Chapter 5

The Grounds for Social Trust

IF WE BEGIN our search for moral progress from where we are here and now, we must ask questions about what we ought to do from within societies that may be dissolving. And we must consider how to develop morally better societies from the points of view of persons already in the societies we are in. What in the way of social cohesion and cooperation will make it possible for us to move forward rather than sink lower? Can the societies of which we are part sustain themselves long enough for improvement to occur?

We live at a time when many observers fear their societies may be falling apart, when it seems that, in that once wonderful phrase of Yeats's which has become by now a cliché, "the center cannot hold."[1] To understand how a society can cohere or crumble, we need to explore the question of trust.

For cooperation among persons to be sustainable, trust must be present. At the level of a society, there must be the possibility of social trust. At the level of persons in their immediate interactions with those close to them, there must be the possibility of personal trust. In a society in the process of dissolution, mistrust and suspicion grow, as everywhere persons pursue their own self-interest, expecting full well that others will do so too. People increasingly become resigned to a society in which taking advantage of others when one can is standard and accepted behavior. All seem to feel they must take part in the struggle to

advance their own interests, or others will do so at their expense. Many worry that American society is in such a process; a U.S. congressman remarked a few years ago that in over thirty years in public office he had never been so aware of an "every man for himself" atmosphere.[2] Since then, trust in the basic structures of the society has decreased rather than increased.[3]

The teachings that students and citizens absorb frequently extol rather than question egoism: the liberal tradition asserts that government is justified only if it serves individual self-interest; the myth of Adam Smith, on which capitalism and market economies rest, asserts that if all pursue their own selfish interests, this will add up to what is best for everyone; the novels of Ayn Rand and the theories of libertarians carry the excesses of egoism to new heights of popularity. And the practices of business societies, of which the United States is the foremost example, are built on the motivating forces of the egoistic pursuit of economic self-interest. But trust and cooperation cannot be built on egoism.

Morality, whether religious or secular, has long recognized the dangers of egoism and has often advocated altruism. However, against the weight of existing behavior, pleas for altruism have appeared to be little more than deluded longings for impossible ideals or, to some perceptive critics, positive contributions to the passivity of the weak and exploitable. As we shall see, trust and cooperation do not require altruism. More recently, the case for or against egoism has been made in terms of its rationality or lack of it. But rationality as usually understood cannot, from where persons are here and now, offer strong arguments against egoism. For those with existing privileges may rationally seek to hold on to them, even if their privileges are unjust and immoral.

It is frequently thought that the solution to the problem of generalized egoism is coercion. It is suggested that if everyone is forced to consider others and to act cooperatively in a common venture, all will do so.[4] But the problem is deeper. For if mistrust engulfs government, or whatever agency would carry out the enforcement, there is nowhere to turn to supply the pressure that will keep those who think only of themselves from pulling society apart. In such a society there will never be enough inspectors, investigators, police, and prisons.

Any mechanism for enforcement constitutes just another area of joint activity where all the problems that led to its creation recur concerning it. For instance, it will be in the interest of each person that others are forced to cooperate but that he or she is free to be egoistic. It will be in the interest of any given person for others to pay the costs of

the enforcement mechanism, for others to assist it in punishing tho
who cheat, for others to fear being caught though the probability i
low, but it will be even more in the interest of this given person to
freeload on this system of enforcement.

If enforcement is seen as a mechanism to apply to a recalcitrant mi-
nority, the arguments in its favor may be quite strong. But in the view
considered here it is seen as a mechanism to apply to us *all*, and the
more rationally self-interested we are, the more we need it. However,
since the enforcement apparatus adds a very large expense to the origi-
nal cost of accepting collective decisions, it would be collectively better
to have as little of it as possible, since it is as vulnerable to the argu-
ments in favor of freeloading as are the rules or agreements it is de-
signed to enforce. And if there can be as much compliance without a
given enforcement mechanism as with it, it would be advantageous to
do without it, since it has in itself no utility and merely adds to the cost
of compliance with cooperative policies the further cost of enforcing
compliance. Voluntary cooperation would be ever so much better, and
a severe lack of voluntary cooperation may even engulf whatever means
of enforcement are offered as a substitute.

