A Deweyan Approach to Integrity in an Age of Instrumental Rationality

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Educators in the contemporary United States are increasingly faced with demands to teach prescribed curricula using scripted methods driven by standardized assessments — all grounded within an instrumental rationality that prizes use value over intellectual exploration. Such demands may conflict with the concomitant expectations to be nurturing, caring educators, conflicts that can pull at teachers' senses of moral integrity. This moral tension is only exacerbated by the common linking of student test performance to teacher and administrator evaluation, creating conditions in which educators are asked to distance themselves from their students morally, to treat them as means to ends, not as ends in themselves. As one of my students, an elementary school principal, recently asked: *When do we decide to stand up to these demands because it has become morally wrong to comply?* Likewise, David Berliner and Sharon Nichols ask us: "Shouldn't we be concerned about a law that turns too many of the country's most morally admired citizens into morally compromised individuals?"[1]

In this essay, I respond to these concerns by addressing a question facing any of us working with current and future educators in today's educational climate: *Can educators working within the currently dominant educational paradigm of the accountability movement maintain integrity?*[2] Of course, judgments of whether or not individuals exhibit or believe themselves to have integrity depend upon the theoretical constructs we use. The boundaries of a particular definition or characterization of integrity influence both how we come to recognize it in our students, and how they recognize it in themselves. It also influences the particular educational experiences we design to nurture its emergence. As a way to begin answering the question, I introduce the general notion of integrity by examining Cheshire Calhoun's[3] discussion of Bernard Williams'[4] well known account of George, the biochemist, and use it as a foundation for a parallel case to represent one facing many educators in schools today. I concur with Calhoun that integrity is a social virtue, but I push her conclusions further by drawing upon John Dewey's moral philosophy to propose an even more social account of integrity. I conclude with some implications for both our conception of integrity and teacher education within these times of instrumentally focused schooling.

Before proceeding, I must first clarify what I mean by instrumental reason. It is thinking that focuses on realizing given ends without also questioning their validity. In a general way, it is a failure of critical thought, but emerging from within critical social theory, the critique signals that such failure supports hegemonic systems of power and control.[5] When an instrumental rationality dominates a social space, agents are discouraged from contesting "the normative context in which it is employed."[6] As I will expand upon in what follows, within schools it creates a

context in which educational discourse must be focused on ways to reach preordained goals and eschews asking expansive questions about human flourishing.[7] Jim Garrison aptly characterizes what I mean here; it causes what is essentially a moral discourse within schools to focus upon the "intellectual language of information processing,"[8] resulting in an emphasis on "the passive and passionless memorization of rules and standards or cost-benefit calculation."[9] As teachers across the country know only too well, it results in a narrowed curriculum that focuses on testing in order to claim legitimacy by aligning itself, at least rhetorically, "to scientific and positivistic forms of knowing."[10] I agree with Gail Boldt, Paula Salvio, and Peter Taubman who argue that it "has impoverished the intellectual, aesthetic, and affective dimensions of life in classrooms. Students' interests, curiosity, and play, as well as teachers' passions and questions fall by the wayside as they work together to follow directives and meet production quotas."[11]

Georgia and the Dilemma of Integrity

Williams uses the case of George, the desperately unemployed chemist, to demonstrate that utilitarianism challenges integrity by forcing agents to act in ways that conflict with personal systems of value.[12] While discussing the relationship of consequentialist approaches to morality and integrity is not my focus here, Williams' scenario aptly captures the nature of the moral dilemmas facing many current educators. In that spirit, I have recast Williams' case into an educational counterpart: Georgia has recently finished her graduate degree in educational administration, and she has been offered a position as a principal at a local school, one that has been labeled as failing and as such has been forced to implement a series of rigid accountability-driven measures. Georgia is ethically opposed to such educational approaches, and balks at the notion of working for an administration that has so enthusiastically accepted the accountability movement's aims and procedures. A school board member who has been advocating on her behalf indicates that if Georgia does not take the position, it will be offered to Georgia's peer, someone, to use Williams' language, who will push the prescriptive program with much "greater zeal" than Georgia would.[13] To complicate things, we also learn that Georgia's partner, also a teacher, does not share the intellectual and moral objections to such educational approaches that plague our scenario's protagonist and is depending upon Georgia to find work. Georgia, it seems, is on the horns of the dilemma.

