Public Integrity: from anti-corruption rhetoric to substantive moral ideal

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Abstract

Recently, policy actors have posited the promotion of public integrity as a new response to corruption in government and the decline in trust in public institutions. However, often, this use of the term 'public integrity' amounts to little more than rhetoric. Upon closer inspection, for many of those advocating its adoption, 'public integrity' just means the absence of corruption, or whatever policy instruments will best prevent corruption. Thus, the putative new 'public integrity agenda' is not new at all, but rather a rhetorical rebranding of the longer-standing anticorruption agenda. In this paper, we argue that such rhetorical use of the term 'public integrity' is not harmless, but in fact risks damage to the overall cause of good governance and in particular the prospects of a genuinely novel, standalone, substantive 'public integrity' agenda.

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Introduction

Surveys repeatedly indicate that public trust in institutions is in long-term decline, notably those most central to the organisation and delivery of political ends (see, for example, Inglehart et al. 2014, Eurobarometer 2018, Edelman 2020, Pew Research Center 2020). Such a decline in public trust can be attributed to many factors, including such things as variable economic performance, declining social capital, less inclusivity, or post-materialism. However, it has been claimed that one of the most significant issues has been an increase in perceptions of corruption (van der Meer 2017). As van der Meer (2017) notes, '[i]n many ways corrupt activities are antithetical to political trust (…) corruption is the epitome of bad-quality government.'

For citizens, corruption tends to be experienced either through direct exposure (in settings where it is endemic and bribe-paying is routinised), or via the revelation of scandals involving public figures, or both. It is not our aim here to rehearse the ever more voluminous literature on the nature, impact or determinants of corruption. Instead, the relevance of corruption to our argument is that there has been a growing emphasis in recent years on the need to promote integrity in public life as a response. After decades in which a host of anti-corruption interventions have delivered disappointing outcomes in terms of any perceived decline in the problem, increasingly appeals are being made to the need for a positive vision to be promoted, based around the idea that integrity may offer a more constructive way forward. Further, it is claimed that not merely will public integrity combat corruption, it will also pave the way to re-establishing public trust more generally. In the words of an OECD Report (2009):

> Public sector integrity management … has been high on the agenda in many OECD countries for over a decade now. Underlying this evolution is a growing understanding that integrity is a keystone of good governance, a condition for all other activities of government not only to be legitimate and trusted, but also to be effective.

There is a simple and appealing logic to this turn towards public integrity: since integrity is necessarily opposed to corruption, then by definition it will force corruption into retreat. Further, since agents with integrity are necessarily trustworthy, then by definition they will deserve to be trusted by citizens (even if further perception factors must be resolved to ensure that they actually are trusted by their citizens).

The problem with this new public integrity agenda, however, is that it is largely mere rhetoric. For most public policy actors, 'public integrity' is just another term for 'anti-corruption'. Thus, public integrity does not offer a new response to an old problem. It simply offers a new name for the old response to that problem. But such rhetoric is not merely a harmless form of positive 'rebranding'. It comes with real costs for the cause of good

governance, and in particular the prospects of a genuinely novel and substantive 'public integrity' agenda. In this paper we seek to demonstrate why that should be so.

The paper proceeds as follows. In section 1, we set out four concerns with the use of 'public integrity' as simply anti-corruption rhetoric. First, it is cognitively dissonant, since any faithful use of the term 'integrity' entails a much higher standard of behaviour than merely being 'not corrupt.' Second, this 'misuse' of the term leads to its 'abuse', as policy actors draw the kinds of logical implications that actual integrity, not merely the absence of corruption, implies. In particular, policy actors draw the assumption that public 'integrity' provides sufficient grounds for public trust, when in fact their understanding of it as the absence of corruption remains insufficient. Third, such misuse and abuse of 'integrity' distracts attention cosmetically away from actually reforming the anti-corruption agenda. And finally, as a consequence, it risks discrediting a genuine, substantive, and novel 'public integrity' agenda before it has even started.

In section 2, the paper looks at some existing attempts to define 'public integrity' as a standalone, substantive ideal. We argue that they tend to exhibit three key problems. First, they fail to define public integrity in a way that is sensitive to the institution-specific ways in which public officers must act in order to be genuinely praiseworthy within their public roles. Second, they often tend to define public integrity merely by further, albeit higher, minimum standards than 'not being corrupt'. This leaves undefined the standard of action required within a public officer's discretion. Third, attempts to define the standard by which we should judge such discretion tend to defer to vague recommendations to be 'just', 'ethical' or 'moral' that fail to make an adequate distinction between integrity in public and private life.

