

## THE MANY FACES OF INTEGRITY

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*Abstract:* Integrity is a central topic in business ethics, and in the world of business it is quite possibly the most commonly cited morally desirable trait. But integrity is conceived in widely differing ways, and as often as it is discussed in the literature and given a central place in corporate ethics statements, the notion is used so variously that its value in guiding everyday conduct may be more limited than is generally supposed. Two central questions for this paper are what work the notion does and whether it does any ethical work that is not done better by other concepts. In pursuing these questions the paper explores the most plausible range of understandings of integrity found in recent literature, considers in what sense it is a virtue, and proposes a strategy of clarification and interpretation that can facilitate both ethical reflection and the guidance of moral conduct in business.

The notion of integrity—or some notion of it—has long been important in business ethics. Integrity is presented as an ideal, cited as a virtue of character, and lamented as missing in the unscrupulous. It has been credited with underlying numerous morally positive dispositions, and its absence has been blamed for myriad wrongs. But there is too little clarity about what integrity is, both in general uses of the term and in business contexts. This point may apply to many other significant moral notions; but in the case of integrity, neither the historically central literature in the virtue tradition nor any theory elaborated by any leading moral thinker articulates a conception of integrity adequate to guide the many kinds of everyday decisions crucial in the business world. This paper will support these points and, positively, provide a framework that may help both scholars and managers to make appeals to integrity clearer and more effective.

### *The Relative Paucity of Sources in the Historically Central Ethical Traditions*

Given that integrity is widely considered a moral virtue (see, e.g., Diamond 1992: 618; Cox, La Caze, and Levine 2003: 41–68), one might expect it to be frequently and explicitly addressed in the literature of virtue ethics. But, at least in the classical literature on virtue, nothing identifiable with one of the contemporary notions of integrity as a virtue is articulated in detail or given a major place. The unity of the

soul portrayed in Plato's *Republic* is a kind of subordination of the other parts of the soul to reason; it is more a kind of rational autonomy than what we commonly call integrity, and 'justice' rather than 'integrity' or any close cousin of the term is the common translation for the Greek word in question. If integrity were equivalent to practical wisdom, we could say that Aristotle treats it in detail in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Practical wisdom, however, is even wider. It encompasses not only the ethical aspects of virtue, but also a high degree of instrumental rationality, which is concerned with finding efficient means in *and* outside the ethical domain.

There is, to be sure, overlap between the moral merits that commonly go under the heading of integrity and some concepts discussed by Aristotle. This also holds for some discussed by other virtue theorists from Plato to Aquinas to contemporary authors. Honesty is the clearest case of such a merit, but integrity is usually credited with a wider moral import.<sup>1</sup> A similar overlap is found in utilitarianism, in Kant's ethics, and in intuitionism from Sidgwick to Ross and beyond. But neither the concern with goodness central in utilitarianism, nor the respect for persons central in Kantianism, nor any one of the more specific moral characteristics central in intuitionism (say, justice, beneficence, fidelity, and veracity) is equivalent to integrity in most of its common and business uses.

It might seem that integrity is often the intended subject treated under the closely related headings of conscience and, more broadly, good character. Certainly much can be said about integrity that may be *derived* from reflection on these other ethically important notions. But even when integrity is construed broadly, it is not clearly equivalent to either of these. Granted, it is probably impossible for someone without conscience to have integrity, but the direction in which conscience steers an agent varies with culture and even idiosyncrasy too much to capture the objective high standards that are commonly regarded as essential for integrity. Moreover, we may fail to listen to our conscience. Even when we hear its voice, we may act against it from weakness of will. These defects are probably not possible for someone with *high* integrity, since that at least normally requires acting in accord with one's conscience; if they are, they represent lapses in integrity. If, as W. H. Hindman quipped, "Integrity is doing the right thing when no one is looking," it apparently also requires doing the right thing when the flesh is weak.<sup>2</sup>

As to good character, granting that we *expect* people of integrity to have good character and vice-versa, good character may be plausibly thought to require elements not necessary for integrity. It demands, for instance, a kind of minimal beneficence that can be forsworn by a person who has high integrity but is fiercely independent or reclusive.<sup>3</sup> Consider, for instance, Kupperman's wide-ranging book on character (Kupperman 1991) as representative in its conception of character. He defines character—and he seems to include moral character—as the "normal pattern of thought and action, especially with respect to concerns and commitments in matters affecting the happiness of others . . . and most especially in relation to moral choices" (13). For him, as for many writers on character, "To be committed strongly to moral conduct is thereby to have a strong as well as good character" (155). We agree on

this point. What may go unnoticed, given the strong association of integrity with good character, is that although integrity may be an essential element in good moral character, it is not sufficient. Suppose, however, that there are some broad uses of 'integrity' in which it is synonymous with 'good character'; it will then be important to see that the term will share the vagueness of that generic term and cannot guide conduct in the specific directions it is usually thought to point out.

There are many discussions of integrity in the general literature of ethics; but if it is a major moral virtue, and especially if it has the importance commonly attributed to it in business ethics, one may well wonder why integrity does not occupy a larger place and play a more important role in that general literature. One plausible explanation is suggested by reflection on day-to-day moral discourse and practice. In the discourse of *practical* ethics, the notion of integrity does not play a large role. By 'practical ethics' we do not mean *applied ethics*, in its main sense. In that sense it is a discipline, and it can be deeply connected with ethical theories being applied. Practical ethics overlaps applied ethics, but its main focus is the exercise of moral judgment: in teaching children right and wrong, in urging good conduct in other adults, in criticizing misconduct, and in guiding behavior on the part of ourselves and others. We teach children not to lie, cheat, steal, break promises, and the like. Positively, we ask them to share, to be honest, fair, generous, grateful, and much more. Integrity, by contrast, is an "adult" notion—especially appropriate in self-conscious moralizing—but, in some central uses, less specific than these other terms. All of those, by contrast, appear in moral discourse in any walk of life.

