of important future interactions between the agents. When this expectation breaks down,

external force is necessary to solve conflicts, and it is doubtful that this strategy can provide background for trust-based behaviour.

A solution to this problem of acting morally in a social setting where other people are likely to take advantage of you, can be found in Kant’s distinction between right and virtue. He says there are two kinds of moral laws; juridical laws that are “directed to external actions and their conformity to law” and ethical laws that “also require that they (the laws) themselves be determining grounds of action” (Kant 1996 [1797], p. 14). External actions are those that can be constrained by other people’s actions, and the universal principle of right aims at securing freedom of such actions in accordance with justice:

Any action is *right* if it can coexist with everyone’s freedom in accordance with a universal law, or if on its maxim the freedom of choice of each can coexist with everyone’s freedom in accordance with a universal law. (*Ibid.*, p. 24)

We are allowed to act without hindrance as long as our actions conform to this restriction. The universal principle seems to be a categorical imperative demanding that we act within these restrictions, but Kant himself explicitly denies this. This is not a moral demand but a limitation on freedom that “may also be actively limited by others” (*Ibid.*, p. 25). Pogge argues that this is not an implication of Kant’s moral philosophy but a juridical permission for persons to “force any person to act externally so that the free use of his or her choice can coexist with everyone according to a universal law” (Pogge 1997, p. 168). Pogge’s main aim is to show that Kant’s political liberalism does not presuppose his moral philosophy, but is a political theory that anybody could endorse merely for prudential reasons. This is in keeping with Kant’s famous statement in *Perpetual Peace* that even a nation of devils would solve the problem of instituting a republican state, merely in selfish interest (Kant 1984 [1795], p. 31). Thus we have laws in order to protect each and everybody’s freedom to act as they themselves see fit as long as they do not prevent other people’s similar freedom, not in order to make them act in accordance with morality.

How is this relevant for the issue of online trust? To see that, we must not only ask to what extent Kant’s political theory is independent from his moral philosophy, but what function it serves in relation to this moral philosophy. As we saw above, the universal principle of right is a permission to prevent people from infringing on the external freedom of others. We have no right to force others to tell the truth or to refrain from manipulation of other adults, but we can prevent them from stealing, from taking

advantage of minors, and force them to abide by a contract, respect privacy and so forth. Kant's political theory aims to build a state based on juridical laws that enables everybody to pursue their own vision of the good, including those that see the good as acting in accordance with morality as presented in Kant's ideal theory. The main aim of state laws and regulations, if understood in the context of Kant's moral philosophy, is to secure that people can choose to act morally if they so wish.

In a state of nature everybody has the right to use whatever force they wish to secure their life and freedom. In such a state, acting according to morality will lead to loss of both property and life, because nobody else follows any other rule than those derived from their own self-preservation. Therefore, it is only in a civil society where everybody is restrained by law that we are able to exercise the moral conduct demanded by our own reason. An unregulated Internet with no security mechanisms such as "firewalls, biometrics, digital signatures, intrusion detection, auditing and so forth" (Nissenbaum 2004, p. 168) will be a virtual state of nature where naïve trust as suggested by Weckert risks being severely punished. Nissenbaum and Weckert are right in saying that online trust is not a matter of security. It is parallel to saying, as Kant might have, that ethics is not a matter of law. But Kant is also implying that ethics is impossible without a state of law, because the laws enable us to act morally, i.e. to trust and to act trustworthy, without risking our self-destruction. In the same way we may say that online trust is impossible without security measures and a relevant set of laws and regulations to protect people from harm.

This is not merely a matter of saying that the same laws should hold for the world online as offline. They do. But there are issues unique to the online world requiring special laws and regulations and specially trained police for an effective control – for example, of the international child pornography industry. Therefore both security measures and special laws regulating Internet interactions are necessary requirements for online trust, even if trust should never become synonymous with security and regulation.