Therefore, in section 3 we propose a different, 'institution-first' conception of public integrity as a substantive moral ideal. On this view, a public institution as a whole, has public integrity if it has a robust disposition to pursue its purpose, efficiently, within the constraints of legitimacy, and consistent with its commitments. And a public officer has integrity if she has a robust disposition to support the integrity of her institution within the course of her duties.

Finally, in section 4, we return to draw out some of the implications of this proposed, substantive public integrity agenda as it bears upon the current anti-corruption agenda.

Integrity as a residual of anti-corruption

'Integrity', at least as we apply it to individuals in their private lives, names a complex moral ideal. Whilst philosophers debate the precise content of this ideal, they broadly agree that its core involves *consistency* between an individual's values; and *coherence* between those values and actual behaviours (Williams 1973, McFall 1987, Monaghan 2017, Montefiore 1999). It implies *permissibility* in actions, since in ordinary circumstances,[1] it is always morally permissible to act with integrity. It is also invariably morally *praiseworthy*, even if

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[1] Arguably, 'dirty hands' scenarios create a principled exception: (Walzer 1973)

we happen to disagree with the particular values that the individual acts upon (Cox, LaCaze, and Levine 1999). It also entails *trustworthiness*, in that having integrity always provides rational grounds to trust an agent (Calhoun 1995, 237, Philp 2007, 152, Zimmerman 2009, Heywood and Rose 2015, 112). Finally, the individual's disposition to manifest all these qualities must be robust, across time and circumstances, that is, it must be a virtue. In fact, as a number of authors have argued, integrity is not merely *a* virtue – one amongst many – but *the* higher-order virtue that requires bringing the other virtues into balance (McFall 1987) (Taylor and Gaita 1981, 156). As Cheshire Calhoun states, integrity is 'a master virtue, that is, less a virtue in its own right than a pressing into service of a host of other virtues — self-knowledge, strength of will, courage, honesty, loyalty, humility, civility, respect, and self-respect' (Calhoun 1995, 260).

We might assume, therefore, that any attempt to lift such a concept from private life, and to promote some analogue in the public realm *qua* 'public integrity', should do so in a way that entails a similar set of qualities in public office: *consistency, coherence, permissibility, praiseworthiness, trustworthiness* and *virtue*. However, this has not been the predominant use of the term 'integrity' within current good governance discourse. Rather than pressing other 'public' virtues into its service, as Calhoun describes, instead 'public integrity' is itself pressed into the service of 'anti-corruption'. It either refers to the absence of corruption; or to whatever structures of rules, norms and incentives are conducive to the prevention of corruption; or, it is not defined at all, but left to name an explicitly anti-corruption focussed project, organisation or index. Let us illustrate with some high-profile examples.

One of most well-known approaches to assessing 'integrity' at a jurisdictional level is Transparency International's National Integrity System (NIS) assessment. There has been much written on the NIS (see Langseth, Stapenhurst, and Pope 1997, Doig and McIvor 2003, Head, A.J. Brown, and Connors 2008, Brown and Heinrich 2017), but for our purpose the key point is that this approach is described in terms of anti-corruption rather than by reference to any conception of integrity: 'The National Integrity System evaluates key 'pillars' in a country's governance system, *both in terms of their internal corruption risks and their contribution to fighting corruption in society at large* [emphasis added]' (Transparency International 2020). The background rationale and methodology document in turn talks of the importance of the national integrity system for combating corruption, but at no point discusses what is understood by 'integrity' other than, by implication, an absence of corruption (Transparency International 2011).

Transparency International also runs an award-winning week-long School on Integrity, described as 'an annual state-of-the-art anti-corruption and accountability training for future leaders' (Transparency School 2020). The detailed seven-day programme includes sessions on such things as political corruption, measuring corruption, the moral psychology of corruption, money and politics, role of the media in tackling corruption, organised crime, advocacy campaigns and so forth – but there is not a single session devoted to discussing either integrity *per se* or public integrity management more broadly. The course handbook and suggested readings similarly make barely any mention of integrity, beyond this brief definition in a list of key terms: 'Integrity is behaviours and actions consistent with a set of moral or ethical principles and standards, embraced by individuals and institutions, *that create a barrier to corruption* [emphasis added]' (Transparency School 2019).