Sissela Bok, in her widely read book *Lying*, has examined the impli-
cations for trust of a lack of *truthfulness*. She aserts—correctly, I think—
that "trust is a social good to be protected just as much as the air we
breathe or the water we drink. When it is damaged, the community as
a whole suffers: and when it is destroyed, societies falter and collapse."[5]
And she discusses the damaging effects on trust of the high levels of un-
truthfulness and deception that pervade contemporary society.

My concern in this chapter will be more with advantage and inter-
est than with lying. People can betray and take advantage of others
through deception, yes, but also openly. It will be the issue of trust in
the context of interest and advantage and power, rather than specifical-
ly in the context of truth-telling, which I shall address.

A number of political scientists have concerned themselves with
trust as an aspect of political culture, noting the difficulties a lack of
trust may cause for national development.[6] Trust needs to be examined
in the context of social dissolution as well as in that of political
development.

What Is Trust?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the verb "trust," when transitive,
as "to have faith or confidence in; to rely or depend upon."[7] Webster's
definition of "trust" is "the assured reliance on another's integrity."[8] In

these senses, trust is a disposition. But we do not know from these defi-
nitions whether we *ought* to trust.[9] Often, trust is misplaced, misguid-
ed, foolish. Like faith. We ought to trust those who are worthy of trust.
But we ought *not* to trust those who are not.

Trust, then, is not a virtue. It it not only not a virtue, it may be a
vice. To be trusting, naive, or innocent may *help* others to take advan-
tage of one, it may *contribute* to wrongdoing, and may thus, at various
times and places, be a bad rather than a good characteristic. But to be
willing to take a chance on trust, when others are willing also, is a
virtue and may be the only way to break out of a climate of suspicion
and fear. This, however, should be a willingness based on understand-
ing, not simply naiveté.

The virtue that we ought to promote may be trustworthiness. We
can probably say that it is always a virtue to be trustworthy. But we
may have to admit that it is often an empty virtue if it does not lead to
relations of trust. It is the relation of trust between persons which is im-
portant. It is this that societies need, that persons need.

All this is not to say that the relation is always and invariably a good
one. "Trust between thieves" or price-fixers or war criminals may con-
tribute to wrongdoing rather than to a good society. But relations of
trust between persons trying to bring about a better society are good re-
lations. Trust between trustworthy and virtuous persons is a social rela-
tion that we all ought to seek and, in those rare instances where it ex-
ists, that we ought to sustain.

Trust seems to be a willingness to respect and to rely on another
person or persons. When it is mutual, it is based on mutual respect.
Persons who trust one another agree somehow not to take advantage of
one another, not to advance their own interests at the expense of the
other's interests. As trust develops they are able to act cooperatively to-
ward one another, to work together and not in competition with one
another. Or, if they compete, they cooperate at a higher level in
"playing by the rules" if the rules are fair. And they trust each other to
respect rules they have voluntarily agreed to and not to cheat or bend
them to their own advantage. Persons who trust one another count on
each other to keep their agreements, if agreements are made. A relation
of trust is, then, a mutual willingness to cooperate.

Of course, there is infantile trust, which is quite different, and pos-
sibly much trust between adults is merely an extension of such infantile
feelings of blind trust.[10] But the trust I am talking about is voluntary
trust, the trust that is possible between conscious, autonomous persons
who are able to trust or not trust and able to betray or not betray. To
trust is not merely to rely on and to predict accurately the behavior of
another. Trust arises in situations of uncertainty more clearly than in

situations of certainty. We trust another person who *could* betray us not to do so.[11]

In many cases, agreements do not need to be explicit because people who trust one another know what to expect and count on each other to give reasonable interpretations, no matter the changing circumstances, of the requirement not to take advantage of the trusting attitude of others. But when agreements that become explicit are called for, persons who trust each other count on each other to keep them.

