# Why We Need a History of Trust

**Review Number:**
287
**Publish date:**
Monday, 1 July, 2002
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**Date of Publication:**
1979
**Publisher:**
John Wiley & Sons
**Place of Publication:**
Chichester
**Reviewer:**
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Confucius once remarked that rulers need three resources: weapons, food and trust. The ruler who cannot have all three should give up weapons first, then food, but should hold on to trust at all costs: 'without trust we cannot stand'.(1) Machiavelli disagreed. A prince should if possible, he asserted, be both loved and feared, but if both were not possible, then he should choose to be feared rather than loved. 'Love is held together by a chain of obligation which, since men are wretched creatures, is broken on every occasion in which their own interests are concerned; but fear is sustained by a dread of punishment which will never abandon you.'(2)

I suspect most of us, historians certainly, would agree with Machiavelli. On the whole we are more interested in the operation of power within society than in the distribution of trust, in social solidarity brought about from above rather than generated from below. Moreover, historians are more interested in conflict than in stability. We write far more about how wars and revolutions break out than about how conflict is avoided and revolutions are forestalled. How many studies have been written of the breakdown of the Weimar Republic before 1933 in comparison with those on the establishment of the German Federal Republic after 1945? Yet in some ways the latter is the more unusual and remarkable story. We have histories of many things: political power, ethnic and national identity, civil society, economic development, the family, religion and so on. But not of trust, which underlies all these phenomena.

I have spent most of my life studying Russia. That has naturally meant studying power politics, the actions and intentions of rulers and their officials. But over the years I have become increasingly aware of another dimension to Russian society. After all, there have been several occasions in Russia's history when the power structure *looked* impressive, but then suddenly collapsed. In the twentieth century it happened to both the tsarist regime and to the Soviet one. On both occasions, however, Russian society survived, however battered and bruised, and re-emerged in recognisable shape. Some form of social cohesion has been at work,

not independent of the power structure, but detachable from it. Again, in post-Soviet times, the proposed economic reforms *looked* well-conceived, but failed to work as intended because they did not bond with that same grass roots mode of social cohesion.

The vital question, it seems to me, in Russia as elsewhere, is the reason why people trust one another - and why sometimes they mistrust one another. In traditional Russian society peasant communities were welded together by *krugovaia poruka*, or 'joint responsibility', under which they paid taxes and furnished recruits for the army together. If one household failed to pay its share, then others made up the difference; if a recruit from one family proved unsuitable or deserted, then another family had to provide a substitute. This arrangement meant that all members of a village community had an interest in ensuring that every household enjoyed a basic level of subsistence, enough to pay its dues and bring up healthy young men. Forms of land tenure and village administration were designed to ensure that that was the case. Hence the custom of mutual aid in times of adversity. It was not altruism but common sense: if your neighbour was poverty-stricken, you would end up paying his taxes.

Such grass roots contrivances were very convenient for the rulers: they made taxation and recruitment relatively easy. But they also enabled peasants to survive difficulties and emergencies, inevitable in a country with a harsh climate and vulnerable borders. The resulting customs re-emerged after the revolution in Soviet society, where communities of 'joint responsibility' reconstituted themselves in different forms in Soviet enterprises, collective farms and communal apartments, each with their own boss or patron both exploiting and protecting them. And even in post-Soviet society they survive: they are the main reason why the practices of the globalised economy are difficult to reproduce in Russia. When in trouble, you look for rescue to a protector or to group solidarity, and not to the police, the law courts or the market.

So if we do not study systematically the structures of trust and social cohesion, we risk missing essential features of a society and are likely to make serious mistakes in dealing with it. That is what the International Monetary Fund and other international financial institutions have done in Russia.

Trust is one of the most pervasive - and perhaps for that reason least noticed - aspects of social life. We need it in order to live at all. As the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann has remarked, 'A complete absence of trust would prevent [one] even getting up in the morning.'(3) For that reason human beings tend to face the world with an attitude of trust. Unless there is strong evidence to the contrary, we assume when we go out of the front door that no gunman will be waiting in the street to shoot us. Until recently we took it for granted that, if we worked in the upper floors of a tall building, no one was deliberately going to fly an aircraft into it. Every time I use a lift I presume without checking that it has been properly constructed, repaired and maintained, that its cables are in good working order and that its electric supply system is safe. Yet it is not a hundred per cent certain that that is the case. We simply have to make these assumptions, otherwise life would become impossible. We do not have the time to check the professional competence of everyone on whom our health and even lives may depend.

Trust is necessary in order to face the unknown, whether that unknown is another human being, or simply the future and its contingent events. Seldom, if ever, can we obtain all the information we would need in order to take decisions in a completely rational manner. At a certain point in our 'intelligence-gathering' about the world we have to call a halt, say 'enough is enough' and take a decision based on what we know and the way we feel. That decision will inevitably partly be based on trust. Trust is thus a way of reducing uncertainty. It lies somewhere between hope and confidence, and involves an element of semi-calculated risk-taking. 'Trust, by the reduction of complexity, discloses possibilities for action which would have remained unattractive and improbable without trust - which would not, in other words, have been pursued.'(4)

Trust also makes an essential contribution to our cognitive equipment. It forms a constitutive part of the way in which we conceive the world. We learn about the world first of all from our parents, and later through our intercourse with partners, friends, colleagues and people with whom we feel an affinity. Since we cannot learn everything by personal experience, we take on trust much of what they tell us. At an even deeper level, their discourse, their ways of mentally constituting the world in which they live becomes a usually unnoticed

but firmly embedded part of our own world-picture.

