

INTEGRITY: AN ANALYSIS

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When we think why do we consider integrity so highly, *prima facie* it appears that our unhappiness with the current scenario is primarily responsible to rate it so high. The need for it was felt even in ancient times. In ancient Indian writings, particularly in political morality, its need was felt and we have plenty of evidence of that. On account of sharp moral decadence in government, governance and populace in general that we witness almost everyday, we hope that it can be arrested from further decline by inculcating this virtue, if we are allowed to call it a virtue at all. Hence this word is used very often without knowing intricacies of its meaning. Disciplines which are involved in the excavation of its meaning are philosophy, psychology and public administration.

When we try to understand the meaning of integrity the dictionary meaning of it gives us some clue very succinctly. Oxford dictionary¹ tells us that it has the following four meanings which we can arrange under two heads. We are also told that it had its origin either from France '*intégrité*' or Latin '*integritas*'. It is somehow also related to integer which means 'intact' or 'complete in itself':

1.	the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles
2.	i. the state of being whole and undivided
	ii. the condition of being unified or sound in construction.
	iii. internal consistency or lack of corruption in electronic data.

Many thinkers are inclined to call the first meaning the moral dimension of the meaning and the second meaning with all its three components the formal or structural dimension of meaning. In normal discourse we give importance to the moral dimension. But a philosophical dissection makes it clear that both dimensions are important and emphasizing on one facet at the cost of others actually takes away its essence. It is also required to be borne in mind that the term is question does not apply solely to human beings; even it is applied on objects as it is evident from our 2(iii) component as stated above. Even when it is applied to human behaviour and

¹*Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2nd edition (edit. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson), Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 900.

views someone upholds, it is used from various angles such as moral integrity, intellectual integrity, professional integrity and so on.

We have already mentioned that Bernard Williams' *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (1973) stirred up the debate at the contemporary time. His view given in the said treatise actually was a polemic against utilitarianism. To be more precise it was directed against act-utilitarianism which holds that an action is right if it maximizes our general well-being. What in a nutshell he wanted to show is that the act utilitarianism cuts off moral agents from their actions and feelings and this, in turn, impairs his integrity. Rule or 'indirect' utilitarianism count on the distinction between theory and practice which for Williams is indefensible. He even prophesied that the heyday of utilitarianism will be on the wane soon on account of these serious lapses. The demand of act utilitarianism is so high, says Williams, that it requires the agent to sacrifice his 'ground projects' and in doing so the agent undermines his integrity. Let us see how does it happen.

Williams holds that the moral agent considers some project which is constitutive of him or to put it simply it makes him what he is. But act utilitarianism tells us to perform only those actions which promote our maximum aggregate well-being. Acting in accordance with this principle of utilitarianism amounts to regarding the agent's project simply 'one set of satisfactions among those which he may be able to assist from where he happens to be.'² For Williams, a reflective agent may need to renounce certain projects, but some project 'with which (he) is more deeply and extensively involved and identified' cannot reasonably be given up by a moral agent as this, what he calls 'ground project', is the identity-conferring project for him. In other words, this is that act or project which is integral to his being and with which he 'is more deeply and extensively involved and identified.'³ This demand of utilitarianism from a moral agent to relinquish such identity-conferring project for fostering some other project merely for promoting overall well-being is an attack on the agent's integrity. In saying this Williams seems to adhere to the 2(i), meaning, i. e., the state of being whole and undivided. This sacrifice is not an ordinary sacrifice rather it is so astounding that it psychologically fractures him. The sacrifice of this

² Williams, Bernard (1973), *Utilitarianism: For and Against*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, p. 115.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

central moral feeling amounts to losing ‘a sense of one’s moral identity; to lose, in the most literal way, one’s integrity.’⁴ He illustrates his point by a number of examples.

Whether there is cogency in Williams argument or not is a debatable issue. More than two decades later Elizabeth Ashford made efforts to show that there no much substance in Williams’ claim and utilitarianism, in fact, promotes integrity. She tried to substantiate her claim by invoking the notion of what she termed ‘objective integrity’. For her, Williams criticism of utilitarianism hinges on two points. First, for any moral theory to be appealing should not require the agent to act ‘in a way that contravenes their present self-conception’, let that whatever self-conception may be, and next that utilitarianism compromise those ‘commitments, moral and personal, adherence to which the agent sees as constitutive of who he is.’⁵ Elizabeth does not agree with Williams’ arguments and argued ‘that there is a practically realizable state of the world’ where utilitarian’s demand of moral obligation is not at odds with agent’s pursuing of his personal project.