The notion of integrity is, then, both more abstract and more sophisticated than the more specific notions that cover most of the relevant territory. Furthermore, these *anchor* our moral appeals to integrity. For reasons that will soon be apparent, we depend on them to clarify what constitutes integrity so far as it is morally conceived. In this light, one might be somewhat surprised that its main home is in the business world and in the literature of business ethics. In fact, integrity has appeared in 20 percent of company mission statements (Foster 1993) and is the most frequently mentioned value in corporate values statements (Murphy 1998). Plainly, it can signal many good deeds and valuable dispositions. Its *versatility* is doubtless one reason for its prevalence. But what work does it do? And does it do any work that is not better done with other terms? These are among our central questions.

### *Some Characterizations from Standard Literature in Business Ethics*

One might think that the literature in business ethics would contain definitions that enable us to focus on a manageable concept of integrity.<sup>4</sup> This expectation seems unduly optimistic. In her insightful *Encyclopedia of Ethics* article, Cora Diamond proposes to treat integrity "simply as a human virtue" (Diamond 1992: 618). But she qualifies the apparent presupposition that it *is* a virtue by citing the case of a Nazi officer who prefers death to receiving a life-saving transfusion of "impure" blood. She calls his integrity here an instance of being "loyal to his values" (619).

We agree that loyalty to one's values is central for integrity (though not the only important element); but loyalty to one's values by itself, even when the values form a systematized whole (as is possible for a highly immoral person) seems quite insufficient to make such loyalty a moral virtue: there are corrupt values.<sup>5</sup>

It is instructive to consider four other writers in the business ethics literature who have explicated integrity in some depth.<sup>6</sup> Lynn Sharp Paine is credited with popularizing an "integrity strategy" for companies (Paine 1994). Robert Solomon has written extensively on virtue ethics and focused on integrity as a central virtue for business. John Dalla Costa's book, *The Ethical Imperative*, contains a number of references to integrity as an important guiding principle for business. Adrian Gostick and Dana Telford's *The Integrity Advantage* (Gostick and Telford 2003) describes the characteristics consistently displayed by people of integrity as they define it.

For Paine, integrity "in the sense relevant for business ethics," is "the quality of moral self-governance" (Paine 1997: 335). This apparently means self-governance under moral standards (whether these must be sound or can be ethically flawed she leaves unspecified). In developing the idea of moral self-governance, she maintains that integrity is "generally identified with one or more of the following related characteristics": moral conscientiousness, moral accountability, moral commitment, and moral coherence (335). We agree that integrity may, in different uses, be identified with any or all of these. But these are rich and disparate notions; each needs analysis on its own, and the very fact that 'integrity' can be used for multiple purposes makes it vague and potentially ambiguous. These four notions are, however, clear enough—and clearly disparate enough—to cast some doubt on the idea that integrity is either a moral virtue or a highly determinate characteristic. First, with the possible exception of moral conscientiousness, all of the traits in question can be possessed by someone who is thoroughly immoral, such as a certain kind of egoist or a certain sort of systematic oppressor. Second—and this reinforces the first point—these traits indicate *how* one realizes one's moral standards but not *what* they are. This is one reason they apparently do not exclude the Nazi.

For Solomon (whose detailed treatment of integrity gives it a central place in his overall virtue ethics), "Integrity—literally 'wholeness' . . . consists not just of individual autonomy and 'togetherness' but of such company virtues as loyalty and congeniality, cooperation and trustworthiness" (Solomon 1992: 109). He labels integrity a "supervirtue," and also says something quite encompassing that is very different: "Integrity is often understood as resisting or refusing the orders of others, but, more often, integrity requires obedience and loyalty. Either way, integrity is essentially *moral courage*, the will and willingness to do what one knows one ought to do" (168).<sup>7</sup> Quite apart from whether one grants that moral courage is the essence of integrity, it is worth pointing out that the overall conception of integrity sketched in the passage does not include—though it does not rule out—something one would expect, especially in business contexts: a will to do what one reasonably *believes* (but does not know) is right. Integrity might require acting on probability rather than knowledge. Moreover, a good case may be made for the view that when

our evidence is very good—say, for thinking that an act would harm innocent people, as with introducing an unsafe product in a Third World country—we should act accordingly even if it later turns out that we were mistaken.

These broad characterizations of integrity are by no means the only kind common in discussions in business ethics. There is a strain in both business ethics literature and segments of everyday moral discourse in which integrity is understood much more specifically and taken to be equivalent to honesty in a wide sense of that term. John Dalla Costa, for instance, in one of his diagrams treats integrity as roughly equivalent to honesty (Dalla Costa 1998: 191). Moreover, honesty is what is chiefly “measured” in “integrity tests.” Linda Klebe Treviño and Katherine A. Nelson, for example, cite reports maintaining that “research on integrity tests is improving and that evidence supporting the tests’ ability to predict behavior has increased” (Treviño and Nelson 1999: 254), where honesty is the main element that the tests aim to assess. To be sure, Dalla Costa also approvingly cites Paine’s broad descriptions of an “integrity strategy” as “characterized by a conception of ethics as the driving force of an enterprise” (Dalla Costa 1998: 209) and of an “integrity-based approach to ethics management,” which Paine says “combines a concern for the law with an emphasis on managerial responsibility for ethical behavior” (Paine 1994: 107). In addition, he gives an elaborate description of “Integrity Through Integration,” in which the notion goes beyond honesty and covers virtually all of a person’s behavior in business (Dalla Costa 1998: 234–36). Treviño and Nelson also exhibit this duality of emphasis, claiming that “Integrity is defined as that quality or state of being complete, whole, or undivided. So the ultimate idea is . . . that a business person can be equally ethical at the office and at home” (Treviño and Nelson 1999: 150).

