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Trust in a free society [1]

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A free society and a free economy rely on trust between individuals to function effectively. As trust breaks down, the clamour for a more invasive state grows.

One of the main reasons for the breakdown of that trust within our society was highlighted [3] by Jane Shilling in *The Times* last week. A woman claiming to be a new neighbour asked for £7 so that she could charge her electricity key and rescue her children from the darkness of their new home. Ms Shilling gladly handed over £10 with the hope of helping a neighbour in need, based on the promise that the money would be repaid. Upon finding out that this woman and her friend had canvassed the whole street in this manner she is now faced with the dilemma of what to do next time.

Ms Shillings honourable actions reflect how she hopes others would act if she were a similar predicament. The fundamental difference though, between her actions and those of the professional thief she encountered, is that she would return the money. The honest amongst us who unfortunately might find ourselves in a situation where we are at the mercy of the kindness of strangers will now have to accept that a majority of the time we will find that no help is forthcoming.

The selfish actions of a minority have repercussions on the wider community since they destroy the trust that has been built up over time. We are no longer able to act out our natural instinctive behaviour of caring for others in need based on a reflective rationality. We now become cynical of everyone and are deterred from acting for fear of being lied to. The moral compass of our society has been shifted, much for the worse, by those who believe that they have a right to steal whilst praying on our best intentions. Thus society becomes more atomised and moves further from being free.

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