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Integrity of Governance: An Examination of The Concept of Integrity in Relation to the Assessment of the Actions of Public Officials

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Master Thesis

Integrity of Governance

An Examination of The Concept of Integrity in Relation to the Assessment of
the Actions of Public Officials



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Abstract

The central research question of this thesis is ‘How can we define the concept of integrity for the purpose of realizing an adequate tool to normatively assess the actions of public officials in both a desirable and feasible way?’. The thesis aims to: (1) demonstrate how the relevant norms, values, virtues and principles relate to integrity in a fundamental way; (2) contribute to reducing the ambiguous nature of integrity of governance; (3) advance the ongoing process of defining integrity as an ‘essentially contested concept’. First, the thesis establishes that integrity should be regarded as an ‘essentially contested concept’, according to the conditions set out by Gallie (1956). Second, the thesis develops a ‘multidimensional account of integrity of governance’, as I contend that it is possible to formulate a sufficient definition of integrity in regard to particular contexts. The *multidimensional account* defines integrity of governance on the basis of five aspects, which are indebted to existing philosophical accounts of integrity, and operate jointly as necessary elements to explain the *wholeness of integrity of governance*: (1) *community-identification* (FL), which constitutes the *formal limits*; (2) *community-constitution* (ML 1) and *standing for community values* (ML 2) as the *moral limits*; and (3) *the fundamental principles and moral norms and values* (MC 1) and *the framework of virtuous judgement* (MC 2) as the *moral content*. Third, the thesis will exemplify how the *multidimensional account* accounts for several criticisms inherent in the existing philosophical theories of integrity, as well as argue that the potential objections of demandingness, disagreement, and indistinctiveness do not invalidate the *multidimensional account*.

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Introduction

The concept of integrity has become an increasingly important topic in discussions about governance in the last several decades, reflected by an increase in research on this concept (De Graaf et al., 2018, p.131; Huberts & Montfort, 2021, p.7). The growing concern for integrity developed in an era plagued by scandals and cases of integrity violations in government affairs. To illustrate, the number of integrity *affairs* in Dutch public administration alone amounted to 65 cases in 2023.¹ This included allegations of fraud and bribery at a former position; transgressive behaviour in the workplace (physical and verbal intimidation); abuse of organizational resources by using the official car for private purposes; conflict of interest due to providing wrongful access to relevant government files; fraud due to unjustly received benefits; digital harassment of other politicians; and a lack of transparency of ancillary positions (De Koning, 2024).

The increase in debates on ethics and integrity highlights the importance of integrity of governance. The challenges which follow from a lack of integrity are particularly of significance, for example, the destabilization of (local) government. Local governments 'are accountable for large public expenditure in service provision areas that are often known for their vulnerability to integrity violations', while the 'risks [of destabilization] are increased by the trend to decentralize public powers (...) and intense contact with citizens at the local level, where officials may have greater vested interests based on social ties' (Hoekstra et al., 2023, p.137-138). Similarly, integrity violations may wield destabilizing effects on the (trans)national level of government due to the large extent of ministerial portfolios and central legislative power. The emphasis on the destabilizing effects of integrity violations predominantly concerns consequentialist arguments. Yet, integrity also seems to be a valuable quality worth pursuing *in itself*. Otherwise, the mere appearance of possessing integrity could be sufficient to produce desirable consequences,² which could bear perverse ramifications (e.g., culture of silence) at odds with our general understanding of integrity, as the lack of moral quality might be incompatible with integrity.

Uncertainty still remains about the precise extent and nature of integrity *violations* in Western governance, despite the increased importance attributed to the concept (De Graaf et al., 2018, p.132). Additional empirical knowledge is needed about the prevalence of integrity violations. Moreover, further knowledge is required about the actual effects of integrity policies, despite earlier appeals to examine 'what works' in terms of policy instruments (Huberts, 2018, S25-26). These instruments aim to either prevent or flag the risks of integrity violations by

¹ See Huberts, Kaptein and De Koning (2021) for an analysis of the Political Integrity Index, which is used to assess the prevalence and types of integrity affairs by public officials on all government levels in The Netherlands. It concerns cases of integrity affairs which received media attention and relate to current moral norms and values, which led to resignation, sanctions or are believed to be well-grounded. However, the researchers are not 'moral referees', who decide on the moral quality of actions themselves. An overview of the results of the PI-index shows that between 2013 and 2019 the total number of integrity affairs in The Netherlands fluctuated between 38 and 64 cases (Huberts, Kaptein and De Koning, 2021, p.336); this line continued in the subsequent period, with 45 occurrences in 2020, followed by 52 scandals in 2021, a record number of 75 instances in 2022, and 65 integrity affairs in 2023 (De Koning, 2024).

² This is the case when governments act from a Machiavellian perspective, as Nieuwenburg (2001, p.125-126) contends. Therein, governments employ an ends-over-means approach, which emphasizes the *appearance* of integrity, rather than *actual* integrity.

public officials. Furthermore, the need for greater clarity and a less ambiguous definition of integrity still exists within public administration, despite the abundance of research (Hoekstra et al., 2023, p.146; Kerkhoff & Overeem, 2021, p.83-84; Lasthuizen et al., 2011, p.384; Six & Huberts, 2008, p.65). Simultaneously, a vast amount of literature has been written about the concept of integrity from a philosophical position. However, ambiguity still prevails, since 'It is also perhaps the most puzzling [virtue term]' (Cox, La Caze, & Levine 2021).

The problematic implications which follow from the ambiguous, context-dependent and open nature of integrity are exemplified by practical examples. These examples disclose the possible challenges which we encounter when we assess governmental action on the basis of integrity. Oftentimes, these challenges result from the grey area wherein these actions are performed. For example, activist civil servants are expected to adhere to the ministerial policy stance, which can be at odds with fundamental personal convictions that are possibly in accord with human rights treaties or (constitutional) law; as was the case in The Netherlands, where civil servants publicly expressed their discontent with the government's policy stance in relation to the Israel-Palestina conflict (Derix, 2024). It is possible to defend either course of action as bearing integrity: while it is essential for a ministry that their employees obey independently of their individual (political) convictions to function coherently and effectively, acting in accord with human rights and legal provisions seems to undoubtedly bear integrity at the same time. Secondly, it is sometimes challenging to establish when (sexual) physical and verbal contact becomes of transgressive nature, which often depends on the nature of personal relationships and convictions, apart from the instances in which the nonconsensual (illegal) nature can be determined straightforwardly. For instance, the researchers who investigated whether the former chairman of the Dutch parliament behaved transgressively concluded that the work environment was unsafe, but also that at times colleagues regarded her as attentive and involved (Logtenberg & Aharouay, 2023).

Lastly, a tension may occur between justified, proportional representation of the interest of (a group of) citizens versus acting in conflict of interest. This tension occurred in the criminal case against De Mos, a Dutch representative in the local government of The Hague. De Mos was prosecuted for alleged bribery, perjury, violation of the oath of office and official secrecy, and membership in a criminal organisation, but the court acquitted him of all charges in the first instance (Van de Ven, 2023; Verlaan, 2024). In response to the allegation that De Mos was bribed by five businessmen in exchange for political services, the court argued that adequate regulations for local party financing are lacking. The prosecutor was also unsuccessful in proving malicious intent of the donators. De Mos maintained that he justifiably represented the interests of the citizens which his party aims to serve from the start ('Ombudspolitics'). However, the prosecutor appealed against the judgement. The case of bribery and violation of official secrecy is currently in process in a higher court. The prosecutor argued repeatedly that the businessmen bought themselves political power to influence the process of decision-making. Wiretap findings revealed that one businessman would have said "It is brilliant that we are indirectly sitting at the negotiation table with other coalition parties". The case of De Mos exemplifies the tension within representing interests, as it is sometimes hard to decide whether there was a conflict of interest, let alone prove it. That is, whether public officials were justified in representing the interests of certain citizens compatible with serving the public

interest and admissible financial support, or that they represented the interests of certain citizens disproportionately on dubious grounds.

This thesis explores the aforementioned themes from a philosophical angle. The relevance of this normative inquiry stems from the following. I will examine the relation between (alleged) integrity violations and the lack of fundamental normative accounts. The discussion whether it is desirable to use the concept integrity to assess governmental action does not only precede the question whether integrity policies are effective *when they are in place* or how they *should be constructed*, but also adds to the difficulty of answering it. The latter follows from the fact that a lack of understanding might negatively affect our ability to determine the feasibility of using the concept sufficiently in practice. This thesis takes a step back to examine the practice of assessing behaviour in terms of integrity from a more conceptual standpoint, which precedes the stage wherein the practice is analysed in empirical terms.³ The challenges which follow from the grey area wherein integrity often operates highlight the importance of this task. These challenges are accentuated in light of ‘integritism’, which concerns the phenomenon wherein judgements of integrity are made without them being substantially grounded in facts.⁴ The central research question is as follows: ‘*How can we define the concept of integrity for the purpose of realizing an adequate tool to normatively assess the actions of public officials in both a desirable and feasible way?*’.

In this thesis, ‘public officials’ refers to politically appointed officials, elected officials, and administrative officials.⁵ It is preferable to include all the aforesaid actors, since public officials constitute governmental action *together*. All these actors fulfil a crucial element in governmental action that establishes policy, which is forward-looking (policy-making) and present-facing (policy-execution). Moreover, in many Western government forms, each of the three categories of public officials executes legislative power in some way. For example, in the Netherlands, politically appointed officials and elected officials share legislative power on the highest level. Whereas policy officers prepare the revision or introduction of provisions under the authority of the minister, but also work out proposals for legislation on their own account. Although there may be certain differences in the nature of the occupations between the three types of public officials, as they require different qualities relating to good governance, I contend that the disparity does not require us to differentiate. As the arguments are generally equally applicable to all the actors in a non-problematic way, wherein all three types seem to require a sufficient degree of integrity.⁶ However, I will account for differences in case the nature of a public official requires a distinctive analysis.

The research question discloses the necessity of grasping the fundamental nature of integrity as an ambiguous concept. The elements which do not lend themselves to be formulated in clear and unambiguous legal norms, but nevertheless underpin these latter norms, are of particular importance. Critics might argue that the vast amount of ambiguity within integrity of governance might be surmounted by formulating straightforward legal provisions, as this

³ See Anechiarico and Jacobs (1996) for an empirical study into the effectiveness of integrity policies.

⁴ E.g., exaggerating the importance of the norms and values at stake, or generalizing judgement in claiming that a specific judgement applies to the person or organization as a whole (Huberts, 2005, p.17).

⁵ This definition is consistent with Frederickson’s (1993) definition, also used by Six & Huberts (2008, p. 66).

⁶ It may be argued that actors within the judicial system fall within the scope of this argumentation too. However, for the purpose of this inquiry, I assume that the link of these actors with governance is fundamentally different than the public officials discussed, since they exercise backward-looking governmental action.

eliminates the burden of judgement whether public officials acted with integrity. It might be suggested that there are clear legal provisions related to integrity violations. For example, Rules of Procedure or Codes of Conduct that aim to regulate interpersonal manners. Also, legal provisions in Dutch law that cover conflict of interest due to (the income from) ancillary activities, incompatibilities (*incompatible professional positions*), prohibitions (*incompatible actions*), (in)direct involvement of personal interest in decision-making, or act contrary to the oath of office (see: figure 1). However, I contend that these provisions are generally not inadequately formulated, but still encompass ambiguousness and inconclusiveness, as they unavoidably contain discretionary room. This grey area is necessary to sufficiently account for the context-dependent nature of integrity violations, which requires a window of interpretation.