Two directions of moral emphasis are apparent here. One points to honesty, the other to a far wider set of standards. If honesty is the element central in integrity, we know what territory to examine for a better understanding; but such terms as ‘ethical behavior,’ ‘wholeness,’ and ‘being ethical’ indicate no definite direction for inquiry. We are thrown back on our general moral outlook, and we might as well define the notion of integrity stipulatively for ourselves rather than take it as having sufficiently definite content to help on its own in moral inquiry.<sup>8</sup>

One point that is probably not controversial in the business ethics literature is that, on any plausible conception, integrity is a good thing. For most of us, the term has a perceptible glow. This may partly explain why it has such a wide range of exhortatory uses. In “Integrity: An Essential Executive Quality,” Donald G. Zauderer (1992) speaks of thirteen traits that constitute integrity, including truthfulness, humility, concern for the greater good, fairness, respect, and forgiveness (27–28). Similarly, Richard DeGeorge, in *Competing with Integrity in International Business* (1993), argues that acting with integrity and acting morally or ethically are synonymous, yet ‘integrity’ does not have the “moralizing” connotation the other two terms have. If, in this wide usage, we urge people to have or maintain integrity, we are at bottom urging them to be ethical. Morrison (2001) echoes some of the same themes as DeGeorge and sees “integrity and leadership as inextricably linked” (76). If business leaders,

codes of ethics, or ethics guidelines call on people to maintain integrity (or, say, to act with integrity or uphold high standards of integrity), something in the context may make clear what specific conduct is intended; some of those addressed may also be morally upright people with good judgment, for whom no special contextual guidance is needed. But sometimes moral discussion requires greater clarity, whether in exhortation to do what is right but difficult, or in criticism of what is wrong but all too easy. For codes of ethics and for values and policy statements, moreover, as for teaching ethics, clarity and specificity are indispensable.<sup>9</sup>

What we are seeing in the authors considered here—as indeed in some philosophically oriented treatments of the topic—is a blunt instrument problem.<sup>10</sup> In a great many cases, ‘integrity’ is a specific-sounding term for something like moral soundness, whose exact character is left quite unspecified. Some tasks can be done with blunt instruments, but many cannot. More important—since this limitation of appeals to integrity may often go unrecognized—using a blunt instrument can prevent or delay using a sharp one. It can also give the false impression that we have diagnosed a problem, or provided specific guidance for moral judgment, where we have not. A recent article by a columnist for *The Financial Times* has gone further, particularly with reference to discourse in the United States: “Integrity is undergoing what C. S. Lewis, in his ‘Studies in Words,’ called ‘the tendency of words to become less descriptive and more evaluative . . . and to end up being purely evaluative—useless synonyms for good and bad’” (Caldwell 2004: 11). Insofar as this is true, awareness of the trend, especially in the business ethics community, is immensely important. We also think that such semantic trends can be resisted and, in at least some places, perhaps even reversed. Let us proceed, then, to some positive proposals about how integrity may be best conceived, particularly in business ethics.

### *The Soft Core of Integrity*

It is natural for authors seeking to find a central element in a complex notion to go to the etymology of the key term. Various writers on the topic have done this. Christine Korsgaard, for instance, has said, “Etymologically, integrity is oneness. . . . [W]e use the term for someone who lives up to his own standards. And that is because we think that living up to them is what makes him one, and so what makes him a person at all” (Korsgaard 1996: 102).<sup>11</sup> There may be something to be learned from reflecting on the Latin root, *integritas*, used to mean “completeness, purity, from *integer*, whole.”<sup>12</sup> Completeness and purity, however, are by no means equivalent, though there is no doubt that the notions that come to mind as their opposites in moral character are defects, say underdevelopment of the moral aspects of personality, a noxious admixture of ambition that often overcomes good intentions, and deficiencies (“impurities”) in the dimensions of character that should be governed by moral virtues.

A better clue to what might be central in the widest notion of integrity is its relation to two close cousins. As it happens, two related terms, ‘integral’ and ‘in-

tegration,' have the same Latin root as 'integrity.' The notions of integration and being integral (to the person or thing in question) can add some clarity to the face of integrity. The integrational aspect of integrity is often assumed to be clear, but too rarely explicated. We want to explore integrity, understood in the widest sense, in relation to these two notions.

Consider first the notion of a trait's being *integral to* a person and in that way part of the person's integrity. If we can imagine a person to whom no traits are integral—a sort of chameleonic personality—this would certainly not be one with integrity. But consider honesty as a trait that undergirds speaking and acting honestly. This trait might be regarded as part of a person's being. Without it, there is a sense in which there would not be the same person. Thus, if honesty is integral to a person, a person of integrity cannot normally deliberate about whether to be honest. This would require, in effect, contemplating a kind of change of identity. Moreover, the acts that integrity characteristically produces often occur without the need for deliberation, though deliberation may be needed to determine what specific conduct is, say, honest or just. This last point bears a similarity to Solomon's view that a person of integrity generally acts "spontaneously" whenever difficult occasions arise: "The truly honest person probably never even *thinks* of lying" (Solomon 1999: 35). Still, unwillingness to consider giving up one's integrity does not imply *automatically* doing the right thing. Doing the right thing may require reflection and, in extreme situations, even breaking a promise or lying. People of integrity, in business as elsewhere, have a natural tendency to make fair and balanced decisions; doing so is part of their constitution—hence integral to their actions—but achieving fairness and balance may require deliberation and tradeoffs among conflicting demands.

