Integrity, Personal and Political

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Social discourse about morality often features appeals to identity-grounding commitments. Individuals who wish to justify their conduct to others frequently portray certain actions they pursue as stemming from commitments that are central to their identity and portray actions they reject as incompatible with their identity. Such familiar appeals to identity-grounding commitments are frequently put in terms of “integrity.” Yet many moral philosophers have been skeptical of the idea that an agent’s integrity can have independent normative significance. My main aim in this essay is to respond to such skepticism from the perspective of political philosophy. I argue that polities, at least of a liberal-democratic kind, can have their own normatively significant integrity. More specifically—and more dramatically—I contend that it is actually easier to defend the normative significance of this political integrity than it is to defend the normative significance of individual integrity.

Social discourse about morality often features appeals to identity-grounding commitments. Individuals who wish to justify their conduct to others frequently portray certain actions they pursue as stemming from commitments that are central to their identity and actions they reject as incompatible with their identity. Such familiar appeals to identity-grounding commitments are frequently put in terms of “integrity.” When an individual says, for instance, “I am a committed pacifist, and so joining the military will compromise my integrity,” we readily understand what this person means. Appeals to identity-grounding commitments, however, are equally ubiquitous in social discourse about political morality. Public figures often try to justify the policies they favor by showing how these align with commitments widely considered to be central to the polity’s collective identity. And just as an ordinary individual will often distance herself from a certain action by saying “this is not who I am as a person,” so political leaders will often try to distance a polity from a certain course of action by saying “that is not who we are as a country” (Lander 2012).

My aim in this essay is to develop an idea that may be seen as latent in such political statements. The idea is that a polity, at least of a liberal-democratic kind, has its own normatively significant integrity. More specifically—and more dramatically—I wish to show that it is actually easier to defend the normative significance of this political integrity than it is to defend the normative significance of individual integrity.

In order to establish this contention, I address two forms of skepticism in the pages that follow. First, many will be skeptical of the notion that a polity can even have integrity in any sense that meaningfully parallels the integrity of an individual agent. Anticipating such skepticism, I try to show that the idea of collective integrity is not only plausible but also necessary for capturing a variety of important intuitions, especially concerning the moral implications of liberal democracies’ tainted past for their current conduct.

The other source of skepticism that I confront stems from philosophical claims with regard to any agent’s integrity. Many philosophers who have discussed integrity have been skeptical of the very idea that integrity considerations can have independent moral importance. According to such skeptics, an agent acts with integrity when the agent does what morality, all things considered, requires. Hence, it does not make sense to talk about “integrity” as an independent factor going into moral analysis—integrity can only be a derivative result of such analysis and is therefore doing no normative work on its own. In what follows, however, I will not only dispute this *fifth-wheel objection* to integrity arguments. I will also seek to show that it is easier to defeat this objection at the political as compared to the individual level. This claim will underlie my thesis, that it is easier to defend the normative significance of political as compared to individual integrity.

I construct this thesis as follows. After some framing remarks, I elaborate what I take to be the best defense of in-

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tegrity against the fifth-wheel objection—a defense focused on the moral salience of agents' particular histories. I then show why this historical defense is especially powerful in the case of liberal democracies as group agents and offer additional reasons for why it is easier to defend the normative significance of their integrity, as compared to individual integrity. Finally, I discuss the argument's policy implications, focusing on liberal democracies' current international dealings.

FRAMING REMARKS

It is natural to begin our inquiry with some basic remarks about the concept of integrity. Following Bernard Williams, I presume that an agent's integrity consists in the pursuit of the projects or commitments that the agent considers constitutive of its identity.¹ According to the fifth-wheel objection, integrity thus conceived can never be an independent normative factor. This is because integrity should be seen as derivative from the overall moral judgment as to what a given situation requires. When an agent does what morality, all things considered, demands, she should see herself as acting with integrity. Since integrity can only be an output of all-things-considered moral deliberation, not an input feeding into such deliberation, there is no basis for giving integrity independent attention.

One way to see the significance of this objection is to note its natural alignment with the following, powerful thought. Few would want to assign moral value to *any* set of commitments that agents may take to be central to their identity, no matter how repugnant these commitments might be from an objective perspective. Therefore, rather than focusing on what agents may deem important to their identity, we should focus on what morality deems important simpliciter. And once we adopt this objective approach, it is only a short step to the further thought that an agent's identity-grounding commitments should be derived from morality's overall requirements. Yet if this is true, then it seems profoundly wrongheaded to treat integrity as an independent concept that might help us answer the question of what morality's overall requirements in fact are. To proceed in this manner is to try to answer a question with the help of a concept that can only have content once that very question is settled.