As Williams has scripted the scenario, Georgia must weigh the various competing concerns pulling upon her. She and her partner need her to find work, and perhaps the most pressing part of the scenario: If she refuses to work within a school that succumbs unquestioningly to the mandates of the accountability movement, she most certainly *will* be replaced by another who will even more enthusiastically embrace a limited and what she deems to be a harmful conception of schooling and its corresponding educational practices. Like Georgia, many administrators and teachers have to weigh a number of personal and professional conflicts as they try to negotiate the contours of school practices that may deeply trouble them. Abhorring what they are forced to do as a result of their schools' test-focused mandates, many educators feel only too real challenges to their moral integrity.

One immediate and attractive response is to argue for the removal of the testing apparatus and the concomitant instructional mandates associated with it: Because the conditions themselves have created the challenges to integrity, radically altering them will remove the source of the moral conflict. Despite not addressing the particulars of needing to maintain integrity within current conditions, the move also presumes that we can return to a previous state of innocence that, I posit, never existed. As I argue in what follows, the challenges to integrity may not originate within practices like high stakes tests themselves, but within something much less obvious — the greater epistemological context out of which the restrictive approaches to education emerge.

The first step in the argument that instrumental reasoning is a threat to educator integrity involves conceptualizing integrity much more relationally than is common. To do so, I turn now to Cheshire Calhoun's work on integrity where she expands its individualistic frame to argue that integrity is a distinctly *social* virtue.

CHESHIRE CALHOUN ON INTEGRITY AS A SOCIAL VIRTUE

Calhoun helpfully distinguishes among three approaches to defining integrity, those associated with descriptions of an "integrated self," others that focus on personal identity, and a third set that discusses having "clean hands" in morally despicable situations ("Standing," 235). All begin with some sort of central position that integrity involves the alignment of personal systems of value and one's actions. The accounts differ in their focus — from integrating parts of the self, to remaining faithful to one's identity-conferring commitments, or remaining ethically untainted within "dirty-hands situations" ("Standing," 235). They all focus on describing integrity as an attribute of individuals. As I will develop first through Calhoun and then through Dewey, such a conception of integrity fails to address the problems educators like Georgia face within the context of schooling driven by instrumental reasoning.

Discussing moral situations like the Williams-inspired situation confronting Georgia, Calhoun argues that while integrity does generally involve aligning one's actions with one's ethical frameworks, such a viewpoint fails to capture the full scope of what integrity entails and why it is of value to us. Considering integrity to be a solitary virtue grounds it within the task of reconciling competing moral choices, to rank order them according to some personally chosen ethical standard. But Georgia's case reveals that integrity involves something more, something associated with one's moral community. While Georgia risks being hypocritical if she were to take a position as a principal who ultimately must make moral compromises because of the nature of her position, Calhoun helps us see that such a charge emerges from the impact our individual moral stances have on our wider communities of value. We worry about Georgia's integrity because "hypocrites mislead," Calhoun asserts. "And it is because they deliberately mislead us or others about what is worth doing that they lack integrity" ("Standing," 258). She argues that traditional accounts miss this social nature of integrity.

As a counter, Calhoun argues that integrity is a social virtue, one that helps us to see "persons of integrity as insisting that it is in some important sense for us, for

the sake of what ought to be our project or character as a people, to preserve what ought to be the purity of our agency that they stick by their best judgment" ("Standing," 257). Furthermore, she argues that

> To have integrity is to understand that one's own judgment matters because it is only within individual persons' deliberative view-points, including one's own, that what is worth our doing can be decided. Thus, one's own judgment serves a common interest of co-deliberators. Persons of integrity treat their own endorsements as ones that matter, or ought to matter, to fellow deliberators. ("Standing," 257)

It is this codeliberative stance that drives Calhoun's vision of integrity, one that pushes us to examine the ways that "standing for something," as she describes it, situates integrity not only within the private sphere of personal deliberation, but also squarely amidst our shared struggles to define the right and good. When conceived as a social virtue, Calhoun argues, integrity emphasizes that the misrepresentation of one's best judgment fails to take seriously one's role as a codeliberator in the public engagement with what is most worth doing.