Most of the achievements that human beings are able to bring about require some degree of cooperation. It takes cooperation to create relations of friendship or love, to bring up and educate children, to produce and distribute food and clothing and dwellings and transportation, to govern and to live under government, to make and uphold laws, to build cities, to have peace between nations, to have plays produced and paintings hung and novels published, and to conduct scientific inquiries. But cooperation is usually not spontaneous. It must be created, nurtured, appreciated, developed, and protected.

What Is Cooperation?

Cooperation does not require altruism. But it cannot be based *merely* on egoism. To be altruistic is to put the interests of the other person or persons ahead of one's own, to defer, to sacrifice oneself. To be egoistic is to act on self-interest above all, to put one's own interests ahead of the interests of the other person or persons, to be selfish, inconsiderate. To cooperate is to act with others but not against oneself.

Efforts are sometimes made to interpret cooperation in terms of rational self-interest—the efficient pursuit of a person's own gain.[12] It may sometimes be the case that a given course of action will be in the self-interest of both or all persons and that both or all, in *simply* following their own self-interest, will act together. For instance, to use an example made famous by David Hume, if there are two of us in a rowboat, and if I want the boat to go and you want the boat to go, and if the boat will go only if both of us row, then I will take an oar and row, and you will take an oar and row, and together we will make the boat move through the water.[13]

However, we might contend that what is going on here is only the easiest and most favored kind of joint activity, since both of us want the same objective *and* the same way of reaching it. We do not need to agree on who will do what or trust each other to keep the agreement, because

if either of us fails to row, neither of us will get what he or she wants. Cooperative activity need not exclude joint activity based on no more than self-interest, but it must include much more than this.

Many cases of what is taken to be cooperation are no more than activities based on coinciding self-interest: if you and another person both want to play Ping-Pong, you may play together, or if you both want to make love you may do so together. But if such seeming cooperation should at any time run counter to the self-interest of either person, joint activity based only on coinciding self-interest will cease. It is only in situations where conflicting interests are *absent* that this model can be applied. And those situations may be rather rare.

We can *try* to follow Rousseau's advice, offered in what he refers to as "one great maxim of morality, the only one perhaps which is of practical use: to avoid situations which place our duties in opposition to our interests, and show us where another man's loss spells profit to us. . . ." Exploring his motives, Rousseau says, "My sincere wish has been to do what was right, and I have strenuously avoided all situations which might set my interests in opposition to some other man's, and cause me, even despite myself, to wish him ill."[14]

Certainly we can *try* to turn more social situations into ones resembling those Rousseau recommends and to avoid, where possible, requiring people to choose between their own interests and the interests of others. But our success in simply *avoiding* all conflicts of interests will inevitably be modest, at least in the short run.

What we will usually need will be ways of *handling* conflicts of interests, not of sidestepping them. We will want to be able to cooperate even when our interests do *not* fully coincide. And so, cases in which interests partially coincide and are partially in conflict are better cases with which to consider cooperation, because the life of human beings seems to present us with so many versions of them. When both of two people cannot have exactly what they want, it may be that no basis for cooperation will exist until, for both, some solution to the conflict seems better than no solution. But they will usually still have *some* conflict of interest about *which* solution to choose and about *how* to achieve any goal selected.

Let's consider a hypothetical case in which some interests conflict and some do not—the usual situation between persons. Suppose one person wants a truck to carry grain from west to east, and the other wants a truck to carry cloth from east to west. Neither can afford a truck alone. Both have the resources for half a truck, and neither one can impose an agreement concerning a truck on the other. Typically, such

situations lead to bargaining, and often to a deal. In our example, the persons may agree to buy and use a truck together, cooperatively. They may agree to take turns using it and to share expenses. But let us suppose that at any moment in their cooperative enterprise benefiting both it would be *more* in the interest of either person to make off with the truck, take it to a new part of the country, and start a new life. Let us suppose they would have little to fear from being caught and punished or from the wrath of the wronged partner. In this situation, if the two persons have agreed to share the truck, cooperation requires them to keep on using it together or to ask openly for, and obtain agreement to, a change in the arrangement. But their own self-interest, simply interpreted, would be furthered by secretly breaking the agreement and taking for themselves what they have cooperatively achieved.