It has been argued that the scientific revolution only became possible thanks to the operation of a certain kind of trust. According to Steven Shapin, seventeenth-century English scientists, of whom he takes Robert Boyle as an exemplar, combined three sets of qualities, all needed for systematic but at the same time innovative scientific speculation: (i) the knightly code of honour, courage and independence, needed to challenge accepted concepts, to make assertions unaffected by dependence on others, and to stick by one's unrefuted hypotheses; (ii) the post-renaissance humanist courtly virtues of self-discipline, decorum and courtesy, needed for systematic work and calm, orderly discussion of the results; (iii) the Christian virtues of humility, self-interrogation and readiness to acknowledge a fault, needed to accept criticism and to abandon hypotheses once refuted. On their own, none of these sets of characteristics would have sufficed to engender scientific thinking: it required their coalescence in the seventeenth-century English social milieu, which encouraged regular meeting and exchange of ideas in a supportive atmosphere.(5)

Some of the most powerful and pervasive institutions of the modern world have grown out of arrangements initially improvised in order to foster familiarity and trust. The English legal profession - model for many others in the modern world - originated in the Inns of Court and Chancery in London, where apprentice practitioners learned their trade from their seniors, and also ate their dinners together. The latter practice was presumably intended to promote conviviality and mutual confidence, as well as the exchange and discussion of experience. In the early sixteenth century those same Inns were also a kind of 'third university of England', where young gentlemen, including some not intending to study law, spent time improving themselves and forming social networks on the threshold of adult life. As the legal historian J. H. Baker has remarked

Here the future statesmen, members of parliament, county magistrates and official classes joined together in work and play. They learned the names which would matter to them, dined and prayed together, displayed their wealth or their talents (whichever was more conspicuous), talked of law and much else, drank, diced and misbehaved. The experience coloured one's whole life: well might Justice Shallow's mind dwell in his closing years on the days he had spent in Clement's Inn.

Since attendance was expensive, especially for those who lived outside London, its members had the comforting consciousness of belonging to an elite club. That is one of the ways in which mutual trust is built up, and the motive is evidently still at work: to the present day aspiring barristers must dine 32 times over at least eight terms in order to qualify.(6)

Similarly, both insurance companies and stock exchanges originated in late seventeenth-century London coffee houses, where merchants, shipowners and bankers would gather to exchange news about commodities, technical novelties and commercial voyages. At establishments such as Jonathan's or Garraways in Exchange Alley in the City, buyers and sellers of securities could be brought together and matched. Not far away, Edward Lloyd's Coffee House specialised in marine insurance and Tom's and Causey's in fire insurance. With the help of the latest information and of various colleagues' estimates of it, those involved could better assess the price one should pay for particular goods and services, and the risk one was assuming in undertaking certain types of transaction. The informal bonhomie of such establishments was crucial in generating the mutual confidence necessary for commercial and financial operations.(7)

Such an example may at first sight seem haphazard. In reality it is not so. Trust needs to be created, but once it is established it can become both powerful and long-lasting. That is why some writers refer to its results as 'social capital', facilitating social development in the same way that financial and fixed capital, properly deployed, advances economic development. As an example of how social capital operates, the sociologist James Coleman cited a family which moved from the suburbs of Detroit to those of Jerusalem, even though Israel is both poorer and more vulnerable than the USA. The parents felt, however, that in Jerusalem they would be able to let their children have more freedom, going to school and shopping on their own, secure in the knowledge that if they got into any trouble other adults would intervene and help them out - something

unlikely to happen in Detroit. Jerusalem was richer in social capital, the elementary background trust which enables us to get on with our lives without constantly taking precautions. Where social capital is plentiful, opportunities are increased and transaction costs reduced.(8)

In exercising trust we are not simply lazily choosing to ignore part of what we do not know: we actually change some of the circumstances which will affect our actions, on some occasions even decisively. In most of our everyday transactions, we are not simply dealing with objective, unalterable conditions, but with people and their subjective response to us: by exercising trust we are likely - though not certain - to affect that response positively. Besides, trust is a self-generating and self-renewing resource. Unlike most forms of capital, it does not get consumed by our drawing on deposits of it. On the contrary, trust is self-reinforcing. When we trust others, they usually - not always, of course - reciprocate, and the total stock of trust is thereby increased. By the same token, when we distrust others, they will almost certainly pay us back in the same key; the total stock of trust is diminished, and conflict, of whatever kind, becomes more likely. The stock market in social capital plunges.

Human beings tend to produce trust spontaneously, indeed to overproduce it, like a gland which secretes more of a certain chemical than is strictly necessary for the body. We 'secrete' trust sometimes when the circumstances do not warrant it. Not indefinitely: trust can become eroded, can turn into suspicion and then break down altogether. There are times when a spouse's infidelities become intolerable, even to a trusting partner, or a son's capacity for getting into debt undermines the patience of even the most doting parent. But the point is that human beings commonly display trust well beyond the point when evidence starts to suggest that it is unwarranted. As Dr Johnson explained, 'It is happier to be sometimes cheated than not to trust.' We all know that banks do not carry deposits of gold sufficient to back up our use of paper money, yet we go on trusting banks in all but the most abnormal circumstances. We all know that governments issue more orders and instructions than they could possibly enforce by calling on their powers of coercion, yet we mostly obey governments, pay our taxes to them and expect others to do likewise. This kind of acquiescence by inertia is essential for civilised life to continue, and usually we do not even notice that we are practising it. Yet it is by no means to be taken for granted. There are some societies in which banks are not trusted, taxes are not paid and governments are routinely disobeyed. The point is to explain how this kind of routine minimal trust arises at all, how it is sustained and whether or not it generates peace or conflict.