The debate thus started with a critique of utilitarianism is still going on and with greater strength. Some philosophers having realized the hypothetical nature of utilitarians fell back on Kantian Categorical imperative to explain the notion of integrity satisfactorily and also in consonance with our intuitive understanding of it. The philosophical debate about integrity mainly centres around two primary questions:

- First, does integrity primarily mean a formal relation that the agent has with oneself or between different parts of his self?
- Second, does it only mean acting rigidly under certain normative rein, i. e. acting morally?

The problem becomes more complicated when we see that if we accept the first interpretation many widely acknowledged heinous crimes can qualify as a fit candidate for calling them acts of integrity and which is obviously preposterous.

⁴ Williams, Bernard (1973), *Utilitarianism: For and Against*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, p. 104.

⁵ Ashford, Elizabeth, ‘Utilitarianism, Integrity and Partiality, published in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 97, No. 8 August, 2000, P. 421. (source: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2678423>, accessed in January, 2018.)

Some prominent interpretations of integrity are: (a) it means the preservation of identity; (b) it is explained as the integration of the self; (c) it stands for something; (d) it means acting under moral constraints; and (e) it is a virtue. Huberts finds at least eight perspectives of it in the literature on ethics and integrity.⁶ Those who adhere to any particular interpretation give spirited arguments to substantiate their claims. Let us give a synoptic explanation of some of these approaches.

The champion of identity-conferring interpretation, as we have seen in a preceding paragraph, was Bernard Williams. He and other supporters of this view attempted to explain integrity in terms of commitment, which to my mind is a term that belongs to family-circle of integrity. ‘Commitment’ is a term used in various senses such as to mean convictions, promises, expectation, an obligation to be undertaken, proclaimed attachment to a cause/doctrine and so on. A person lives amidst a number of commitments either consciously or even sometimes unconsciously. Out of these hosts of commitments, he remains steadfast to some which he holds so dearly and gives up others when faced with obstacles. In other words, the person considers those particular commitments, with which he remains so resolute, confer his/her identity. As these he considers as conditions of his existence, he finds it pointless to live without those commitments. On this view, integrity is precisely to act in conformity with agents deep commitments and hence it cannot be a virtue in the traditional sense of the term. Though this view has its worth a number of thinkers pointed out drawbacks of such a view. One such important drawback has been pointed out by Damian Cox, an Australian philosopher. In his article ‘Integrity’ he raises the question ‘Is integrity a virtue at all?’ Analysing Bernard Williams view given particularly in ‘Utilitarianism and Moral Self-indulgence’ (1981) where Williams holds that though integrity ‘is an admirable human property, it is not related to motivation as the virtues are’ he showed that integrity is not a virtue in Williams' sense and hence his interpretation is too narrow. It is too narrow as it overlooks certain important aspects of the term and overemphasizes certain other aspects of it only. Writes Cox: “It overlooks the integrity or lack of integrity with which identity-conferring commitments are formed and revised, and overlooks the way in which

⁶ Huberts, L. W. J. C. (2014), *The Integrity of Governance: What it is, what we Know, what is Done, and where to go*. Palgrave Macmillian: England, p.39-44.

integrity can be implicated in aspects of life other than identity. It overlooks the social aspects of integrity and it denies that integrity has moral implications.”⁷