Second, consider integrity in the integrational sense: as an integration among elements of character. Above all, this is a kind of unity among the elements in which they form a coherent, ideally a harmonious, structure. Elements of character and personality are especially appropriate types of factors to assess as integrated with one another or not. The unity in question can be based on adherence to a set of principles, on virtues of character, and even on a coordination among basic desires, as in the case of the "ground projects" stressed by Williams (1981). This is in part why accounting for integrity in the integration sense does not require holding any particular ethical theory including a virtue theory.

We can also speak of an integration between conduct and character in individual agents, as well as at the macro level: among people in an institution, among institutions in a society, and among nations in the world. Integration in people is generally a good characteristic; and in moral matters it has the advantage of generally making them consistent in their thinking, in their conduct, and in what they say that connects the two. In the business world, executives with a facility for integration tend to be viewed favorably by their peers and competitors alike. This may be seen in the case of CEOs and other high-level executives who are credited with integrity on the basis of conduct that lives up to their words. (Several will be cited below.)

If we think of the core notion of integrity just outlined—of *integrity as integration*—we have a partial explanation of why honesty is, for most who appeal to integrity in ethics, the clearest case of integrity. Honesty is above all a kind of tight coherence, hence an integration, between belief and avowal, and between word and deed. The dishonest—whether their dishonesty is manifested in lying or in theft—must cover their tracks and are commonly (though not always) ad hoc or even capricious or clumsy in doing so. They must struggle not only against being found out but also against the natural tendency to say what one thinks. They are particularly deficient in living up to stated policies—at least policies that are not self-serving—and, as compared with honest people, they are more difficult to predict. For example, management behavior in the now villainized firms like Enron, Tyco, HealthSouth, and others lacked integrity in all the relevant dimensions—honesty, behavioral consistency, and overall integration.

A kind of deficiency in integration that constitutes a related defect of character is insincerity. Insincerity is typical in the dishonest, but it does not entail dishonesty in the strict sense that involves lying or theft. Insincerity is not just a matter of a tendency to lie, which would yield a discrepancy between intention and assertion; it also implies a wider discrepancy: between intention and conduct, verbal *and* non-verbal. Some people seldom lie but are often deceptive in giving false impressions by what they say and do. Some have a genial manner that seems to express affection but does not. Others commiserate without real sympathy, inquire without interest in the information given, exhibit affectionate conduct with no aim but manipulation. If dishonesty commonly manifests a lack of integration between affirmation and belief, insincerity commonly exhibits a lack of integration between behavior and intention.

Suppose that a kind of integration is the core notion in integrity taken in its widest sense. This helps to explain both why certain traits are identified with integrity—since integration is central in them—and why the term ‘integrity’ can be used so variously. For one thing, in a socially well functioning person, a good overall integration typically implies moral uprightness, and this is multi-dimensional. For another thing, many defects in moral character imply some lack of integration, and thus one way to describe the failure in being morally upright is to stress the absence of integrity or at least a deficiency in manifesting that trait. Still, the concept of integration is vague, and unless the context specifies the kind of integration in question, ‘integrity’ will tend to be at best less clear than more specific terms such as ‘honesty,’ ‘loyalty,’ and ‘fairness.’ At worst, it will simply cover whatever positive ethical standard the speaker is emphasizing, and it may be understood differently by different hearers or readers, sometimes with morally unfortunate effects. When we are insufficiently definite, we are open to exploitation.

By leaving people too free to decide for themselves what counts as conduct that expresses integrity, we can also make it too easy to pay lip service to moral commitment. This point is especially important in business ethics and indeed in businesses themselves. One executive’s integrity might be centered on an undiluted effort to make a maximal profit in any way that seems legally safe; another’s might



be centered on balancing the legitimate claims of shareholders, employees, and customers by pursuing an open and honest business strategy. Integration is possible for both executives; openness and even honesty may have to be compromised by the former. A call for integrity, without explicit indications of the standards to be met, might easily be thought—by someone inclined to pursue profits over all else—to *allow* those compromises. It is true that a company's ethical standards may be set out at too great a length, say in long, detailed codes of ethics; but the brevity and summary that are common in corporate values statements should not be constructed at the cost of avoidable vagueness or ambiguity. It should surely not be achieved by allowing appeals to integrity to do more work than can be reasonably expected of them. We grant that even honesty, fairness, and promise-keeping are significantly vague notions. But normal people grow up in their midst, and their wide and constant use gives them a sharper edge than integrity.