The issue of trust is crucial today. In the decade or more since the end of the cold war, most nations and a good many international organisations have been looking for ways to reconcile bitterly divided communities, to create and maintain peace. 'Truth and reconciliation commissions' have endeavoured to enable former oppressors and their victims to live in the same society without tearing each other apart. 'Peace-keeping' has become the principal business of many national armies, and that sometimes seems to mean creating a peace where there was none to keep. In the Balkans, the former Soviet Union, Angola, Indonesia and elsewhere, international organisations have been seeking ways to promote social cohesion and the stability which encourages economic growth. Failure in this endeavour is far more dramatic and 'interesting' than success, and gets itself better reported in the media, so that the ordinary newspaper-reader or television-watcher gains the impression that promoting trust is hopeless, and we are certainly not well-informed on the ways in which success is sometimes achieved.

In advanced western societies trust is also a serious problem: there is growing public distrust of the institutions, official and professional, in which we used to place our confidence, and as a result, there is more litigation, more overworked teachers and demoralised social workers, greater reluctance to help the police, greater recourse to private health care, and the like. Robert Putnam has suggested that since the 1960s membership in associations of civil society has drastically declined, and that as a result the peaceful interaction of citizens necessary to democracy may be under threat.(9) In her Reith Lectures of 2002 Onora O'Neill argued that the decline in trust is partly illusory, but did not deny that a 'culture of suspicion' is developing apace (10). Francis Fukuyama has provided abundant evidence of growing distrust: rising crime rates, the weakening of the family, distrust towards scientists, doctors, police personnel, state officials and so on.(11) Anthony Giddens has suggested that trust is not necessarily at a lower level today than in earlier generations, but that it certainly takes very different forms.(12)

Historians have not entered this debate very much. In a way, that is understandable, since they write about the past. They do, however, have two great advantages when approaching questions of trust. The first is that they do not examine economies, political structures or social welfare systems in isolation: they are interested in whole societies. Western economists working in the former Soviet bloc in the last decade are probably excellent at their subject, but they have not seemed able to place their economic counsel in a wider context, to see that measures which promote growth in one society will stifle it in another, or even endanger the social fabric. An economy is part of a web of inter-relationships which make up society as a whole. Historians are better placed than most social scientists to study the entirety of that web.

Secondly, historians locate their studies in the flow of time. A social problem is not like a chess problem, where the previous moves needed to reach the position on the board are irrelevant to the solution. Societies are composed of people whose mentality and outlook have been constituted by their previous life experience and that of those around them. Their future actions will be strongly, perhaps decisively, influenced by that experience. It is vital to know what their past was and to understand how they reacted to it.

In principle, then, historians could be useful in providing an insight into the different ways in which trust functions in different societies, and in which social cohesion is or is not sustained. Yet actually, when I look at what most of my colleagues are doing, I have to admit that the generation of peace and stability is not high among their priorities.

I believe that historians currently over-emphasise power. The history of societies is nowadays usually written in terms of their power relationships, and the assumption that power is the decisive factor, not only in politics, but in all aspects of social life has eaten deep into our routine accounts of social structure. The salient aspects of social life are analysed through relationships of domination and submission - or periodic revolt - whether it be family, gender, class, culture, religion or ethnos which is at issue.

The thinker who currently underwrites the obsession with power is Michel Foucault. He sees power as being 'inscribed' into all our social relationships, all our discourses and practices. He contends that a new form of power has arisen since the sixteenth century: that of the State (with a capital 's'). It operates not just through coercion, but in many other much subtler and more insidious ways. Its most successful coup was to take over the pastoral role of the church, replacing the function of ensuring salvation in the after-life by that of guaranteeing social welfare in this life. In order to fulfil that function, it collects information on individuals, counting them, classifying them, fixing them in card indices (or computer files) and archives, and also backing up the efforts of professional experts to educate them (teachers), care for their bodies (doctors) and souls (psychiatrists), enmesh them in juridical relationships (lawyers), supervise them (policemen) and if necessary punish them (prison officers). In a real sense the state confers on persons their individuality, for without the documents and records of the state their identity is insubstantial and they are helpless to do anything; it even moulds their consciousness, which it then controls, not in a direct manner, but through the multiple technologies available to those who occupy the higher positions in the political hierarchy.(13)

Power is even more pervasive than that, in Foucault's account. It is not just the exercise of sovereignty,

which is the prerogative of the state, not just a matter of commanding or laying down the law. Power is 'intentional and non-subjective': that is, it operates through the intentional activity of collectives of people who are nevertheless unable to foresee or to determine the results of what they are doing. It is also multi-directional, 'operating from the top down and also from the bottom up.' It is 'exercised on the dominant as well as on the dominated; there is a process of self-formation or auto-colonisation involved.' As the bourgeoisie gained power during the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries it had to 'exercise strict controls primarily on its own members. The technologies of confession and the associated concern with life, sex and health were initially applied by the bourgeoisie to itself.' Even truth statements reveal not the truth - which anyway in an objective sense does not exist, in Foucault's view - but the nature of the power relationships in the society which produced the statement.(14)

I have considered Foucault at some length because he is very perceptive about many aspects of social cohesion, especially perhaps about the feelings of those who are excluded from the power network and driven to various forms of 'resistance' against it. His notion of 'genealogy' is useful in explaining the origin and development of human feelings during historical time. Yet there is something profoundly unsatisfactory about a concept of power which is so vague and all-embracing, which proceeds from no particular source or centre, and which is lacking in all subjectivity and direction. It is no accident that his master-image of power in the post-Enlightenment world, Bentham's Panopticon, was never put into practice. At times one feels that Foucault was deliberately not noticing what was under his nose: people's mutual sympathy, their lively and apparently ineradicable tendency to seek reciprocal relationships with one another. Many of his evasions and circumlocutions could be avoided if one postulates that much of what he explains through power would be better explained by a quite different human propensity: trust. What we really need is a genealogy of trust.