1. See Williams (1973). Like Williams, I also assume that a compelling normative theory should be alert to the alienation and loss of purpose that follow when an agent's actions deeply contradict its constitutive projects. Although note that, in contrast to Williams, I explicitly impose here (starting in the next section) independent moral constraints on the projects that agents may adopt. I use "commitments" and "projects" interchangeably.

Another way to see the significance of the fifth-wheel objection is consider how it forms—together with the thought I just noted—the background of philosophy's most well-known debate on integrity, between Williams and his utilitarian critics. Williams famously argued that utilitarianism (or at least, act utilitarianism) "cannot hope to make sense, at any serious level, of integrity," not least because it demands of agents to regard their identity-grounding projects as entirely dispensable in the pursuit of overall utility (1973, 114–15). In turn, the main act-utilitarian response to Williams's criticism has been to assert that agents who adopt the utilitarian goal of maximizing moral value in the world as their identity-grounding project would never have to dispense with their identity-grounding commitments—and thus would never have to experience a loss of integrity—when advancing utilitarian aims. Moreover, at least some utilitarians hold that agents ought to adopt the utilitarian project as constitutive of their identity and that if we do not insist on agents viewing the utilitarian project in this way, we run the risk of allowing agents to adopt any project whatsoever as central to their identity, no matter how disturbing (see, e.g., Carr 1976; Triantosky 1986).

It must be emphasized, however, that one does not have to be a utilitarian in order to espouse some variant of the fifth-wheel objection. One does not have to be a utilitarian to argue, as Kagan, for instance, does, that real integrity requires that an agent be able to "defend his moral outlook against the challenge of critical self-examination" (1991, 391) and that only agents who adopt the correct all-things-considered moral outlook possess this ability. Even avowed opponents of utilitarianism can endorse the fifth-wheel objection to integrity arguments.

Now many philosophers, I believe, take it for granted that appeals to integrity concerns that are independent of morality's overall requirements are simply "confused" (see, e.g., Gaus 2003, 178). In fact, I suspect that the fifth-wheel objection strikes many as so obviously fatal to integrity arguments that it may not even seem necessary to actually present the objection.² If this is the case, the impact of the fifth-wheel objection might very well exceed its published appearances.

RESPONDING TO THE FIFTH-WHEEL OBJECTION

The fifth-wheel objection, then, is a serious one. But I believe that it is ultimately mistaken. Moreover, this objection turns out to be mistaken even if one grants—as I will here—that not any set of identity-grounding commitments can have

2. As Barry (2001, 6) has pointed out in another context, many people can be expected to hold certain objections without actually airing them, if they take these objections to be so obvious that they do not bother to confront their targets.

normative significance. We can and should grant that racist or sexist identity-grounding commitments, for instance, have no normative significance at all—not even minor or presumptive. I wish to show that even when we make this (necessary) assumption, “screening out” obviously repellent commitments *ab initio*, we still have good reasons to doubt the fifth-wheel objection.³ Even when this assumption is granted, we can still see identity-grounding commitments, and the integrity they underlie, as an independent factor feeding into moral deliberation, rather than being only an output of such deliberation.

My key claim in support of this view (stated first in compressed form) is as follows. Even if we accept the need for independent moral standards to affect an agent’s identity-grounding projects, it is still possible for an agent’s moral history to yield particular projects with their own normative significance. The fifth-wheel objection, however, cannot account for this possibility. So if we were to endorse the objection, and deny that integrity considerations can ever be an independent factor, we would have no way to ground significant moral intuitions pertaining to agents’ histories.

Later on, I try to show that this “historical” defense of integrity is actually more forceful when applied to the political level than when applied to the integrity of an individual person. But in this section I focus on the individual level. Proceeding in this way will eventually give us a clearer view of both the salient analogies and the salient disanalogies between individual and political integrity.

