**The Wager of Trust: Formation Beyond Accountability**

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Kia ora!

Today I am talking about interpersonal trust. Let’s watch someone deciding whether or not to trust another person. Watch Doyle Lonnegan’s face closely in this clip from the classic movie *The Sting*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vw1dPsf0JgE>

In this address, I will argue four things:

1) that trust may be defined as *accepted vulnerability*;

2) that to trust others is to learn how to be in a particular kind of moral relationship with them;

3) that trust is thus richer and more complex than simply holding someone accountable; and

4) that to form our students into ethical ministers involves more than nurturing their virtuous qualities and/or simply holding them to account but also actually trusting *them*.

Along the way I will draw upon the work of a New Zealand philosopher, Annette Baier, whom I never met but who taught me much of what I know about the ethics of trust. I am delighted by the coincidence of talking about trust using Annette Baier in a Kiwi context![[1]](#endnote-1)

Learning about trust and accountability from con artists

But first, let me begin with the narrative from the film we watched. *The Sting* may be familiar to many of you but has probably rarely been associated with trust or accountability and probably never with field education! In this film, two con artists wish to play a confidence game on a notorious crime boss who recently ordered a hit on one of their friends. Henry Gondorff and Johnny Hooker team up to pull off an elaborate scheme—a “sting”—on Doyle Lonnegan. Gondorff has been in the con business a long time. Hooker is a rookie who wants to advance in it. You might say that Gondorff is the mentor and Hooker is the protégé, Gondorff the supervisor and Hooker the intern. The scheme they concoct requires that Hooker pose as someone he is not. Hooker pretends to be a protégé who holds a grudge against Gondorff and makes Lonnegan believe that *he* wants to take a lot of money off Gondorff. This is the way he wins Lonnegan’s confidence so that the mobster will follow Hooker’s advice and wager a significant sum of money on a horse race, money that the pair will eventually take. Gondorff and Hooker set up a fake gambling parlor. Hooker pretends to Lonnegan that he has an accomplice who can delay the race announcements just long enough to know which horse won before a bet is placed. Thus Lonnegan will be able to bet on a sure winner, all the while unaware that the entire operation is a charade.

How does L, an otherwise ruthless and untrusting man, come to believe what H is telling him and agree to follow his lead? L is inclined to believe H because he himself also holds a grudge against G from the past. L therefore trusts H in the way that people do who share mutual enemies. It’s not so much trust in H that motivates L as it is his intense and insatiable desire for revenge.

L does insist, however, upon testing out the “con” H supposedly wants him to help pull on G. He agrees to place an initial small bet just to see that the system works. He bets on the horse H tells him to bet on, and it wins, and L is satisfied. Just to be thoroughly assured that H can be held accountable, however, L demands to meet H’s accomplice. H arranges a meeting—it, too, of course, is a charade. But L believes what he sees and concludes that he has satisfactorily checked out the whole operation. He places a half million dollar bet on the next horse race in order to take G for everything he’s got. H and G have successfully conned their mark. Shortly after handing over his money at the betting window, the gambling parlor is raided by fake policemen, and L is hurriedly ushered out without ever being able to collect on his bet, thus forfeiting his half million to his enemies.

Doyle Lonnegan is a character who places trust where he should not. His flaw is not simply that he is too trusting and, therefore, gets himself duped. Anyone can be lured into misplaced trust by being deceived. His flaw, rather, lies in his willingness to trust in a scheme whose players he does not take the time to get to know. In the film, he never really establishes any relationship with H. Instead, he focuses on the system H presents and its operations. Satisfied that everything seems to work as it is supposed to, he invests in the betting scheme. *Lonnegan places his trust in procedures rather than people*.

Credentials are a start, but not enough to establish trust

In contrast, the film offers a very different portrayal of G’s and H’s evolving trust relationship. They learn that there is no shortcut around getting to know one another, quirks and all. G has not met H before they join forces to pull off the con on L. He therefore takes his time getting to know the rookie. H had been mentored by Luther, the mutual friend who L had killed. This prior relationship is H’s “in” with G. Still, when H shows up at G’s doorstep eager to meet and team up with the legendary older con artist he has heard so much about, he doesn’t make it past G’s assistant without offering up the name Luther. Credentials are often an important segue into trust because potential confidants want to know that the other is in their circle--familiar--known by someone they know.