Perhaps Diderot can help us make the leap from power to trust. He once said that 'The consent of men united in society is the foundation of power.'(15) It is the nature of that consent, the ways in which it is generated and sustained, that need to be more closely examined. That is where trust comes in.

Foucault deliberately refrained from defining 'power', but let me all the same rashly attempt to define trust. It relates to both contingencies and persons, so here are two parallel definitions: 'The expectation, based on good but less than perfect evidence, that events will turn out in a way not harmful to me,' and 'Attachment to a person, based on the well-founded but not certain expectation that he/she will act for my good.' Trust is not a precise term, however, and there are many near synonyms: tolerance, acquiescence, acceptance, confidence, loyalty, familiarity, attachment, hope; social cohesion/solidarity are objective correlatives.

A sociologist who worked on similar material to Foucault but from a different viewpoint was Norbert Elias. He was interested in the way extensive areas of peace and civilisation were created in Europe from the late middle ages onwards. Essentially a historical sociologist, he traced the process by which the gradual centralisation of power in monarchical states changed human behaviour, so that the coarse and aggressive demeanour of medieval people, especially men, was tamed. People became more courteous and considerate of others, more calculating and rational in renouncing immediate gratification in favour of longer-term benefit. In the genteelly competitive milieu of the monarchical court - and also in the financial and commercial world, to which Elias seems to me not to pay enough attention - the people who almost always won out would be those who knew how to restrain their affects, to foresee the consequences of their actions and to behave prudently, reserving expressions of anger or aggression for the moment when they could have maximum positive effect. The culture of the court then gradually spread to high society at large, to the professions, to the market place; it influenced anyone who wanted to get on in life and do well for him- or herself. The networks of human inter-dependence became more extensive and more complex, demanding of each individual a more generalised and impersonal bonhomie or tolerance, to cope with the repeated experience of dealing with strangers. (16)

Elias worked in the same field of the 'genealogy' of human feelings as Foucault, only he called it 'sociogenesis' and 'psychogenesis' instead. The difference is that, although he sees the importance of power, he is not totally obsessed by it. He attributes more importance to 'agency' than Foucault, to what human beings decide for themselves, however strongly influenced by the 'structure' of the society and culture

around them. I believe we can both verify and develop his insights by examining the different ways in which human beings trust - accept, tolerate, etc - one another in different societies.

Elias indicates the ways in which networks of communication and the associated trust are extended to ever wider communities. That process accelerated sharply during his own lifetime. Today we may well be in closer touch with professional colleagues in Warsaw and Los Angeles, whom we have never met, than with our next-door neighbours, to whom we nod casually every day. This is exciting and fruitful, but there is a downside. Trust of this kind is likely to be 'cooler', mediated through electronic text rather than through the warmth of handshakes, eye contact and the spoken word. In the globalised community human beings may feel depersonalised and spiritually empty, they may suffer from depression or the anomie which was a principal concern of another analyst of social cohesion, Durkheim. So widening the radius of trust has its drawbacks as well as its benefits.

Besides, reposing trust in any community implies distrust of what lies beyond its borders. The larger the community the greater the distrust and the more destructive the resultant conflict, especially if it comes to war. The national wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been the most destructive in human history. They offer ample evidence of the dangers of both trust and distrust when projected on large human communities. Later in his life, Elias wrote *The Germans*, which highlighted the dark sides of the spread of civilised behaviour and impersonal trust in his own home country.

Some human communities face genuine crises or turning-points, at which they have to choose between different forms of social solidarity. These are usually periods of acute conflict, for each version of solidarity will have its convinced and determined proponents. A fairly simple example of the kind is the dilemma faced by the socialist parties of Europe in August 1914. For some decades they had been preaching the virtues of superseding nationalism by creating an international proletarian community on socialist principles. Now they were suddenly asked to jettison their version of social solidarity entirely and vote for the credits required in order that their nation could make war on other nations, including the latters' proletariat. After a greater or lesser degree of agonised debate they nearly all did so; the only exceptions were the Russian Trudoviks and Mensheviks (who abstained) and the Bolsheviks (who voted against), and the Italian left-wing socialists, led (ironically) by the future fascist leader Mussolini (who also voted against).

A similarly fateful choice was faced by the ordinary soldiers of the French and Russian armies in the summer of 1917. There were serious mutinies in both armies, during which the soldiers refused to participate further in offensive operations, declared solidarity with striking workers, expressed concern about their families at home and called for peace without annexations or indemnities. Pétain in France and Kornilov in Russia endeavoured to rally their troops by a mixture of harsh discipline and appeals to patriotic sentiment. Pétain was successful, but Kornilov was not. French *poilus* could be persuaded that they were 'citizen-soldiers' and that their democratic republic was worth defending against 'Prussian militarism'. Russian soldiers were not similarly persuaded by their experience of the Duma and the Provisional Government, and vested their solidarity instead in their own soldiers' committees or village communes, rather than in the Russian army or the institutions of Petrograd. Many of them left the trenches and made for home, effectively condemning Russia to military defeat and political revolution.(17)