When the US chapter of Transparency International lost its official accreditation at the start of 2017 (Transparency International 2017), it subsequently reconstituted itself as Coalition for Integrity (C4I), a new NGO with a mission 'to combat corruption and promote integrity in the public and private sectors' (C4I 2017b). In its website section headed 'What We Do', the main entry on 'private sector integrity' talks of the risks from corruption and the organisation's support for allies that operate with high standards of integrity and transparency, offering assistance for 'companies in adopting clear anti-corruption policies and effective anti-corruption procedures' (C4I 2017a). Yet, there is no discussion anywhere on the C4I website of what integrity means beyond, implicitly, absence of corruption.

Another organisation with integrity in its title, the Washington DC-based NGO, Global Integrity, is committed to supporting locally led efforts to solve governance related challenges and amongst its outputs are the Africa Integrity Indicators. These assess 'key social, economic, political and anti-corruption mechanisms at the national level in all 54 African countries' (Global Integrity 2020). Some of the indicators look specifically at 'public management integrity' and 'civil service integrity', but nowhere in the public-facing material available through the GI website is there an explanation of what is understood by 'integrity'. The same organisation previously published from 2006 to 2013 an annual Global Integrity Report, described as 'an essential guide to anti-corruption institutions and mechanisms around the world […that] *evaluates both anti-corruption legal frameworks and the practical implementation and enforcement of those frameworks* [emphasis added]' (Global Integrity 2012).

The recently launched Index of Public Integrity (IPI), developed by the European Research Centre for Anti-Corruption and State-Building (ERCAS) in Berlin, 'assesses a society's *capacity to control corruption and ensure that public resources are spent without corrupt practices* [emphasis added]' (Mungiu-Pippidi et al. 2017). The index is designed to provide policy makers and civil society leaders with a measure of corruption that is objective, transparent and – in contrast to the most frequently cited indices such as the Corruption Perceptions Index – actionable. However, it remains unclear how the index offers any measure of integrity as opposed to control of corruption; again, there is no definition of integrity provided in any element of the website, where the sole mention of the term is in the title of the index.

Another recently launched organisation, formed in 2016, is Integrity Initiatives International (III), which has the aim of combating grand corruption (sometimes known as kleptocracy). III describes its mission as being '*to strengthen the enforcement of criminal laws to punish and deter leaders who are corrupt* and regularly violate human rights, and also to create opportunities for the democratic process to replace them with leaders dedicated to serving their citizens rather than enriching themselves' [emphasis added] (III 2020). To do so, Integrity Initiatives International lists four measures, all of which specifically reference anti-corruption initiatives (including the creation of an international anti-corruption court, one of its central aims), but nowhere on its website is there any reference to or discussion of integrity, other than in the title of the organisation.

Two organisations have sought to provide more in the way of outlining what they understand by integrity. The NGO, Integrity Action, which supports community and citizen monitoring initiatives in the developing world including the establishment of 'integrity clubs' previously offered a formula to describe 'integrity':

$$I = a (A, C, E) - c$$

That is, 'Integrity is the alignment (a) of Accountability (A), Competence (C), and Ethical Behaviour (C), without corruption (c)', understood to include the implementation of corruption control mechanisms (cited in Heywood et al. 2018, 16). However, following a change of organisational leadership, reference to the formula appears to have been removed from the Integrity Action website, which no longer seems to offer either a definition or any discussion of the term 'integrity' in its public facing material (Integrity Action 2020).

Another, though still only partial, exception to the general rule comes from the OECD, which has been at the forefront of efforts through The Council on Public Integrity that in 2017 adopted a new Recommendation on Public Integrity (OECD 2017). Like other organisations, the OECD explicitly links integrity with anti-corruption, but it goes much further in offering not just a clear definition of what it understands by public integrity, but also in outlining a set of mechanisms to help ensure its implementation. According to the OECD, public integrity 'refers to the consistent alignment of, and adherence to, shared ethical values, principles and norms for upholding and prioritising the public interest over private interests in the public sector' (OECD 2017) . Rather than simply identifying an anti-corruption strategy as the sole means to achieve integrity, the OECD Recommendation 'shifts the focus from ad hoc integrity policies to a comprehensive, risk-based approach with an emphasis on cultivating a culture of integrity across the whole of society'. None the less, two of its three pillars still specifically reference anti-corruption: pillar one ('System') stresses the need to have 'a system in place to reduce opportunities for corrupt behaviour', whilst pillar two ('Culture') refers to 'changing a culture to make corruption unacceptable socially' (OECD 2017).

Let us assume that these examples represent a general trend, that is, the use of '(public) integrity' to mean either the absence of corruption, or whatever instruments best serve the goal of anti-corruption. What's the worry? We think there are four problems, and together they underline the need for a much more careful distinction between 'public integrity' and 'the absence of corruption': in rhetoric as much as in research and political practice.