But creds are not enough. H may know the right people and bear a positive reputation, but these are just his ticket in the door. Unlike L, G is more careful about who he agrees to team up with. Throughout their initial meeting, the older man bides his time and clearly sizes the youngster up. He teases the overeager H, who wants to get started right away before the pair even figures out whether they are well suited to work together. He quizzes H, asking him how much he knows about L. Hooker has to give a little recital of L’s record in the mob before G is satisfied that he knows enough about the man they are up against to be a credible partner. He also assesses H’s seriousness and commitment to the task that lies ahead. He tries to figure out whether the younger man’s goals are realistic or whether he will blow the job by pressing for more gain and glory than they can reasonably expect. “Don’t be coming back afterward saying it isn’t enough because it’s all we’re gonna get.” (Does any of this testing out sound familiar from our experiences with how internships sometimes start?)

For his part, Johnny Hooker has to learn to trust Henry Gondorff as well. G does not appear at first glance, or even second glance, to be someone who makes a trustworthy mentor. Not only is he passed out on the floor next to his bed when H first encounters him, but it comes out that the reason he has been out of the business or so long is that he blew it on a big job. “Don’t kid yourself, friend, I still know how,” he maintains, but his current position managing a shabby amusement park hardly conveys confidence. (Haven’t we sometimes had students come back to us and say “Why did you think *that* person would be a good supervisor for me?!”) Only through little hints and exchanges does H slowly learn that, despite all appearances, G is still a capable operator who can teach him things. And the lessons are not what he expects at first. H is caught off guard when G guesses that one of L’s men may be tailing him. “I didn’t see anyone,” H protests, to which G replies, “You never do, kid.” At one point in their conversation, H realizes that G feels apprehensive toward the job they are about to undertake. “You’re afraid of L, aren’t you?” H asks with dismay. But G simply concurs. “Right down to my socks, buddy,” as if to say that self-assurance does not eliminate all fear, and that a little fear in a professional may even be a salutary thing. (I’ve had students tell me that one of the first surprises they encountered is that even sometimes with seasoned ministers, fear never completely goes away.) As H continues to try to minimize the threat that L poses, saying with bluster that “He’s not as tough as he thinks,” G calmly replies, “Neither are we.” G is teaching H humility. He is also teaching his student that appearances can be deceiving and that it is possible to place trust in someone who is imperfect and has failed in the past.

*Those who at first seem the most unlikely of students or mentors because of their flaws and vulnerability may turn out to be the very ones who are safe to trust.*

G eventually approves H and agrees to teach him to pull off the big con. Immediately, however, H lies to G about some counterfeit bills. Then he denies lying, when G inquires. A bit later, H fails to share with G his suspicion that he might have someone tailing him, making G guess at the danger. In other words, despite having been accepted and entrusted by the very mentor he wanted to study under, H consistently proves himself to be a flaky student. He is one of those students who is smart, highly capable, and a good learner, but also cocky, irresponsible, and evasive. (Know any of those?) He doesn’t yet appreciate what it really means to work as a team in the con business. Does G realize this? Does he suspect that H may be holding out on him? Or has he naively agreed to mentor someone he should never have entrusted with so much responsibility?

The Riskiness of Trust

It turns out that G has hedged his bets about H all along. A wise mentor, he trusts but does so prudently. He puts a safety net in place. Unbeknownst to H, he assigns a colleague to follow H and make sure the young man remains unscathed. He admonishes H when the truth about the counterfeiting and the tail come out. “What else haven’t you been telling me? You just won’t learn, will you? I’m teaching you things maybe five people know.” He even issues a direct lesson to his student about trust relationships: “You can’t play your friends like marks.” As a supervisor, G grants a great deal of responsibility to H—nearly enough that H could ruin the whole plan if he were rash enough to do so. Yet all the while G works to ensure H’s safety and the safety of the whole operation. G effectively creates the conditions necessary for H to grow into trustworthiness. One glance between the two of them toward the end of the film tells it all: when H shows up with L at the betting parlor unscathed, having realized that his mentor protected him, there is obvious relief on G’s face and gratitude on H’s.