This situation is a model for an infinite variety of actual social relations between human begins generally. In such situations, policies based on cooperation and policies based on straightforward egoism recommend *different* courses of action, and people must choose between them. Unlike the case of the two people in the boat who both must row or the boat will not move—where their own self-interest is enough to "enforce" or "police" an arrangement requiring each to do his or her fair share—now, self-interest is not enough to bring about cooperation. Now, cooperation requires trust and mutual respect.

To enter into cooperative relations where interests conflict, trust is needed or neither person will be willing to risk losing what he or she will put into the relations. To keep on cooperating, and sharing, in such situations, trust is required because—and this is important—if one person has strong reason to believe that the other will use their common venture for self-advancement at that person's expense, he or she would be a fool not to do so first, even though he or she would like to go on sharing. The worst outcome of all for a given person would be that the other person appropriates the whole of their common venture, leaving the unsuspecting innocent with nothing. And so if trust breaks down and suspiciousness develops, both persons will be strongly tempted to avoid being taken advantage of and left holding the bag. In our example, each might refuse to let the other use the truck for fear the other would abscond with it, and both would be worse off than in the cooperative venture.

In sum, joint ventures for mutual benefit between persons will not get started without trust. And continued cooperation, which is better for both or all than not having what it makes possible, will become impossible unless the persons involved trust each other enough to count on the cooperation remaining mutual.

Notice, however, that cooperation does not require altruism. Neither person in our example is being expected by the other to sacrifice his or her interests in the sense of giving up his or her share of the common enterprise. When they entered into the cooperative venture, they did so because it would be, for both, in their own self-interest to have a truck to transport their goods. Neither even wanted the other to be altruistic.

When people offer to do us a pure favor, to do something that will be in our interest and directly contrary to theirs, we may feel uncomfortable or suspicious. If one person in the above example had nothing to transport and no use for a truck, but offered simply to give the other the money for it with no expectation of return, the recipient might wonder with some anxiety, unless there were ties of friendship or family to explain the action, what favor the donor would ask in the future and how to refuse it. Normally, we do not want to be indebted to others. We would rather act cooperatively in ways that serve the interests of others as well as of ourselves than to accept charity. To accept charity may be demeaning in a way that entering into relations of mutual respect and cooperation is not. But, as explained, cooperation requires trust, because if one person in a cooperative arrangement can get away with betraying the other, it will be even *more* in his or her self-interest to do so than to go on cooperating. However, if the other one, reasoning in the same way, does so first, the person betrayed will be worse off than with the cooperative arrangement. As long as both cooperate, both benefit over the situation that would exist without the mutual venture. But trust is needed to resist the temptation to betray. And even after patterns of cooperation have evolved, if self-interest is the basis for decision, cooperation may at any moment break down, for the more trusting others are, the easier they are to take advantage of.

The issues we have been considering are true at the level of a whole society as well as between two persons with a joint enterprise or relationship. To work with others in relations of mutual respect for goals that we share, we need to trust and be trusted.

Rational Decision

To depict situations of partial conflict in a formal way, we can look to the game-theoretical model called prisoner's dilemma.[15] At the level of a group, rather than of two "players," the issues can be formulated in terms of the "free-rider problem," seen as an *n*-person prisoner's dilemma.[16] In these situations, a solution does not seem to be posssible with either an egoistic or altruistic approach, and morality and advantage

may conflict here or may be compatible. The prisoner's dilemma model has gained increasing acceptance as a way of representing a wide range of human situations in which some interests are in conflict and some interests coincide, and in which choices must be made in uncertainty. Since other persons can intentionally choose to disregard our interests and we can choose to disregard theirs, human beings acting with and toward one another face not only risk but uncertainty.