Figure 1 | Legal framework: Various provisions related to integrity in Dutch law (non-exhaustive)

	<i>Ancillary activities</i>	<i>Incompatibilities</i>	<i>Prohibitions</i>	<i>Personal interest in decision-making</i>	<i>Oath of office</i>
House of representatives	Article 5 Wet schadeloosstelling Tweede Kamer	Article 57 Dutch constitution; Wet Incompatibiliteiten Staten-Generaal en Europees Parlement			Article 60 Dutch constitution jo. 'Wet beëdiging ministers en leden Staten-Generaal'
Senate	Article 3b Wet vergoedingen leden Eerste Kamer	Article 57 Dutch constitution; Wet Incompatibiliteiten Staten-Generaal en Europees Parlement			Article 60 Dutch constitution jo. 'Wet beëdiging ministers en leden Staten-Generaal'
Ministers	'Handboek voor bewindspersonen', p.11	Article 57 Dutch constitution; Wet Incompatibiliteiten Staten-Generaal en Europees Parlement			Article 49 Dutch constitution jo. 'Wet beëdiging ministers en leden Staten-Generaal'
Elected officials (Local government)	Article 12 Gemeentewet; Article 11 Provinciewet; Article 32 Waterschapswet	Article 13 Gemeentewet; Article 13 Provinciewet; Article 31 Waterschapswet	Article 15(1, 2) Gemeentewet; Article 15(1, 2) Provinciewet; Article 33(1, 2) Waterschapswet	Article 28(1) Gemeentewet; Article 28(1) Provinciewet; Article 38a(1) Waterschapswet	Article 14 Gemeentewet; Article 14 Provinciewet; Article 34 Waterschapswet
Politically appointed officials (Local government)	Article 41b Gemeentewet; Article 40b Provinciewet; Article 44k Waterschapswet	Article 36b Gemeentewet; Article 35c Provinciewet; Article 31 Waterschapswet	Article 41e(1) jo. 15(1, 2) Gemeentewet; Article 40e(1) jo. 15(1, 2) Provinciewet; Article 33(1, 2) Waterschapswet	Article 28 jo. 58 Gemeentewet; Article 28 jo. 58 Provinciewet; Article 38a Waterschapswet	Article 14 Gemeentewet; Article 40a Provinciewet; Article 34 Waterschapswet
Appointed officials by the crown (e.g., mayors) (Local government)	Article 67 Gemeentewet; Article 66 Provinciewet; Article 48 Waterschapswet	Article 68 Gemeentewet; Article 67 Provinciewet; Article 47 Waterschapswet	Article 69(1) jo. 15(1, 2) Gemeentewet; Article 68(1) jo. 15(1, 2) Provinciewet; Article 47(3) jo. 33(1) Waterschapswet	Article 28 jo. 58 Gemeentewet; Article 28 jo. 58 Provinciewet; Article 38a Waterschapswet	Article 65 Gemeentewet; Article 64 Provinciewet; Article 50 Waterschapswet
Administrative officials	Article 5 and 8 Ambtenarenwet 2017	Article 57 Dutch constitution; Wet Incompatibiliteiten Staten-Generaal en Europees Parlement			Article 7 Ambtenarenwet 2017

The idea that it can sometimes be difficult to establish whether (legal) provisions of integrity have been violated is emphasized by the great increase in integrity investigations and research firms, while these integrity investigations are at the same time precarious and not always straightforward. The latter is accentuated by the need for quality requirements for integrity investigations – as underscored by the Dutch minister of the interior in a letter to parliament (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2023). Recently, De Vries (2023) examined 86 practical cases of research firms that investigated the presence of transgressive behaviour. De Vries claimed that these investigations were often based on unfounded allegations, suggestive research assignments and insufficiently substantiated conclusions. These perverse features often originate from procedural malpractice, as research firms serve the interest of their client or advance fallacies and epistemic manipulation, but perhaps also emerge from a lack of fundamental theoretical understanding. Yet, if we conceptualize integrity in relation to governance, it may inform us what the central nature of this diffuse concept pertains to when we apply it in practice. It may assist us in identifying the essential elements and mechanisms of integrity. These elements and mechanisms underpin the legal norms related to the integrity of governance, and possibly serve as the normative background for the evaluation of the actions of public officials – particularly, when the legal norms are inevitably ambiguous.

This investigation may also reduce the theoretical lacuna with respect to the ambiguous nature of the integrity of governance and mitigate the observed shortcomings within

conceptualizations in public administration *and* philosophy. It may contribute to a clearer normative understanding of integrity of governance within public administration. This thesis philosophically examines the nature of the integrity to advance the demand for “An “ethics and integrity turn” [which is needed] in the dominant fields of study” (Huberts, 2018, S28). Public administration provides accounts on how we should judge public officials based on their integrity.⁷ Yet, these accounts do rarely move beyond more general characterizations of the ethical elements which may be identified in the concept of integrity. For example, they discuss the theories to eventually argue why they think a certain account of integrity is most plausible in relation to governance. For instance, claiming that integrity should be identified with norms, values or virtue(s). Sometimes, they go further by arguing that norms, values or virtues are constructive elements of integrity. Occasionally, they offer examples what these norms, values, or virtues consist of. But oftentimes, they omit to amply demonstrate extensively how these norms, values or virtues fundamentally relate to integrity, apart from the observation that these concepts are (intuitively) associated. Additionally, this inquiry aims to lay a piece of the puzzle in the ongoing philosophical process of defining integrity as an ‘essentially contested concept’⁸ – in particular, with reference to its practical functioning in governance and its normative implications. I will discuss various philosophical accounts, whereafter I will position myself within this theoretical framework, to eventually conceptualize integrity against the background of governmental action. The academic relevance of this thesis stems from conceptualizing a new normative account of integrity of governance.

The text is structured as follows. *Chapter one* aims to answer sub-question (1a): ‘*To what extent is it possible to formulate a relatively uncontested definition of integrity which can be applied unambiguously to establish the presence of integrity comprehensibly in its general application?*’. Examining the prominent theories, I will posit that integrity should be regarded as an ‘essentially contested concept’. However, establishing integrity as ‘essentially contested concept’ *in general* prompts the question whether formulating a definition of integrity of governance is relevant and feasible. I will argue that such an endeavour *is* valuable, since offering a contending account may contribute to ‘sustain and develop’ the attainment and possession of integrity. Moreover, the contested nature of integrity does not exclude the possibility of constituting a sufficient conceptualization in relation to distinct contexts such as governance, which will be the subject of next chapter. Namely, *chapter two* aims to answer sub-question (1b): ‘*Is it possible to mitigate the theoretical and practical gap of defining an adequate definition of the concept of integrity in relation to governance?*’. I come to postulate the multidimensional account of integrity of governance: ‘*Integrity of governance should be characterized as acting on behalf of the wholeness of the public sphere in Western liberal democracies ruled by law. That is, governmental action bears integrity when public officials embody both (1) the fundamental principles in society which constitute the bedrock of (moral) values and norms relating to integrity, as well as (2) the framework of virtuousness necessary to make appropriate judgements in particular instances*’. Moreover, *chapter three* aims to answer sub-question (1c): ‘*What can possibly be opposed against the multidimensional account of integrity of governance?*’. Wherein section §3.1 demonstrates how the *multidimensional*

⁷ See, for example, Six & Huberts’ (2008) account.

⁸ The term ‘Essentially contested concepts’ was coined by Gallie (1956) and will be explained in chapter one.

account resolves various criticism existent within the incorporated accounts, while section §3.2 accounts for the objection of demandingness, disagreement and inconclusiveness. Finally, the *conclusion* will include a short summary and discuss some implications and final remarks.

Chapter 1: Integrity as an ‘essentially contested concept’

Cox, La Caze and Levine (2021) identify roughly six types of accounts of integrity: (1) ‘Integrity as Self-Integration’, in which integrity entails the embodiment of different parts and qualities of a person’s personality by integrating them into a coordinated, uncorrupted, unimpaired whole; (2) Integrity in the manner of identity, as chiefly concerning “a person’s holding steadfastly true to their commitments, rather than ordering and endorsing desires”(Cox et al., 2021); (3) Integrity in Kantian terms, as a prerequisite to being an autonomous creature who is not irrationally guided by his desires; (4) Integrity as standing for the best judgement on what is valuable for the sake of the social sphere; in contrast to merely arguing from an individual standpoint; (5) Integrity as a kind of ‘moral purpose’, which requires certain moral commitments from individuals to be regarded as bearing integrity (e.g., commitment to norms and values); (6) Integrity understood as either a particular virtue or a set of virtues – and its relation to various characteristics usually agreed upon to either diminish, undermine or constitute behaviour with integrity (Cox et al., 2021). Moreover, Huberts (2014, p.38-44) identifies the prevailing accounts of integrity in public administration, which often bear resemblance to the aforementioned philosophical theories: (1a) wholeness, (1b) being integrated into the environment, or (1c) professional wholeness (related to identity as self-integration); (2) a quality or characteristic to either (2a) *act ‘in accordance with relevant moral values and norms’*, or (2b) to *act on the basis of open, conscious moral reflection* (as related to integrity as moral norms, values, and virtue); (3) *integrity as comprising specific value(s)*; (4) exemplary behaviour (relating to the integrity as standing for something); (e) constitutional, legal or regime values (Huberts, 2014, p.38-44).⁹

If we notice the diverging nature of the accounts exhibited, the question arises if the concept can by any means be defined in a sufficient way to be used as a benchmark to assess actions in practice. Since the concept of integrity is susceptible to contestation about the appropriate *general use* of the term, the subsequent chapter aims to conceptualize in what way integrity of governance can be understood *most properly*. The fact that the nature of integrity is contested in the broad sense does not exclude the possibility of offering a sufficient characterization in relation to particular circumstances. In fact, offering a contending (more narrowly focused) account can contribute to ‘sustain and develop’ the attainment and possession of integrity, conform Gallie’s seventh condition, which will be discussed below. Nevertheless, before we proceed to define integrity of governance, it is necessary to demonstrate that integrity can indeed be characterized as an ‘essentially contested concept’ in a broad sense (e.g., democracy and art). The latter is defined as “concepts the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users”(Gallie, 1956, p.169). Gallie identifies the first four conditions which concepts are required¹⁰ to jointly satisfy to be regarded as ‘essentially contested’, along with three additional conditions.

Firstly, “(I) [I]t must be *appraisive* in the sense that it signifies or accredits some kind of valued achievement”(Gallie, 1956, p.171). Integrity satisfies this condition rather unproblematically, since integrity is often seen as something value to possess or realize, as

⁹ The accounts which define integrity as acting in accordance to (moral) norms and values are of particular importance, since that conceptualization is often adopted in public administration. For example, by Huberts (2014, p.44-45) and Six and Huberts (2008, p.65).

¹⁰ See footnote 2 in Gallie (2014, p. 174) for an defence why the first four conditions are necessary.

integrity is regarded as being or acting coherently, steadfastly, or rationally, as standing for something of social worth, or acting morally, virtuously or law-abidingly. Secondly, thirdly,

(II) This achievement must be of an internally complex character, for all that its worth is attributed to it as a whole. (III) Any explanation of its worth must therefore include reference to the respective contributions of its various parts or features; yet prior to experimentation there is nothing absurd or contradictory in any one of a number of possible rival descriptions of its total worth (...) In fine, the accredited achievement is *initially* variously describable' (Gallie, 1956, p.171-172).

In the same vein as Gallie defends democracy as an essentially contested concept, it could be argued that integrity also satisfies the condition of being 'internally complex'. Namely, integrity encompasses a 'variety of descriptions', while the ascribed attainment of integrity can at first be described varyingly, nevertheless always possessing a sense of valuableness. For example, value enclosed in various descriptions such as wholeness, compliance with moral norms, values, and virtue (general conceptualizations); or abstinence from acting in a disorderly, transgressive, manipulative, or corruptive manner, or preventing interest to conflict (specific descriptions). There are several contexts (times, places and circumstances) imaginable wherein it seems to be justifiable, reasonable and instinctive to ascribe the 'achieved' label 'integrity' to various diverging phenomena.

Likewise, it can be argued that integrity satisfies the fourth condition: "(IV) The accredited achievement must be of a kind that admits of considerable modification in light of changing circumstances; and such modification cannot be prescribed or predicted in advance. (...) [But, is] "open" in character"(Gallie, 1956, p.172). Namely, integrity can be characterized as an 'open' concept, since its attribution depends on the context, including the interests and persons in place, as it often operates within a grey area. The 'right action' – which bears the quality of integrity – heavily depends on (unforeseeable) circumstances, which requires adequate judgement of the actors involved (further defended in §2.3.2).

Fifthly, "(V) that each party recognizes the fact that its own use of it is contested by those of other parties, and that each party must have at least some appreciation of the different criteria in the light of which the other parties claim to be applying the concept in question"(Gallie, 1956, p.172). Again, it would be no stretch to argue that the proponents of the accounts discussed above have at least *some* appreciation for the distinct criteria within competing accounts. Not infrequently, these theorists incorporate certain elements which are prevalent in other conceptualizations in their own account, or (extensively) account for why they disregard particular elements (See: Cox et al., 2021). They thereby show that they are not ignorant of other criteria, and often implicitly or explicitly ascribe at least a minimal level of plausibility to those elements.