Conclusion

Trust is an important factor in optimal use of the Internet. As more and more of public information, commerce and social life involve online interactions, using the Internet is no longer optional, but a necessary part of political and social life for an increasing

group of people. In order to function fully as a citizen in a liberal democracy, one will have to use the Internet both for political and private activities, and protecting the freedom of the citizens becomes a political task. The Kantian approach to ethics sees the protection of the liberty of citizens as a way to enable people to act morally, if they so wish. The core of moral action is action motivated by the moral law, as it is expressed in the Categorical Imperative, which entails that you should behave in a trustworthy way. In addition it means that we should trust others, as a way to express respect for them as moral beings.

The Kantian analysis is not restricted to an ideal theory of morality. In a social world dominated by people pretending to act morally, covering up their selfish motives and wishing to make exceptions for themselves from rules they think everybody else ought to follow, we need a set of laws and regulations that protect us from coercion and deception. Also, on this pragmatic approach to morality, we need trust-enhancing security measures and regulations. In this case, the aim is not to enable us to act morally, but to protect us from the consequences of humanity's evil nature. As Kant has pointed out, being evil is not a matter of choosing to act immorally for its own sake, but rather that as human, a man "is conscious of the moral law, but has nevertheless adopted into his maxim the (occasional) deviation therefrom" (Kant 1960 [1793], p. 27). In an online world where trust is needed, but unconditional trust is imprudent, securing conditional trust is important for a well-functioning online society. In a relatively safe atmosphere like this, our "endeavour to look well to others" may lead us to do well later on, as Kant thinks. Securing the freedom of citizens online through security measures and law is not merely a way to enable people to act morally if they wish, but also clearing a path for them to develop the wish to become trustworthy.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Charles Ess and the Journal's anonymous referees for helpful comments and suggestions.

References

- Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*. Basic Books, New York, 1984.
- Cynthia L. Corritore, Beverly Kracher and Susan Wiedenbeck. Online Trust: Concepts, Evolving Themes, a Model. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 58(6): 737–758, 2003.

- Hubert Dreyfus, *On the Internet*. Routledge, New York, 2001.
- Francis Fukuyama, *Trust. The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. Free Press, New York, 1995.
- David Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986.
- Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*. Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990.
- Immanuel Kant. *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, transl. by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson. Harper & Row, New York, 1960 [1793].
- Immanuel Kant. *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*. Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 1965 [1785].
- Immanuel Kant. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 1976 [1787].
- Immanuel Kant. *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*. Reclam, Stuttgart, 1983 [1798].
- Immanuel Kant. *Zum ewigen Frieden*. Reclam, Stuttgart, 1984 [1795].
- Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason*, transl. by Lewis White Beck. Macmillan, New York, 1993 [1788].
- Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals*, transl. by Mary Gregor. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996 [1797].
- Immanuel Kant. *Lectures in Ethics*, transl. by Peter Heath. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.
- Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.
- Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*. Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1969.
- Niklas Luhmann, *Vertrauen: Ein Mechanismus der Reduktion sozialer Komplexität*. Ferdinand Enke, Stuttgart, 1968.
- Knud E. Løgstrup, *Den Ethiske Fordring*. Gyldendal, Copenhagen, 1956.
- Jeremy Moss. Power and the Digital Divide. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 4(2): 159–165, 2002.
- Helen Nissenbaum. Securing Trust Online: Wisdom or Oxymoron? *Boston University Law Review*, 81: 101–131, 2001.
- Helen Nissenbaum. Will Security Enhance Trust Online, or Supplant it? In Roderick M. Kramer and Karen S. Cook, editors, *Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Dilemmas and Approaches*, pp. 155–188. Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 2004.
- Onora O'Neill, *Autonomy and Trust in Bioethics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002.
- Thomas Pogge. Is Kant's *Rechtslehre* Comprehensive? *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 36: 161–187, 1997.
- Piotr Sztompka, *Trust: A Sociological Theory*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999.
- John Weckert. Trust in Cyberspace. In Robert J. Cavalier, editor, *The Impact of the Internet on Our Moral Lives*, pp. 95–117. State University of New York Press, Albany, 2005.
- Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999.