First, and as a preliminary to the other problems, this particular 'public' use of the term 'integrity' is cognitively dissonant. It is not a faithful analogy with the private paradigm. Let us assume that, roughly speaking, corruption – as conventionally understood – is some kind of abuse of public office for private gain (see, Philp 1997). It is true that such corruption is, in ordinary circumstances, neither permissible, nor praiseworthy. We can also concede that, in practice, such corruption involves the breaching of commitments in office, inconsistent with trustworthiness. In this way, then, we might conclude that the absence of corruption is *necessary* for 'integrity' in public office. However, it is certainly not sufficient for integrity in public office: at least, not if 'public integrity', is to be at all faithful to the private concept

from which it derives (Heywood et al. 2018, 4). Public agents can act *impermissibly*, without being corrupt. For example, they might break laws that they are morally obliged to obey for some claimed public, not private gain. Public agents can be *unpraiseworthy* without being corrupt: they can be incompetent, negligent, disorganised, malicious, indifferent, cowardly, without any private gain. Public agents can be *untrustworthy* without being corrupt. For example, they can intentionally renege on commitments made to stakeholders for public, not private gain; or internal incompetence may lead to inflated, conflicting and/or inconsistent commitments, triggering unreliability despite even best intentions. Finally, the mere absence of corruption now, does not entail robustness against corruption in the future. It is no great *'virtue'* to not be corrupt, for example, if current circumstances just happen to make it unattractive.

Such *mis*use of the term 'integrity' might well be conceded by the various actors and organisations we have cited above. However, they might reply that little damage is being done outside the philosopher's armchair. Their claim could be that the term 'integrity' is being deployed to good *rhetorical* use, even if it involves a certain 'corruption' of language. Yet, this is not so clear, given three further problems.

The second problem is that the term 'integrity' is not merely being used, rhetorically, to valorise the absence of corruption as a positive outcome. It is also being *ab*used to license the kinds of logical implications that 'having integrity' implies. 'Public integrity' is lauded as a kind of moral ideal in government, that should be the priority of good governance (OECD 2009, Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston 2017, 4) (de Graaf and van der Wal 2010, Cerrillo i Martínez and Ponce 2017). This may be true, but not if it merely means the absence of corruption. Ridding public institutions of corruption may be a valuable end, but it is not *the* goal of good governance. It is not always virtuous, praiseworthy or permissible to promote more and more anti-corruption measures, at the expense of all other aims of governance (Anechiarico and Jacobs 1996). Yet, the rhetoric of anti-corruption as 'public integrity' appears to license this bad inference. After all, how could more integrity not be virtuous, permissible and praiseworthy?

Further, integrity *qua* the absence of corruption is often posited as *a*, if not *the*, driver of public trust in public institutions (OECD 2009, Albrecht 2002, Nieuwenburg 2007, Ulman 2015). This rhetoric seems to be leveraging the conceptual relationship between integrity and trustworthiness. Having integrity, by definition, entails that one is trustworthy. However, as illustrated above 'not being corrupt' does not, by definition, entail that one is trustworthy. Once again, for example, one can break many commitments to the public without being corrupt. In sum, the rhetorical use of the term 'integrity' is not merely advertising the positive value of fighting corruption, but is actually misrepresenting the product: the absence of corruption might be good but it is neither an unqualified moral ideal of good governance, nor a sufficient rational basis for trust in public institutions.

The third problem is that such misuse and abuse of the term 'integrity' is a distracting cosmetic response to a substantive problem with the current anti-corruption agenda, on its own terms. There is a growing concern that the mainstream approaches to combating corruption have failed to have the desired impact. The apparent lack of success of a wide range of anti-corruption initiatives and measures has been attributed by some in large part

to a combination of methodological nationalism, isomorphic mimicry and a misplaced focus on combating corruption directly rather than addressing its underlying causes (Cooley and Sharman 2017, Heywood 2017, 2018, Rothstein 2018). Indeed, after more than two decades of reform measures that saw corruption largely as a technical, institutional design issue – whereby the key to success was seen to lie in offering broadly uniform technocratic measures with little consideration for specific or local contexts – there is an increasingly widespread recognition that such approaches are ineffective. In consequence, there have been growing calls to 'rethink' prevailing understandings both of corruption itself and of how best to combat it (see, for example, Gevurtz 2007, Wedel 2012, Ackerman 2014, Heywood 2017). This rethink is needed, and a substantive conception of public integrity may need to be central to it. But neither is achieved where the only change is to rebadge past anti-corruption practices as building 'integrity'.