Sixthly, "(VI) the derivation of any such concept from an original exemplar whose authority is acknowledged by all the contestant users of the concept"(Gallie, 1956, p.180). That is, they aim to capture an exemplary version of the same concept, even though there is disagreement which conditions have to be met to attain that same concept, or which elements have to be prevalent to constitute the latter. If we consider the descriptions of integrity discussed in relation to the third and fourth condition, it becomes apparent that they all attribute the over-encompassing, normative classification of 'integrity' to their description. These descriptions

bear the same widely shared intuitive perception, as it entails a quality of (moral) value and appeal of a high-order, which is worth to pursue and to possess. The attribution of integrity in these description all derive from an idea of the original exemplar, thus satisfying the sixth condition.

Seventhly, “(VII) the probability or plausibility (...) of the claim that the continuous competition for acknowledgement as between the contestants users of the concept, enables the original exemplar’s achievement to be sustained and/or developed in optimum fashion”(Gallie, 1956, p.180). Integrity satisfies the seventh condition, considering the various accounts discussed above. Namely, it is important that we continuously revitalize our understanding of integrity to keep attaining or possessing it over time, which is signified by: (1) the continuous interaction and competition between accounts of integrity to be recognized as the dominating conceptualization, (2) the increased relevance ascribed in practical affairs, and (3) the enlarged interplay in furtherance of better theoretical understanding and proper application of the concept in practice. In particular, if we consider the open-ended, context-dependent nature of integrity.

Chapter 2: A multidimensional account of the concept of integrity in relation to governance

The previous chapter showed that integrity can be regarded as an ‘essentially contested concept’. The preceding *suggests* that the prevailing accounts are fairly equal able to claim plausibility when someone aspires to explain integrity at large (context-independently). That is, examples of actions or people which we generally consider as possessing integrity oftentimes highlight different aspects of integrity, equally convincing as fundamental to integrity, depending on the circumstances at hand. This chapter will examine whether the various central aspects in these accounts can *indeed* claim plausibility in explaining integrity of governance. I will contend that these aspects are not reducible to one narrow definition. It is not possible to formulate a definition that is able to context-independently explain the nature of integrity, as it is not able to unambiguously encapsulate the full meaning of integrity in approximately all applications.¹¹ I argue that the accounts offered in literature often provide *merely a part of* the multidimensional nature of integrity, yet the latter also entails that these aspects *are* part of the definition. This is compatible with the claim that integrity is an ‘essentially contested concept’, as established in the previous chapter. Which aspects prevail and which aspects are of less-yet-some importance depend on the context and discipline in which the concept is used. Notwithstanding the fact that a comprehensive definition of the concept seems to be out of reach, I contend that it *is* possible to formulate sufficient definitions in particular contexts. The preceding also applies to defining integrity in relation to governance. This chapter aims to demonstrate how various aspects in the prevailing accounts offer insights which are central to our understanding of integrity of governance.

Ultimately, I will utilize the existing accounts by incorporating several elements. I argue that ‘*Integrity of governance should be characterized as acting on behalf of the wholeness of the public sphere in Western liberal democracies ruled by law. That is, governmental action bears integrity when public officials embody both (1) the fundamental principles in society which constitute the bedrock of (moral) values and norms relating to integrity, as well as (2) the framework of virtuousness necessary to make appropriate judgements in particular instances*’. In other words, while the existing theories provide conceptual tools to define the concept of integrity, I will argue that a sound normative theory of integrity of governance requires that we are aware of both (a) the multidimensional nature of integrity as well as (b) the role of (practical) judgement of public officials. Both elements are necessary to explain the mechanisms of normatively assessing actions in practice. The following will examine the *conceptual aspects and content* of this ‘multidimensional nature’ of integrity of governance.

The multidimensional nature comprises of (1) the *dimension of formal limits of the wholeness of governance* (formal limits of integrity), (2) the *dimension of moral limits of the wholeness of governance* (moral limits of integrity), and (3) the *dimension of moral content of*

¹¹ Similar to democracy, which Gallie (1956) also identified as an ‘essentially contested concept’. The subsequent claims all satisfy the definition of democracy, while they all refer to different aspects of the concept: (1) the fact that my vote counts equally implies equal influence on governmental action (formal equality; comparable to accounts of integrity which only include formal constraints); (2) the actions of government should reflect the interests of citizens in such a way that they have an equal opportunity to flourish (moral equality; comparable to accounts of integrity concerning moral norms and values); (3) appointed and administrative officials are believed to act virtuously when they act in the interest of every citizen (equal consideration as virtue; comparable to integrity as virtue).

the wholeness of governance (moral content of integrity). This chapter aims to demonstrate that the three dimensions are indispensable to explain the mechanisms of integrity of governance. The *formal limits of integrity* are constituted by: (FL) *community-identification*, which indicates the formal conditions that public officials need to satisfy to act with integrity (§2.1). The *moral limits of integrity* includes: (ML 1) *community-constitution*;¹² and (ML 2) *public officials should stand for matters of social value in a way that emphasizes proper respect for their fellow-man*. This classification follows from the fact that both (ML 1) and (ML 2) offer some *abstract indication* of the *moral perimeters* that the content of integrity of governance should meet in order to satisfy the *multidimensional nature of wholeness*. The *moral limits* constitute the minimum threshold in the public sphere for acting with integrity in the moral sense (§2.2). Yet, the *substantial normative substance* of integrity of governance is contained within the *moral content of integrity*. The *moral limits* pertain to: (MC 1) *fundamental principles and moral norms and values*; and (MC 2) the *framework of virtuous judgement* (§2.3). The *moral limits of integrity* stand in close relation to the *moral content of integrity*, since the moral perimeters shape the bandwidth of permissible moral content. Hereafter, I will first defend why the five aspects are part of integrity of governance in their own respect. I will account for the fact that these accounts often emerged as a critical response to the shortcomings of an earlier conceptualization, therefore may not always seem compatible *at first*.

§2.1 Community-identification as formal limit of integrity of governance

First, (FL) *community-identification*. The public official's actions should reflect his intention of integrating various fundamental parts of the community into harmonized legislation or executive action. These parts pertain to the prevailing norms, values, and principles in society. The latter is rather similar to an account of integrity as 'self-integration' (Cox et al., 2021). Yet, the rationale of private individuals is transformed to the social sphere of governance. The former concerns a formal relation to *the self*, while the latter concerns the formal way in which individuals are united within the community (e.g., through shared norms and values); the same reconstruction applies to the subsequent accounts of self-identification and self-constitution. Frankfurt (1987, p.39) offers an account of self-integration in which volitions and desires are located in a hierarchical order; wholly integrated people bring these volitions and desires into harmony, whereafter they identify themselves with them:

In conflicts of the one sort, desires compete for priority or position in a preferential order; the issue is which desire to satisfy *first*. (...) When a conflict of the first kind is resolved, the competing desires are integrated into a single ordering, within which each occupies a specific position. Resolving a conflict of the second kind involves a radical separation of the competing desires, one of which is not merely assigned a relatively less favored position, but extruded entirely as an outlaw. It is these acts of ordering and of rejection - integration and separation - that create a self out of the raw materials of inner life.

¹² All accounts have been adapted to the context of integrity of governance. So, while the first two (FL; ML 1) are usually viewed as concerning a personal matter (Cox et al., 2021), they are conceptualized in interpersonal context.

People succeed in the preceding when they ‘constitute themselves without ambivalence’¹³ or ‘inconsistency’¹⁴, which indicates that they possess ‘wholeheartedness’. However, given that these desires, commitments and principles develop over time, acquiring this ‘wholeheartedness’ is a continuing process, which requires self-knowledge. Self-integration would presumably increase the chances of individuals succeeding in harmonizing the prevailing societal convictions: self-integrated public officials will not let their desires take the upper hand, which bolsters their ability to resist the temptation of merely acting in their personal interest.

However, commitments conflict and develop over time, which renders it insufficient to define personal integrity in terms of staying persistently faithful to your commitments, as the ‘self-integration’-account defends (Cox et al., 2021), for it seems important *which kind of* commitments people should stay devoted to. These are often characterized as their fundamental commitments: the commitment that they most profoundly identify themselves with and decisively constitute their identity. The latter concern ‘identity-conferring commitments’ or ‘ground projects’, which Williams (1981, p.12) defines as “present projects [that] are the condition of my existence, in the sense that unless I am propelled forward by the conatus of desire, project and interest, it is unclear why I should go on at all”(identify-view).

The preceding also seems plausible in relation to integrity of governance: ‘community-integration’ seems to be insufficient, as the societal convictions conflict and change over time, which requires that public officials discern and *hold steadfastly true* to the *profound* societal convictions which embody the identity of the community (‘community-identification’). Otherwise, public officials would be able to act with integrity when they cherry-pick a prevailing societal conviction at the expense of a non-compatible societal conviction of profound nature, which seems to be counterintuitive. The latter will contribute to the appearance of public officials as reliable and predictable, which is important, as public officials should act in a way that breeds trustworthiness. They should not be moved by their own desires, or desires of a small group which are unreasonable to defend in accord with public interest. The previous is indebted to the account of personal integrity as ‘identity’(Cox et al., 2021). Moreover, public officials who possess personal integrity consistent with the identity view are probably better able to act in accord with *community-identification*. These public officials hold steadfastly true to their commitments in accord with fundamental public beliefs, and are able to act consistently, reliably and predictably.

Public officials need to be able to discern the prevailing convictions that are present in the political community in order to act steadfastly in agreement with these convictions. It requires that public officials can estimate the level of significance and urgency of social beliefs in civil society, including their relative position in the hierarchical order of convictions. This entails that public officials have a perception of which convictions qua norms, values and principles are most strongly endorsed by citizens, to the extent that they can: (1) estimate which convictions should be served urgently; (2) determine which societal conviction bears more significance in case two convictions are in conflict; (3) decide which conviction should enjoy priority in policy-making or policy-execution due to material and/or workforce limitations. These convictions change over time and depend on the – (geo-)political, social and economic

¹³ ‘Unresolved desire for a thing and against it’ (Cox et al., 2021).

¹⁴ ‘Unresolved desire for incompatible things’ (Cox et al., 2021).

– context at hand. Public officials identify themselves with the prevailing convictions by virtue of internalizing them through ‘social awareness’, which demands unceasing care-taking to subsist, analogous to self-knowledge in relation to personal integrity.

Public officials cultivate their social awareness by staying in close contact with citizens from various backgrounds through diverse means and in distinct places: they grasp and show concern for what is happening in their community. This is even more pressing in relation to the interests of minorities, since their convictions and concerns are often less able to reach the mainstream media. The way in which public officials can acquire social awareness is extremely diverse, but I will offer some examples which can contribute to the attainment of social awareness:¹⁵ volunteering (e.g., at a sports club, home shelter, cultural centre); an open attitude towards interaction outside their socioeconomic bubble; gaining ‘hands-on experience’ in professional activities outside politics (only applies to part-time functions); organizing events on certain topics that are at issue in society and/or bear significance; offering opportunities for citizens to attend consultation or participation meetings; inform themselves through media, citizen letters, or surveys (possibly in relation to poll results). Moreover, various virtues enable or put public officials in position to acquire social awareness, for example, open-mindedness or prudence (See §2.3 for a more extensive discussion). However, the ‘social awareness’-requirement may face the challenge of demandingness. Another challenge which we may encounter is how we should deal with disagreement about the content of the prevailing convictions in society, both *internal* (conflict between private and public convictions) and *external* (uncertainty or divergence with respect to societal convictions). Both challenges will be discussed and accounted for in §3.2.

Exemplification: Public officials are deemed to act with integrity if: ‘(FL) they hold steadfastly true to their commitments, which are grounded in the prevailing essential convictions and significant needs of citizens. Public officials need to *identify* themselves with these fundamental convictions in a way which (1) excludes arbitrary satisfaction of desires, (2) is informed, non-deceived and responsive to the public interest, and (3) exemplifies reliability and predictability’ (community-identification).

To illustrate: Public officials should make impartial and informed decisions, which display a sufficient degree of consistency over time, in governmental action related to (I) the institutional form of government (e.g., the characteristics of the electoral system), (II) immigration (e.g., the utilities available for asylum seekers in the reception centre), and (III) climate policies (e.g., subsidies for means that reduce global warming).