When human beings act upon the natural world, the outcomes may be difficult to predict, but the natural world cannot intentionally take advantage of us. Other persons, however, can. But we, too, can calculate what rational self-interest recommends and what other persons guided by it would be likely to do. We can learn to thwart others if they try to take advantage of us. Hence, for many social contexts the theory of games is more appropriate than theories that assume we can predict how others will behave and then maximize expectable utility.

The choice in prisoner's dilemma situations is between competition and cooperation rather than between egoism and altruism.[17] Choices between competition and cooperation abound in social situations. There should be no mistaken impression that such choices can be understood only in the abstract representations of a game-theoretical model or that they are rare and isolated dilemmas. Notice, however, that cooperation should not be equated here with collusion. In contexts where competition is the *right* relation—for example, honest competitive bidding rather than price-rigging, or honest playing of a competitive game—the "cooperative strategy" would be to play by the rules and compete honestly rather than cheat.

But notice also that when the rules are themselves unfair, "playing by the rules" may be the competitive strategy, and cooperation may require a willingness to *change the rules*, to make them such that those subject to them would agree to them if not coerced. Persons forced by economic necessity to enter into economic transactions against their will should not be coerced by a set of unjust rules to contribute to their own exploitation; those willing to cooperate will not use existing rules as just another weapon with which to defeat opponents.

When we speak of cooperation versus competition, we mean a cooperative *strategy*, which may include upholding competitive rules instead of breaking them or being willing to change unfair rules instead of insisting on maintaining them. The choice between cooperation and competition arises in situations in which the pursuit of self-interest at the expense of the interests of others will yield a potentially greater gain for a given individual than the cooperative pursuit of mutual value, but

if both or all players choose the competitive self-interested course of action, both or all will share an outcome that will be *worse* for them than if they had shared the results of cooperation.

The dilemma is most acute when the players cannot communicate with one another and it is a one-shot decision, so there is no record of interaction on which to base an estimate of what the others will do. Life-and-death situations often are of this kind, along with some of the most crucial decisions persons face in their lifetimes, decisions that cannot be defused into repeatable choices where patterns and trust can evolve. However, even after a pattern of cooperation has developed, in a sense nothing changes, for at any later stage the parties are in effect choosing whether to keep or break the pattern. Breaking the pattern would be recommended on grounds of self-interest. After a certain amount of trust has developed, it would then pay one party to take advantage of this and choose the competitive strategy while the other continues to cooperate. If a given party chooses competition while the other continues to choose cooperation, he or she will achieve the higher payoff this outcome makes possible. If the other follows suit, they may soon be back with an outcome worse for both. But sometimes the gain from "breaking faith" may be very significant, especially if there is reason to believe that once a large gain has been realized, a player can get out of this particular game. This is often a plausible assumption in business, politics, or traditional marriage.

In such cases, if one party has solid grounds for predicting that the other will adopt the competitive policy, then not to do so as well amounts to altruistic self-sacrifice, which is not recommended. In the case of a group effort, if most others will try to freeload, the efforts of a given individual to be cooperative may simply be futile and foolish. However, when we can expect others to cooperate or when we have no grounds to predict that they won't, ought we not to cooperate? Standard definitions of rationality will not recommend that we do so, since rationality is defined in terms of the efficient pursuit of self-interest. But it would certainly be *reasonable* to cooperate when we can expect others to, and to take a chance on cooperation when the chances that it will be mutual are at least even. And if we must conclude from such reflections that, from a human point of view, the "rationality" of economics and decision theory and all the thinking they have influenced is in need of drastic revision, we had better acknowledge this.

Reasonable policies are those in which some mutual respect and concern are needed beyond self-interest.[18] The importance for society of reasonableness, in this sense, is very great. As a sociologist writing

recently on exchange theory has put it, "what makes society possible is a solution to the prisoner's dilemma."[19] Are people in a society characterized by much mistrust, then, generally unreasonable?