The final problem is that, given such misuse and abuse of the term 'integrity' in order in part to sell an arguably faulty product – that is, the current anti-corruption agenda – there is a risk that a possible new good governance agenda is being discredited before it has even begun. Such an agenda would be one that actually defines a quality of 'public integrity' faithful to its analogue in the private sphere; and asks how that quality may be promoted in public institutions. It is to sketch out this agenda that we now turn.

Current conceptions of public integrity

As foreshadowed by our discussion of the OECD Recommendation on Public Integrity, some public policy actors, both researchers and practitioners, have attempted to establish a less prominent 'public integrity' agenda not reducible to mere 'anti-corruption'. Of note has been the work of Huberts (2014) and what might be termed the 'Netherlands School', perhaps reflecting the influence of the Dutch Labour Party Minister of the Interior, Catherine Isabella ('Ien') Dales, who famously stated in the early 1990s, 'The government either has integrity or it does not. A government without integrity cannot enforce the rule of law. A little bit of integrity is not possible' (cited in Hagedoorn and Hermus 2016, 51). The speech has been seen as the starting point for the focus in The Netherlands on developing an integrity policy, increasingly linked to broader theories of good governance. Initially something of an outlier, it now seems that The Netherlands was a pioneer in its emphasis on promoting public integrity.

Interestingly, although Dales was explicit in her reference to a *government* having integrity or not, approaches to public integrity as a dimension of good governance almost universally conceive of integrity as a property of *individuals*. Such conceptions of 'public officer integrity', however, tend to suffer three shortcomings.

The first and most important shortcoming is that they define the public integrity of officers independently of any conception of the moral ideal of their institutions as a whole (see (Lasthuizen, Huberts, and Heres 2011, Huberts 2014, Heywood and Rose 2015, Heywood et al. 2018, Hall 2018). But this is like trying to tell a member of a team what they should do individually, without first having any idea of what one wants the team to do as a whole. Whilst we might be able to define very minimally what we do *not* want from public officers

in this manner (i.e. not be corrupt), this cannot work when trying to define much more substantially the justifiable, praiseworthy, virtuous, consistent, coherent, and trustworthy behaviours that we *do* want from public officers, which is the central ambition of the 'integrity approach'. Most of what we really want from any *particular* public officer will always be *particular* to her institution, and this applies to a substantive notion of integrity as much as anything else. As such, we need first to offer some moral ideal of public institutions, and only then define the public integrity of individual officers as what they must do, proactively, in a co-ordinated and/or related fashion to achieve this collective goal.

The second shortcoming is that, as a consequence of this focus on the integrity of public officers, current conceptions are restricted to mimicking the 'minimum standards logic' of the anti-corruption approach (Lasthuizen, Huberts, and Heres 2011, Mungiu-Pippidi, Dadašov, and Fazekas 2015). The only difference is that the minimum standards are somewhat 'higher' than 'don't be corrupt.' The difficulty here is, first, that a conception of integrity needs to define truly praiseworthy behaviour, but just meeting minimum standards no matter how high is not particularly praiseworthy. Second, minimum standards always leave some domain of behaviour 'above the line' to discretion with respect to which they pass no judgment. However, it is precisely within the domain of discretionary behaviour that we need to define some regulating norm of integrity. Third, insofar as current conceptions seek to address this issue by eliminating discretion and defining ever higher minimum standards, they become less and less generalizable across different institutions in differing contexts. Thus, for example, even claiming 'being transparent' as a minimum standard of public integrity cannot capture the public integrity of rightfully secretive institutions like, for instance, intelligence agencies. We need a conception of integrity that explains *why* and *when* we want public officers to be transparent.

A third shortcoming is that since acting with public integrity must always be morally permissible, it must, in part, be defined by some moral norm, but without an institutional context we do not have a basis for identifying that norm. An amoral, purely procedural conception of public integrity is a contradiction in terms and would label dutiful compliance with illegitimate government policy as manifesting 'public integrity' and defiance of such policy as not (contra Montefiore 1999). However, divorced from any institutional frame of reference, current conceptions of public integrity fail as follows. First, some conceptions define 'integrity' by reference to obviously moral ideals: 'acting ethically,' 'justly,' 'equitably' and, so on (Brock 2014, 5, Heywood and Rose 2015, 112-3, Fleishman 1981, 53, Brenkert 2004, 5, Lasthuizen, Huberts, and Heres 2011, 387, Thomas 2016, 246). However, whilst it might always be permissible for a private individual to act in such a way, as a public officer it can be impermissible. This is because public officers must always act in ways that are consistent with the scope of their legitimate public authority, and sometimes this precludes acting on what they believe to be best, most just, or most equitable, *even if they may be right*. For example, the Code of Ethics developed by the American Society of Public Administration (ASPA) requires that all public servants 'Promote affirmative action and other initiatives to reduce unfairness, injustice, and inequality in society' (ASPA 2020). But if affirmative action is inconsistent with an existing government's legitimately formed policy on affirmative action, then public servants should *not* be promoting it contrary to that policy. They can of course vote for a change of government in their private capacity, or they could even choose to resign in protest. Yet, even if they were entirely correct on the