Of course, within Georgia's dilemma — as inspired by Williams' construction as a critique of the ways that consequentialist moral frameworks may require one to make moral compromises — there remains a challenge to integrity: Cooperating with the current test-driven schooling requires Georgia to get her "hands dirty." Maintaining integrity may be impossible if she takes the position and chooses to work in a district that embraces the accountability movement's brand of prescriptive and restrictive schooling. But if she chooses another option, perhaps leaving public schooling altogether, she and educators like her face real reproach by their teaching peers, their supervising administrators, their own families, and even students and their families. Quite reasonably, the charge is that protesting by walking away — even when couched within the need to maintain integrity or not to do harm to students — leaves students behind, leaves them in the care of those without the moral sensitivity that such schooling is harmful. The implication is that getting one's "hands dirty" is morally more tenable than a "clean hands" stance. But, of course, if remaining engaged seems to be the way forward, it is a direction fraught with moral peril — and certainly a challenge to integrity.

To put it succinctly, in contrasting the two choices, either acting on a deeply held conviction about what just education entails and refusing the position or the "doing one's best" to fight within the system option, individualistic definitions of integrity like the clean hands approach mislocate the heart of integrity questions. As Calhoun argues, it is a public stance. Georgia's decision *does* matter because of its impact upon her personal moral identity, but it *also* matters because of its public implications for what is best for her community of value to believe and do.

While valuable, Calhoun's picture of integrity as involving a public and codeliberative stance only captures part of the way that integrity is a social virtue. Dewey's work advances Calhoun's position by helping us see that even the personal aspects of integrity are always socially embedded and that the codeliberative stance is required not just because *others* are interested in our moral deliberations, but because influencing our social context also influences our own resources for developing and maintaining integrity.

DEWEYAN INTEGRITY

Dewey argues that we should not see morality as the "conscious testing of conduct by an inner and self-imposed standard."[14] Instead, he urges us to see that our moral frameworks, beliefs, and dispositions "operate largely through habit rather than through choice."[15] Understood as habits, or persistent responses to moral situations, one's moral framework is socially mediated by one's moral community. Dewey argues that

> a vast network of relations surrounds the individual: indeed, 'surrounds' is too external a word, since every individual lives *in* the network and as a part of it. The material of personal reflection and of choice comes to each of us from the customs, traditions, institutions, policies, and plans of these large collective wholes.[16]

The individualistic view of integrity does not account for the ways that the social aspects of one's life are key features of integrity (beyond supplying the obvious source of moral conflict.)[17] This is problematic for Dewey because focusing on individual accounts of moral growth leads individuals to focus on themselves without also looking at the way that the social sphere is always a part of individual moral horizons. In contrast, a social perspective on the self reveals, "social modifications are the only means of creation of changed personalities."[18]

The transactional nature of integrity is alive in Michael Katz's observation that in the process of maintaining integrity, "our sense of self often changes as we act in ways to preserve our sense of wholeness, to maintain relationships with others that are critical to us, and to make new sense of the existential realities we confront in our day-to-day lives."[19] Conceiving integrity much more socially has important consequences. Garrison is right on the mark here: "Situations are an intimate, interconnected set of functional relations involving the inquirer and the environment. The resolution of a problematic situation *may involve transforming the inquirer, the environment, and often both*. The emphasis is on trans-formation."[20]

Approaching integrity through Dewey's work, then, helps illustrate why Calhoun takes us only part of the way to conceptualizing integrity as a social virtue. Her conclusion that integrity means standing up for something is important, but it fails to emphasize that public expressions and actions are important not just because the community of codeliberators cares about our private deliberations but because such actions involve *changing our social–moral contexts*. Viewing the demands of integrity through this social lens, then, emphasizes that someone in Georgia's position can work within schools that challenge her moral integrity, but doing so requires a dual focus on both the personal and the social. On this account then, integrity *does* involve aligning one's actions with one's moral commitments, but it also entails influencing the context that gives rise to one's moral commitments in the first place. Again, Dewey reminds us "when we take the social point of view we are compelled to realize the extent to which our moral beliefs are a product of the social environment and also the extent to which *thinking*, new ideas, can change this environment."[21] Thus, change in the environment can lead to more systemic changes in individuals, for "the thought and choice of one individual spreads to others."[22]

Despite initial misgivings Georgia can, indeed, take the principalship, but in doing so, she must seek to transform the social–moral horizon of the school so that her integrity (and that of those with whom she works) can be nurtured. Now we return to the reason why we need to focus on instrumental rationality and its influence on the conditions necessary to foster integrity within schools. As Axel Honneth argues, moral communities hierarchically rank values, and as such, individuals are encouraged to emulate those most prized and to suppress those not valued.[23] Dewey also makes this point when he argues that while without "ulterior design," our social spaces esteem certain traits and actions, thus educating community members to "emotionally and practically"[24] value what the community values. One outcome of this is that the intending community may not recognize some ethically focused actions and motivations as moral. The logic governing an action may not be recognized as moral within the valuing community because either the rationale one offers is not as highly regarded or is simply noncomprehensible given the types of reasons and actions currently valued by the community and its moral horizon.