Another persuasive interpretation of integrity is that it is a matter of arranging or integrating various parts of a person’s personality into an integrated whole. It is like establishing a formal relation to someone’s self. This view of integration considers such accomplishment as an achievement and not as a disposition or quality of a person. When a person arranges different parts of his/her personality into a coherent whole, it is a mere formal arrangement and does not have any evaluative component. Though a number of thinkers championed this view one powerful thinker of this family is Harry Frankfurt, a professor of Princeton University. Frankfurt in his essay ‘Identification and wholeheartedness’ (1987) gives a basically psychological interpretation of the term in question. Frankfurt was eager to show how different conflicting desires in the agent’s psyche can impair the autonomy of the will. In order to explain that he specifies conflicts that goes on in the agent's mind amongst different desires or level of desires. This conflict engenders a tension or inner struggle on account of which the person experiences frustration. To get rid of this unpleasant situation he hierarchically orders his desires so that they become arranged or integrated elements of the self. When ordering such desires and volitions we give more importance to what we care more. This helps us to accept some and reject others when we face obstacles or tempted to act in a particular way. This adoption, rejection and joining in one-self completes the self-integration process. In his hierarchical order, he talks about first-order desires, second-order desires etc. which discipline them and brings into a harmonious whole and thus accomplish the self-integration process. This arrangement of desires and volitions are necessary for a reflective being as without this a person will act merely at that moment's strongest desire. Such a person's act is not done out of integrity and he terms such a man 'wanton'. Hence, rejection of some desires and acceptance of some others and integration of them to one-self is *sine qua non* for an integritous person. The conflicts that Frankfurt discussed are not limited to desires only. It may cover commitments,

⁷ Cox, Damian, Caze, M. L. and Levine, M., (2014) ‘Integrity’ Source: *The Handbook of Virtue Ethics*, ed. Stan van Hooft, Acumen: Durham, p. 206.

principles etc. too. This conflict and conflict-resolution ceaselessly go on in someone's life.

Frankfurt's elaborate arguments though made a remarkable influence in clarifying the notion in question, still it fell short of common-sense expectation and hence were criticized by many. One such critique is Mark S. Halfon. Halfon in his *Integrity: A Philosophical Enquiry* (1989) describes integrity as a disposition. For him putting only formal limits cannot satisfy our moral demand. It is expected that a man of integrity should be honest and genuine while acting and this self-integration elucidation does not ensure that. He seems to give a holistic interpretation of integrity and not rigid formal arrangements merely. For example, he says that a man of integrity does not rigidly follow one single rule for acting in all circumstances. Rather he takes into consideration all the relevant facts while acting and decides the course of action that he considers best in that moral situation even if it involves an abandonment of some principles that he gave more importance in his previous actions. Halfon's and other critics' main point against this interpretation is that overemphasis placed on formal aspects by the propounders of this interpretation takes away its moral worth. In spite of this criticism, the spirit of this interpretation should not be belittled as it is indeed true that a vast majority of cases a self-integrated person is likely to act more morally than from a not-integrated person.

A constructivist view of integrity, the third one of our list, sees the notion from a different angle. Christine Korsgaard in her *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity and Integrity* (2009) take a neo-Kantian approach to explain the notion of integrity from this perspective. In her work, she draws heavily from Plato, Aristotle and Kant. Utilizing the Kantian distinction between categorical and hypothetical imperatives of the practical reason she tells us that acting in consonance with hypothetical imperative may be productive but acting as per categorical imperative makes us autonomous. This principle of the categorical imperative is the legislation for self-constitution. It also provides us with identity. Arrangement of desires etc. harmoniously and coherently is not enough for a rational agent. Though it is necessary for a rational being, it is not a sufficient requirement. Acting on categorical imperative calls for the moral agency to act in a way which his future reflective self will endorse. In other words, the action is not only limited to the present self only rather we need to establish a bond between the present and future self. Actions which

are in congruity with Kant's categorical imperative can constitute and unify self ideally. Not only that, but acting on the said principle also ensures that such action will be morally satisfactory too. As she says, when in the process of falling to pieces we pull them back together, we create or constitute something new, ourselves. If someone can constitute well, he/she will be a good person. 'The moral law is the law of self-constitution.'⁸

The self-constitution version of integrity is a new way of looking at the notion. Still, it has a lot of affinity with the self-integration view that we have discussed. And this affinity makes it susceptible to the similar drawbacks raised against self-integration interpretation. Among the critics of constructivist approach David Enoch who teaches at Hebrew University of Jerusalem is one. He in his 'Agency, Shmagency: Why Normativity Won't Come from What Is Constitutive of Action'⁹ made a vigorous criticism of three constructivists out of which Korsgaard is one. Enoch is eager to show why normativity cannot be anchored in what is constitutive of action¹⁰. For him, the ilk of the agency that Korsgaard talked about is non-mandatory and someone could long for a different type of agency in a consistent way - which he called 'shmagency'. Acting on shmagency can be successful without being committed to universalizability. Thus her prescription for acting on categorical imperative comes to a nought. Korsgaard, says Enoch, 'has to show that self-constitution (in whatever sense she gives this expression) is indeed constitutive of action and furthermore that all the normativity she wants (morality, the hypothetical imperative, and so on) can be extracted from this aim of self-constitution.'¹¹

