

<p>Institution: University of Cambridge</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: UoA32A</p>
<p>Title of case study: Trust in Public Life: the Leveson Inquiry</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) The work of Baroness Professor Onora O'Neill (Cambridge 1992-2006) has had a wide impact on public discourse of trust in the context of politics, journalism and education. This has been achieved through public talks to a wide variety of audiences, including professional and managerial bodies, charities and the civil service, as well through a podcast and appearances on BBC Radio 4. Following her involvement in the 2011-12 Leveson Inquiry her ideas have also had an impact on the policy recommendations produced by the Inquiry. The importance of her contribution was acknowledged and endorsed at a number of different points in the final report.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) Onora O'Neill was Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge from 1992 to 2006, and an honorary Professor in the University's Faculty of Philosophy during that period. Since her retirement she has remained very active in the Faculty, which still serves as her research base.</p> <p>Her work in moral philosophy is inspired by Kant. Kantian moral philosophy emphasises the importance both of the autonomy of the moral agent, and their duty to a moral law whose nature is discovered by reason. O'Neill has developed a specifically Kantian conception of autonomy in a number of works, such as <i>Towards Justice and Virtue</i> (1996) [3.1] and <i>Autonomy and Trust in Bioethics</i> (2002) [3.2]. Her conception of trust derives from her non-individualistic conception of autonomy, where autonomy is conceived of as a more complex phenomenon than the mere freedom to choose. (Her ideas on trust were articulated for the general public in her 2002 BBC Reith Lectures [3.3]).</p> <p>According to O'Neill's Kantian conception of morality, we do not embark on personal relationships from a position where we have to establish on some independent basis which people we can trust and which we cannot. Rather, we know that we can trust some people in certain contexts and others in others, and we need a more refined conception of how we are sensitive to the evidence of who is trustworthy about what subject-matters.</p> <p>O'Neill argues that the so-called 'crisis of trust' in public life arises not because people are in general untrustworthy (something we know to be not true) but rather because there is an attitude or culture of suspicion. We need to place trust in people carefully, not because we should be sceptical of the trustworthiness of everybody, but because we should be sensitive to the specific contextual evidence for when and where people should be trusted.</p> <p>Accordingly, she asks what practical norms should govern the placement of trust: how should we 'trust well'? She does not therefore directly address the question of what trust is, but rather the question of when we should find people trustworthy: 'to place and refuse trust intelligently we need first to judge others' trustworthiness, or their lack of trustworthiness, in specific matters. Only when we can do so, will we be in a position to place and refuse trust intelligently'. If we are to place trust intelligently then we must be able to 'grasp relevant evidence and distinguish cases, and in particular get some sense of others' competence, honesty and reliability in the relevant matters' [3.3]. Hence it is crucial that in coming to understand trustworthiness, we also come to understand how to apply these empirical, evidential details in particular cases.</p> <p>In public life this means that we need to pay more attention to the accuracy of information provided to us. In the specific context of the so-called 'crisis of trust' in public life, O'Neill concludes that the root cause of the problem here is an attitude or culture of suspicion. But this suspicion is, as a general attitude, unjustified: particular reasons for suspicion need to be assessed in particular practical contexts.</p> <p>O'Neill's general thesis is that there is no general mechanism for assessing trust, and that we</p>

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should therefore be sceptical of excessive regulations which attempt to enforce transparency and accountability in public life, well-motivated as they may be. These regulations can have the effect of undermining trust, rather than enforcing it.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[3.1] Onora O'Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue: A Constructive Account of Practical Reasoning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996)

[3.2] Onora O'Neill, *Autonomy and Trust in Bioethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002)

[3.3] Onora O'Neill, *A Question of Trust* (BBC 2002) (See also <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2002/>)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

O'Neill has spoken to dozens of audiences about the topic of trust: mainly professional and managerial bodies, charities, civil service. Significant audiences since 2008 have included:

- Royal Statistical Society, Beveridge Memorial Lecture 2009 **[5.1]**
- National Council for Voluntary Organisations, Hinton Lecture 2010, Onora O'Neill 'Can Trust be Rebuilt?' **[5.2]**
- BBC Radio 4: 'Analysis', January 30 2011 **[5.3]**; and 'A Point of View', 7 December 2012 **[5.4]**
- Philosophy Bites Podcast 'Onora O'Neill on Trust' (on 5 Jul 2013 there had been 45,802 downloads) **[5.5]**
- British Humanist Association Bentham Lecture 2012, Onora O'Neill 'Perverting Trust' **[5.6]**
- TED talk, Onora O'Neill 'What we don't understand about trust' June 2013 (on 3 October 2013 there had been over 200,000 views) **[5.7]**

However, the focus of this case study is the impact on policy debate achieved via her contribution to the Leveson Inquiry into the culture, practices and ethics of the British press following the recent phone hacking scandal, chaired by Lord Justice Leveson in 2011-12. O'Neill was called as an expert witness to the Leveson Inquiry in July 2012. Her contribution **[5.8]** was acknowledged and endorsed at a number of different points in the final report **[5.9]**:

(1) Volume I, §2.19: the nature of the free press: the report endorsed O'Neill's statement of the problem of the freedom of the press; the question is what conception of freedom is required.

(2) Volume I, Part B §4.15: The report endorsed O'Neill's 'six principles of openness' for journalism:

- (a) openness about payments from others
- (b) openness about payments to others
- (c) openness about the interests (financial or otherwise) of owners, editors, programme-makers and journalists
- (d) openness about errors
- (e) openness about (most) sources, with an adequately drawn test of the public interest to allow sources to be kept secret, for specific reasons and in particular situations
- (f) openness about comments from members of the public.

(3) Volume II, Part F, Chapter 6, §9.16: the report endorsed O'Neill's claims that public has an interest in 'assessability' of the evidence base for claims made in the press: 'Overall, the identification of the source or sources would go a long way to meeting what Professor Baroness O'Neill has described as the public interest in "assessability"; and that should be the default position, only to be displaced if the public interest in confidentiality requires it'.

(4) Volume II, Part F, Chapter 7 §3.4: The report endorsed O'Neill's views about the importance of the extent to which media content is unchosen 'particularly by children, those in institutional

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settings, and those in public places’ and her view that ‘regulation should have regard to the realities of media penetration rather than assuming that it always reflects consumer choices’.

(5) Volume IV, Part K, Chapter 4, §8.21: O’Neill commented on how there are limits to the effectiveness of codes, and the weaknesses of ‘self-interested regulation’; the report stated that this was particularly so ‘where “professions” lack powers or willingness to discipline their errant members. This, [O’Neill] says, sets limits to the effectiveness of any ethical codes adopted by parts of the media and means that ethical codes, while important, are not enough’.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Material relevant to Onora O’Neill’s public engagement:

[5.1] Beveridge Memorial Lecture, Royal Statistical Society 2009

<http://www.rss.org.uk/site/cms/contentCategoryView.asp?category=236>

[5.2] National Council for Voluntary Organisations, Hinton Lecture 2010, Onora O’Neill ‘Can Trust be Rebuilt?’ <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/documents/hinton-lecture-can-trust-be-rebuilt>

[5.3] BBC ‘Analysis’ January 2011 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00xnxl4>

[5.4] ‘A Point of View’ (BBC Radio 4, 7 December 2012) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-20627410>

[5.5] ‘Onora O’Neill on Trust’ Philosophy Bites Podcast <http://philosophybites.com/2012/05/onora-oneill-on-trust-originally-on-bioethics-bites.html>

[5.6] British Humanist Association Bentham Lecture 2012, Onora O’Neill ‘Perverting Trust’ <https://humanism.org.uk/2012/11/22/news-1146/>

[5.7] TED talk, Onora O’Neill, ‘What we don’t understand about trust’

http://www.ted.com/talks/onora_o_neill_what_we_don_t_understand_about_trust.html?

Material relevant to the Leveson Inquiry:

[5.8] Witness statement for Leveson Inquiry, June 2012 <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Witness-Statement-of-Professor-Baroness-ONeil.pdf>

[5.9] Leveson Report <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/hc1213/hc07/0780/0780.pdf>.

Relevant sections are:

- Volume 1, Part B, Chapter 2, §2.19
- Volume 1, Part B, Chapter 4, §4.15
- Volume II, Part F, chapter 6 §9.16
- Volume II, Part F, Chapter 7 §3.4
- Volume IV, Part K, Chapter 4, §8.21