‘Community-identification’ can be defended by positing that we would not regard a public official to act with integrity when particular actions are at odds with fundamental societal beliefs, or fall short of properly weighing public interest. Note that the examples do not contain moral valuation about the content of these policies. Moreover, the moral desirability of (FL) can be defended on utilitarian grounds, as it is reasonable that consistently acting in accord with these prevailing convictions usually brings a greater quantity of happiness for the greatest number of citizens subject to governmental action. Nevertheless, it is possible that in some situations public officials would produce greater happiness if they act contrary to the prevailing convictions, in accord with *act utilitarianism*. It is possible to mitigate the latter challenge, as

¹⁵ Certain examples lend themselves better to different types of public officials.

public officials who act in agreement with the prevailing societal convictions would probably cultivate greater happiness based on *rule utilitarianism*.¹⁶ However, regardless of the claim that (FL) *generally* bears moral value on utilitarian grounds, it does not contain substantial moral limits in regard to the *content of particular actions*,¹⁷ as it merely consist of formal limits.¹⁸ The latter exposes the urgency of identifying moral limits and content of integrity of governance, starting with the claim that the fundamental societal convictions should be grounded within *deontological considerations*.

§2.2 The moral limits of integrity of governance

§2.2.1: *Community-constitution as the first moral limit*

Community-constitution (ML 1) understands integrity as the integration and identity of the community in a constructivist, Kantian manner. *Community-constitution* obtains its name from the fact that the community constitutes itself through the rationality of public reason, as it ensures the minimal requirements to exercise private and public autonomy within liberal democracies ruled by law. Moreover, *community-constitution* is indebted to the self-constitution view of integrity proceeded by Korsgaard, which views integrity as a prerequisite for being an autonomous being, in contrast to a condition of excellency (Cox et al, 2021). Korsgaard (2009, p.xii) argues that:

the only way in which you can constitute yourself well is by governing yourself in accordance with universal principles which you can will as laws for every rational being. It follows that you can't maintain the integrity you need in order to be an agent with your own identity on any terms short of morality itself. That doesn't mean that we have a reason for being moral that is selfish, that morality gets us something *else*, the integrity needed for agency and identity. Rather, it means that a commitment to the moral law is built right into the activity that, by virtue of being human, we are necessarily engaged in: the activity of making something of ourselves. The moral law is the law of self-constitution, and as such, it is a constitutive principle of human life itself.

It may be opposed that Korsgaard's notion of individual self-constitution cannot be directly adapted to the level of the community. I will confine myself to arguing that I *assume* that it is possible to adapt individual constitution to community constitution, instead of positing that it is *necessarily* possible. The grounds for assuming that it is possible stem from the fact that both views contain the minimum requirements for citizens to exercise their autonomy: (1) in Korsgaard's 'self-constitution'-view, actions are required to satisfy the categorical imperative, as the latter constitutes the necessary condition for identity and agency within individual action;

¹⁶ It goes beyond the scope to defend this claim elaborately.

¹⁷ On the contrary, since a strict utilitarian approach would allow formal limits to be superseded by actions which we usually regard as violations of integrity, in case this action would somehow produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number, despite its morally reprehensible character (e.g., arbitrarily serving the interest of certain individuals). This holds even for rule utilitarianism, as it might be formulated in terms of a standard exception. It seems that we need more substantial moral guarantees for the fundamental principles to do justice to our general understanding of integrity of governance, instead of mere formal limits (regardless of the nature of the moral ground for formal limits).

¹⁸ Supplementing the concept of integrity with moral limits (§2.2) and moral content (§2.3) account for the criticism that (FL) only places formal limits on integrity, which will be further discussed in §2.3.

(2) while public reason seems the appropriate equivalent in relation to the fundamental principles, as the latter constitutes the necessary condition for citizens to exercise their private and public autonomy.

Moreover, public officials who bear personal integrity in the manner of self-constitution are probably better able to satisfy the conditions of *community-constitution*. Public officials who act in a way that would be rationally endorsed by themselves are most likely be better able to act in accordance with public reason in regard to the fundamental principles of integrity of governance. For *community-constitution* entails that public officials only act with human agency if their actions constitute a consistent identification with the prevailing fundamental principles. The latter are encapsulated in the fundamental societal convictions relating to governance, which are grounded in public reason, as they are contingent on their susceptibility to rational endorsement by their fellow-man; in contrast to being grounded in unreflective satisfaction of desire. In other words, the following claim seems to be untenable: ‘Acting in conflict with the fundamental principles of governance, which are in accordance with rationality, is consistent with claiming that those actions bear integrity’.

These *fundamental* convictions are distinct from the (essential) *prevailing* convictions in §2.1 (FL), as the former requires substantive moral quality, while the latter does not necessarily contain moral value *in themselves*. The *prevailing* convictions pertain to the prevalent convictions in society, which does not exclude the possibility that they contain morally reprehensible content (e.g., the prevailing convictions in Nazi-Germany). Moreover, fundamental convictions are fundamental in the sense that they constitute the backbone of liberal democracies ruled by law, as well as the minimal requirements which the norms, values and laws should satisfy (e.g., a norm, value or law is not allowed to be in conflict with the idea of equality or liberty).

Exemplification: Public officials are deemed to act with integrity if: ‘(FL) community-identification’, and ‘(ML 1) the public official’s actions are deemed to be susceptible to *rational endorsement* if they concern the part of the content of policies of fundamental nature. In other words, to satisfy (ML 1), public officials are required to act in accordance with public reason in relation to the fundamental principles. The latter constitute the backbone conditions of relatively-just liberal democracies ruled by law’¹⁹ (community-constitution).

To illustrate: Public officials act with integrity if they sufficiently reflect the principles of liberty, equality and legality, in view of the (I) the institutional form of government. Public officials violate integrity if they unjustifiably constrain people’s rights of liberty, unequally and disproportionately serve the interest of (a) certain individual(s) contrary to the public interest, or act in the absence of a clear legal basis. Moreover, in regard to (II) immigration, public officials violate integrity if they formulate or enforce policies which subject asylum seekers to inhuman treatment, in conflict with personal and public autonomy and civility. Lastly, with respect to (III) climate policies, public officials violate integrity if their policies directly threaten the survival of people in that particular location.

However, I would not go as far to defend that this condition needs to be applied in *every instance* of governmental action. This would require that public officials suppress nearly all

¹⁹ See: Figure 2, p.22.

individuality and personal convictions in the activity of lawmaking and policy execution, as it is unclear how ‘secular, objective morality’ can be adequately reconciled with ‘each person’s agency’ in a way that properly reflects the quality of being ‘uniquely crucial to that person’ (Alexander & Moore, 2021). It would be susceptible to the challenge that the “seeming demand of deontological ethics that on occasion one’s categorical obligations [(e.g., public reason)] require one to preserve the purity of one’s own moral agency at the cost of having one’s actions make the world be in a morally worse state of affairs” (Alexander & Moore, 2021). While the latter would precisely be the location wherein people’s individuality, as distinct from strict categorical action, could inform the content of policies or executive action, to produce morally desirable ends tailor-made.

Consequently, I contend that public officials are only required to *act categorically* in accordance with the *fundamental principles* which relate to integrity of governance, which could be rationally endorsed by all citizens within the public realm. The *fundamental principles* are encapsulated in fundamental societal *convictions*, and constitute the bedrock of the norms and values (see §2.3 for a discussion of these principles). The latter can be defended on account that actions which conflict with, for example, equal political liberty would not be regarded as bearing integrity, due to their immoral quality according to public reason.

§2.2.2: Standing for community values as the second moral limit

The demanding duty to act in accord with public reason does not apply to the entire content of *specific, individual laws or policy-execution* which derives from these fundamental principles. However, governmental action is always required to be *generally acceptable and reasonable* to the vast majority, and needs to reflect the moral beliefs and legal framework of society consistently; public officials display proper respect for their fellow-man if they satisfy the aforementioned conditions. The preceding is encapsulated in (ML 2): *public officials should stand for matters of social value in a way that emphasizes proper respect for their fellow-man.*²⁰

²¹ (ML 2) resembles Calhoun’s (1995, p.246) account of integrity as ‘standing for something’, which emphasizes the relational nature of integrity: “Standing for something is not just a matter of personal *identification* with certain values; it is also a matter of insisting on the *endorsability* of those values”. It entails that people value their judgement and want their actions to stand for something, instead of merely being consistent. Citizens need to reflect as community members on what has most social value, which they accomplish through respecting their fellow-men by pursuing valuable ends for society (Cox et al., 2021). (ML 2) echoes the latter:

Exemplification: Public officials are deemed to act with integrity if: ‘(FL) community-identification’, and ‘(ML 1) community-constitution’, while ‘(ML 2) policy-execution and lawmaking in both the non-fundamental and fundamental sphere of governmental action need to be *generally acceptable* to the vast majority of society. These actions

²⁰ Unmistakably, this condition is also important in the part of the content of governmental action which concerns fundamental principles. However, it can be asserted that the condition of properly respecting your fellow-man is already implicitly contained within the idea that the public official’s actions need to be in accordance with public reason, which would render the explicit introduction of (ML 2) less urgent in relation to fundamental principles.

²¹ (ML 2) is able to account for the difference between integrity and fanaticism, seeing the importance that (ML 2) attributes to properly respecting others and their deliberations; while the self-integration- and identity-view understand integrity in personal terms and only contain formal limits (Cox et al., 2021).

need to stand for matters of social value: they should sufficiently reflect the moral beliefs and the legal framework in society, and show proper respect for their fellow-man' (Standing for community values).

To illustrate: It is assumed that the following examples all satisfy the subsequent conditions: the vast majority is convinced that the goal is acceptable, stands for social value, and exemplifies proper respect for their fellow-man. As to (I) the institutional form of government, public officials should offer adequate opportunities for democratic participation, but the government might grant the possibility of participation through various diverging ways (e.g., citizens' assemblies, referendums, right to challenge or petition, town meetings). Furthermore, in view of (II) immigration, public officials act with integrity if they provide asylum seekers with some minimal options for leisure, instead of restricting them into boredom. Lastly, in regard to (III) climate policies, public officials act with integrity if they advance climate change reduction.

(ML 2) allows public officials to exercise their unique personal agency consistently with integrity in regard to the non-fundamental part of the content of policies. It does not concern nor violate the conditions of the fundamental principles, as long as the public official's actions are generally acceptable and reasonable, stand for matters of social value and show proper respect for their fellow-man; while public officials are still required to satisfy the demanding condition of public reason to act with integrity in the part of the content of policies of fundamental nature.

The three aspects discussed are all essential to integrity of governance. While aspects (FL), (ML 1) and (ML 2) were largely formulated in critical reply to each other, this does not necessarily imply that they are incompatible. Their complementary nature is revealed if we consider the above characterizations, in which the partial explanation in earlier accounts is supplemented or strengthened in later accounts. Public officials are required to identify themselves with the community through consistent identification with the essential convictions (FL). If governmental action concerns the fundamental principles of governance, they are required to be susceptible to rational endorsement (ML 1). While the actions of both non-fundamental and fundamental nature need to be generally acceptable and exemplify proper respect for your fellow-man (ML 2). In (ML 1) and (ML 2), *fundamental* pertains to the substantive, backbone conditions of society, which constitute the minimal threshold for governmental action with integrity in relatively just liberal democracies ruled by law. (ML 2) can be combined appropriately with (FL) and (ML 1), since displaying proper mutual respect in your actions *in general* is perfectly consistent with steadily acting on the basis of rationally endorsed convictions regarding *fundamental principles*.