The above three varieties of interpretations can be clubbed into one in the sense that all adherents of these views actually emphasize the structural side. However, common-sense usage of the term 'integrity' seems to be value-laden and hence this set of interpretation fails to meet this expectation and as we shall see even some horrible practices can be interpreted as an act of integrity. Hence under another

⁸ Christine, Korsgaard (2009), *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity and Integrity*. Oxford University Press, p. 214.

⁹ Enoch, David, 'Agency, Shmagency: Why Normativity Won't Come from What Is Constitutive of Action', *The Philosophical Review*, April, 2006, Vol. 115, No. 2, source: <https://jstor.com/stable/20446897>, accessed in February, 2018.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 177.

set of theories thinkers tried to emphasize that integrity stands for something and by this 'something' they sometimes meant it is a social virtue and sometimes it meant that it implies acting under certain moral constraints. Cheshire Calhoun, a feminist philosopher of the United States of America, showing the two drawbacks of the aforementioned three sorts of view persuasively argues for treating integrity as a social virtue. She in her 'Standing for Something' (1995) held this view. Two criticisms she levels against structural views are: One, they in their ultimate analysis reduce the term 'integrity' to something with which, she thinks, it is not identical, e. g. 'to the conditions of unified agency, to the conditions for having a reason to refuse cooperating with some evils,' to volitional unity etc. Second, all these accounts treated integrity as personal, not as social virtue. These two factors acted as limits to the notion of integrity¹². She shows that who endorse these views of integrity are forced to bite the bullet by accepting in the name of integrity some non-moral actions or even morally despicable actions. In order to plug this loophole and also finding flaws in treating it as a personal virtue, she espoused the view that integrity is a social virtue.

Calhoun held that some virtues are personal, some are social and some are both. Social virtue is defined by a person's connection with others. It is of course agent's correct evaluation of best judgments but this judgment is not like an isolated island. It is the best judgement in a context - within the community where the agent is situated and they are, within the community, collectively trying to uncover what is valuable and worth pursuing. This is giving due respect to other members of the community. As she says, 'one's own judgement serves a common interest of co-deliberators. Persons of integrity treat their own endorsements as one that matter, or ought to matter, to fellow deliberators.'¹³ She very cogently showed that her interpretation precludes those fanatic and morally despicable acts that might be done in the name of integrity and allowable under other interpretations showing that their commitments form a coherent whole. She showed that fanatics lack one important characteristic in her schema. It is that they do not show respect to others'

¹² Calhoun, Cheshire (1995), 'Standing for Something', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vo. 92, No. 5 (May, 1995), p. 252. Source: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2940917?seq=1#metadata-info-tab-content>, accessed in January, 2018.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 258.

deliberations. In showing this Calhoun did a splendid job as the decimation of a group by another group cannot go on in the name of integrity justifying their structural consistency. In spite of this stupendous achievement of Calhoun's account the moot question that arises about her account is what is meant by a proper respect for views to be given to other deliberators. An answer to this question is vital as otherwise we cannot differentiate between a fanatic's stand and some other stand which is right and someone needs to stick to it even under great adversities. There are writers who tried to fill up this gap by giving an epistemic account of integrity and they sometimes held that integrity is an epistemic virtue. Though this is an interesting area and worth discovering, we will not enter into that domain further.

Almost akin to Calhoun's stand is the interpretation given by some writers who hold that integrity entails moral constraints upon the agent of integrity to which he should remain true. Some such advocates are Elizabeth Ashford, Mark Halfon and some other thinkers. The recurring feature of their arguments is that it entails moral obligations, moral purpose etc. Of course, in spite of the similarity in their conclusion, their lines of argument vary. For example, Elizabeth Ashford, about whom we referred in a preceding passage, invokes the notion of 'objective integrity' to show that a person having objective integrity can have enough understanding of his/her moral obligations and it is this that works as a shield for not being morally mistaken. His actions are not in conflict with morality, rather it is in harmony with it. Halfon describes integrity in a different way but he also holds that actions done out of integrity aligns with moral purpose. He considers integrity as a disposition of the agent and acting out of integrity does not mean that the agent will rigidly adhere to any single norm for action. Instead, he will take all relevant factors into consideration in each event and then decide the best course of action. He opined that remaining adamant to a single rule or commitment may be wrongheaded. Hence, for him, integrity 'embraces a moral point of view that urges them to be conceptually clear, logically consistent, apprised of relevant empirical evidence, and careful about acknowledging as well as weighing relevant moral considerations.'¹⁴ In Halfon's account, moral purpose as well as pursuing a commitment both got due weight. In

