

Unconditional Commitments, Integrity, and the Polity



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Abstract

An important philosophical position holds that an agent's moral integrity is entirely parasitic upon morality's overall requirements. According to this "integrity skepticism," we can only know what our moral integrity requires once we know how, all things considered, we morally ought to act. In this essay's opening part, focused on individual ethics, I present two main arguments against integrity skepticism. The first argument is that since agents have important moral reasons to incorporate certain unconditional commitments into their self-conception, it is unfair to criticize agents who go on to treat these commitments as an independent factor in their moral deliberation. The second argument links agents' unconditional moral commitments to their duty to sustain self-respect. In the essay's latter part, I seek to show that parallel versions of these two arguments provide even stronger grounds for resisting integrity skepticism regarding collective affairs. Specifically, I contend that integrity skepticism fails when it comes to liberal-democratic polities as collective agents: such polities have their own morally important integrity, which is not parasitic upon them "doing the right thing." Rather, a liberal polity's moral integrity is an independent moral factor informing the analysis of what the polity ought to do.