A more complex example is presented by nineteenth-century Germany. In the course of the century, Germans were faced by a number of competing models of the kind of social solidarity appropriate for their people. Broadly, one may say they were (i) monarchical-dynastic; (ii) ethnic-regional (Bavarian, Rhineland, Prussian, etc), (iii) religious-confessional; (iv) international working-class; (v) all-German. Bismarck began his career as a convinced proponent of (i), but moved to (v) in a way that shocked some of his closest supporters. Even after he had created the new German Empire in 1871, he continued to pay limited homage to (i) and (ii) by allowing the existing regional dynasties to continue and even in some cases to maintain embassies in foreign powers. At the same time he endeavoured to cement all-German sentiment by launching bitter political campaigns against (iii) and (iv), the most threatening rival projects, as he saw it. In the 1870s he conducted the *Kulturkampf,* a series of laws restricting the freedom of the Catholic Church, which he suspected of being more loyal to the Vatican than to Berlin. When that was settled he turned

against the Social Democrats, as bearers of the un-German notion of international proletarian solidarity.

Trust is not an invariant entity, present in different societies at the same level and in the same forms. On the contrary, both its incidence and its social forms vary greatly. Some societies seem peaceful and stable, and their members relate to each other without acute or chronic distrust for generations; other societies are riven by apparently unceasing distrust, so that conflict between individuals or groups is always either present or latent, ready to break out at the slightest provocation. No society can survive, however, on a diet of total distrust. As Adam Smith once said, 'There is society even among bands of robbers and murderers, since they must at least refrain from robbing and murdering each other.' Furthermore, the transition from widespread trust to widespread distrust can take place remarkably quickly during, for example, an economic crisis, or a period of ethnic strife. The Croat writer Dubravka Ugresic noted with alarm in 1992 'the terrifying speed with which all [her] colleagues change colour, flag, symbols, the genres of oral and written confession with which they cleanse themselves of Communism and Yugoslavism' in order to take up their new identity of Serbs and Croats, denouncing each other.(19) The result was a drastic simplication and hardening of identity, characteristic of a community faced with great danger. As the Croat Slavenka Drakulic remarked

Along with millions of other Croats, I was pinned to the wall of nationhood ... That is what the war is doing to us, reducing us to one dimension: the Nation. The trouble with this nationhood, however, is that, whereas before I was defined by my education, my job, my ideas, my character - and, yes, my nationaltiy too - now I feel stripped of all that. I am nobody, because I am not a person any more. I am one of 4.5 million Croats. (20)

The opposite can also be true, as John Plumb remarked in the preface to one of the few historical works which explicitly aims to explain the onset of social cohesion: 'Political stability, when it comes, often happens to a society quite quickly, as suddenly as water becomes ice.'(21) The association of freezing is perhaps unfortunate, but the physical metaphor of a critical stage where social molecules rearrange themselves quite rapidly in a different and more stable configuration is suggestive and I think appropriate for certain junctures in the history of societies: for example the Solon reforms in late sixth century BC Athens; the Augustan peace in Rome around the year 0; 1688-1725 in England/Britain; 1945-50 in western Europe.

1. Athens, like other Greek communities, had been basically a tribal society. However, by the late sixth century, its growing wealth and the diverse networks of trade it had built up increasingly divided the rich and the poor from each other, especially since the indebted became slaves to their creditors. This polarisation not only generated serious social conflict, but also weakened the city's defences, since slaves could not serve in the army. Customs appropriate to tribal society, where there was no such gap between rich and poor, were sapping the vitality of a great trading city. The reforms of Solon redrew the property-owning map by forgiving debt, freeing indebted slaves, redeeming their land and forbidding future debt bondage. Those of Cleisthenes, some decades later, reconstituted the tribes on a geographical basis, so that they formed the constituencies for a new kind of rule, the polis or city-state, governed by its own citizens, rather than by tribal leaders or tyrants. These reforms represent the stage when Athenian society moved from the forms of trust associated with tribal society to those appropriate to a city-state, where one had to accept, tolerate and work with people quite outside one's kin. They laid the foundations for Athens's prosperity and her extraordinary culture over the next couple of centuries.

2. Rome of the first century BC was in a state of chronic crisis caused by the incapacity of city-state institutions to cope with governing what by then had become a far-flung empire. A few oligarchs enriched themselves through colonial plunder, while much of the population was poverty-stricken. A former soldier might return after giving of his best in Rome's wars to discover that an oligarch had bought up his farm and evicted his family. Much of the power in the state had devolved to military leaders who each took a province as a base and used their wealth to provide for such impoverished soldiers, turning them into clients in private armies. When Augustus seized power he used his own immense wealth and that of his treasury to outbid those warlords by making provision for veteran soldiers in the entire army, as well to provide famine relief, municipal works and public entertainments for Rome's own poorest inhabitants. Acting as a kind of super-patron, he was able - without admitting it - to supersede the city-state and erect administrative and financial

structures capable of governing the empire. His super-patronage enabled Rome finally to bridge the gap between city-state and a huge and diverse territorial empire. This was the basis for the *pax Romana* of the next two centuries or so.

3. Mid- to late 17th century England suffered from instability engendered by the attempt to impose a European-style absolute monarchy on a nation some of whose structures of trust were intensely local, while others were already supra-national, linking the home-country with overseas colonies. When William III seized power in 1688, the great landowners and city merchants bound him to a constitutional style of rule in which they consented to being seriously taxed in order to establish trustworthy forms of public credit, in return for gaining control over parliament, the army and navy, and the fiscal system. The result was what the historian John Brewer has called the 'military-fiscal state', far more efficient than its great rival France at raising both taxes and loans, so that with more modest resources it was able to mobilise much greater economic power for war-making purposes. Forms of trust came into being which subsequently underlay both the nation-state and the international capitalist economy.