American Society at Present

Let us turn to the question of the reasons there may be so little trust in American society at present. A great deal has been written about this paucity of trust, from descriptions of the dissolution and alienation characterizing our society in its loss of community[20] to analyses of the ramifications of narcissism.[21] An ever-shrinking percentage of Americans eligible to vote actually do so.[22] And polls consistently show an extremely low level of trust in U.S. institutions and a low level of confidence that much can be done about it.[23]

But many analyses focus on generalized features of our individualistic social condition. In doing so, many of the discussions of mainstream political scientists, sociologists, philosophers, and others may distract us from more direct explanations. Such explanations may be less intriguing conceptually, but in fact more plausible. In his study of the political culture of Italy, LaPalombara points out that the critical events in Italian history have been divisive events.[24] Sidney Verba, writing on this subject, notes that "such divisive political events which teach groups to distrust each other are probably a prime source of a political culture low in a sense of political integration."[25] Although the United States may have suffered fewer divisive events, it has recently had such notable contributions to mistrust as the war in Vietnam and the Watergate scandals. Furthermore, many groups in American society have good reasons to mistrust other groups. Greater understanding of how well founded is the mistrust of various groups might tell us something about the climate of mistrust that threatens to engulf us.

Consider the situation of the disadvantaged in American society. Poverty has not been overcome, and the poor continue to suffer severe deprivation. Their share of the national income has remained unfairly small throughout this century, and there has been virtually *no* significant redistribution to narrow the gap between rich and poor in the entire period since World War II.[26] In terms of wealth and corporate stock ownership, the picture is even less egalitarian than in the case of income. The top fifth of households owns almost 80 percent of the total wealth.[27] A study by the Joint Economic Committee of Congress found in 1976 that 1 percent of the population owned almost 26 percent of the total net worth of the United States. Half of this 1 percent owned 50 percent of the total value of all corporate stock outstanding in 1972.[28] And given the political climate of the Reagan years, these figures will undoubtedly be worse from the point of view of social justice in succeeding years than they have been in the 1970s.

American society fails dismally to provide equal opportunities for its children, desite its proclaimed commitments to at least equality of opportunity if not to more substantial forms of equality. Poor children suffer much higher rates of infant mortality and bad health; their parents are burdened with high risks of unemployment, which correlates strongly with mental illness, family breakup, and child abuse. Among children of comparably high ability, those from wealthy families are five times as likely to go to college as children with as high ability from poor families.[29] The poor, and all who fear being poor, have very strong reasons to be mistrustful.

Or consider the situation of women and nonwhites, many of whom are also poor. They routinely do the worst-paid, most tedious, least satisfying work in the society and do enormous amounts of unpaid and underpaid work throughout their lives. Power and cultural influences have been used to persuade many of those of whom advantage has been taken to accept their subordinate roles as "natural" or inevitable. Women have been socialized to have weak egos, losses of identity, and stunted ambitions. They have been taught to be altruistic so that others could more easily benefit.[30] Women have very good reasons to mistrust the parents, educators, psychologists, preachers, and writers, along with the more obvious architects and builders of the social structure, who have brought this about. Unemployment rates for blacks have remained almost twice as high as for whites throughout the period since 1970, with the gap widening for youths until half of black youths can find no work.[31] That this is not the result of educational differences can be seen from the fact that white high school dropouts recently had a 22 percent unemployment rate, while black youths with a college education had a 27 percent rate.[32] And to now interpret the movement to liberate women as a form of narcissism,[33] or the efforts of nonwhites to redress past wrongs as demands for unfair preference,[34] is further cause for mistrust.

The mean earnings of fully employed white males are already almost three times as high as the mean earnings of all others in the labor force.[35] Many policies and programs of the Reagan administration will make these disparities even more pronounced.