Within the context of schools, then, if one were to make a principled stand against some rigid accountability-related measure, the logic of instrumental reasoning could help the community read the action as naïve or irrational, thereby discounting it as relating to moral integrity in the first place. For example, within the context of schools dominated by instrumental reasoning, protesting that students are not able to develop meaningful and caring relationships with one another, their teachers, or their intellectual pursuits in the ways that Nel Noddings describes may draw on a set of reasons that are not recognizable or valued within the instrumental logic governing the discourse of teachers and administrators in schools.[25] On the social conception of integrity offered here, this lack of recognition is important because it may influence how individual agents then understand the contours of legitimate moral direction. In order for a protest to make sense to the acting agent, in our case someone like Georgia, she must be able to imagine the stance as intelligible to her target communities of value, of which the school constitutes an essential one in this case. If she is unable to do so, then integrity is threatened because she may be encouraged or required to rethink her reasons for acting and to discount them in favor of ones more valued and recognizable within her community. Georgia and her teaching staff may find themselves pulled to think within the logic of the accountability movement and not other worthwhile educational paradigms. As Calhoun argues, this increases their vulnerability to others' "lower standards that make it easy to get away with violating our own, and their collective construction of a world that calls upon us to act against our ideals" ("Standing," 252). The dominance of instrumentally focused reasoning contributes to a morally laden epistemological context that challenges integrity's emergence because it alters and/or prevents true codeliberation. To borrow Charles Peirce's language, it blocks the path of inquiry.

When considered amidst the prevalence of instrumental reasoning in schooling that makes expressing alternative conceptions of school purposes and practices

often unintelligible to those in the school community, the preceding argument can seem overly determined and bleak. That is not the case. Communities of value are not monolithic. For example, there may be smaller groups within a school to whom Georgia's reasoning may be intelligible and reasonable. Likewise, she could also develop alternative communities of value by interacting with educators in other schools, professional organizations, or universities. Nevertheless, drawing upon alternative communities of value to sustain individual efforts to craft and maintain moral integrity within unsupportive social environments is a challenging task, one that is constantly threatened when the community of value in which one must act daily and publicly does not recognize or encourage alternative moral viewpoints. It is also problematic for someone like Georgia who occupies a leadership position that requires her to focus the community's discourse and analysis on the instrumental goals imposed by others.

The last line of reasoning opens another issue that cannot be fully developed in the space remaining: Hierarchical role stratification influences how one can "stand for something" within a community. As theorists like Iris Marion Young[26] and Honneth[27] argue, being able to make a principled stance of integrity may be highly dependent upon one's standing associated with aspects of one's social identity. For example, within institutions governed by patriarchal attitudes, a woman's public display of integrity may be read as an emotional and irrational response rather than a contribution to the moral life of the community. This is in keeping with Katz's important argument that "incompatible sets of social roles" constrain individual attempts at integrity maintenance.[28] A public leader like Georgia may be even more constrained by dominance of a masculinist instrumental rationality that may doubly bind her to acting within its epistemic frameworks. Not only might her reasons for developing alternative educational spaces be unrecognizable or devalued, but they might be read as evidence that she is, as a woman, not up to the task of making the decisions that a school leader must make.

The implications of these observations are that integrity is more than an attribute of individuals; it is also highly dependent upon the resources afforded by the social communities in which agents are embedded. As a result, I argue that it does not stretch the notion of integrity too far to assert that influencing one's community of value is part of integrity itself — that the public standing for something has something to do with influencing the moral field surrounding the self. Integrity involves influencing the context in which actions emerge in order to support the development of habits that sustain its further development.

