

## **Integrity**

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Integrity is one of the leading normative concepts employed in our society. We frequently talk about the degree of integrity of community leaders and famous historical figures, and we highly value integrity in our elected public officials. But philosophers have had a difficult time arriving at consensus about what integrity consists in. Some claim that it is a purely formal relation of consistency, others that it has to do primarily with one's identity, and still others that it involves subjective or objective moral requirements. The primary goal here is to outline the leading facets of integrity in the contemporary philosophical literature.

First, though, a preliminary note. The word 'integrity' has a number of different uses. We talk about the structural integrity of a building, the musical integrity of a symphony, and the environmental integrity of an ecosystem. Here, however, the focus will only be on the concept of integrity as it applies to the general character of a person.

### Facets of Integrity

There are at least five different purported facets of integrity that have received a great deal of attention. Each is controversial, and for each I briefly review some of the central objections to whether it is either necessary or sufficient for integrity (in what follows I have been helped by Cox et al. 2008).

Integrity as Coherence. On this view, integrity is a formal relation of coherence between various components of a person, so that the person with integrity is said to be harmonious,

undivided, or intact, and to wholeheartedly desire and act in various ways. Such agents are not ‘wantons’ simply expressing their strongest desires, but rather agents whose actions exhibit that with which they identify or align themselves (Frankfurt 1971, Dworkin 1988). As a strictly formal matter, then, integrity as coherence does not involve any normative constraints on what the components themselves may consist in (for more, see Halfon 1989: chapters three and four; Calhoun 1995: 236-8; Cox et al. 2008, *see* AUTHENTICITY).

An advocate of integrity as coherence can postulate a number of different coherence relations (McFall 1987: 7-8). One is between the agent’s own principles, commitments, or values. If a person is deeply conflicted about whether to keep a promise or not in a given situation, that person is not exhibiting integrity at that moment. A second coherence relation is between the agent’s values and behavior, especially in the face of temptation or societal pressure. A person with integrity would not value a political cause but then act contrary to it when facing mild opposition from others. And a third coherence relation is between the values and the behavior such that the behavior is *based on* those values. A person might value donating to charity, and in fact make a \$100 donation to a given charity, but if this donation was actually made primarily because of peer pressure or feelings of guilt, then it would not count as a genuine display of integrity with respect to that value.

John Bigelow and Robert Pargetter have offered a simple model of integrity as coherence. We can distinguish between first-order desires (such as a desire to eat candy or to read a book) and second-order desires (such as a desire to stop desiring to eat candy). Strength of will, on their view, is a matter of one’s lower-order desires conforming to the higher-order ones. So if I desire to stop desiring to eat candy, and that desire is effective in precluding my first-order desire for candy from leading to action, then I am exhibiting strength of will. Integrity, then, is the

character trait of having the capacity to exercise strength of will in a wide range of relevant situations (Bigelow and Pargetter 2007: 44).

Is coherence of some kind necessary for integrity? Most philosophers seem to argue that it is. But Sutherland uses the example of Shostakovich to suggest that the artistic compromises he made to code his work with anti-Stalinist messages were signs of great integrity (1996: 23-5). And Calhoun appeals to a case of a person dealing with multiple forms of oppression involving identities with conflicting value claims that cannot be easily resolved (1995: 239).

Is coherence of some kind sufficient for integrity? Here there have been a number of objections. One is that a coherent person can also be a moral monster. Someone who is a devoted Nazi, serial killer, or child molester can exhibit the relevant coherence relations, but not seem to be a person of integrity (McFall 1987: 9-10; Calhoun 1995: 241; Sutherland 1996: 21). More generally, this view may leave it unexplained why we value integrity so much, why it is thought to be morally praiseworthy, and why it has traditionally been considered a virtue (*see* VIRTUE). Indeed, advocates of integrity as coherence typically concede that on their view integrity might not be a virtue (Bigelow and Pargetter 2007).

A second concern is that such a view can seem to trivialize integrity. On this approach, we exhibit integrity all the time in our lives in even the most mundane activities, such as eating, brushing our teeth, or turning the lights out. No distinction is made between coherence relations involving commitments which are central to an agent's identity and those involving commitments which are peripheral (McFall 1987: 12-3; Calhoun 1995: 242; for additional concerns with integrity as coherence, see Calhoun 1995: 237-41; Cox et al. 2008).