¹⁴ Halfon, Mark (1989), *Integrity: A Philosophical Inquiry*, Temple University Press: Philadelphia, p. 37.

spite of this merit, there are certain pitfalls in this view too. One such problem is when we talk about ‘all relevant moral considerations’, these considerations depends completely on one person - only an agent’s moral viewpoint. What the agent considers as moral may miserably fail in other persons' assessment. In the name of this 'all relevant moral considerations' some may perpetrate horrifying actions like one committed by Nazis’ or Fascists’. This indeed is a possibility that cannot be ruled out under this interpretation though it has been argued that its likelihood is slim.

A perusal of all these views and some other writers’ views that we have not discussed here make us feel that the term ‘integrity’ refers to something that is quite complex. We need to comprehend that it is not judicious to take only one aspect and ignore others. Actually, within its fold lie a cluster of concepts that all these thinkers have been trying to capture in their elucidations through their prisms. In order to comprehend its essence and eliminate those morally despicable acts which go on in the name of integrity only formal conditions are not enough. They need to be fortified by moral conditions. Emphasizing one aspect at the cost of others will take away its worth that we usually associate with the term. Structural dimensions may be engaging to esoteric few, but philosophical interpretations need to come out of this as the term ‘integrity’ is used so widely and even in everyday’s common parlance. Hence our intention should be to make it exoteric, otherwise, under the garb of integrity many works will go on which future moral agent will not condone. Huberts' collection of eight perspectives, about which we mentioned earlier, gives us a better panoramic view of the notion. These eight standpoints are—wholeness and coherence, moral reflection, professional responsibility, values like incorruptibility, laws and rules, exemplary behaviour, and moral values and norms.

One pertinent question that may arise in any inquisitive mind is why the term ‘integrity’ is so popular and widely used. To put it differently: not only the question of what is integrity is important, equally important is Why integrity? A simple response to this question is that it has relevance in the social and political arena and also in all other sectors of modern society for a number of reasons. Nowadays in governance and in government it is used on umpteen occasions. There integrity is loosely used as quality or disposition and it is regarded as key to preempting many unethical practices. It is on account this overriding importance of this concept that people began to enquire its meaning and onus fell on philosophers to dig dip into the

concept. There are writers who took a roundabout route to get to its essence. Gabriele Taylor is one such writer. She in her article 'Integrity' tries to capture first what it means by lacking integrity and then tries to understand it what it means by having integrity.¹⁵ We in a previous passage stated that integrity is not a given disposition in a human being, it needs to be accomplished. The moot question is how can we accomplish it or what are the practices required for becoming integritous. Some clue regarding this we find in P. A. Sorokin's view. If integrity is a central virtue, then societal institutions, government and economic arrangements need to be restructured in such a way so that they are helpful or create a congenial milieu for promotion of integrity. It has been pointed out by some writers that many social structures have not been created in a way that conduces to pursue most of its members their goal with integrity. There is no gainsaying the fact that an individual's integrity is closely linked to social and political structures. If society is shaped in a way that it creates obstacles in people's attempt to work with integrity, upon commitments, desires and values that one so dearly holds and also reinforced by other deliberators, then such an arrangement is unfavourable to act with integrity. Some thinkers consider that integrity has a close connection with people's well-being. If a societal structure is inimical to acting with integrity, it becomes a threat to the health of society. It leads to alienation. By now this much has become clear that integrity concerns decision making and also decision implementation but the area that remains blurred is the question: does it have any connection with outcomes of actions?

¹⁵ Taylor, Gabriele and Gaita, Raimond, 'Integrity' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volumes, Vol. 55 (1981), published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the Aristotelian Society, source: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4106856>, accessed in December, 2017)