Given such facts as these, the poor, the unemployed, women, nonwhites, and many men who feel closer to them than to their rulers ought *not* to trust their privileged fellow Americans. To do so would be

to contribute to the ability of the privileged to perpetuate their unfair advantages. But ought they to trust one another?

There can often be considerable trust among the members of groups deprived of power. In reform movements, there is often a high level of spontaneous reliance on one another among members, even when they hardly know one another. This is possible just because those in the movement can know that others in it are probably participating not merely to advance their own interests, but out of some dedication to a larger cause. Those active in the women's movement, for instance, or in the antiwar movement during the Vietnam war or in the disarmament movement, have often experienced this easy trust. Of course, there are exceptions: some people in such movements clearly *are* largely concerned with their own status and with personal gain at the expense of others. But the very disgust often felt for such people indicates the extent to which they depart from the expected standard of trustworthiness. The expected standard in this context requires that self-interest be restrained by a concern for the good of the movement.

In an unjust but very stable society, although there may be great mistrust between an oppressed group and the group that oppresses it, considerable trust may develop between fellow members of a disadvantaged group who may help one another to bear the burdens of discrimination, exploitation, and lack of power. At times, some groups in American society seem to show these characteristics. At other times, the society seems to succeed in undermining trust among the opponents of existing arrangements.

A society that skillfully practices tokenism, that cleverly buys off selected members of the groups it exploits, preventing large-scale upheaval, is in some ways even more insidious than one that is consistently unjust. If the only way members of an oppressed group can move ahead in a society is to distance themselves from the groups they leave behind, this increases mistrust between the members of such groups, who never know which of their members will betray them to serve their own ambition. And so, while trust is sometimes considerable among those who recognize the need to work together to overcome the injustices to which they have been subjected, the legacy of mistrust—mistrust for those who have exploited them *and* for each other—is very great.

The Grounds for Justifiable Trust

If we look beyond a conflict between the overprivileged and the relatively powerless, we can ask whether there *could* be any basic understandings underlying existing societies such that *all* their members might begin to trust one another. In asking this we might ask not for a causal explanation of cohesiveness or its absence in existing societies, but for an examination of the justifiability of trust in society. What would a society have to do to *deserve* to be trusted? This question has been reflected in a long line of social contract theories, from Hobbes and Locke to Rousseau and Kant, and now John Rawls. A "social contract" can be thought to represent what we might all agree to if we had no governing institutions and were freely choosing the principles on which to set them up. Most social contract theories of the past were marred by the crucial though unstated assumption, false for most people, that the persons who would enter into such contracts would be male, adult, economically self-supporting, and psychologically self-sufficient. The model invoked was that of the independent farmer or craftsman who, if he had no property already, could find some unoccupied land or useful trade and, through his own toil, provide for his needs and enter into Adam Smith's free market on his own terms. Such persons as these would, according to these theories, want a government that would keep the peace, assure freedom from interference as they went about their business, and aid their pursuit of their private interests.

Such views led to the development of western liberal democratic systems of rights and liberties in which the wrongness of taking away from someone what was rightfully his—his life, liberty, or property—was recognized. But the wrongness of failing to respond to the needs of those persons who had no property to protect and no way to acquire any, who were thus unable to be economically self-sufficient, was sadly ignored. (See chapter 8.)

The myth of the self-sufficient, self-employed individual voluntarily entering into whatever exchanges take place continues to operate to deflect criticism from our economic system. But the picture it presents is obviously fanciful. Today, almost everyone who works to earn money works for someone else. And we are forced by economic necessity as effectively as by threats of physical harm to do business with corporate enterprises. We can no more escape their power than we can escape the power of government, and so we sell them our labor, we buy their products, we live in an environment shaped by their actions, while they, among the most undemocratic of all modern institutions, pursue the interests of the corporation. We would be naive indeed to trust our corporate Leviathans.

An acceptable social contract for a contemporary, developed society would have to guarantee that when the society had the resources to do so, it would meet the basic needs of all its members. The means to ac-