Integrity as Practical Identity. The integrity as practical identity view attempts to avoid this second concern by focusing on what are variously called 'identity-conferring commitments'

or ‘ground projects.’ These are an agent’s fundamental commitments that provide a sense of purpose and meaning to her life, and could include her family, her job, or her most deeply valued activities or principles (Williams 1973: 116; 1981: 12-3). Integrity, then, is a matter of having a character constituted by such ground projects, and being true to that character when the time comes. And it is easy to see how integrity on this approach is something that people care deeply about and for which they are even willing to die in order to preserve it (for more, see Taylor 1981; McFall 1987: 13; Halfon 1989: chapter one; Calhoun 1995: 241-6; Korsgaard 1996: 102-3; Schaubert 1996).

Is a focus on identity and ground projects necessary for understanding integrity? One challenge concerns whether we can exhibit integrity with respect to causes that are not fundamental to who we are as persons. For instance, if I am a person of integrity, I might be expected to exhibit integrity in a wide variety of circumstances, and even with respect to particular political, social, intellectual, or religious causes which are not a part of my ground projects (Calhoun 1995: 245).

Is a focus on identity and ground projects sufficient for understanding integrity? Note that, as with the first view, integrity as practical identity is a purely formal approach to integrity, since it places no normative restrictions on the content of the grounding projects. So it too would have to hold that certain moral monsters have integrity. And again it might have difficulty explaining why integrity is a virtue and is praiseworthy. Better, we might even think, that such moral monsters not have integrity so understood in the first place (for this objection, see Taylor 1981: 151-2, 157-8; Halfon 1989: 29; Graham 2001: 238; for additional concerns with integrity as practical identity, see Calhoun 1995: 242-5; Cox et al. 2008).

Integrity as Social Virtue. Where the previous two approaches go wrong, according to Cheshire Calhoun, is in understanding integrity as a personal virtue concerned primarily with maintaining a proper relation to oneself, rather than as a social virtue which is concerned primarily with having a proper relation to others (1995: 252). For Calhoun, we should begin by noting that we are trying to answer the question “What is worth doing?” as one among many deliberators. To exhibit integrity centrally involves the concept of *standing for* something in front of one’s fellow deliberators, “because doing so matters to deliberators’ common interest in determining what is worth doing” (259). Such a person cares about what other members of that community have to say, but also stands up for what is her best judgment when the time comes, and in doing so, is acting not just for herself but also for all deliberators trying to answer the question of what is worth doing (257). Thus the person who fails to stand for certain principles is not in the first instance violating his or her own internal norms or commitments, but rather those of the community of people pursuing the good life (254).

Is socially standing for something necessary for integrity? Not obviously. Consider a secular hermit who routinely fasts during daylight hours. He is not standing for something in front of co-deliberators about how to live (whether human or divine). Nor, if he fails to fast for a day, is he primarily failing the community of people pursuing the good life. Yet it is hard to deny that there could be hermits like this of great integrity. In such cases, personal standards seem to be more central to integrity.

Is socially standing for something sufficient for integrity? Again, we have the worry about moral monsters, since there are no normative constraints being offered on the content of agents’ conclusions about “What is worth doing?” Genocidal conclusions, for instance, would still be on the table provided, that is, that we first care about other points of view and take

seriously dissenting opinions. Indeed, the thoroughgoing amoralist has an answer to what is worth doing, and can still respect other points of view (albeit not for moral reasons). And yet it might be implausible to think that an amoralist has the virtue of integrity, and is praiseworthy because of it (Graham 2001: 238; for additional concerns with integrity as social virtue, see Cox et al. 2008).

Integrity as Reasonability. As noted, the first three approaches to understanding integrity are purely formal in that they deny any substantive normative constraints on the agent's relevant commitments. And this leads to worries about moral monsters of various kinds serving as counterexamples to the sufficiency of their accounts. So a natural approach to take is to add such normative constraints to a larger account of integrity. One way to do so is to employ normative criteria about what is reasonable for an agent to value. Here is Lynne McFall: "When we grant integrity to a person, we need not *approve* of his or her principles or commitments, but we must at least recognize them as ones a reasonable person might take to be of great importance and ones that a reasonable person might be tempted to sacrifice to some lesser yet still recognizable goods" (1987: 11, emphasis hers). So on this approach, a person does not have to have objectively correct values, but only reasonable ones in order to be a person of integrity (for more, see Taylor 1983: 148; McFall 1987: 11; Halfon 1989: chapter two; Graham 2001; Cox et al. 2008).