*The Sting*, a film whose very theme is confidence, teaches us a lot about trust. The relationship between G and H shows us what genuine trust is like. We do not always have the luxury of choosing to trust only those people who have in some way already proven themselves to us. We are not always given partners who can demonstrate with clarity the qualities of honesty, fidelity, and responsibility that make up the trustworthiness we hope for. We are not always provided a detailed accounting of their history and actions. More realistically, we have to accept people as they are, with all their vices and virtues and a track record that may be checkered. We have to take a risk with them, extending perhaps a bit more responsibility than they are ready for, but judging that risk to be acceptable. Trusting someone is like going out on a limb. You cannot know with absolute certainty how things will turn out but you wager some of your security in exchange for the payoff that the closer relationship will bring.

Annette Baier on Trust

Annette Baier defines trust as one form of reliance on others’ good will. Specifically, it is *accepted vulnerability to their possible but not expected ill will*. When I trust you, I accept the possibility, however remote, that the branch holding us up might break beneath us and you will let me down. If I could lock in, with absolute certainty, the future course of your actions and intentions and know that no harm will befall the endeavor we are engaged in together, then strictly speaking, that’s not trust. That’s something else, call it perhaps a guarantee or a contract. It’s not an accepted wager, the way trust always is. She writes, “Trusting is an intentional mental phenomenon . . . that requires awareness of one’s confidence that the trusted will not harm one, although they could harm one.”[[2]](#endnote-2) Lonnegan never examined and confessed his confidence in H and G. He didn’t and couldn’t name his vulnerability before Hooker, be transparent about it, and this was his flaw.

Mutual Vulnerability and Trust

G and H become mentor and protégé because they are willing to risk being in relationship with each other even before they have complete assurance that the risk will prove worthwhile. At first tentative with each other, engaging in a sort of dance, they learn to “read” each other. That is, they learn where the other’s strengths and weaknesses lie and how much they can expect of each other. They are vulnerable—in this case, the mentor even more than the protégé—and this mutual vulnerability actually helps their mutual trust to grow. They learn that it is all right to risk honesty and that it is also acceptable to hedge a bit against the other’s potential dishonesty, just in case.

Baier says that a key ingredient in trust is practicing *discretion*. To trust someone is more than merely counting on them to come through precisely the way you stipulated. We allow the people we trust to make decisions about the well-being of the things with which we entrust them. We trust them to exercise good judgment in these decisions. The reality of genuine trust is that usually the end is left open; part of what we are putting our faith in is the other’s ability to take things forward in ways we cannot fully predict or control or stipulate ahead of time. Sometimes that might even mean acting in ways we did not initially want. The most trustworthy people may surprise us. Baier writes, “To trust is to give discretionary power to the trusted, to let the trusted decide how, on a given matter, to decide how one’s welfare is best advanced, to delay the accounting for a while, to be willing to wait to see how the trusted has advanced one’s welfare.”[[3]](#endnote-3)

The most trusting supervisors do not merely check to see that their students did what they said they would do. Supervisors who place the highest trust in their students are ones who are open to outcomes that they may not have expected. These supervisors may even hope that their students will break with procedure and come up with something even better than asked for.

This openness to the future, which can never be eradicated from genuine trust, is one reason I argue that trust and accountability are not the same thing. At least not if accountability is defined as someone’s past performance consistently meeting your specific expectations. ‘Trustworthy’ has become so synonymous with ‘faithful’ that we forget the distinction. To steadfastly and consistently discharge their responsibilities so that they pass inspection is ultimately not the sum of what we want from the people we trust, is it?

Trustworthy, or accountable?

Baier doesn’t think so. She gives the example of a wife who receives a rose from her husband every year on her birthday. Given her husband’s important and busy career, every year the wife considers and accepts the risk that maybe this time he will forget, and every year she is therefore extra delighted, not just to get the rose but to know that he went out of his way to come through. Until, that is, the year she happens to discover that long ago her husband instructed his secretary to place a standing order with the local florist to deliver a rose on the same day every year. Has the husband been *faithful?* Yes. Has he really proved himself worthy of his wife’s *trust?* I think not.