substantive value of affirmative action, so long as the government's leadership is acting legitimately then, *as a public official*, they are not permitted to engage in it (see also Dobel 1990, 356). Second, other conceptions seek to define integrity by reference to 'public opinion' (OECD 2009, 7, Huberts 2014, 50-6, Heywood and Rose 2015, 112-3). However, public opinion is often incoherent, ill-defined, and/or prejudiced. Furthermore, performing an action simply because 'everyone else thought it was the right thing to do' would not be to act with integrity. Finally, some conceptions seek to avoid these problems by simply remaining as vague as possible. For example, one might define 'integrity' as being 'directed by a moral compass […] striv[ing] to do the right thing in any given situation and to achieve consistency in their intentions and actions across contexts' (Mintrom 2010, 43). However, whilst true, this is such a general claim that could apply to anyone in or out of public office. Thus, it fails to clarify the specific content of that moral compass, or the particular norms of 'rightness' that apply in public office as opposed to other contexs.

Public office, at least in the modern world, is a team game, and thus praiseworthy, permissible behaviour in that role needs to be defined by one's praiseworthy, permissible contributions to the team. If that conflicts with one's *personal* integrity, then as Alfred Hirschman famously summarised, one might exit, voice one's concerns internally, or choose to remain loyal (Hirschman 1970). But the ideal of *public integrity* must be conceptually independent of personal integrity. Instead, it must be defined by reference to the moral ideal of a public officer's institution.

An institution-first approach to public integrity

Drawing upon work published elsewhere (Kirby forthcoming, Kirby and Webbe 2019), we argue that a public institution has public integrity if it has a robust disposition to pursue its purpose efficiently to the best of its abilities, within the constraints of legitimacy, consistent with its commitments. Here, we outline in five parts the rationale that underpins this moral ideal for public institutions.

(1) *Pursuit of Purpose* – without a clear purpose, a public institution cannot act effectively as a team (Kozlowski and Bell 2003). If there is no overall purpose understood by all of its members, then they are each liable to exercise their discretion within the institution in potentially contradictory and inconsistent ways. One obvious consequence is that the institution will then be more liable to make inconsistent commitments, making it untrustworthy.

(2) *Legitimacy* – both an institution's purpose and activities in pursuit of that purpose must be legitimate, or they will not be permissible (Raz 2009, Ch 5). Legitimacy is a moral notion, but it is distinct from 'ethical,' 'just,' 'equitable,' and so on. Instead, institutions have 'legitimacy' when they have the right to pursue a particular purpose, or act in a certain way, even though others may not see such behaviour as the most ethical, just or equitable, and even though they may be right. In fact, as discussed above, to do the most 'ethical,' 'just' or 'equitable' thing, if it is not legitimate, is not justifiable for a public institution (or public officer).

In general, an institution acquires legitimacy as a function of procedure or other background conditions that determine who, even amidst disagreement, shall make such public decisions, and the scope of that power. Like all moral notions, legitimacy can be deeply contested at a fundamental theoretical level. But in practice, we have a broad agreement on what is legitimate and what is not (generally compliance with the rule of law, democratic norms, constitutional and human rights, and so on). Where we do disagree, however, in any particular situation, then we will indeed disagree about what the moral ideal of a public institution requires. But that is as it should be. By its very nature, realising any moral ideal – individually or collectively - will sometimes be hard, controversial and uncertain, because morality is hard, controversial and uncertain. A good conception of a moral ideal will direct us to precisely the right point of contestation, and thus the most relevant moral debates to have. Our point is that, for public institutions, these debates must be specifically about its *legitimacy*, rather than 'justice,' 'equity', or 'ethics' in general.

(3) *Consistent with its own commitments* – public institutions do not merely have *ex ante* duties to comply with the constraints of legitimacy, but also acquire *ex post* duties to fulfil any commitment that they make to various stakeholders, whether it be for instance to provide clean water for citizens, a certain degree of stability for foreign investors, or to implement new internal employee policies. If an institution does not act in a manner that is consistent with such commitments, however, then it is untrustworthy (Hawley 2014, Kirby, Kirton, and Crean 2018). This means that an institution with public integrity works proactively to keep its commitments, activities and overall purpose consistent. It has the foresight and competence to commit only to what will further its purpose even as circumstances change, the restraint to promise only what it can deliver, and the fortitude to deliver even if a commitment becomes costly.