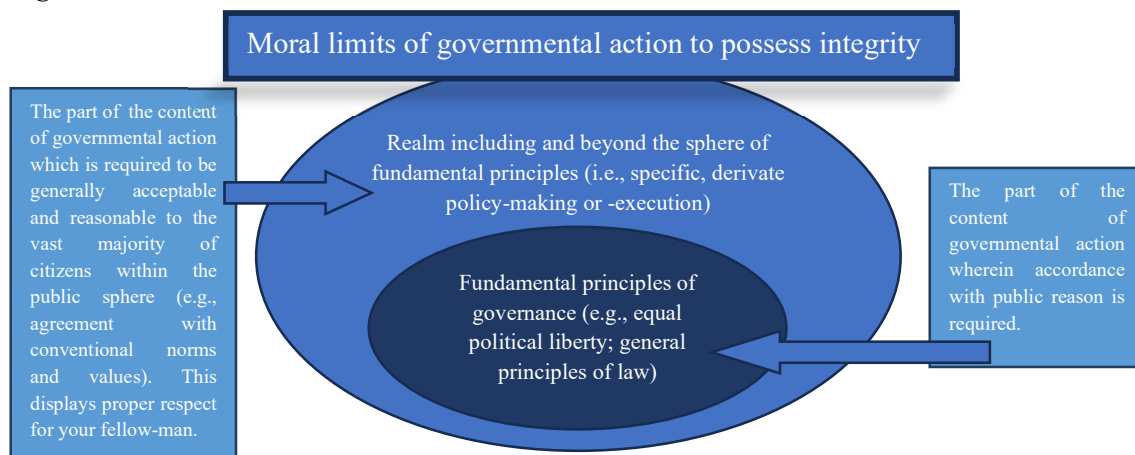
In short, (ML 1) and (ML 2) add to the requirement of acting in accordance with societal principles (FL) the condition that these principles contain substantive moral limits. The substantive moral limits follow from the rationality of public reason in regard to the fundamental principles, and derive from proper mutual respect in policy content of non-fundamental nature. The above is compatible with Kant's (1991, p.79-81) view on rightful public law²²:

²² Which Kant proceeded in relation to the hypothetical social contract, but is likewise applicable to different accounts of political authority, it seems to me.

[I]t can oblige every legislator to frame his laws in such a way that they could have been produced by the united will of a whole nation, and to regard each subject, (...) as if he had consented within the general will. This is the test of the rightfulness of every public law. For if the law is such that a whole people could not possibly agree to it (for example, if it stated that a certain class of *subjects* must be privileged as a hereditary *ruling class*), it is unjust; but if it is at least *possible* that a people could agree to it, it is our duty to consider the law as just, even if the people is at present in such a position or attitude of mind that it would probably refuse its consent if it were consulted. (...) For so long as it is not self-contradictory to say that an entire people could agree to such a law, however painful it might seem, then the law is in harmony with right.

In fact, the *multidimensional account* seems stricter with reference to the last claim, as it requires that laws which are susceptible to possible agreement amongst people are also acceptable and reasonable for the vast majority. This excludes the possibility that a great deal of people would probably reject the content of policy-making or policy-execution, even if those laws are in (possible) agreement with the fundamental (categorical) principles of integrity. Concluding, this account of integrity of governance is largely concerned with legitimate lawmaking and policy-execution. However, it is broader than a mere account of legitimate lawmaking: it also requires that public officials exemplify a proper degree of civility in their interactions with other actors (e.g., acting respectful and non-transgressive), and that they are capable of virtuous judgement (§2.3).

Figure 2



§2.3 The moral content of integrity of governance

§2.3.1: The unsatisfactory nature of mere formal constraints

However, the ‘limiting aspects’ discussed above only constitute a partial definition of integrity of governance. The conception would still be susceptible to many of the criticism outlined by Cox et al. (2021). In order to account for these criticism and the way we generally understand the concept, it is essential to include the *moral content of integrity*: public officials are required to act in accordance with (MC 1) the (moral) norms and values, and (MC 2) display virtuous judgement to act with integrity. The *moral content of integrity* account for the following

criticism, together with the *moral limits* to some extent. That is: (1) *definitions which only establish formal limits*²³ (self-integration- and identity-view); (2) *normative content seems to be of importance to integrity* (self-integration-view); (3) *integrity is generally regarded as something worth pursuing* (identity-view).

McFall (1987, p.11) illustrates the problematic nature of merely requiring formal limits to possess personal integrity, as well as the importance of moral content to acquire the latter:

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. (...) Integrity is a personal virtue granted with social strings attached. By definition, it precludes "expediency, artificiality, or shallowness of any kind." The pleasure seeker is guilty of shallowness, the approval seeker of artificiality, and the profit seeker of expedience of the worst sort. Whether we grant or deny personal integrity, then, seems to depend on our own conceptions of what is important. And since most of our conceptions are informed if not dominated by moral conceptions of the good, it is natural that this should be reflected in our judgments of personal integrity.

The criticisms discussed above relate to personal integrity, but also seem valid in light of integrity of governance. For it is unlikely that we would regard the following in accord with integrity: 'A public official acts with sufficient integrity when he acts consistent with the prevailing norms and values, even when these norms and values are unreasonable and/or immoral, or when these actions of public interest are not directed towards the good'. However, it should be noted that the criticism of merely containing *formal limits* is less pressing in relation to integrity of governance as distinct from personal integrity, since the *formal limits of integrity* are defined in terms of community. The latter would generally not purport to prevailing convictions of highly immoral nature within liberal democracies, as these convictions are by definition widely shared. Yet, it is conceivable that these existing prevailing social convictions *can be* immoral, even in liberal democracies – and likely would be the case in societies as Nazi-Germany. Judgements about integrity of governance should therefore be informed by moral conceptions of the good. The latter requires compliance with moral norms and values, which consist of (1) normative content and (2) ends worth pursuing, and (3) imposes moral constraints on the type of commitment a person may adhere to.

In this way, the *multidimensional account* would also account for the criticism that conceptualizing integrity as *self-identity* and *self-integration* would disregard our understanding of integrity as something praiseworthy. Both accounts pertain to a "self-unifying view of integrity [that] emphasises a person's steadfast commitment no matter what the content. It is neither impossible nor unusual for an evil person to possess this kind of integrity"; conversely, more consistent with our intuitive conception of integrity seems to be "a person of sound moral judgment who remains steadfast and consistent in judgment and action", as they "would remain true to exemplary moral convictions in the face of considerable adversity and temptation. To

²³ Nieuwenburg (2001, p.112-113) also contends that explaining integrity of governance merely in terms of formal constraints would insufficiently account for the nature of the concept.

say that someone possesses this kind of integrity is to automatically and unequivocally praise the person” (Cox, La Caze, & Levine, 1999, p.519). Similar to personal integrity, a genuine lack of praiseworthiness would constitute a valid challenge, as it would be at odds with our general understanding of integrity of governance, for we usually regard public officials as actors who should exemplify moral character; as someone who should act praiseworthy on the basis of moral judgement. Frequently, we even hold public officials to higher moral standards in contrast to layman, as they are regarded as role models, in some extent. Conversely, public officials seem to lack integrity if they act transgressively, in conflict with the principles of liberal democracy ruled by law, or contrary to moral norms and values, regardless whether they act consistent or not. The praiseworthiness within integrity of governance is generated by the *moral content of integrity*, along with the *moral limits*.

§2.3.2: *Virtuousness, principles, norms & values as moral content of integrity of governance*

The previous section exhibited why the *moral content and limitations of integrity* are crucial to account for the shortcomings of mere formal constraints. But what constitutes the *moral content*? This section will argue that the *moral content of integrity* is composed of moral norms, values, principles and virtuousness.

Exemplification: Public officials are deemed to act with integrity if: ‘(FL) community-identification’, and ‘(ML 1) community-constitution’, ‘(ML 2) Standing for community values’. Moreover, their actions should bear (MC 1) substantive moral substance, as well as (MC 2) virtuous judgement.

To illustrate: Public officials act with integrity with respect to (I) the institutional form of government if the electoral system and facilities enable every citizens to participate (e.g., equal opportunity for everyone to vote, by ensuring via legal provisions that polling stations are within reasonable reach and accessible for people with disabilities – fundamental principles); while guaranteeing a decent degree of individual privacy, public transparency and responsibility in the electoral process (norms and values). In view of (II) immigration, public officials act with integrity if they supply utilities for basic needs, do not subject asylum seekers to unjust imprisonment, but facilitate decent temporary housing, and ensure tolerable rather than long lasting legal processes (fundamental principles). Additionally, public officials act with integrity if they provide *some* opportunities for leisure, such as (study) books and options to exercise, which contribute to self-fulfilment (norms and values). With respect to (III) climate policies, public officials act with integrity if their policies aim to enforce dikes or ensure the safety of nuclear power plants, thereby, avoid negligence, which could threaten the survival of people in a particular location (fundamental principles). Also, public officials act with integrity if their policies advance climate change reduction, such as granting subsidies for solar panels or heat pumps, or impose taxes on cars with very high emissions (norms and values). Lastly, virtuous judgement allow public officials to determine the exact content of the policies, which depends on the context (e.g., the maximum distance to polling stations; the kind of utilities necessary for basic needs; the sort of opportunities for leisure that are satisfactory; the kind of policies which reduce climate change compatible with proper mutual respect).

Moreover, moral norms, values and limits are compatible with virtue, and can be incorporated into one theory rather unproblematically. If we conceptualize integrity as virtue, it conjointly allows for constraints on the content of the norms which people can commit to, as

extreme deficiencies in moral principles and beliefs might concern separate-yet-related defeaters of integrity (Cox et al., 2021). In a similar way, adding the *formal limits of integrity* does not seem susceptible to the charge of incompatibility.²⁴

The *moral content of integrity* entails that public officials recognize their substantial moral obligations and show their commitment to living a moral life. They should exercise a *sufficient degree* of intellectual responsibility in deliberation about the content of governmental action, which reflects their goal of enabling people to flourish. Public officials accomplish the latter if they adhere amply to the moral norms and values and fundamental societal principles. The preceding reflects an approach which combines two accounts of integrity as ‘moral purpose’ (Cox et al., 2021). Namely, the idea of ‘substantive implications’ is present in Ashford (2000), while Halfon (1989) advocates the importance of intellectual responsibility and reasonableness (‘intelligible and defensible’). In this combined approach, the moral substance is not required to satisfy the demanding condition of being absolutely right (‘objective integrity’),^{25 26} nor need to contain the excessive intellectual responsibility with which people normally encounter contemplation about moral questions (Halfon).

The substantive content of governmental action should meet the minimum threshold constituted by the *moral limits* in §2.2 to possess integrity. *Fundamental principles* of integrity (MC 1a) bear significant moral value, as they require agreement with public reason (ML 1). The *norms and values* (MC 1b) should at minimum meet the condition of mutual respect and widely shared acceptance (ML 2). However, it is assumed that the norms and values usually associated with integrity of governance (e.g., avoidance of conflict of interest or corruption) bear substantive moral value in themselves.²⁷

§2.3.2.1 *The principles, norms and values of integrity of governance.*

The fundamental principles constitute the bedrock of the norms and values which relate to integrity. It goes beyond the scope to defend these principles extensively. Yet, their relevance for understanding integrity of governance indicates the importance of further examination. Still, they are introduced briefly, since this will provide some insight into their nature. More importantly, it provides aid in clarifying how virtuous judgement constitutes a crucial capacity which need to be present in public officials to act with integrity. The minimum criterion for these fundamental principles is agreement with public reason: they should be acceptable or justifiable to some extent to everyone who is subject to the authority of the principle. Regarding the discourse principle, this amounts to the idea that “the only regulations and ways of acting that can claim legitimacy are those to which all who are possibly affected could assent as participants in rational discourse” (Habermas, 1997, p.458). Private autonomy, equal political

²⁴ Analogous to the distinction McFall posits between personal integrity (formal limits) and moral integrity (See: Cox et al., 2021). In the latter account, personal and moral integrity both constitute a different form of integrity. Yet, that does not exclude the possibility of them being present at the same time. This is consistent with my contention that the three dimensions all need to be present the presence of integrity of governance.

²⁵ In contrast to what Ashford (2000, p.246) contends.

²⁶ Despite the fact that the categorical character of the fundamental principles do suggest objectivity in some way.

²⁷ Although it goes beyond the scope to expand on the subsequent extensively, we can suppose that preventing these types of integrity violations rather unproblematically bear substantive moral weight argued from the perspective of deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics.

liberty, and civility satisfy the aforementioned conditions and are fundamental principles of integrity of governance. However, this list is merely preliminary and non-exhaustive.

Autonomy enables individuals to shape their life, follow their plans and achieve their goals, on the one hand, and refers to people's inviolable rights such as bodily integrity, on the other hand. Public officials lack integrity when their actions unjustifiably coerce others, which violates their autonomy. Autonomy can be divided into public and private autonomy, although they are strongly related. Habermas (1997, p.415) claims that "Legitimate law closes the circle between the private autonomy of its addressees, who are treated equally, and the public autonomy of enfranchised citizens, who, as equally entitled authors of the legal order, must ultimately decide on the criteria of equal treatment". Basic negative freedoms, membership rights, and due process rights are indispensable, as they guarantee *private autonomy*; whereas the rights of political participation are a prerequisite for *public autonomy*, as private autonomy would otherwise merely pertain to 'paternalistic impositions', instead of 'expressions of self-governance' (Habermas, 1997, p.xxvii).