Lest Baier and I have made trust sound like a completely rational, deliberate choice, I hasten to say that it isn’t always. There is such a thing as trust we simply drift into. And sometimes it’s not a wise thing to trust or be trusted. Feelings of trust facilitate all sorts of relationships and all sorts of actions, both foolish ones and wise ones. Trust can even coincide with evil. Baier: “If the enterprise is evil, the producer of poisons, then the trust that improves its workings will also be evil, and decent people will want to destroy, not protect, that form of trust.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

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Formation into trustworthiness

Given all this, then, how do we form our students into trustworthy ministers? *Do* we form our students into trustworthy ministers? What are strategies for formation if we care about forming ethical ministers who can be trusted?

First, certainly we can try to instill in our students a range of virtues that contribute to trustworthiness. Trustworthy people tend to be people who act in virtuous ways. Honesty, veracity, thoughtfulness patience, generosity, conscientiousness, and many more virtues make people into those more worthy of others’ trust. After publishing her initial essays on trust, Baier was criticized for not talking about the quality of trustworthiness more. So later, she wrote about the contribution of these attitudes and characteristics, saying that while cultivating them isn’t in and of itself exactly the same as developing morally sound trust relationships, such virtues certainly do “contribute to a climate of trust.”

Accountability is trust one step removed

Second, alternatively, we can double down on systems of accountability in order to discern which and whether students ought to be trusted in the ministry. Greater trustworthiness is widely assumed to be assured through greater accountability. If we could only keep closer tabs on what practitioners are doing in their work, the thinking goes, then we could be confident in placing our trust. Thus arises systems such as audits, documentation, sampling, standardized testing, and assessment. All are ways to look at select samples of work, see if they pass muster, and declare the practice, and the practitioner performing it, trustworthy.

*But accountability is really only trust one step removed*. Let me explain.

Accountability means that I am entrusted with a responsibility for which I have to give an account. Anybody who is held accountable for their practice has, in effect, a dual obligation. Their first obligation is a direct one, they must answer directly to the people they serve or to their jobs. A nurse, for example, is obliged to care for his patients in a competent manner. At the same time, however, they have a second obligation to provide an accounting of how they have met their responsibilities. A nurse, for example, does not just provide care but must also account for his competent caring. He answers to someone else, by filling out a chart or making a report to a supervisor, or being subject to spot checks. Almost everyone employed or taught or supervised has this dual set of obligations.

Another way of saying this is that accountability is always a “second-order obligation.” The first order obligation is to do the job; the second order obligation is to show that the job was done. Both obligations are important. Primary obligations can never, of course, be neglected. But secondary obligations are also important, and increasingly so in this time of emphasis on accountability.

Typically, the accounting is offered to a third party rather than back to the person served. This third party is charged with holding the practitioner to account. And they also provide sanctions and means of redress if there is misconduct.

The problem is that those entrusted to do good work have to balance these two obligations, and tensions can arise between them. The third party may not know as much as they need to about the work, the culture in which it’s happening, and what the people being served really need. So under pressure to provide a thorough accounting, the practitioner may have to neglect their primary obligations in order to spend time explaining and documenting all of this detail as part of their secondary obligation. They also might become anxious to provide an accounting that looks good. Teachers who “teach to the test” in order to produce good test scores are doing this. The focus on rendering an accounting of our practice can overtake or overshadow our practice itself. Good work can be neglected in the effort to demonstrate that good work is happening! The stronger and richer our accounting schemes become, the greater is the danger that we feel more obligated to the parties holding us to account than to those we serve.

An additional problem with accountability culture is that those who are trying to figure out whether they want us to serve them have to rely on the third party more than on us. Search committees, for example, can sometimes end up placing more confidence in the processes by which candidates were vetted than in the candidates themselves. As British philosophers Neil Manson and Onora O’Neill put it, “Those who rely on systems of accountability in effect place their trust in second-order systems for controlling and securing the reliable performance of primary tasks, and in those who devise and revise such systems of accountability.” But this is not really replacing trust. It is simply placing trust at the next level. “Pushing trust one stage, or several stages, back does not eliminate the need to place or refuse trust and to do so intelligently,” they argue.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Therefore accountability is part of trust, but not a substitute for it, in formation. Good systems of accountability are crucial; don’t get me wrong. They produce information and evidence that we can use to understand what’s going on, say, in field education. But I don’t think we ever replace the need for interpersonal trust.