If we think of integrity in itself, rather than as honesty, sincerity, living up to promises, taking responsibility for one's deeds, or the other traits sometimes closely associated with it, then we can see that the notion is best used in ethics in subordination to, *or as a complement to*, certain more specific concepts. These need not be formulated on the basis of any particular theory: for instance Kantianism, utilitarianism, or some version of intuitionism or virtue ethics. The results of this paper are essentially neutral with respect to the major kinds of moral theories. This holds even if integrity in the integration sense is conceived as a moral virtue. That view alone does not require viewing any particular moral content as a constraint on having the virtue; each theory can take integrity to entail adherence to the standards central in it, and we leave open how plausible a case can be made here for any particular theory. The point is that, regardless of our particular moral theory, we should characterize the integration that is central for integrity in its widest sense in the light of our best understanding of the demands of a sound morality. The four kinds of theories just named—the historically dominant types of ethical theories—all incorporate standards of honesty, justice, fidelity, beneficence, and liberty, though they interpret and interconnect them in different ways.<sup>13</sup>

It may be useful to distinguish between two kinds of virtues that are central in ethics. *Substantive moral virtues*, such as honesty, fairness, and beneficence are traits that are *morally* good in themselves.<sup>14</sup> Having them normally implies a significant measure of success both in internalizing and in living up to sound moral standards. Possessing these traits requires (among other things) certain attitudes toward others, such as a kind of respect, certain kinds of intentions in interpersonal relations, a sensitivity to the difference between right and wrong, and a tendency to act toward others for an appropriate range of reasons, for instance a sense of obligation as opposed to self-interest. But there are other virtues, such as courage and one kind of conscientiousness—roughly, a thoroughness and steadfastness in doing what one is committed to—of which these points do not hold (they of course do hold for conscientiousness conceived as steadfast devotion to moral duty). Courage and the kind of conscientiousness in question are not morally good in themselves. What is

good about them need imply no commitment to moral standards. They do not require the kinds of attitudes, sensitivities, and intentions that go with moral virtues. They can exist in thoroughly unethical people—people of whom it would be wrong to say that they have *any* morally good traits of character at all—something that does not hold for moral virtues. These non-moral traits can also contribute to the agent's success in immoral projects in a way moral virtues cannot. It is true that in special circumstances a person who was (say) honest but otherwise immoral might succeed better because of the virtue, say because of the confidence honesty can inspire. But this would require a great deal of luck; asked the right questions, such people would have to lie about themselves or their intentions or be hampered in their immoral projects. Courage, by contrast, is non-accidentally contributory to the success of almost any kind of substantial project, whether moral or not.

In most people, however, and probably in all who are basically ethical, the qualities of courage and conscientiousness strengthen moral character. It is natural to call these qualities *adjunctive virtues*. They are important for achieving overall moral uprightness (as well as for prudence and for other non-moral traits that are not of direct concern here). Indeed, without courage and at least enough conscientiousness to remember one's promises and carry out cooperative projects, one could be morally good only if this is compatible with a kind of weakness that can make a person morally ineffectual. But the point concerns whether integrational integrity and other traits are moral virtues, not whether they are important (they plainly are). A structure of bricks will not be strong without cement; this does not entail that cement is a building block.

To see the contrast between the two kinds of traits in a somewhat different way, note that courage and the sort of conscientiousness that is largely a regular adherence to what one takes oneself to be committed to can be possessed by brutal but systematic oppressors, whereas such people cannot be beneficent, just or, except in unlikely circumstances, honest. Moreover, if they ever are honest—say, openly admitting their standards of conduct and avoiding lies—their being so is to *some* degree mitigatory in a way in which (in their case) courage and conscientiousness are not.<sup>15</sup> Still, *in* a good person, courage and conscientiousness are very important elements in realizing good intentions. So is (integrational) integrity.

Our hypothesis about integrity—in its main, integrational sense—is that it belongs to this second category of virtues.<sup>16</sup> We have been distinguishing this integrational sense from what might be called the *aretaic sense* (from the Greek *arete* meaning 'virtue'), in which integrity is identified either with specific virtues such as honesty or, significantly if less commonly, with virtue in general. Integrity in both senses is important for understanding human conduct in general and ethical behavior in particular. But in its integrational sense, as opposed to its aretaic sense, integrity is not a self-sufficient ethical standard and does not entail one. In our view, it is an adjunctive rather than a substantive virtue.

If integrity in the integrational sense is not a substantive virtue, one might wonder whether its value is only instrumental. We have not implied this. It can be a trait

that is good in itself without constituting a moral virtue, much less overall moral virtue, as on the loosest use (roughly the overall aretaic use) the term is sometimes given. Wit, aesthetic sensitivity, imagination, and many other traits are good in themselves, but they are not moral virtues. Moral virtues do not, however, govern conduct in isolation from other traits, or indeed from good judgment in (non-moral) factual matters. To say that integrity, in the distinctive and wide integrational sense, is not a moral virtue implies neither that it is not good in itself, nor even that it is not essential for strong moral character.

### *Sketching Features on the Faces*

We may have given the impression so far that there is no work to be done by any notion of integrity that cannot be done better with some other notion, either one that is quite specific or one more general such as that of ethical conduct. This has not been our drift; and it would not be a blanket condemnation even if it were. There may be some such work even if it is limited. Moreover, as we have said, a blunt instrument has its uses.<sup>17</sup> It may be both versatile and forceful. Integrity in the integration sense and even in some more specific uses is like this: it is applicable to many different cases that call for disciplined adherence to high moral standards, and it is evocative, sometimes even motivating when invoked in the right way. Facilitating moral reasoning and supporting ethical conduct are so important that we should not give up any useful instrument.