The integrity as reasonability view can be developed in (at least) two different ways. One is to maintain that there are objective standards as to what counts as reasonable for a person to value. Thus a deeply committed Nazi or a serial murderer could not have integrity, but someone could who had objectively reasonable views opposing ours on the moral permissibility of the death penalty or stem cell use. Such an approach would allow for a diversity of normative

outlooks to count as reasonable, while also appropriately excluding extreme cases. As it turns out, this approach seems to be the leading way of developing the integrity as reasonability view in the literature. But one could instead index what is reasonable to an agent's subjective opinions. Hence there would not be integrity as such, but rather integrity relative to what a given observer or group of observers deems to be reasonable. Thus this subjective reasonability approach would allow for the deeply committed Nazi to have integrity, at least from certain Nazi perspectives, although not from our own perspective. Perhaps not surprisingly, such an alternative approach has found few supporters.

Is reasonability necessary for integrity? This may hinge largely on how we think about the moral monster and amoralist cases. Some take them as compelling counterexamples to merely formal accounts of integrity. But not everyone is persuaded. Those who are not, will accordingly reject this proposal.

Is reasonability sufficient for integrity? Clearly not. Merely holding reasonable views does not come close to approximating integrity. For one thing, one might immediately compromise those views under pressure. But to be fair, the integrity as reasonability approach is not purporting to offer sufficient conditions, but is best seen as highlighting a central component of the concept of integrity that, it maintains, has been missing from the other accounts above (for additional concerns with integrity as reasonability, see Cox et al. 2008).

Integrity as Objective Accuracy. The integrity as reasonability view provides some normative constraints on what the content of an agent's commitments has to be in order for the agent to have integrity. But it still allows for a diverse range of such commitments, many of which could be false. The integrity as objective accuracy approach goes one step further and requires that the commitments be objectively correct, both in their moral claims and in their

empirical presuppositions. As Elizabeth Ashford writes, the agent's self-conception "must be grounded in reality: it must not be based on her being seriously deceived either about empirical facts or about the moral obligations she actually has. In particular, her self-conception as being morally decent must be grounded in her leading a genuinely morally decent life" (2000: 424).

Is objective accuracy necessary for integrity? It might initially seem not. Presumably one side of the debate about the moral permissibility of the death penalty is objectively mistaken, but it seems that there could be people of integrity on both sides who have devoted their lives to arguing for their position. Damian Cox et al. make a similar objection when they write that the "point of attributing integrity to another is not to signal unambiguous moral agreement. It is often to ameliorate criticism of another's moral judgment. For example, we may disagree strongly with the Pope's views of the role of women in the Church, take this to be a significant moral criticism of him, and yet admit that he is a man of integrity" (2008, see also Halfon 1989: chapter two; Calhoun 1995: 248-9; Bigelow and Pargetter 2007: 39-40).

The advocate of integrity as objective accuracy has (at least) one way of responding. Following Ashford, she can distinguish between objective integrity, which requires objective accuracy, and subjective integrity, which requires something weaker such as reasonability or mere coherence (2000: 424). Our thinking about integrity might not clearly distinguish between these two kinds, and so our intuitions might track subjective integrity in some cases (such as in the previous paragraph) and objective integrity in others. In addition, Ashford argues that objective integrity is what people ultimately value, and are sometimes willing to risk their lives to preserve. Furthermore, thought experiments like the experience machine show that we prefer living a life that is genuinely worthwhile (Nozick 1974: 42). We want our lives to have value and

worth in virtue of their actually having valuable characteristics, and not just in virtue of our thinking that they do (Ashford 2000: 424-5).

Is objective accuracy sufficient for integrity? Clearly not. Any virtue will require objective accuracy, and so there would be no distinction between integrity and the other virtues (Schauber 1996: 119-20). But again to be fair, the integrity as objective accuracy approach is also not purporting to offer sufficient conditions, but rather highlights what it takes to be a central component of the concept of integrity.