I received the ANZATFE standards recently and I smiled when I saw the word ‘accountability’ in several places throughout the document. I thought to myself, “Oh great, I’m about to go tell them that accountability isn’t all that important!” Not so. I would just encourage you not to forego the time-consuming and sometimes difficult work of establishing interpersonal trust and teaching others how to do so. I like to say that I had it easy deciding which supervisors I could trust in my program, being a field educator in the State of Connecticut in the US. You can get almost anywhere in CT by car in about an hour. I had the luxury, therefore, of visiting every single site and supervisor in my program personally. I got to know them. I know that was a luxury. And our MDiv program was just the right size that I could get to know all my students as well. Because of these circumstances aiding trust, I was able to have everyone’s back. Students knew that I would protect them, and in a worst-case scenario, remove them from a situation that went south if I had to. Supervisors knew that I would protect them, and in a worst-case scenario, support them if they needed to fail a student’s internship. The school knew that I would protect it, and in a worst-case scenario, promptly call upon the university counsel if any liability issues seemed to be arising in an internship.

You will note, as an aside, that I just named three parties to field education. My operative grounding is that what we are primarily doing as field educators is cultivating and hosting covenantal relationships. Most of the time we think of covenants as between two parties. But in field ed they are at least three-way: student, supervisor, school.

Trust *them*

If systems of accountability are necessary but have some flaws, I would like to suggest a third strategy for forming trustworthy ministers, which is this: If we want to teach our students how to be trusted, then we could try trusting *them*. Intentionally *going out on a limb* with them, explicitly *telling* them we are doing so, *naming* the consequences and the vulnerabilities, and *describing* why we nevertheless trust them. One strategy for getting them to be trusted as ministers, in other words, is to trust them as students of ministry.

Trusting our students (and for that matter, our supervisors, and sites, as well) can take many forms, and those who are interested can take a closer look at strategies in my workshop. Here the paradigm I mainly have in mind is entrusting student interns with real, serious ministry responsibilities. Accepting vulnerability to possible harm is accepting that your intern could mess up someone’s ministry, could do something badly that would harm those ministered to. What if we let our interns preach on Easter? What if our intern took the primary role at the bedside of someone seriously ill? The best instance I can think of is one year when a supervisor of mine let his intern preach on Stewardship Sunday. Their congregation’s stewardship consultant advised against it, saying it was the one Sunday that the pastor needed to be in the pulpit to deliver a rousing and inspirational sermon about generosity. Turns out inviting a debt-strapped student to deliver a sermon about generosity made the point even better! It was a risk worth taking. But my point is that that supervisor took a risk and entrusted his intern with something important.

When persons, like students, learn that you have consciously entered with them into a relationship of accepted vulnerability to possible though unanticipated harm, they tend to rise to the task of reducing that harm. They come to see themselves as people in whom trust has been bestowed, and *if* that trust has been bestowed wisely, this only increases their confidence and their likelihood of developing even further those good qualities and skills that had made them trustworthy in the first place. If trust has not been bestowed wisely, we pretty quickly find out, and scale back trusting our students until the time is right.

What I’m saying is that trust, in other words, is something that to a certain extent can be taught, or at least “caught.” In an essay devoted to the concept of self-trust, that is, learning to be confident in one’s self and one’s skills, Annette Baier writes that trust can be “spread” from teacher to learner. “Good coaches,” she writes, “in sports like acrobatics, swimming, and diving have this art of imparting not only skill but confidence in it. Theirs is a meta-skill, the skill of getting others to become skilled, and to have trust in their skill.”[[6]](#endnote-6) Baier herself learned how to drive for a second time later in life. She had given up driving in her thirties after a series of scary accidents, but in her seventies, she decided to try again. Her self-trust was low. But she gradually tuned in, and leaned in, to her driving instructor’s trust *in her*. “If my driving teacher trusts me to drive safely, indeed puts his life in my hands when he leaves me in control, and sits calmly beside me as my passenger, any lack of confidence in my own driving skills may be slowly overcome, as I come to share his belief in me, and his calm.”[[7]](#endnote-7) Baier hastens to add that a teacher’s trust in her student has to be prudent. “This sort of confidence, to be communicated and duplicated, needs to be reason-backed, not blind optimism, if it is to spread from a reasonable one to another. And when it is spread from teacher to learner, the learner has to see not just that the other trusts her ability but that she has grounds to do so.”[[8]](#endnote-8)