Private autonomy. Habermas (1997, p.122) argues that *private autonomy* is guaranteed by basic negative freedoms (e.g., right to life and property), membership rights (e.g., freedom of association), and due-process rights, which together ensure individual freedom of choice. This entails legal equality *before the law as addressees*, to the extent that inequality in treatment can only be justified if it is founded on non-arbitrary, proportionate, and general grounds. These negative rights are rights against interferences. These interferences can be non-physical, as they can pertain to coercion or manipulation (e.g., threatening people). These negative liberties often concern bodily integrity,²⁸ which stands in close relation to (violations of) integrity. For example, unsafe – mental or physical – working environments, resulting from shouting, aggression, or violence;²⁹ abusive name calling; (sexual) transgressive behaviour; manipulation; abuse of power; or intimidation. Moreover, integrity violations can result from unjustified restrictions of the right of association when, for example, announced demonstrations are prohibited. However, "the realization of basic rights is a process *that secures the private autonomy of equally entitled citizens only in step with the activation of their political autonomy*" (Habermas, 1997, p.426).

Public autonomy is assured when equal political liberty is guaranteed, consistent with our democratic values. Equal political liberty enables all citizens to partake equally in the process of collective self-legislation and self-governance, which allows them to execute their autonomy within the public sphere. This fundamental principle relates to theories of political authority that ground legitimate authoritative directives in democratic procedure,³⁰ which are based in mutual recognition and respect for all citizens as free and equal persons (Habermas, 1997, p.496). The idea of self-governance is that all citizens are both equally *subject to* and *responsible as cowriters of* the law through representation or participation (Habermas, 1997, p.123), despite our actual intellectual, physical, or socioeconomic inequalities. Citizen's interests should bear equal value as part of the public interest that is converted into governmental action, since "the equal right to political self-determination assumes concrete

²⁸ For example, lied down in Article 11 of the Dutch constitution: "Everyone shall have the right to inviolability of his person, without prejudice to restrictions laid down by or pursuant to Act of Parliament".

²⁹ Although aggression and violence normally fall within the legal sphere without considerable ambiguity.

³⁰ For example, Habermas (1997, p.135).

shape in civil rights that ground equal claims to participation in democratic legislative processes” (Habermas, 1997, p.134). This requires effective opportunities for political participation which are equally distributed, according to Dahl (Habermas, 1997, p.315). The principle is strongly related to certain violations of integrity of governance observed in practice, such as unjustified, disproportionate advocacy and conflict of interest, as well as unequal treatment, discrimination, nepotism, cronyism and favoritism. For they all constitute an arbitrary and prejudiced balancing of interest or influence of individual(s) within the public realm, contrary to the idea of equal political liberty. Furthermore, sufficient visibility and transparency are required, since the execution of equal political liberty is “completed through communicative and participatory rights that guarantee equal opportunities for the public use of communicative liberties” (Habermas, 1997, p.458). Dahl (1989, p.112) claims that “Each citizen ought to have adequate and equal opportunities for discovering and validating (...) the choice on the matter to be decided that would best serve the citizen's interests”. It would therefore be difficult “to justify procedures that would cut off or suppress information which, were it available, might well cause citizens to arrive at a different decision; or that would give some citizens much easier access than others to information of crucial importance”. However, a certain degree of informational privacy is necessary as it enables ‘democratic decision-making processes, and political participation’ (Roessler & DeCew, 2023). This tension is relevant for integrity of governance. On the one hand, it relates to integrity violations such as breaches of confidentiality. On the other hand, it refers to breaches of law due to a severe lack of transparency, as these provisions require the publication of internal government information necessary to perform self-governance as cowriters.

Civility is associated with certain norms and values that enable us to live autonomously, peacefully, and orderly. For it allows us to fulfil our life plans in a relatively undisturbed and predictable way in the interrelational context, due to the requirement of a certain degree of decency, compassion, and care for your fellow-man. I do not subscribe to a Rawlsian account of civility, despite the significance I ascribe to public reason, who famously proceeds a method of the former kind. The latter contains the idea that public officials “must appeal to the political values they think belong to the most reasonable understanding of the public conception and its political values of justice and public reason”, and explain why they advocate these values (Rawls, 2005, p.236). However, Zerilli (2014, p.130) argues that Rawls’ account entails a *method of avoidance*, since it requires that the most divisive issues, which may cause severe contention and might weaken social cooperation, need to be dismissed: “their focus is not on fostering associative politics around worldly things but on stabilizing the intersubjective relations of mutual respect among citizens”. This view can be challenged on account that the democratic realm have historically been enlarged due to actions in disagreement with the method of avoidance; while the uncertainty about the reception of words can have a ‘world-building’ rather than ‘world-destroying’ effect (Zerilli, 2014, p.131). Instead, ‘civility should be understood as democratic, pluralistic and premised on a sense of moral equality’, as it alleviates ‘social conflicts’, facilitates ‘social interactions in a complex and diverse market society’, and has intrinsic moral value as it displays mutual respect (Boyd, 2006, p.263). Governmental action does not only have to satisfy the condition that citizens *could assent* to it in the rational discourse (ML 1), as discussed in §2.2.2, but requires that laws and policy-execution are acceptable and reasonable for the vast majority (ML 2), in a way that does not violate the

fundamental rights of minorities. The latter would render a method of avoidance in conflict with integrity of governance. The prevailing societal convictions constitute the guideline, but virtuous judgement of public officials should sufficiently account for diverging convictions, as required by the fundamental principle of equal political liberty and private autonomy. A lack of civility is usually present in all types of integrity violations, as they often concern an uncivil disregard for the individual or civil society at large, who are disrespected as fellow-man by the subjection to integrity violations.

Norms and values. The principles discussed above are distinct from the norms and values, since the former are more fundamental to the structure of near-just liberal democracy ruled by law and constitute the bedrock of the latter; however, some values are rather similar to certain principles. The norms and values which relate to integrity of governance depend on the spatiotemporal location, historical-cultural context, and legal-political circumstances. There is an ongoing dispute about the definition and measurement of *values* (Huberts, 2014, p.80). Simultaneously, there is philosophical discord in value theory about what constitutes value (Schroeder, 2021). The scope of this inquiry withholds me from elaborating extensively on the latter. However, for the sake of this inquiry, I argue that: '*values furnish goodness as well as constitute moral convictions in society, which should guide governmental action*'. Literature offers insight in the significant values in administrative ethics, for example, Huberts (2014, p.84) and Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007, p.360-361). Furthermore, I adhere to the conventional definition that *social norms* are *informal rules which govern and constrain behaviour between individuals in associations and society, which contain a motivating quality* (Bicchieri, Muldoon, & Sontuoso, 2023). It would be difficult to list these social norms to apply adequately to all the diverging societies situated within liberal democracies ruled by law, as they quite differ depending on the context. Therefore, I will confine myself to arguing that public officials should be aware of the social norms which govern their society, as this awareness is essential to be able to act with integrity.

§2.3.2.2 *The framework of virtue and virtuous judgement of integrity of governance.*

Additionally, the substantive moral substance will be derived concomitantly from the ability of virtuous judgement to determine the right action in light of the circumstances at hand. The *multidimensional account* that is postulated is by definition deficient when applied in practice: the content of especially the fundamental principles, but also of the norms and values, requires interpretation, which demands adequate judgement. For they are largely content-dependent when they are applied in particular instances. Particularly in this case, since the essence of integrity heavily depends on the circumstances, which results from its ambiguous nature. Hence, this accentuates the importance of judgement by public officials in practical practices. This seems to suggest that public officials need a kind of ability which enables them to adequately interpret the fundamental principles and norms and values in light of the circumstances to act with integrity. *Virtuous judgement* enables public officials to do the latter, which seems to emerge as a necessary capacity to act with integrity, since it concerns the degree

to which governmental *action* possesses integrity in practice.³¹ This observation is demonstrated in a clear manner by Kant (1991, p.61):

It is obvious that no matter how complete the theory may be, a middle term is required between theory and practice, providing a link and a transition from one to the other. For a concept of the understanding, which contains the general rule, must be supplemented by an act of judgement whereby the practitioner distinguishes instances where the rule applies from those where it does not. And since rules cannot in turn be provided on every occasion to direct the judgement in subsuming each instance under the previous rule (since this would involve an infinite regress), theoreticians will be found who can never in all their lives become practical, since they lack judgement. (...) But even where a natural talent for judgement is present, there may still be a lack of premises. In other words, the theory may be incomplete, and can perhaps be perfected only by future experiments and experiences from which the (...) [public official] can and ought to abstract new rules for himself to complete his theory.

The last part discloses the importance of practical knowledge (*prônésis*), which will be discussed later on.

Continuing, I contend that public officials should bear a *sufficient degree* of the virtue of integrity to be able to possess the capacity of virtuous judgement, wherein the virtue of integrity should be characterized as a ‘cluster concept’.³² The latter contains various qualities of character and multiple ‘motivations and thoughts’ regarding more than one moral capacity or end, which are united in the urgency and sincerity they exemplify in advancing the public sphere. In that way, the *framework of virtuous judgement* closely follows the definition proceeded by Cox, La Caze and Levine (2003), as they regard integrity as “a complex and thick virtue term” which “is not reducible to the workings of a single moral capacity”(Cox et al., 2021). The criticism that conceptualizing integrity as a ‘cluster concept’ prevents us from being able to make explicit and unambiguous judgement about individual instances of action, expressed by Audi and Murphy, will not be completely resolved in my conceptualization (Cox et al., 2021). However, the inability to make absolute unequivocal judgements results from the indistinctiveness that is fundamentally entrenched in the concept of integrity due to its open and ambiguous nature. To deny the ambiguity and multidimensionality confined in the concept of integrity with the aim of enabling the possibility to make explicit and unambiguous judgements seems to disregard the fundamental nature of integrity. Nevertheless, the norms, values, principles, and virtuous judgement offer tools to at least further our understanding of integrity *of governance*, despite that the label ‘integrity’ remains to encompass a wide range of applicability, as a consequence of its multidimensional and ambiguous nature. These tools aspire to guide judgement about whether or not public officials acted with integrity in particular

³¹ The role of action highlights a difference between the multidimensional definition of integrity of governance and a mere passive list of related societal norms, values and principles.

³² It is not feasible to offer a substantiated conclusive list of virtues within the scope of this text. However, inspiration can be found in the Aristotelean virtues (Book II, II and IV in *Nicomachean Ethics*), Calhoun’s (2000, p.259-260) civility, as well as equity, trustworthiness, accountability, open-mindedness, benevolence, (self-)discipline, (social-)responsibility, moral reflection, rationality, fairness, firmness and independence (against perverse influences).

instances, and hopefully contribute to reducing the ambiguity of integrity in the more narrowly defined context of governance.

But how should we understand the cluster virtue of integrity of governance? Public officials act virtuously when they possess the disposition to determine the appropriate course of action between two extremes of deficient or excessive action aimed at *eudaimonia* (flourishing).³³ It requires intermediate feelings and attitudes, in the sense that governmental action is proportional and adapted to the particular context. Virtuousness is predominantly acquired through practical habituation and experience, not by nature or theoretical knowledge. The former bolsters the necessary interrelational and deliberative abilities. However, rational responsiveness is required, as it allows enjoying pleasure resulting from good action, and the development of appropriate emotions (Aristotle, 2009). Aristotle emphasizes the importance of *prônésis* (practical wisdom or prudence). A public official possesses practical wisdom when he is:

without qualification good at deliberation (...) [when he] is capable of aiming in accordance with calculation at the best for man of things attainable by action. (...) [He] must also recognize the particulars; for it is practical, and practice is concerned with particulars. (...) [This includes] ‘political wisdom’; this has to do with action and deliberation, for a decree is a thing to be carried out in the form of an individual act (Aristotle, 2009, p.109).

Public officials might possess theoretical knowledge of significant worth. However, they need practical wisdom to sufficiently apply this universal knowledge in particular instances, as the appropriate application of knowledge is context-dependent. The necessity of practical wisdom is even more pressing when we consider integrity of governance, considering its ambiguous nature, while the correct understanding of the norms, values and principles related to integrity often requires interpretation.