### Kinds of Integrity

The previous section illustrates that one of the central debates about understanding integrity has to do with whether integrity requires normative constraints on the commitments of agents, or whether it is instead a merely formal concept. One much discussed way to simply avoid having this debate in the first place, is to distinguish between two kinds of integrity: *moral integrity*, which pertains to the moral commitments and values of the agent and requires a normative constraint such as reasonability or objective accuracy, and *personal integrity*, which pertains to the non-moral commitments of the agent and is purely formal. To be sure, there are other ways of making this distinction; one could hold that both kinds of integrity require normative constraints, or that both kinds are purely formal, or even that only personal integrity requires normative constraints while moral integrity does not. But the main interest amongst philosophers in this area has been in the distinction understood as above (McFall 1987; Graham 2001; Cox et al. 2008).

One reason to potentially question this move has to do with whether the divide between the moral and the personal can be neatly drawn. While moral integrity plausibly entails personal

integrity, the above distinction assumes that personal integrity does not entail moral integrity. But perhaps all of our personal commitments are infused with moral considerations in some way. Being a professional baker seems like a clear non-moral commitment, for instance, but in fact it is bound up with considerations of fairness in one's treatment of customers, honesty in one's description of the product, fortitude in one's work ethic, respect in one's relationship with employees, and so forth. So it may not be clear what it would mean to say that I exhibited personal integrity in my bakery irrespective of any moral considerations (for a related point, see Halfon 1989: 55-7; Graham 2001: 239-41).

Regardless of this concern, the distinction between moral and personal integrity does not seem to be the end of the story. For we are interested, not just in certain respects in which a person exhibits integrity (morally, personally, intellectually, etc.), but also in a person's integrity *simpliciter*. Does integrity as such require normative constraints on agential commitment, or is it purely formal? Here the advocate of the moral/personal distinction could claim that integrity *simpliciter* is simply a function of the extent to which a person exhibits the various kinds of integrity. Sticking just with moral and personal integrity for the moment, the proposal would be that an agent has integrity *simpliciter* iff the agent has both moral integrity (which has normative constraints) and personal integrity (which does not).

But this proposal is clearly too simple. For one could have both kinds of integrity and yet be highly conflicted. As will be discussed below, act-utilitarianism could be a reasonable moral theory to adopt, for instance, and one could stand for one's moral principles formulated on the basis of utilitarian reasoning. But those principles could conflict with one's personal projects and concerns. Someone who acted out of a state of repeated internal conflict like this would not

likely be instantiating integrity *simpliciter*. So a coherence relation *between* the domains pertaining to the different kinds of integrity may also be needed.

Finally, it is worth mentioning other potential kinds of integrity besides the moral and the personal, such as intellectual integrity, bodily integrity, emotional integrity, professional integrity, and artistic integrity (for a helpful overview, see Halfon 1989: chapter five; Cox et al. 2008). One interesting question is whether we can systematically delineate these types of integrity. Another interesting question is which of the five facets applies to each of these different kinds of integrity. An initially plausible hypothesis is that different ones apply to different kinds, so that there will be no unified underlying account of the various kinds of integrity. A normative constraint on the content of one's commitments might apply to intellectual integrity, for instance, but perhaps not to artistic integrity. A third interesting question is whether and in what ways exhibiting one of these kinds of integrity may conflict with exhibiting another kind. For instance, it seems that a doctor may be conflicted when his professional integrity with respect to certain standards of his profession, is in tension in his eyes with his related personal norms. These are all difficult questions, and additional work is clearly needed in this area.

### Integrity and Theories of Morality.

In addition to understanding integrity in its own right, philosophers have been very interested in the implications of integrity for the plausibility of first-order normative theories. The main source of this interest is Bernard Williams' integrity objection to act-utilitarianism (*see* UTILITARIANISM; WILLIAMS, BERNARD). According to act-utilitarianism, roughly speaking we are morally required to act in such a way that our actions maximize net overall utility. Such an account of moral obligation is completely impartial – it gives no special weight

to any one person's commitments or projects, but rather evaluates all of them solely on the basis of their conduciveness to the overall promotion of utility and prevention of disutility.

At the deliberative level, an agent who is a self-conscious utilitarian must tailor his decisions, not only to what promotes his own utility, but also to "all the satisfactions which he can affect from where he is: and this means that the projects of others, to an indeterminately great extent, determine his decision" (Williams 1973: 115). But what happens when contributing to the utility of others overrides an agent's own deepest projects, his ground projects or identity-conferring commitments "round which he has built his life" (116)? Then, Williams claims, "It is absurd to demand of such a man...that he should just step aside from his own project and decision and acknowledge the decision which utilitarian calculation requires....this is to neglect the extent to which *his* actions and *his* decisions have to be seen as the actions and decisions which flow from the projects and attitudes with which he is most closely identified. It is thus, in the most literal sense, an attack on his integrity" (116-7, emphasis his).