We certainly do *not* mean to discourage the exhortation of business executives to demonstrate integrity in their actions. Such exhortation can be useful whether the term has the core integration sense or a more specific one.<sup>18</sup> Among those who have consistently and consciously sought to realize integrity of both kinds and have been notable for ethical leadership are four singled out by Murphy and Enderle (1995). These (now retired) individuals are James Burke (former CEO of Johnson & Johnson, in office during the Tylenol poisonings), Adrian Cadbury (former Chairman of Cadbury Schweppes), the late J. Irwin Miller (longtime CEO of Cummins Engine and a civic leader), and Max DePree (former CEO of Herman Miller and author of books on leadership).<sup>19</sup>

Burke demonstrated moral leadership in deciding to recall Tylenol products after fatal poisonings of a few purchasers, despite government regulators encouraging him not to do so. He cited the first line of Johnson & Johnson's credo and stressed that moral values were always paramount in his managerial decisions. Cadbury was outstanding for the way he moved his company into international markets without compromising its values; he remained loyal to the Quaker principles on which his firm was founded and wrote a noteworthy ethics statement, "The Character of the Company," for his firm. Miller—viewed as one of the pioneers in modern management as using ethical underpinnings—was the first lay president of the National Council of Churches of Christ and promoted the ethical view that business has some responsibility for helping to solve social problems. DePree was

a forceful proponent of “servant leadership.” He stood out for his placement of an upper limit on the amount a CEO can make (twenty times the average pay). As the study by Murphy and Enderle (1995) confirms, these leaders exhibited not only virtue in their management of their companies but also an integration both within themselves and between their conduct and the corporate standards to which they were committed. They are good candidates to illustrate integrity in either the aretaic or the integrational senses.

Our positive thrust is mainly this: appeals to integrity in the wide sense in which it is roughly morally sound character should not be made without an awareness of its many faces; and it should not be invoked to do ethical work where our purposes are better served by using some other notion. This leaves open that we may find the term better than any alternative for stressing the integration that is important both for supporting substantive moral standards and for achieving coherent management of a business, credibility, and good leadership. The point also allows us to sketch in the many faces of integrity where one or another is specially relevant.

To see how this clarificatory sketching may be done, we might better speak of the *facets* of integrity. Where integrity is conceived as morally sound character, it has at least as many facets as there are moral virtues (one could also speak of *aspects*). These facets cannot all be cited here (nor is there a neatly closed list). But one way to identify them is to speak of *integrity as*—as honesty, as sincerity, as fairness, as adherence to high moral standards, as devotion to principle (a trait with special impact on one’s degree of integration). Even where only one of these is in question, it may still be appropriate to think in terms of facets. Honesty, for instance, has at least three interconnected facets, one concerned with assertion, another with cheating (as in competitions), and still another with avoidance of theft. Integrity as integration also has facets. But the greatest need for specificity seems to lie in cases where the wide moral soundness use of the term is in question. This is where there is the most danger that, because of the halo that surrounds the term ‘integrity,’ people will use it to designate any of their favorite moral standards and some of their preferred managerial or other business virtues. At least the emphasis on integrity *as* one or another of these things provides a context or, in some cases, a fairly concrete interpretation, of what it means. To seek such clarity, to avoid being too generic when one can be definite, to enlist the force of the familiar notions of honesty, fairness, loyalty, and good will are surely appropriate to integrity in the widest sense.<sup>20</sup>

### *Some Research and Managerial Implications*

A clear implication of this paper is that philosophers and business ethics scholars interested in studying integrity should sharpen both their accounts of it and their appeals to it so that this important concept can be more than a blunt instrument. The following are some positive suggestions for research in business ethics.

Researchers who plan empirical investigations might examine differences in interpretations of integrity within corporations, especially in those that profess integrity

as a core value. Specifically, the views of integrity and the appeals to it among top management could be contrasted with those of middle and lower management in the same company. A major question here is whether the vagueness of 'integrity' lends itself to role-related interpretations—or even role-based biases. We suspect that the interpretations might be significantly different at the different levels. The four corporate leaders cited above were able to overcome this limitation by the clarity of their leadership and the ethical consistency of their conduct.

A research question about integrity that overlaps the empirical and conceptual might be called *operational*. How can managers who are genuinely interested in personal and organizational integrity put into practice the ethical standards that go with their concept of integrity? We envisage several ways this might occur.

First, the many-faceted character of integrity requires its use with other related concepts, such as honesty, fidelity, and moral courage, that are easier to understand in the context of practical decisions. When a company is faced with a crisis like those often reported in the media, the facet of integrity constituted by moral courage means that the management team will have the backbone to make difficult decisions (possibly including layoffs) and communicate them forthrightly to lower level employees (see Mahoney 1999 for a helpful discussion). The concept of trustworthiness is also closely tied to integrity. As James Burke, one of the most respected U.S. managers of all time, put it, "A person with integrity clearly is someone you trust. Trust is a very, very good word" (Gostick and Telford 2002: 57).<sup>21</sup>

Second, business organizations function more smoothly (and, we would argue, more successfully) when a premium is placed on ethical employee behavior at all levels. Integrity can play a role in this kind of policy. Many have argued that companies should hire individuals with integrity (sometimes even relying on integrity/honesty tests). However, if we have been right, then managers must reinforce a culture of integrity by clarifying it and combining it with other valuable elements, such as transparency in communication and action, "unvarnished" honesty—even with bad news—and a commitment to abide by professed standards.

Third, corporations that utilize integrity in the mission or values statement should "fill in" the usually incomplete face of integrity by clear communication with employees. In certain companies integrity is likened to "quality" or "wholeness" or "highest standards of ethics" or "our commitments." As we have argued throughout, these approaches, by themselves, paint an incomplete picture. For integrity to move beyond platitudes, these statements need more specificity. They should be connected with the specific virtues that ground integrity in the widest aretaic sense, in which it is roughly good moral character, and they should be illustrated with representative examples from the sphere of business that the standards are to govern.