Treating students as adults

So trusting our students means giving them serious responsibilities. It also means treating them like *adults*. Like many field educators, I started my job without knowing too much about field education. I did not yet know about ATFE, or the existence of literature on field education that I could read. I turned to the closest thing I knew, which was the literature on adult education. And I’m glad that that became the theoretical grounding for the work that I did. I treated my students like adults from the get-go. Sometimes I would hear others argue that students of ministry necessarily had to *un*learn most of what they thought they knew about themselves, about the faith, and about serving and caring for people. Therefore we should not be swayed by their age and seeming maturity, and treat them as we would other students, especially children. One of my supervisors, in fact, reported that in their first meeting, she always told her interns that they were “toddlers.” But something always felt wrong about that to me. Adult learners bring a host of wisdom and experience to their new role. I think we should respect and even exploit that. Our students bring many abilities to theological education, and we have the grounds to trust in those abilities even as we seek to develop them further and impart new ones.

Jo Ann Deasy, of the Association of Theological Schools in the U.S., has argued that too often theological educators treat students like children. And then they, in turn, grow into ministers who treat lay people like children. She says that “Churches are often modeled after a benevolent patriarchal family structure”[[9]](#endnote-9) and it begins in seminary, because schools themselves are often structured this same way.

I think Deasy is right. Moreover, students want to be treated like adults. They already bring an amount of skepticism, nervousness, and self-doubt to the learning enterprise; they do not want to be condescended to or stereotyped or dealt with platitudes. One of the most accomplished scholars of adult learning is Stephen Brookfield. Brookfield has done a lot of research over the years to support what he teaches about teaching. In his helpful book, *The Skillful Teacher*, he concludes his introductory chapter called “The Core Assumptions of Skillful Teaching” with a section subtitled “Treating Students as Adults.” I quote him at length even though he assumes a classroom context because the quote is such a good summary of treating students as adults. Substitute ‘internship’ for ‘classroom’ and supervisor, or field educator, for ‘teacher,’ and his description applies quite well to field education:

In my own classroom research over the years . . . it seems that students, whatever their age, wish to be treated as adults. They don’t like to be talked down to or bossed around for no reason. They don’t trust (at least not initially) teachers who tell them that they (the students) know just as much as the teacher and that everyone is an equal co-learner and co-teacher. To use [Paulo] Freire’s terms, they want their teachers to be authoritative, not authoritarian. They say they wish to be treated with respect, though what that looks like varies enormously according to learners’ class, race, and culture. One of the most important indicators they mention that convinces them that they are being treated respectfully is the teacher attempting to discover, and address seriously, students’ concerns and difficulties.

They also want to believe that teachers know what they’re doing, that they have a plan guiding their actions, and that they’re not new to the classroom. They want to be able to trust teachers to deal with them honestly, and they hate it when they feel the teacher is keeping an agenda or expectation concealed from them. They like to know that their teachers have lives outside the classroom, but they dislike it when teachers step over that line and make inappropriate disclosures regarding their personal life. They also want to be sure that whatever it is they are being asked to know or do is important and necessary to their personal, intellectual, or occupational development. They may not be able to understand fully and completely why the learning they are pursuing is so crucial, but they need to pick up from the teacher the sense that this is indeed the case. One indicator of this that they look for is the teacher’s willingness to model an initial engagement in the learning activity required. This is particularly appreciated where the learning involves a degree of risk and where failure entails (at least in the student’s minds) public humiliation and embarrassment.

