**Notes for talk at OSR on Nov 7th**

1. **Trust and Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is more basic than Trust, yet a huge proportion of discussion is abt Trust in abstraction from Trustworthiness.

Trust is only worth having if intelligently directed to Trustworthy claims, action and actors. So important to be able to judge Trustworthiness if we are to place and refuse Trust intelligently. We need evidence—and often it can be useful, sometimes essential, to have evidence that is quantitative, systematic, and assessable. The evidence we need most bears on **ethical** and **epistemic** standards, in particular on the honesty, competence and reliability people and institutions are likely to maintain. Getting these wrong is costly: Misplaced trust and misplaced mistrust are both costly.

**2. Is judging** Trustworthiness **harder than in the past?**

Trust is placed in products, persons, institutions—all depend on judging Trustworthiness. This can be hard. The easy cases are when situations and interlocutors are familiar, and contact is direct and frequent. Examples. Absurdity of claims to trust nobody and nothing, but difficult in complex cases. So while we still have lots of cases for which we are competent, we encounter many that are too demanding.

In some matters we have to judge complex evidence, chains of evidence, and above all indirect evidence; interact with more people of whom we have little knowledge, and the evidence reaches us by complex routes.

Interaction is also mediated by more complex institutional structures, oversight and multiple links—all can make judging Trustworthiness harder. This is broadly because judging Trustworthiness is typically a matter of judging **speech acts,** and not just **speech content**.

Indirectness not new, and problems have often arisen when technologies for communicating change.

**3.Past Changes**

Many large and disruptive changes have arisen when technological innovations make judging Trustworthiness harder. This has been particularly evident when communication technologies have changed.

Plato on writing; invention of printing; print media; broadcasting: each technological innovation introduced different *intermediaries*, and often intermediaries with whom many were not familiar. As a result there were successive challenges to everyday ways of judging Trustworthiness.

Also successive remedies. Remedies typically have worked by establishing accountable intermediaries who oversee the relevant activity. For print the remedies took over 200 years. They distinguished the roles of author, editor, printer, publisher, bookseller etc and required at least some of those holding them to be identifiable; introduced copyright, imprints; set legal requirements bearing on defamation and IP; curation and culture; editors and indices. In short accountability was secured by legislation and regulation, esp. regulation of intermediaries, and fine tuned by culture and character. We have seen more legislation, more regulation, more accountability, and more codes of practice. But also at its best more good sense. More care, more honesty, more accuracy and so on.

**4. Is more better?**

Do these remedies work? Or do they produce complexity that defeats the very aim of the exercise and defeats those of us who are trying to work out whether to place or refuse trust? Sometimes they work. Think about practices such as copyright, or financial audit. Think about publishing basic statistics about something that is useful in accessible form, such as weather forecasts.

But sometimes remedies have been introduced that do not secure Trustworthiness.

Failures are of many sorts, and include excessively complex terms and conditions; complex metrics that are opaque to users. Midwife’s comment: ‘It takes longer to do the paperwork than to deliver the baby’. Perverse incentives; gaming some activity. And in our own times things have got more difficult.

**5. Digital technologies**

Initial assumption was that the new technologies would improve communication

Zuckerberg: ‘Move fast and break things’. Getting rid of the old intermediaries was thought to be liberating and beneficial. [I](file:///\\\\\\i) assume that his thought was that some of those intermediaries were obstacles to good communication, or perhaps to individual choice.

But also, and less remarked, the new technologies have introduced new intermediaries. Failing to consider the new intermediaries and their interests systematically, has allowed them to wrap themselves in cloak of anonymity.

-- this is not simply a problem of social media (echo chambers etc)

--Social media are an important source of private harms (e.g. cyber bullying, trolling, fraud, etc)

--However public harms (e.g. damage to public discourse, to media, to culture and to democracy) are mainly a consequence of the new intermediaries created by Tech business models

**4 What are the Problems of Digital Intermediaries?**

They allow powerful players anonymity, making it hard or impossible to tell who is doing what, and even what is being done. The Trump election campaign; Brexit referendum. But those were early days. DCMS select committee. Now far more developed Oxford Internet Institute report on Disinformation Campaigning of October 2019.

--May not be feasible to regulate on-line providers of various sorts as publishers rather than platforms

--what can be done if digital providers cannot carry the responsibilities of publishers, and jurisdictional limitations make it unlikely that they can be required to do so?

-- sheer difficulty of regulation suggests putting more weight on codes. But codes often lack authoritative backing. Cf. the undermining of professions and their codes in the 80s.

We are on a cusp where change is evidently needed but has barely begun. Some things may be remediable, esp. in the matter of private harms: tech companies have an interest in not having a reputation for fostering the evidently nasty things that are done to reputations, and to persons. Less clear whether they have any interest in limiting the profits obtained by marketing ads covertly, even when this damages public goods, and in particular undermines democracy.