Finally, as a case in point we might note that one professional organization which has long touted the importance of integrity—the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA)—has given a definition that is both highly vague and quite indirect. Although integrity is listed as one of the Association's major *principles*, it is defined as "an element of character fundamental to professional

recognition. It is the quality from which the public trust derives and the benchmark against which a member must ultimately test all decisions.” (For a full discussion of the four points outlined about integrity, see <http://aicpa.org/about/code/article3.htm>.) The problems that the accounting field has suffered in the last several years indicate that the integrity endorsed by the profession has been violated by some accountants. Might the results have been different if AICPA took a less sweeping, more direct approach to integrity? And might greater clarity and a specification of the less abstract facets of integrity help in the future?<sup>22</sup> One would hope that these efforts might make integrity in all its senses more integral to the Association’s impact on the daily activities of its members.

### *Conclusion*

We are living in a period in which, for almost any sense of ‘integrity,’ a lack of the trait has been prominent in many influential people in major corporations. But to respond to the problem with a call for higher integrity is only the beginning of an indication of the higher moral standards that must be observed. We have noted two main kinds of uses of the term. One is the wide, integrational sense, in which integrity is a certain kind of unity in character; the other is the aretaic sense, in which integrity is identified either with specific moral virtues or with moral virtue in general. Integrity in its wide, integrational sense is an important notion to reinforce the clearer and more familiar ones that represent the daily working standards of morality. It may be used as a substitute for some of these other notions, such as honesty; but when it plays this substitutional role, it is less clear than the concept it replaces. If it is to be used in this aretaic sense, to designate these more specific notions, that should be indicated. The appeal to integrity *as*—and the consequent *contextualizing* of the notion—is an important positive step. Integrity in the wide, integrational sense is important in maintaining good character and moral conduct; but appeals to integrity in this wide and general sense, and certainly appeals to integrity in the sense of morally sound character, are not by themselves a sufficient guide for the specification of character traits or types of action that are the major fabric of moral life both in business and in other realms. We have identified several different sorts of traits that can and sometimes are taken to constitute integrity; we have distinguished the moral from the non-moral kinds of characteristics in this field; and we have suggested a number of ways to add clarity and force to ethical thought and moral appraisal in which these characteristics figure. In so doing we hope to contribute to the quality of ethical discourse both in business and in other fields where integrity is a major concern.

## Notes

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1. This is quite evident in a wide-ranging article by Cora Diamond in Becker and Becker (1992).

2. A number of writers have noted that integrity requires a certain strength of will. Calhoun (1995), for instance, speaks of "our sense that people with integrity decide what they stand for. . . . Nor are they so weak-willed or self-deceived that they cannot act on what they stand for" (237). Similarly, in describing the coherence she sees as necessary for integrity, McFall (1987) says, "Integrity requires 'sticking to one's principles,' moral or otherwise, in the face of temptation, including the temptation to redescription [of the principles]"(7).

3. Although Kant and W. D. Ross and other major moral philosophers have recognized a duty of beneficence, and despite its being the most demanding duty of all under utilitarianism, one might contest this view, but we take it as sufficiently plausible not to need argument here.

4. Georges Enderle has reported to us that in examining dictionaries in French, German, Italian, and Latin he found the term corresponding to 'integrity' to have approximately the same broad definition that many English dictionaries give for the term: wholeness, completeness, and (perhaps most significant) freedom from moral corruption.

5. See the view of Larry May (1996), on which "Moral integrity has three aspects: coherence of value orientation, mature development of a critical point of view, and disposition to act in a principled way" (123). None of these notions implies any substantive moral standard; and although an important kind of morally sound person may have to satisfy them, a systematically immoral person could surely also do so. That reading is not inconsistent with May's overall view is confirmed by his later statement, "[i]t is the process rather than the substance of one's beliefs that is most important for integrity" (135).

6. Other treatments of integrity will be taken into account below, but the literature on the topic is now very large. Among the books on the topic we have considered but cannot discuss in detail are Carter 1996, which considers integrity mainly in the sociopolitical domain; Halfon 1989, a philosophical treatment; and Beebe 1992, which offers a psychological perspective.

7. The passage continues with a needed qualification, which brings out the way in which integrity in the broad sense implies a kind of integration between one's conduct and values: "The key, of course, is that the orders one obeys and the person or organization that commands our loyalty must be compatible with one's own values and virtues" (Solomon 1992: 168). This qualification does not undermine our points in the text.

8. A related text is Gostick and Telford 2003, which liberally uses quotations by well known business executives to illustrate how to achieve the "integrity advantage" (roughly, to be ethical) in business. While the title and simplistic "ten integrity characteristics" may lead some to view this as an integrity cookbook, the authors do echo a number of the themes articulated by other writers and introduce a few new elements: they stress, e.g., honesty and fidelity to principles, the consultative role of those with integrity, and questioning and admitting mistakes as part of integrity. The text is helpful in seeing the diversity of usage of 'integrity,' and it mainly confirms our overall position.

9. A recent use of 'integrity' illustrates both its wide sense and its common designation of honesty. Richard Coughlin, in a *New York Times* Op-Ed page article, says of judges in Iraq: "Many were Baathists in name only; some had reputations for honesty and fairness. . . . The

courage they had shown in retaining their integrity, often at great personal cost, was inspiring” (July 26, 2003): A13.

10. As clear as some of their criticism of others’ views often is, Cox, La Caze, and Levine (2003) do not present a clear analysis of integrity or, in our judgment, adequately anchor their own account in data drawn from theoretically unbiased uses of the notion of integrity in which it is invoked to do the descriptive and critical work it is supposed to do. They say, e.g., that “integrity is about managing self-conflict well” and that “understanding integrity involves taking the self to be always in flux” (xix; cf. 152–53). We find neither of these ideas clear; nor does our experience justify describing the self as “always in flux.” Moreover, so far as the notion of self-conflict is clear, it would seem that a person of high integrity might at most rarely encounter it—unless the term is stretched to cover conflicts of, say, *prima facie* duties or of desires.