Finally, it’s clear that students experience a vigorous emotional life as learners that is often concealed from teachers, and sometimes from peers. Students frequently feel like imposters, believing they don’t deserve to be in the role of learner. They worry about committing cultural suicide as friends and family see them changing because of college. They often feel in limbo, that they are leaving old ideas and capacities behind as they learn new knowledge, skills, and perspectives. Sometimes it feels as if learning is calling on them to leave their own identities in the past. However, if they can find others with whom they can share these fears—a supportive peer learning community—many of their anxieties apparently become much less corrosive.[[10]](#endnote-10)

Authenticity

You and I could undoubtedly add to Brookfield’s list of what our students want and don’t want because they are adults. Getting inside our student’s heads and appreciating what they are experiencing as adult learners is the prerequisite to trusting them as adult students. Getting inside our students’ heads also itself builds trust, because if we consistently express curiosity about what it’s like for our students to be our students, then they can relax and slowly learn that it’s all right to be *authentic* in front of us. They don’t have to fake it so much and pretend, the way Hooker initially did with Gondorff, that they have no fears and worries. They don’t have to bluff or worse, lie, in front of us. (I had an opportunity just last week to practice this kind of curiosity when I inquired what was going on with a student of mine. She had an assignment to carry out in her home congregation, yet she was planning to ask some of her fellow students from class to attend. I asked her why she wanted them there—to my thinking they would only skew the results—and she told me. She was nervous and wanted some moral support. I honestly had no idea she was nervous to do this assignment. And so we talked about that, and I gave her some advice, and she is probably still nervous, but now she is at least assured that she doesn’t have to be nervous about telling me she’s nervous.)

Authenticity is a theme of a later address in this conference, so I won’t dwell too long on it here in mine. But being authentic is absolutely central and crucial to ethical ministry, the topic of this conference. And I am convinced that people who have had experienced authenticity as learners become authentic as ministers. People who are entrusted to be ethical and trustworthy become ethical and trustworthy.

Summary: the wager of trust in field education

We have covered a lot of ground, from the moral philosophy of trust, to the difference between trust and accountability, to forming trustworthy students by trusting them and treating them like adults, to the importance of authenticity in formation for ministry. Let me summarize: In field education, in order to form our students into trustworthy ministers, we should go out on a limb and place trust in them, in their knowledge and skills and in them as adult learners and ministers. This isn’t placing blind optimism in their abilities, but is rather the willingness to enter into a relationship of trust with them. Forming and being formed for ministry is a big, scary endeavor that we are undertaking together. Student ministers, their supervisors and sites, and we as field educators all have to accept the vulnerability of knowing that things could go wrong. All of us have to let others exercise some discretion. But with some safety nets and boundary fences in place, to be sure, trust makes formation for ministry a rich, creative, and rewarding adventure.

I conclude with another video clip, this time from a new television show called *Stumptown*. It shows a student of private investigation who is interviewing to get her PI license. She goes out on a limb and risks being authentic. Her interviewer affirms her authenticity, takes her seriously as a colleague, and goes out on a limb herself to credential her. It pays off for everyone. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0AkciXqF7E>

1. This address draws upon my article in the 2010 issue of *Reflective Practice* whose theme was “Responsibility and Accountability in Formation and Supervision in Ministry.” Barbara J. Blodgett, “Trustworthy or Accountable: Which is Better?” *Reflective Practice* Vol. 30, 34-45. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Annette Baier, “Trust and Antitrust,” in *Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics* (Harvard University Press, 1994), 100. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Annette Baier, “Trust and Its Vulnerabilities,” in *Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics* (Harvard University Press, 1994), 136. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. *Ibid*., 131. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Neil C. Manson and Onora O’Neill, Rethinking Informed Consent (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 162-63. See chapter 7, “Trust, Accountability, and Transparency.” [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Annette Baier, “Sympathy and Self-Trust,” in *Reflections on How we Live* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 194. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. *Ibid*., 193. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. *Ibid.*, 195. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Jo Ann Deasy, “Father Images and Women Pastors: How Our Implicit Ecclesiologies Function,” in *Doing Theology for the Church: Esays in Honor of Klyne Snodgrass* (Covenant Publications, 2014), 155. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Stephen D. Brookfield, *The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom*, 2nd ed. (Jossey-Bass, 2006), 32. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)