4. After 1945 it was clear that the kind of solidarity which focussed on the nation-state, while it had mobilised unprecedented human resources, had also brought unparalleled destruction and death to millions in Europe and Asia. It seemed imperative to set up international institutions which would prevent nationalism getting out of hand again and enable nations to work together - to create in fact global structures of trust. That was the purpose of the United Nations, the Bretton Woods currency agreement, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. The USA also distributed Marshall Aid, mostly in the form of grants, to European countries, to help them overcome post-war economic dislocation.

Sociologists who have studied trust make a broad distinction between its forms in pre-modern and modern societies. Perhaps the most persuasive is the exposition offered by Anthony Giddens. According to him in pre-modern cultures of trust focus on (i) kinship structures, which 'may involve tension and conflict', but are 'very generally bonds which can be relied upon in the structuring of actions in fields of time-space', (ii) local communities, of which something similar may be said, (iii) religious cosmology, which 'provides moral and practical interpretations of personal and social life ... which represent an environment of security for the believer,' and (iv) tradition, which 'sustains trust in the continuity of past, present and future'.(22) In the modern world, by contrast, our trust reposes much more diffusely among friends and colleagues who may be scattered throughout the world. Or we put our trust in impersonal systems, such as the law, the police, banks, structures of professional expertise, and so on. Religious cosmology and tradition are replaced by reflexively organised knowledge, so that our 'social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about [them].'((23)

Giddens's account is a good start towards a historical examination of trust (though I suspect in fact most of us are not as modern as it would suggest). There is not, however, only one kind of pre-modern configuration of trust, but a great variety of different kinds. The species of trust which exists in any given society may be taken as a kind of basic code-breaker for understanding the discourses and practices of that society, since trust is crucially involved in the following fundamental social phenomena.

1. Religion, which expresses in symbolic and ritual form the norms and values to which members of the society attribute the highest importance;

2. Myth, which articulates in narrative and discursive form those same values;

3. The armed forces, whose success depends not only on technology and logistics, but also on morale and mutual trust;

4. The economy, which functions well or ill according to the degree of trust (in economic terms, credit) which actors place in its institutions and in its focal symbol, money;

5. Politics, since no authority can coerce all its subjects all the time, but depends on acceptance generated in part by the habit of obedience, in part by religion and myth and in part on security provided by the armed forces and by the smooth functioning of the economy;

6. Science and philosophy, whose function is to increase our knowledge of the world and our capacity to confront it with confidence, to cope with risk and reduce uncertainty, and to provide for our knowledge an all-embracing framework;

7. Culture, which provides the subjective framework within which all our social intercourse takes place;

8. Law, which provides the objective framework within which all our social intercourse takes place and when necessary allows conflicts concerning its interpretation to be settled in a peaceful and orderly manner.

The most important characteristic of any society is the form of solidarity by which it lives, that is, the reasons for which its members trust each other - or at least tacitly agree that their community forms the arena within which their conflicts and disputes should be peacefully settled. Each form of solidarity is reflected in religion, myth, military structure, law, politics, culture, even to some extent in science and philosophy, and in the forms of economic exchange.

In my view, at least for European societies, one can discern seven fundamental types of social structure and the structures of trust corresponding to each one.(24)

1. **Tribal society**. Confidence reposes in the tribal god and in the leader of the tribe, in his capacity to lead and his martial abilities. The dominant ideal is honour and pride centred in the kin, and fighting in the tribal army is the most prestigious occupation for men. Law is customary and unwritten. Myths are masculine, heroic and elitist, and religion celebrates the ancestors and the tribal god. Barter, gift, tribute and other pre-monetary forms of exchange predominate.

2. **City-state.** Trust in the solidarity of the citizens (note: citizenship is defined quite narrowly in most city-states) is nourished by civic religious ritual and experience of fighting together in the citizen army. The citizens are a male elite, and their dominant ideal is honour, centred above all in the individual, to a lesser extent in the family. Law is established by citizens' assemblies and interpreted by citizens' courts. Myths are heroic, but tragedy also establishes itself, as it shows the risks of trusting human beings rather than gods. Science detaches itself from myth and philosophy from religion. Money is widely used in cities and individual household property is honoured, but debt has sometimes to be forgiven.

3. **Ancient empires**. These are confederations of tribes and city-states, and are still sustained by the forms of trust characteristic of those societies. But over-arching them empires need a multi-ethnic ruling class, which generates its own sense of honour and its own myths. Empires also have a multi-ethnic army, often including 'barbarians' recruited from just across the frontier. For these reasons religion needs to be universal, to rise above ethnos and city: Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam. Each of these religions creates its own forms of trust, which is based on a universal morality, not just the principles of one elite or ethnos. Similarly law needs to rise above ethnos: it becomes written and begins to generate its own science and its own specialists. Money is widely used, especially in cities, and in trade between provinces, and is guaranteed by the emperor, whose image appears on the coins. What was most attractive about ancient empires to their subjects was that they guaranteed extensive areas of peace in which life could be lived and trade could be conducted with relatively slight risk: *pax Romana.*

4. **Medieval feudalism** This involves a partial return to tribalism, except that now kinship is not its principal feature. Armies now consist of lords or knights with their retainers, and the loyalty of the vassal to his lord is the dominant social bond. Trust and loyalty to persons, not arising out of blood ties, have to be created artificially, through the oaths and ceremonies of commendation. Christianity or some other universal religion reinforces these and now finally replaces tribal and city gods. Law derives from feudal institutions and from other customary sources and is enforced by the lord over the vassal; or it is generated by the universal

religion and its institutions. 'Honour' is still a dominant sentiment, but is supplemented by new elements in 'chivalry', which implies a duty to protect the weak and also the sublimation of sexual desire into chaste loyalty. Heroic myths (Chanson de Roland, Nibelungenlied) inspire the warriors, but also Christian ones, culminating in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Religion is semi-magical and relations between the individual and God are mediated by a church hierarchy and demonstrated in miracles. The economy is largely local, apart from a few cities and merchants who specialise in very long-distance trade, which however is hazardous. The most trusted forms of money are those issued by the most affluent cities (Florence, Venice) or by powerful kings. Risk is met by one's feudal lord.