11. The view in this passage is fruitfully compared with Bernard Williams’s idea—influential in many later writings on character and integrity—that our identities as persons are tied to our “ground projects”; these provide “the motive force which propels him [a person] into the future, and gives him a reason for living” (Williams 1981: p. 13).

12. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1971); cf. the initial definition in *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1993): “The condition of not being marred or violated; unimpaired or uncorrupted condition; completeness.”

13. We do not mean to deny that where integrity is taken to be or to entail a moral virtue, a *specific account* of that virtue may preclude certain theories’ countenancing it as a virtue. If, e.g., integrity is understood as requiring avoidance of lying even where this *fails* to produce the greatest good the agent can produce, then that view of integrity is incompatible with act-utilitarianism. But we are not presenting a specific normative account of exactly what conduct integrity (or honesty) requires. We leave open whether various kinds of theories can account for integrity as we conceive it. Some will do better than others, but no major one (at least among the four historically important kinds we have mentioned) is ruled out automatically.

14. On a certain kind of virtue ethics, moral virtues are the *only* elements morally good in themselves; other morally good things, such as actions, are good on account of their relation to the moral virtues. We do not presuppose that the notion of a moral virtue is precise; our points allow for reasonable disagreement on the classification of certain traits. But the contrasts drawn in the text are plausible in the light of the clear cases of moral virtue and might be accepted by some virtue ethicists as well as by people holding other kinds of ethical positions.

15. We speak cautiously about the possibility of a brutal oppressor’s being honest, in a sense implying having the relevant virtue. It could be argued that the virtues—or at least the moral ones—are so tightly interconnected that no one can be possessed without all (or at least a certain subset) of the others. Aristotle is generally taken to have held a unity of the virtues view, and assessing it would require extensive discussion. It is sufficient here to note that insofar as someone generally immoral approaches possession of a moral virtue, this counts favorably in the assessment of moral character. It may still count only in a mitigatory fashion, but it has distinctively moral significance. An ugly painting can have a beautiful part.

16. There are several reasons to put this point as a hypothesis. For one thing, the distinction between substantive and adjunctive virtues is likely to be controversial. Second, some who accept it might argue for placing integrational integrity on the substantive side. Third, some might question whether (integrational) integrity is a virtue at all, as noted (sympathetically) by Sutherland (1993). We should emphasize that integrity in this sense is not merely a kind of consistency and, at least in typical cases, is in part steadfastness under a coherent set of standards or principles. Our point, in part, is that no *moral* commitment or standard is entailed by the trait in question. Sutherland stresses consistency as a candidate for a necessary element in integrity without contrasting it with integration. He leaves no doubt that he believes it is not sufficient: “A



serial killer may . . . act with horrifying consistency but the gap between that and moral integrity is only too apparent" (Sutherland 1993: 21).

17. An illustration of the usefulness of a broad (and quite vague) integrational notion of integrity is provided by a recent paper exploring how personal integrity is compatible with "moral compromise" (Goodstein 2000). The paper largely presupposes that on the "dominant" notion of integrity, it is a matter of upholding "one's principles and values" for the right reasons and even in the face of temptation (808). Achieving this is clearly a kind of integration between values and conduct, and the vagueness of the notion makes it easy to see how certain compromises in moral matters might be consistent with maintaining one's overall integrity, but—unlike a notion of integrity as, say, chiefly honesty—it does not indicate anything definite about what compromises are ethically permissible.

18. In a new book, the management guru, Peter Drucker (2004), presents short bits of management advice for each day of the year. Significantly, the January 1st selection is titled "Integrity in Leadership." Part of the entry reads: "Character is not something one can fool people about. The people with whom a person works, and especially subordinates, know in a few weeks whether he or she has integrity or not. They may forgive a person for a great deal: incompetence, ignorance, insecurity, or bad manners. But they will not forgive a lack of integrity in that person" (8).

19. A more recent illustration is Bill George of Medtronic. His book, *Authentic Leadership* (2003), outlines not only his management style but also the central role that integrity plays in it: "We need authentic leaders, people of the highest integrity, committed to building enduring organizations" (5). Gostick and Telford (2003) also provide examples of current CEOs, who reflect on their interpretation and application of integrity in their companies.

20. We believe, then, that Caldwell goes too far when he says of 'integrity': "Where the word is not dangerous, it denotes only honesty of a certain kind—a certain non-existent kind . . . the kind of honesty ideologues have, much as "discretion" is the kind of chastity promiscuous people have" (Caldwell 2004: 12). We have noted dangers in certain appeals to integrity, and we can agree that in many cases a more specific term does the intended job better; but if the clarifications we have made are observed, the term can be used with more care than is usual, and it may still have a valuable role in moral discourse.

21. In 2003 IBM completed an extensive analysis and discussion (with over 1,000 employees on the company Intranet) regarding the firm's corporate values. One of three proposed at that time was "Integrity that earns trust." This was criticized as being "too vague." Some thought it was just another way of saying "respect for the individual," one of IBM's original values (and many now viewed as outdated). In the end, the third of the three values adopted was: "Trust and personal responsibility in all relationships." For an extensive interview with CEO Sam Palmisano and discussion of IBM's values, see Hemp and Stewart (2004).

22. A textbook on accounting ethics by Duska and Duska uses the story of "Pinocchio" to illustrate how integrity helps in developing a conscience and in learning to become a "whole" person (Duska and Duska 2003: 82–84). Such narratives can be clarifying and may be particularly needed to give concreteness and specificity to the ethical uses of the notion of integrity.

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