(4) *Efficiency* – an ideal public institution not only pursues a clear purpose, within constraints of legitimacy, consistent with its own commitments, it also does so whilst being frugal with public resources. It is far more ideal – praiseworthy – to achieve such outcomes with fewer resources than with more.

(5) *Robustness* – the true quality of a public institution is not revealed when conditions are easy, but instead when they are hard. An ideal institution can pursue its legitimate purpose, efficiently, legitimately, consistent with its commitments, across all manner of instability, threats and pressures. It must have systems in place ready for future shocks. There is, however, no universal rule on how best to achieve robustness for all institutions. Principles of institutional competition, minimising discretion, transparency, monitoring and accountability, for example, may *generally* be effective. But for every general principle, there will be a counterexample of an institution, or part of an institution, for which such a principle is counterproductive. The moral ideal demands, therefore, that such general principles are not seen as ends in themselves and applied blindly in cookie-cutter fashion, but instead are applied only where they genuinely serve robustness.

Let us assume that, roughly speaking, these conditions together define the moral ideal of a public institution. The interesting point to note is that they also mark out a kind of *institutional* integrity. The common pursuit of purpose ensures *institutional* coherence and consistency. Acting with the constraints of legitimacy ensures *institutional* permissibility.

Acting consistent with commitments ensures *institutional* trustworthiness. Efficiency in achieving the aforementioned ensures *institutional* praiseworthiness. And, robustness ensures that, together, its qualities go 'deep' as a genuine *institutional* virtue. On this basis, we might call it a conception of 'public institutional integrity.'

With such a definition of public institutional integrity in place, what does it mean for an individual officer to have 'public integrity'? Our argument is that we can now define public officer integrity as meaning that a public officer has a robust disposition, in the course of her public duties, to support the integrity of her institution to the best of her abilities. Three elements of this definition merit emphasis:

(1) *Support of the public integrity of her institution as a whole, to the best of her abilities*. It might be 'permissible' for any public officer to 'stay in her lane' and merely execute her direct powers without taking responsibility for the integrity of the institution as a whole, but it would not be 'praiseworthy.' And it might, arguably, be 'praiseworthy' to use one's discretionary powers to promote other values apart from the integrity of one's institution (eg. some controversial conception of justice) but that would not be permissible, because it would not be legitimate for a public officer. For these reasons, the uniquely permissible *and* praiseworthy activity for any public officer to pursue is the integrity of her institution – whether that happens to be simply doing the best she can with respect to core responsibilities at the current moment, or stepping outside of those responsibilities to draw attention and response to some weakness or threat to institutional integrity overall.

(2) *A robust disposition*, motivated by the value of public institutional integrity. This means that integrity 'interventions' and 'trainings', seeking to shape the ethos of any particular institution should be focussed upon building a clear, shared, and concrete conception of that institution's integrity, and then developing the different ways that different members can best support that institutional integrity. It demands positive, motivated, co-option in the collective task of institutional integrity, rather than merely a top-down delegation and enforcement of each individual's bare minimum, 'integrity responsibilities'.

(3) *In the course of her public duties*. In theory, public officer integrity has no implications for her personal morality, and her personal integrity (compare Dobel 1990). She should be able to keep those worlds separate. However, in practice there are some points of intrusion. First, insofar as one's private circumstances might undermine one's robust disposition to pursue public institutional integrity in one's public life, action must be taken to safeguard the institution. Conflict of interest mechanisms are a paradigmatic example. Secondly, whilst there is no general justification for moralism on behalf of the institution about one's private life, there should be a clear commitment between public officers and their institution that one's private life should not damage the institution's legitimate reputational interests. Finally, where public officer integrity and personal integrity are in conflict, in general the only option is for the officer to resign.