Moreover, there is often an interplay between norms, values and virtues. As different virtues are closely related to and/or overlap with various norms and values (e.g., reliability as virtue, which relates to the idea that public officials should act in a predictable, deliberate, non-biased way). The virtues and moral education and character enable public officials to sufficiently assess the situation. They are able to recognize the relevant fundamental principles and norms and values, to determine the right action which that particular context requires. The (corresponding) virtues inform the appropriate interpretation of the norms and values. The latter also concerns the space wherein the individuality of public officials enters the stage. Practical wisdom is required to exercise virtuous judgement. The preceding also entails that public officials who lack the required virtuousness will (often) have an insufficient capacity of judgement to act with integrity, despite the possibility that he is largely aware of the existing norms and values, as they are unable to navigate themselves through the grey area in which – a lack of – integrity often emerge.

³³ Integrity as a ‘cluster concept’ of virtue in an Aristotelean fashion can also be identified in Cox et al. (2003).

Chapter 3: A critical examination of the multidimensional account of integrity of governance

This chapter demonstrates how the *multidimensional account* accounts for various criticism on the incorporated accounts, whereafter I will address some potential challenges against the *multidimensional account*.

§3.1: The multidimensional account resolves various criticism existent within the incorporated accounts

This section explains how the conceptualization above accounts for some additional criticism. The *moral content of integrity*, as well as ‘standing for community values’ (ML 2), account for the critique that (4) *people are deemed to act with integrity in circumstances far exceeding the scope of fundamental commitments* (identity-view)(Cox et al., 2021). Calhoun (1995, p.245) argues in reply to accounts which conceptualize personal integrity in terms of ‘acting steadfastly true to their commitments’:

It would seem, then, that on matters that are not strongly connected to one's sense of self-identity, one cannot act without integrity. But this does not seem right. We recognize persons with integrity not only by their willingness to incur great losses for the sake of what they hold most dear, but also by their conscientiousness in smaller matters having no strong bearing on "the agent's broad conception of his or her life's direction." We expect persons of integrity not only to stand up for their most deeply held and highly endorsed commitments, but to treat all of their endorsements as ones worthy of being held by a reflective agent.

The claim that integrity entails more than only fundamental convictions is also valid in relation to integrity of governance. For it is improbable that we would regard public officials as acting with integrity when they act in accordance with the fundamental principles in society, but fail to act morally or socially acceptable on the basis of reflection outside the sphere of fundamental affairs (e.g., they exhibit obnoxiousness, rudeness or unruliness, or lack prudence in lawmaking or policy-execution in the context of less significant policy areas). The *multidimensional account* does not encounter the criticism of narrowness: (a) those involved in the public sphere are in *every instance* of governmental action deemed show proper mutual respect; (b) the content of the fundamental principles suggests a broad threshold of minimum requirements to possess integrity, as people are required to act in accordance with civility, private autonomy, and equal political liberty.

Furthermore, ‘standing for community values’ (ML 2) accounts in conjunction with the *moral content of integrity* for the criticism that several accounts of personal integrity would: (5) *discard legitimate aspects worth pursuing by* (5a) *restricting the scope of integrity to matters meeting the narrow conditions of the categorical imperative* (self-constitution), or (5b) *requiring settling all self-conflict* (self-integration)(Cox et al., 2021). Calhoun (1995, p.241) argues that “the integrated-self picture of integrity (...) reduces integrity to volitional unity. As a result, it obscures the fact that persons can have reason to resist resolving conflicting commitments and ambivalence about their own desires, and thus that resisting wholeheartedness may sustain integrity rather than be symptomatic of its absence”. In addition,

Cox et al. (2021) argue that “The cost of the resolution of all self-conflict may be a withdrawal from aspects of life that make genuine claims upon us. Resolving self-conflict at the expense of fully engaging with different parts of one’s life does not seem to contribute to one’s integrity”. The criticism that satisfying the categorical conditions or resolving all self-conflict would discard legitimate aspects of life is also valid in relation to integrity of governance.

On the one hand, it would reduce the scope of integrity to matters which are compatible with the rationale of the categorical imperative (5a), while integrity of governance should be applied more broadly.³⁴ The *multidimensional account* accounts for (5a). For the strict duty to act in accord with the categorical imperative only applies to the part of the content of policies of fundamental nature; which requires adherence to the fundamental principles of integrity of governance (ML 1). Yet, this demanding requirement does not apply to the part of the content of specific laws or policy execution beyond the fundamental sphere – as long as the latter are generally acceptable to the vast majority of society and adequately reflect the moral beliefs of the community; thereby, express proper mutual respect (ML 2). This allows for a more extensive application of integrity, assigning it to actions and persons beyond the restricted scope of the categorical imperative. (ML 2) allows *some* room for personal interpretation in determining what is in the public interest. The advantage of the latter is that it does not require public officials to completely abandon identity-conferring commitments, as (ML 1) would entail. It thereby preserves a part of the individual character of public officials when they execute professional activities. Williams (1981) exemplifies the disputable nature of the abandonment of identify-conferring commitments in his critique on Kantian moral theory, which could also be employed in view of (ML 1). Furthermore, while (ML 1) might *constrain* the individual character of *public officials* in performing governmental action, it simultaneously *guarantees* the conditions for *citizens* to let their actions reflect their identity: (ML 1) ensures that citizens can exercise their private and public autonomy, as it requires that governmental action of fundamental nature needs to be in accordance with public reason. Social awareness of widely shared societal beliefs about what constitutes the backbone of society and integrity of governance informs which principles are *fundamental* principles (condition: public reason), and what are the (derivate) norms and values which fall outside the latter scope (condition: mutual respect). This depends on the type of society and form of government. Admittedly, this leaves room for discussion and interpretation. However, this is unavoidable, considering the context-dependent nature of integrity of governance.

On the other hand, it would be unfeasible to *resolve* all the conflict between the convictions of citizens (5b). The *multidimensional account* by no means requires that public officials need to settle all conflict between the convictions present in society (*absolute settlement*). Public officials are merely required to be able to establish which convictions are most endorsed and widely shared *at that time* (*temporary establishment*). These prevalent convictions should inform the actions of public officials to bear integrity. Even if it was feasible to settle all conflict between societal convictions, it would still be undesirable, as it would imply complete stagnation in the development of beliefs about the public sphere, while clashing convictions are characteristic to cultural development over time. Yet, to constitute a stable society, public officials need to *temporarily establish* which societal convictions are most

³⁴ See also the reply to criticism (4).

prevalent, which seems to bear legitimacy in guiding governmental action.³⁵ Moreover, public officials should evaluate to what extent the prevalent societal convictions are compatible with the convictions and rights of minority groups. For governmental action on the basis of prevailing convictions should never result in a tyranny of the majority, wherein the rights and convictions of minorities are severely violated; this would be in conflict with the fundamental principles of liberal democracy ruled by law (e.g., equal political liberty and private autonomy).

In addition, the criticism that accounts of self-integration and self-constitution (6) *defend that unreflective satisfaction of desire needs to be completely excluded from experience and consideration by rational reasoning, which comes at the expense of the value which lies in overcoming them*. The ability to overcome temptation may exhibit strength of character, instead of a lack of personal integrity, as Halfon contends (Cox et al., 2021). In the same way, the criticism is valid in regard to integrity of governance. For public officials are deemed to act with integrity when they overcome the temptation to satisfy their personal desires, or desires of a small group of individuals (e.g., when they prevent conflict of interest). A public official would be praised for his integrity when it would become public that he resisted an attempt of certain individuals to perversely influence policies by tempting him with certain forthcoming benefits. However, I concede that the criticism still applies to the fundamental principles (ML 1). Yet, this is not problematic, since it is not unreasonable to subscribe to the belief that ideas which are at odds with the fundamental conditions of liberal democracies ruled by law should be completely excluded from consideration; as we would regard it desirable if these fundamental principles – such as equal political liberty or civility – are beyond question in the general practice of lawmaking and policy-execution. Furthermore, the criticism has no bearing on the formulation of the non-fundamental part of the content of specific laws and policy execution, since (ML 2) does not include the condition that desires need to be categorically excluded from consideration. Personal interests – including desires – can play a part in decision-making in government in the latter sphere. For public officials should overcome desires that exceed the bounds of acceptance by – and fail to display proper respect for – the vast majority of society and its conventional norms and values.

Moreover, the critique on personal integrity as ‘standing for something’: (7) *it lacks an account of what counts as failing to properly respect as distinguished from failing to respect the interests of your fellow-man*. Cox et al. (2021) question how “is one to understand the difference between standing up for one’s view under great pressure and fanatically standing by them?”. In the former, public officials would properly respect other people’s views, while the latter fails to properly respect others. The criticism seems valid in view of integrity of governance, for it seems important for citizens that they are able to determine whether public officials acted fanatically: narrow-mindedness and dogmatism would be at odds with the fundamental principles (equal political liberty, private autonomy, and civility) and the idea that public officials should consider the prevailing convictions adequately. The *multidimensional account* accounts for criticism (7): it could be argued that failing to *properly respect* your fellow men amounts to acting in conflict with the strict duty of public reason enshrined in the fundamental principles (ML 1), as well as acting hostile to what is generally accepted by the vast majority

³⁵ Governmental action on the basis of prevailing convictions would be justified, as the endorsement of the vast majority of society yields legitimacy. Yet, the legitimacy emanating from public endorsement can be undermined or reinforced, depending on whether they are in accordance with the *moral content* and *moral limits of integrity*.

of society in the sphere beyond the fundamental principles (ML 2). Admittedly, this leaves room for interpretation, which is however inherent to the ambiguous nature of integrity of governance.

§3.2: The multidimensional account in reply to potential challenges

First, I will account for the objection that the account might be too demanding (*'objection of demandingness'*), which is mostly relevant in view of the requirement that public officials should identify themselves with the community. This requires that public officials internalize the prevailing substantive convictions regarding the norms, values and principles of society by means of social-awareness. However, to what extent is it possible for public officials to estimate the relative position of the norms, values and principles in a hierarchical order? How can public officials determine which prevailing convictions are so profound that governmental action should continue to reflect them, as they constitute the identity of civil society? And how much can we expect from public officials to achieve the social awareness which is necessary to identify these prevailing convictions?; as it requires that they inform themselves and organize and attend social events, while their time is often largely absorbed by the day-to-day obligations at work. When does a public official have 'sufficient' social awareness to be able to act with integrity? What does 'unceasing care-taking of the social awareness to subsist' entail? To a lesser extent, is the condition of possible rational endorsement by society not too demanding in view of our general understanding of governmental action?

In reply, I will start by addressing the alleged demandingness of community-identification and social awareness. I agree that the conditions set high standards for public officials to act with integrity. However, I contend that these conditions are achievable, since they mostly function as solid guidelines, not as absolute requirements to the extent that they are unachievable. I argue that integrity of governance is not a strict 'all-or-nothing' bidimensional quality, which imposes an unfeasible burden on public officials, since integrity operates on a scale. Therein, it *is* possible to assert that public officials acted with *sufficient* rather than *insufficient* integrity – which would in the general usage of the word purport to saying that someone possesses integrity or lacks integrity, respectively. This sufficient level of integrity is the minimum threshold public officials should achieve. Public officials are not required to *absolutely* identify with the community to achieve this threshold, as adequate embodiment would suffice. Public officials should be sensitive of the most profound convictions, the hierarchical order of convictions, and the convictions which bear urgency, priority and prevail in conflict. Though by no means does the *multidimensional account* require them to hold the absolute truth. But what does adequate embodiment pertain to? This is rather difficult to answer conclusively, following the ambiguous nature of integrity of governance. In the end, it depends on the assessment of the professionals and citizens involved in light of the context, in which the various tools discussed might offer guidance. Moreover, social awareness can be acquired in diverse ways (see §2.1 for some examples), or cultivated in extension of the activities that public officials employ in their capacity as individual citizen (e.g., member of a sports team, attending musical or cultural festivals of a diverse nature).