Here and elsewhere, Williams seems to be assuming the integrity as practical identity approach. Act-utilitarianism, if self-consciously implemented, can attack an agent's integrity because it prescribes impartial moral requirements which will, in certain cases, conflict with an agent's identity-conferring commitments, such as his job, personal activities, education, or family. But such commitments represent what we as agents care most deeply about, and they provide meaning and purpose to our lives. They constitute our identity, not in the metaphysical sense familiar from personal identity discussions, but rather in the ordinary sense of how we understand ourselves and organize our lives. So to undermine an agent's integrity is, for Williams, to undermine something of the deepest importance to an agent (for detailed

interpretations of Williams' integrity objection, see Herman 1983; Scheffler 1993; Ashford 2000).

There has been a variety of different strategies employed in order to respond to the objection. Here I briefly mention a few of them (see also Scheffler 1993: 41-79; Cox et al. 2008):

- (a) *Argue that Williams' own view falls prey to the integrity objection.* Williams does acknowledge that there is a strict moral obligation to help others in emergency situations, an obligation which may not be limited by geographical proximity, and so may repeatedly conflict with identity-conferring commitments (see Ashford 2000: 428-430).
- (b) *Argue that the objection is not unique to act-utilitarianism but rather applies to any plausible normative theory.* Some have noted that, besides ethical egoism, all of the leading normative theories make impartial demands which conflict with an agent's identity-conferring commitments. This has been argued in detail by Ashford for contractualism (2000: 430-4), and Williams himself extends the integrity objection to Kantian views (1981; for resistance from a Kantian, see Herman 1983). But ethical egoism is highly implausible, as is the thought that there are no independent normative constraints on our personal projects. So the integrity objection attempts to prove too much (for an alternative formulation of the objection which is aimed more narrowly at act-utilitarianism, see Scheffler 1993).
- (c) *Move to alternative versions of utilitarianism and consequentialism.* Samuel Scheffler notes that another option is to abandon pure act-consequentialist theories of moral obligation and accept an agent-centered prerogative, whereby an agent in certain cases is permitted to do what would have less than the best overall consequences

(1993: 14). Others distinguish between criteria for moral obligation and moral decision procedures, and claim that it is often best to not employ act-utilitarianism as a practical guide to action (Railton 1984). Versions of rule-consequentialism might also be able to blunt some of the force of the integrity objection.

(d) *Maintain that act-utilitarianism is correct and deny that an agent's integrity is undermined.* One way to carry out this strategy is to argue that a self-conscious act-utilitarian would have, as one of his identity-conferring commitments, compliance with utilitarian principles. So there would be no conflict between an agent's practical identity and utilitarianism if the latter is included as part of the former. But this by itself cannot be an entirely adequate defense. For having utilitarianism just be one identity-conferring commitment among many would still lead to conflicts between different commitments, and hence fragmentation which undermines formal integrity. So what the utilitarian would need to claim here is that utilitarianism can preserve an agent's integrity provided it becomes the *central* identity-conferring commitment. And this move in turn likely raises questions about the psychological plausibility of agents being able to have an impartial normative theory achieve this kind of prominence in their lives.

(e) *Maintain that act-utilitarianism is correct and concede that our integrity is undermined.* Ashford has accepted the integrity objection, while understanding integrity as also requiring objective accuracy. On her view, it is actually a virtue of utilitarianism that it highlights the threats to our objective integrity given our world of extreme poverty and suffering. We live with constant emergency situations, and any view which simply legitimates an agent's personal projects at the expense of these

emergencies is deeply flawed. The only solution to this conflict between the moral and the personal “is the eradication of the extreme poverty” (2000: 435). Hence she maintains that the prescriptions of act-utilitarianism *as such* are not incompatible with an agent’s integrity (2000: 434-9).

This section provides only one illustration of the important avenues for future work which the concept of integrity has made available to philosophers working in ethics. Perhaps attention to integrity will also help to advance discussions of the alleged unity of the virtues, for instance, or shed new light on the empirical adequacy of the virtues in light of work in social psychology. These and plenty of other avenues are worth exploring.

SEE ALSO: AUTHENTICITY; CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION; PROFESSIONAL ETHICS; UTILITARIANISM; VIRTUE; WILLIAMS, BERNARD.

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