4a. **The medieval church** had its own arrangements for promoting peace and reconciliation in a fragmented society. Monasteries endeavoured to offer a model of peace and harmony. Parish worship was organised so as to keep the peace within the community, for example by withholding communion from parishioners still in a state of enmity with their neighbours. Confession was often public, and penance was also regulated and public in such a way as to make manifest reconciliation with the community. In addition, the church did its best to prevent feuds, to keep Sundays, Lent and certain saint's days free from violence, and to protect certain groups of citizens - women, children, merchants - from violence.(25)

5. **Post-medieval monarchy** The art of war now focuses more and more on the monarch, with former feudal elites becoming courtiers and officers in the royal army, which is a mixture of mercenaries and conscripts.

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    - Notions of honour evolve further through chivalry to courtesy (court etiquette) to civilised behaviour.
    - Myth now focuses both on the monarch and on the nation as a whole (whether represented in parliament or not), and its ethnic origins; security and peace are now guaranteed by the large royal army and by the monarch's law courts.
    - Law is increasingly statutory rather than customary, and its professionals - lawyers - are crucial to the functioning of the monarchy.
    - Religion loses some of its magical features; the individual's relations with God become more the responsibility of the individual him/herself. At the same time, perhaps in reaction to this development, the church hierarchy becomes much more highly organised and qualified.
    - Science detaches itself from religion and myth, and becomes the begetter of new systems of knowledge and, through technology, of new productive forces.
    - The monarchy begins to conceive of the economy as being co-extensive with the kingdom, indeed as a fiscal base for the monarchy itself, and tries to either administer or dominate it accordingly: mercantilism. Coinage is national, and bears the head of the monarch.
    - Philosophy is increasingly universal and rational, seeking 'all-human' values (Hume, Voltaire, Kant);
    - New artistic genres arise, some of them patronised by the monarchy: drama, ballet, opera. Civilised society creates demand for the novel. Mass education, not just for an elite, begins to be an object of government policy;
    - New forms of human intimacy emerge. The cult of friendship blossoms; also of romantic and faithful conjugal love, glorified especially in the novel.

6. **Nation-state and market economy**. Mass conscript armies are created, and the entire young adult male population is liable for service in them.

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    - Political structures rest more and more on the principle of mass representative democracy, either as republic or as constitutional monarchy.
    - Law is largely or wholly statutory, and is generated by the elected representatives of the people.
    - Science and technology now provide extensive mastery over nature and sustain increasingly

- productive economies.
  - Economy: the national bank guarantees a stable currency, taxation is high, but rests on parliamentary consent, and public loans are backed by tax income. Risk is now met by insurance and social welfare systems. National economies are increasingly integrated into an international economy, usually colonial/imperial, but increasingly global. Its global nature is often seen as a threat (by some explicitly identified with the Jews), and some states protect parts of their economy by erecting tariff barriers.
  - Myths are ethnic-national, celebrating the glorious past of the ethnos. Moral ideals are partly those of the acquisitive, rational individual, partly those of the patriot dedicated to his/her nation. There is a constant tension between them (the subject of Wagner's *Ring*, the most dramatic presentation of this conflict).
  - Widespread literacy creates demand for the novel as a form, and a more modest one for lyric poetry; other genres continue, but focus more on the nation.
  - In religion there is on the one hand secularisation and on the other a new emotionalism focused on the nuclear family and especially the woman's role within it. Religion increasingly becomes an individual affair, but church hierarchies become increasingly institutionalised.

7. **International community and globalised economy**. A reaction sets in against the very destructive wars engendered by nation-states. Armies tend to become smaller and highly professional. Moral ideals reorient themselves towards international institutions and an ideology of universal human rights, though most of the trust remains deposited in the nation-state. There is no international armed force: national units serve international missions.

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  - International law takes shape, sporadically enforced by international courts.
  - Myths now centre around economic growth as the solvent of humanity's problems, and the model of the acquisitive, rational individual becomes dominant. International institutions support the global market economy.
  - Religion has largely detached itself from churches and focuses on the ideal of individual self-fulfilment and universal human rights.

The Jews cut across most of these categories, which is why they have played such a crucial and controversial role in European history. Already in tribal times, they were a nation with a universal god; already in the feudal era, they were practitioners of a global economy. Yet they have also brought archaic tribal features into the modern world.

Research might take two distinct but related paths:

  i. into the different forms of trust associated with different social structures, and/or
  ii. into particular historical conjunctures when trust relationships seem to take a quantum leap, broadening the sphere of social cohesion.

Let me finally essay one speculative hypothesis. As we have seen above, each historical conjuncture where social cohesion has rapidly crystallised was preceded by an act of economic generosity or of extremely enlightened economic self-interest.

1. In late sixth-century Athens, Solon freed all slaves bonded for debt, redeemed their land, and forbade future debt to be incurred against the pledge of personal liberty.

2. The Emperor Augustus spent large amounts from his personal fortune on famine relief, municipal works and public entertainments, as well as on providing for veteran soldiers.