As discussed, in relation to the demandingness of rational endorsement of governmental action, I concede that (ML 1) demands much from public officials. However, the latter can be justified on account that: (1) (ML 1) does not concern every part of the content of governmental

action, as it only pertains to the sphere which concerns fundamental principles; (2) while the crucial essence of the fundamental principles of integrity for liberal democracies ruled by law signifies the importance of adherence to (ML 1). Simultaneously, the condition for mutual respect in (ML 2) does not seem to bear undue demandingness. In regard to the challenge of demandingness of the *multidimensional account* in general, I will assert the following. Firstly, integrity of governance often requires *omitting* certain actions in order to act with integrity (e.g., do not commit corruption), instead of *performing* unreasonable actions, which bears a less demanding burden. Secondly, the *intent* of public officials is of significant importance when their (non-)action is assessed, as this is the factor that induces resentment. The abilities and skills of public officials are often taken into account in the corresponding judgement. The consequentialist criterion of actually achieving certain ends rather relates to good governance than integrity. However, it is not unreasonable to involve the extent in which public officials could have known that their abilities would fall short of achieving the intended ends, thereby causing a threat to integrity of governance (e.g., public officials who blatantly overpromise what they are reasonably able to accomplish). Thirdly, we are justified to expect a lot from public officials, considering the nature of their position and the fact that they act in public interest; which applies even more to politically appointed and elected officials, in contrast to administrative officials. The latter is accentuated by the idea that governmental action with integrity breeds trust. This enables us to rely on the policy-makers and policy-executors to formulate adequate conditions which facilitate coordination in the public sphere and pursuit of (individual) goals – both relatively undisputed justifications for the legitimacy of the authority of government in the first place.

Second, another challenge we may encounter is the ‘*objection of disagreement*’. For conflict might arise about the content of the prevailing convictions in society, which can occur both *internal-external* (conflict between personal and public convictions) and *external-external* (unclarity or divergence with respect to convictions). Firstly, personal integrity might be in conflict with integrity of governance. For example, when personal convictions are incompatibly and incommensurably at odds with societal norms and values. It may be assumed that such conflicts will not occur very often, as the fundamental principles and moral norms and values of integrity in society are generally regarded as relatively uncontroversial, and are oftentimes internalized in personal convictions. Nevertheless, conflict may still arise, which will be more probable within the sphere of less-fundamental governmental action. In that case, we can expect public officials to subjugate their personal beliefs to societal convictions. The bandwidth of acceptable governmental action determines what citizens can reasonably and justifiably expect from public officials. It informs whether public officials acted culpable in lacking integrity, which renders them liable to civil society. If public officials’ personal set of norms and values exceeds the perimeters of the *multidimensional account* shaped by society, it would be reasonable and far from unfair that public officials would either (1) submit their contrasting beliefs in favour of societal norms, values and principles when they perform actions in their professional capacity, or (2) withdraw from a position in the public sphere altogether.

Secondly, the occurrence of external-external conflict, resulting from unclarity or discord about (i) which conviction prevails when two convictions are compared, or (ii) the proper interpretation of the content of a prevailing conviction. As discussed, sufficient social awareness will offer public officials tools to adequately identify the (content of) the prevailing

conviction. However, when unclarity remains, it would be wise if public officials exercise restraint and suspend judgement about the appropriate course of governmental action, especially when they are not appointed democratically. It would be wise if politically appointed and administrative officials refer the issue (back) to elected officials when the need for governmental action relating to these unclear convictions is pressing or of great importance. In that case, elected officials are more justified to decide which conviction prevails or how it should be interpreted, since they enjoy democratic legitimacy. If the need for governmental action is less urgent or less substantial, public officials might disclose (the content of) the prevailing conviction by conducting research themselves, request another government body, or hire an external research agency. Moreover, they might contact the representatives and embassies of similar states, establish a thinktank with all the stakeholders, or hold a(n) (advisory) referendum.

However, public officials are not always able to suspend their judgement and action.³⁶ For example, when administrative officials are required to execute the ministerial policy stance, which may conflict with strong personal convictions (internal-external), possibly entrenched in other legitimate grounds (external-external)(e.g., human rights treaties). In the introduction we saw that Dutch civil servants publicly expressed their discontent with the government's policy stance in relation to the Israel-Palestina conflict. In view of such conflicts of convictions, it would be desirable if the systems are better equipped to facilitate the expression of the concerns of administrative officials. The latter is desirable, as it stimulates the conversation about which substantive convictions prevail within the organisation and society at large, and reduces the discrepancy between personal and/or public convictions and diverging public convictions. However, complete or sufficient alignment might be out of reach through the internal means existent within the organisation. The starting point would be that public officials submit their personal convictions in favour of societal norms, values and principles in their *professional activities*. Yet, it is possible that the ministerial policy stance is ambiguous or in conflict with the societal norms, values and principles. In that case, public officials might advance different ways to defend their convictions (e.g., protest). Whether the latter is justified depends on the extent to which the public official's actions (1) did not hazardously undermine the power of the government apparatus, especially when his disobedient action involved his professional activities and duties, (2) the significance of the issue and the convictions at hand (e.g., human rights violations *versus* disagreements about convictions of less far-reaching nature), (3) the bandwidth of acceptable governmental action (discussed in chapter 2).

Third, the '*objection of inconclusiveness*'. The *multidimensional account* might be challenged on account that it is still equivocal in its entirety, as well as in certain individual respects. For example, it may be opposed that we should pursue a more definite concept of integrity of governance, and that the *multidimensional account* might inherent a lot of criticism from the various accounts from which it draws inspiration. However, I attempted to show that the *multidimensional account* rather *accounts for* the existing criticism, than that it is *susceptible to* the criticism (see §2.3). Furthermore, I contend that a more unequivocal account is out of reach, considering the inherently ambiguous nature and the importance of

³⁶ In relation to both internal-external or external-external conflict between the prevailing conviction.

interpretation which results from its practical essence.³⁷ The part of the content of policies to which a certain consideration belongs is also somewhat ambiguous, since what pertains to the backbone conditions of liberal democracy ruled by law might be subject to discussion. Yet, I contend that this ambiguousness is inherently entrenched in integrity of governance, which emphasizes the importance of prudent judgement on the basis of societal norms, values and principles in particular instances. Moreover, moral psychology and feelings – such as anger, shame, guilt, remorse, indignation – might play a part in the capacity of public officials to determine which actions bear integrity (e.g., they expect feelings of shame and/or guilt if they execute a certain action), as well as when civil society assess the actions of public officials afterwards. These emotions could *partially* inform whether a governmental action possesses the quality of integrity in a particular context, as it generally reflects internalized convictions based on the prevalent norms, values and principles in society. The latter might suggest the desirability of involving the electorate in integrity investigations within public administration.

³⁷ E.g., similar to democracy as essentially contested concept.

Conclusion

To conclude, the objective of this inquiry was to examine ‘How can we define the concept of integrity for the purpose of realizing an adequate tool to normatively assess the actions of public officials in both a desirable and feasible way?’. The research question was motivated by an increase in debates, the seemingly surging number of affairs, and the far-reaching implications of integrity violations, against the backdrop of persisting uncertainty about the empirical scope, doubt about the availability of an unambiguous definition, and a lack of normative accounts. Integrity often operates within a grey area in practice, which was illustrated by three examples (activist civil servants, justified representation *versus* conflict of interest, indistinctiveness of transgressive behaviour). I examined the practice of assessing governmental action on the basis of integrity from a conceptual instead of empirical standpoint. I aspired to: (1) demonstrate how the relevant norms, values, virtues and principles relate to integrity in a fundamental way; (2) contribute to reducing the ambiguous nature of integrity of governance; (3) advance the ongoing process of defining integrity as an ‘essentially contested concept’.

The *multidimensional account* succeeded in the preceding at least *in some degree*. First, I defended why integrity of governance should be regarded as an ‘essentially contested concept’. For integrity is (1) *appraisive*, (2) internally complex, (3) initially variously describable, (4) ‘open’ in character, and (5) susceptible to appreciation from and towards competing accounts; wherein accounts of integrity (6) aim at an exemplary version of the same concept, and are (7) able to sustain and develop the attainment by continuously revitalizing our understanding. Secondly, I argued that the prevalent aspects of integrity in the existing accounts cannot be reduced to one narrow definition. Thus, a definition which is able to context-independently and unambiguously explain the nature of integrity in the broad sense seems unavailable. However, I argued that *is* possible to formulate sufficient definitions in regard to particular contexts, including governance, as I incorporated various elements from the existing philosophical accounts of integrity into the *multidimensional account*.

The *multidimensional account* defines integrity of governance on the basis of five aspects, which operate jointly as necessary elements. Public officials should identify themselves with the political community. They accomplish the latter when they steadfastly embody the essential convictions which prevail in the public sphere. Public officials should convert these convictions into harmonized governmental action when they act in their professional capacity (FL). It requires that public officials continuously retain ‘social awareness’, which entails that they stay in touch with their fellow-man to prevent ignorance or self-deception about society’s fundamental beliefs and goals. Additionally, the *multidimensional account* requires that public officials should not succumb under (irrational) desires motivated by personal interest, or the personal interest of a small group of individuals. The actions of public officials need to be generally acceptable and exemplify proper mutual respect within both the fundamental and non-fundamental sphere of governmental action (ML 2); while governmental action needs to be susceptible to rational endorsement if it concerns the part of the content of policies which relate to the fundamental principles (ML 1). The *moral limits* constitute the minimum moral threshold to act with integrity in the public sphere, while the *moral content* encloses the substantial normative substance. The latter pertains to the norms, values and fundamental principles in society, in which the latter includes private autonomy, equal political liberty, and civility (MC

1). Furthermore, the moral content is comprised of the framework of virtuous judgement (MC 2), since the presence of integrity seems to depend on whether public officials possess sufficient practical wisdom to determine the appropriate course of action. For they should interpret the principles, norms, values and laws in view of the particular context.

The *multidimensional account* accounts for several criticism: (1) it is comprised of normative content and ends worth pursuing, and does not merely consist of formal limits; (2) it has a broad scope, does not require absolute settlement of all conflict between the convictions of citizens, and is not entirely restricted to the categorical imperative; (3) in certain circumstances, it affords the possibility that public officials can contribute to integrity by surmounting instead of completely excluding desires from consideration; (4) it provides an account of properly respecting your fellow-man, as the latter amounts to satisfying (ML 1) and (ML 2). Furthermore, the challenges of demandingness, disagreement and indistinctiveness do not invalidate the account. Firstly, the demandingness can be put into perspective, as integrity can be acquired in very diverse ways and is expressed *in ratio*, which allows public officials to possess ‘sufficient integrity’ without being the greatest saint that ever lived. Moreover, integrity often requires omitting certain acts, instead of performing them, in which the intent of public officials is decisive. And we are justified to expect a lot from public officials, given their role in the public sphere. Secondly, if there is disagreement between the public official’s personal convictions and the prevailing substantive convictions in society, the public official is required to act in accordance with the latter in his professional capacity. Whereas public officials should suspend their judgment if disagreement emerges about which conviction properly prevails as substantive conviction in society, or what its content is, and let elected officials decide if the issue is pressing or of great importance. Thirdly, the indistinctiveness within the account of integrity cannot be *completely* resolved. However, this inability necessarily follows from the fact that ambiguity is inherently entrenched within the concept of integrity. Nonetheless, the norms, values, fundamental principles and the framework of virtuous judgement offer tools to reduce the ambiguity. The examination thereby fulfilled the three aspirations set out at the start of the inquiry, which were reproduced in the end of the first paragraph of the conclusion.

Concluding, what are the implications of this theoretical endeavour for the practice assessing the actions of public officials? I contend that the framework of the *multidimensional account* can offer guidance in determining whether actions presumably possess integrity, both in future acts as well as in assessing governmental action in hindsight. For example, integrity committees can utilize the normative tools discussed above. In particular, when such a committee establishes whether public officials exemplified virtuous judgement in determining their actions on the basis of the prevailing substantive convictions in society. To illustrate, when someone is accused of acting in conflict of interest, it can be useful to question whether the public officials unjustifiably favoured the interests of particular individuals at the cost of other people’s equal political liberty. The latter seems logical and straightforward, but being profoundly aware of what is really at stake in certain situations is valuable, as it reveals why certain actions are at the heart *with* or *without* integrity within the context of liberal democracies ruled by law. Especially, in matters wherein the grey area established by law does not provides solace, committee members may ask the fundamental question whether the action is compatible with the fundamental principles underpinning the legitimacy of state authority and the norms of civil conduct which govern society. For instance, within a particular context, should we judge

the representation of the interests of certain individuals compatible within the acceptable bandwidth constituted by civility and equal private and public autonomy? Was the action induced by virtuous judgement? The approach of questioning actions in the above manner against the backdrop of legal provisions will illuminate the grey area wherein integrity operates, exposing whether an action falls within the dark side of lacking integrity, or the bright side of possessing integrity. In which the framework of the *multidimensional account* might function as a flickering flashlight, which requires high maintenance, as the lens needs to be adequately adjusted to the obscure and ambiguous reality which plays out before us.

Sjoerd Vooijs

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