As a result, instrumental rationality threatens integrity because it limits the range and types of questions and reasons that can be raised within a social sphere. Rather than encouraging critical inquiry, it remains comfortable with pre-established ends. In such conditions, moral agents are encouraged to govern themselves by the community's moral prescriptions and not to see the process as much more dynamic and coextensive. Failing to acknowledge the social implications that both Calhoun and Dewey help us see may lead agents to respond with individual integrity projects, not the more expansively social ones called for here. Likewise, only

focusing on the alignment of belief/action may threaten integrity because doing so fails to account for the future influence of the social context on the realization of integrity.

<div align="center">CONCLUSION</div>

While maintaining integrity certainly involves the alignment of one's moral beliefs and actions, I suggest that integrity also entails the state of having influence on the social context that gives rise to one's moral dilemmas. If this additional definitional detail seems awkward, perhaps one of the problems with defining integrity is that we discuss it as a noun. Doing so leads to definitions that focus on the quest for certainty and fixed states of being. That focus can lead us toward conceiving of integrity as a stable concept that aligns with a stable core self. Such a view distorts both the nature of selfhood and the complexities of attending to the harmonious balance of ethical actions and beliefs. The denial of a core self or a state of being where the ethical plateau of belief/action alignment resides unchallenged does not undermine the concept of integrity's value as a guiding beacon, or as Calhoun suggests, a guiding virtue. Instead, those acknowledgments and Dewey's arguments about the social nature of even our individually experienced social lives push us to see integrity as a verb. The aim of developing integrity, then, is further moral growth, the further development of integrity.

Georgia's challenge is to integrate, balance, and harmonize. Let us simplify her decision to two options: to take the job or not. Neither one provides her with a stable "state of harmony." Both will require her to respond to further challenges to her integrity. If she takes the position, she'll need to find ways to alter her social context to support her quest for personal integrity. Likewise, not taking the position will also require Georgia to answer the challenges raised by invested others who question why she has chosen to turn away and leave them with a leader who lacks her moral sensitivity. Those interactions — and the answers she narrates — will impact both her moral community and her own habits of integrity.

Educators working within the currently dominant educational paradigm can maintain integrity, but doing so will not involve certainty. It must entail both, the attention to aligning their ethical beliefs with their actions *and* influencing their communities of value in ways that will support the development of habits that sustain integrity's further growth.

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1. David C. Berliner and Sharon L. Nichols, "High-Stakes Testing is Putting the Nation at Risk," *Education Week* 26, no. 27 (2007): 40.

2. I proceed from the assumption that integrity is a good worth promoting.

3. Cheshire Calhoun, "Standing for Something," *Journal of Philosophy* 42, no. 5 (1995). This work will be cited as "Standing" in the text for all subsequent references.

4. Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," in *Philosophy: Basic Readings*, ed. Nigel Warburton (New York: Routledge, 2004).

5. See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1947).

6. Eric Bronner, *Of Critical Theory and its Theorists* (Cambridge, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 39.

7. While loosely related, I am not referring to the epistemic debates involving means/ends practical reasoning typified by Humean accounts.

8. Jim Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 126.

9. Garrison, *Dewey and Eros*, 126.

10. Ronald Barnett, "Knowledge, Higher Education and Society: A Postmodern Problem," *Oxford Review of Education* 19, no. 1 (1993).

11. Gail Masuchika Boldt, Paula M. Salvio, and Peter M. Taubman, "Introduction," in *Classroom Life in the Age of Accountability*. Bank Street College Occasional Papers Series, ed. Jonathan G. Silin (New York: Bank Street College of Education, 2009).

12. Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism."

13. Ibid., 157.

14. John Dewey and James H. Tufts, *Ethics* (New York: Henry Holt, 1909), 31.

15. Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, 31.

16. Ibid., 370.

17. John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920), 196.

18. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 196.

19. Michael S. Katz, "Teaching with Integrity," in *Philosophy of Education 2008*, ed. Ronald David Glass (Urbana, Ill.: Philosophy of Education Society, 2008), 7.

20. Jim Garrison, "John Dewey," http://www.ffst.hr/ENCYCLOPAEDIA/doku.php?id=dewey_john (italics added).

21. Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, 349.

22. Ibid.

23. Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Malden, Mass.: Polity, 1995); and Axel Honneth, *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2007).

24. Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, 400.

25. Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*, 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2005).

26. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

27. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*; and Honneth, *Disrespect*.

28. Katz, "Teaching with Integrity," 6.