Overall, this conception of public officer integrity might be seen as a kind of 'stewardship' *qua* a kind of general responsibility for the institution as a whole that cuts across any particular set of role obligations. Such a conception of public office goes back at least as far as Benjamin Constant (1988) and Emmanuel Sieyès (2003). More recently, it has been

deployed as a distinctive public service virtue (Buchanan 1996, 426, ASPA 2020, Dobel 2007, 166-7) and, in particular, a virtue of administration leadership (Fairholm 2018). However, our conception is unique in clarifying the precise object of stewardship: it is not the interests of the institution itself, but its integrity. Public officers must be stewards of the integrity of their institution – even if preserving its integrity might sometimes compromise its interests or identity (compare Terry 1995, Selznick 1983). Further, by defining public officer integrity in this way, as being a steward of the integrity of one's institution, many of the supposed tensions between the integrity of a public officer and institutional obligations dissipate (Dobel 1990). The latter is no longer an independently defined attribute brought into the group by individuals, but instead integrity is first and foremost an attribute of the group, and the integrity of individuals is defined as each individual playing their role in realising this collective attrbute. Public integrity is then, by definition, a team-sport.

Finally, this 'institution-first' conception of integrity does not in itself offer a decision-making framework, or an algorithm for defining what is right or wrong in public office. It does not aim to answer all the questions one might have in public office (no theory could), but instead tries to clarify what those questions should be. Thus, instead of 'doing ethical policy anslysis' by asking very general questions – for example, what is the right thing to do; what is most fair here; what is most utility maximising; what is consistent with my own deeply held beliefs? (compare Mintrom 2010) – our conception replaces such questions with more specific ones. We would ask, for instance: what is our institution's purpose; what are our commitments; what does legitimacy require in this context; how can we act on this matter, efficiently, consistent with institutional robustness over time? The answers will often be contextual, difficult to ascertain and/or controversial. But at least public officers will be addressing the right questions, even if they do not always get their answers right.

Conclusion: integrity and (anti-)corruption

Our contention is that this double ideal of 'public integrity', at both institutional and public-officer level, can ground an innovative good governance agenda. However, this leaves the question of how exactly it would fit with the current anti-corruption agenda?

On our definition, corruption can be rightly defined as *an* opposite of public integrity. At an individual level, public officer corruption can be conceived as a kind of disloyalty. It involves substituting one's own private purpose for the proper aim of supporting the integrity of one's own institution. Further, at an institutional level, 'institutional corruption' can be conceived as a particular subversion of institutional integrity. As Lawrence Lessig states: 'Institutional corruption is manifest when there is a systemic and strategic influence which is legal, or even currently ethical, that undermines the institution's effectiveness by diverting it from its purpose or weakening its ability to achieve its purpose, including, to the extent relevant to its purpose, weakening either the public's trust in that institution or the institution's inherent trustworthiness' (Lessig 2013, 553).

To this end, the anti-corruption agenda – at both public officer and at institutional levels – can form part of an overall public integrity agenda. But it will not *define and exhaust* the public integrity agenda. Far from it. Corruption is just one amongst many possible opposites

of public integrity. Public integrity has many other possible opposites, defined as the negation of any (combination) of its necessary elements: illegitimacy, lack of purpose, incoherence, inefficiency, untrustworthiness, fragility, and so on. Any 'public integrity' agenda, therefore, must be opposed to all of these 'pathologies of government'. And, most importantly, opposing corruption will not necessarily always be the most urgent, or important. Within a public integrity agenda, anti-corruption must justify its priority against other integrity promoting objectives.

Whilst this may appear to demote the anti-corruption agenda, it is also possible that it helps to achieve its fundamental aim. Indeed, it is in line with an observation that has been widely cited, but less frequently acted upon: in the words of Kaufmann (2005) 'A fallacy promoted by some in the field of anticorruption, and at times also by the international community, is that one "fights corruption by fighting corruption"—through yet another anticorruption campaign, the creation of more "commissions" and ethics agencies, and the incessant drafting of new laws, decrees, and codes of conduct.' Others who have stressed the need to develop more 'oblique' approaches to tackling corruption include Johnston (2013), who sees 'deep democratization' as a necessary, if not sufficient, dimension of corruption control, and Ledeneva et al. (2017) who draw on the arguments of economist John Kay (2010) that objectives are best achieved indirectly. Similarly, those who view corruption through the lens of a 'governance order' spectrum that runs from favouritism, particularism and limited-access to impartiality, ethical universalism, and open-access, focus on the determinants of good governance: effective corruption control in these terms is a policy outcome rather than a driver (for an overview, see Mungiu-Pippidi and Hartmann 2019).

Such approaches recognise that corruption is often a 'symptom' rather than a 'disease.' Its underlying causes are highly complex and varied, but have shown themselves resistant to reform measures aimed at direct 'fixes'. However, instead of just relabelling anti-corruption measures as pro-integrity ones, we have argued in this paper that an effective 'public integrity' approach will entail the identification of a distinctive and substantive moral ideal that can underpin a genuine good governance agenda. The need to do so is urgent.

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