3. As part of the price they were prepared to pay for curbing the monarchy in 1689 and after, and for fighting expensive wars in Europe and the colonies, English landowners and city financiers allowed themselves to be

taxed seriously as a way of establishing confidence in the state's finances.

4. After 1945 the US government distributed Marshall Aid, mostly in the form of grants, to European countries, to help them overcome post-war economic dislocation, with its associated poverty and unemployment.

Today's global economic order was a great achievement in its time. It now operates, however, in such a manner that it manifestly undermines trust between different nations, and especially between the affluent western (and in part east Asian) world and the rest. Just as one example: the affluent nations, and the international financial institutions they dominate, expect developing ones to operate a free market policy and to open their economies fully to international trade. But they protect the vulnerable sectors of their own economies - agriculture, textiles, steel - from the competition that such free trade implies. Both within and between nations, the systems of trust I have outlined above will only operate successfully provided they are not seen to promote blatant inequities. Rebellions and wars break out when trust is clearly seen to be abused. A history of trust is of necessity also a history of mistrust.

If we want to create a more stable global order and a more prosperous global economy, should the world's rich nations perhaps attempt some act of economic generosity or enlightenment, analogous to those outlined above, whether it lies in debt forgiveness, aid, redistribution of income or the opening of frontiers to trade and labour? This is the kind of question historians should be posing.

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# Notes

1. Quoted in the opening Reith Lecture of Onora O'Neill, *A Question of Trust*, BBC Radio 4, April 2002 (see http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2002/lecture1_text.shtml [2] for a full transcript of the lecture). Back to (1)
2. Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1984), p. 56. Back to (2)
3. Niklas Luhmann, *Trust and Power* (John Wiley & Sons; Chichester, 1979), p. 4. Back to (3)
4. Luhmann, *Trust and Power*, p 25. Back to (4)
5. Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (University of Chicago Press; Chicago, 1994). Back to (5)
6. J.H. Baker, 'The English legal profession, 1450-1550', in Wilfred Prest, ed., *Lawyers in Early Modern Europe and America* (Croom Helm; London, 1981), pp. 16-41, quotation on p. 35; Richard L. Abel, *The Legal Profession in England and Wales* (Blackwell; Oxford, 1988), p. 38. Back to (6)
7. Ranald C. Michie, *The London Stock Exchange: a history* (Oxford University Press; Oxford, 1999), p. 20; P. G. M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: a Study in the Development of Public Credit* (Gregg Revivals; Aldershot, 1993), p. 590. Back to (7)
8. James S. Coleman, 'Social capital in the creation of human capital', *American Journal of Sociology*, 94 (1988), S95-S120. Back to (8)
9. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster; New York, 2000). Back to (9)
10. For full transcripts of all five of the 2002 Reith lectures, see http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2002/thelectures.shtml [3]. Back to (10)
11. Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order* (Profile Books; London, 1999), pp. 49-52. Back to (11)
12. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Polity Press; Cambridge, 1991). Back to (12)
13. 'Le sujet et le pouvoir', in Michel Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits*(4 vols, Gallimard; Paris, 1994), iv, pp. 222-43; Barry Hindess, *Discourses of Power: from Hobbes to Foucault* (Blackwell; Oxford, 1996), pp. 118-23. Gramsci provides a similar account in his concept of 'hegemony', but it is anchored in a more coherent theory of culture, and he locates power more unambiguously in certain social classes. Back to (13)

14. 'Les mailles du pouvoir', in Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits*, iv, pp. 182-201.Back to (14)
15. The opening sentence of his entry on 'Pouvoir' in the *Encyclopédie*; D. Diderot, *Oeuvres Politiques* (Editions Garnier Frères; Paris, 1963), p. 35.Back to (15)
16. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, transl. Edmund Jephcott (revised edition, Blackwell; Oxford, 2000); Robert van Krieken, *Norbert Elias* (Routledge; London, 1998); Stephen Mennell, *Norbert Elias: Civilisation and the Human Self-Image* (Blackwell; London, 1989).Back to (16)
17. David Moon, 'Peasants into Russian citizens? A comparative perspective,' *Revolutionary Russia*, 9 (1996), 43-81.Back to (17)
18. John Breuilly, *The Formation of the First German Nation-State, 1800-1871*, (Macmillan; Basingstoke, 1996).Back to (18)
19. Dubravka Ugresic, *The Culture of Lies*, transl. Celia Hawkesworth (Pennsylvania State University Press; University Park, PA, 1998), p. 42.Back to (19)
20. Slavenka Drakulic, *Balkan Express: Fragments from the Other Side of War*, (Hutchinson; London, 1993), p. 51.Back to (20)
21. J. H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability in England, 1675-1725* (Macmillan; London, 1967), p. xvii.Back to (21)
22. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Polity Press; Cambridge, 1991), pp. 100-106. Back to (22)
23. Giddens, *Consequences*, pp. 38, 83-88.Back to (23)
24. My periodisation is influenced by Igor M. Diakonoff, *The Paths of History*, (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 1999), though the labels I choose are different from his. In generating my categories, I have found very useful the diffuse but often penetrating work of Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* (2 vols, Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 1986-1993). His concept of 'ideological power' corresponds quite closely to the religious and mythological aspects of social cohesion, as I envisage them.Back to (24)
25. H. E. J. Cowdray, 'The Peace and Truce of God in the eleventh century', *Past & Present*, 46 (1970), 42-67; John Bossy, 'The social history of confession in the age of the Reformation', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 5th series, 25 (1975), 21-38; John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (Oxford University Press; Oxford, 1985).Back to (25)

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