It might be helpful to begin our substantive discussion of individual integrity with a concrete example that has some parallels to the political cases on which I focus below. Since I will suggest later that the idea of political integrity is especially useful for reflecting on political ties with odious regimes, let us try to construct an individual-level scenario that has some parallels to such ties. Imagine, then, that John lives in a downtrodden city, effectively ruled by a mafia that the police is unwilling to fight. John is a reformed ex-member of the mafia, who has to come see his struggle to break free from his previous life as an identity-grounding project. Recently, the mafia, using typical violence, has taken over the local businesses around which John’s everyday professional and social activities are structured. In each business, the criminals have placed their own men behind the counter, forcing the real owners to stay home and only accept a portion of the revenue,

with the rest going to the mob. Yet these owners urge John to continue frequenting their stores: if he boycotts their stores as a way of boycotting the mafia, this will only make them worse off.

John, in turn, acknowledges that this concern from the owners is one reason to do business with the mafia—one factor that he has to consider when analyzing the situation from the moral point of view. But he also argues that, whatever other factors might have to feature in this analysis, there is at least one factor that clearly militates against his doing business with the mafia—his effort to break free from any kind of association with the mafia. To reassociate with the criminals would take him back to the person he has promised himself never again to be. And this threat to his identity-grounding struggle, John insists, is also a consideration that he has to take into account. Although it might be outweighed by other considerations in the overall moral balance, it is still a genuine factor.

Confronted with this scenario, a proponent of the fifth-wheel objection can opt for one of two strategies. Over the next several paragraphs, I want to show that both strategies encounter difficulties. Consider, first, a strategy that concedes history’s normative weight while still denying integrity’s weight. On this view, John’s particular history does indeed bear on the moral question of how he ought to treat the mafia at present. But the reason for the moral weight of his past has nothing to do with John’s identity-grounding commitments and everything to do with John’s past victims. John has a duty toward the victims of his past wrongdoing to be especially reluctant to (re)engage with the mafia. Such special reluctance is morally necessary, insofar as it reflects a morally appropriate recognition of the severity of his past mafia crimes and their impact on his victims. Yet the moral significance of such recognition can be captured without any reference to John’s own integrity.

While this strategy may seem appealing, it suffers from multiple problems. One immediate problem is as follows. We can imagine circumstances in which John’s compunction still seems morally appropriate, although his past victims approve of him reengaging the mafia. Suppose, for instance, that John’s former victims have accepted the compensation and apologies that he had previously offered them and have even formed a friendship with him. Within this context, John’s former victims offer their blessing for his engagement with the mafia under the circumstances, making clear that they will not see such engagement as offensive and even actively pushing John to seek it. At least some of us, I assume, will think that even given these victims’ preferences, it would be morally appropriate for John to have special reservations about associating with the mafia—stronger reservations than those of

3. I am assuming that at least the vast majority of the repellent commitments that we would want to rule out in this way will not require an elaborate theory. These commitments (say, to slavery or to the subordination of women) will simply be ones that clearly conflict with our fixed, pretheoretical moral judgments.

someone who lacked his particular history. But it is not at all obvious how the moral force of these reservations can be explained solely in terms of what John owes his past victims.⁴

Another, very much related problem is that an exclusive focus on John's duties to his past victims leaves us unable to account for powerful moral intuitions concerning John's repeated association with the mafia. From a normative point of view, there is a difference between John dealing with the mafia as a "one-off" aberration, as compared to repeated interactions with the criminals whom he had been striving to break away from. If we focus only on what John owes his past victims, we have no ready way to explain this difference (especially in circumstances in which these victims themselves wish John to engage the mafia). In contrast, if, against the fifth-wheel objection, we see integrity as an independent normative factor, then we can easily account for this difference. We can do so simply by holding that repeated association with the mafia poses a far more acute threat to John's identity-grounding struggle to distance himself from his previous life.

These points suggest that a person's reluctance to act in a manner that conflicts with identity-grounding moral struggles has normative force that cannot be explained solely through reference to what this person owes to others. "Moral persons," as Markovits writes, "seek commitments and plans that leave them reflectively satisfied not just with what they have done to others, but also with what they have made of themselves" (2009, 110–11). And this is especially true when persons consider what they have made of themselves over time, in relation to their morally fraught projects. When persons seeking to break free from a morally haunted past repeatedly take actions that take them back to what they had firmly sought never again to be, only part of the normative story lies with others. Whether or not such persons have betrayed their duties to others, it also matters morally that they have seriously compromised their own integrity.

What follows from all this is that the fifth-wheel objection cannot be saved if it concedes that John's particular history sets his moral situation apart from the situation of other town residents who lack this history. But some proponents of the objection may want to avoid this concession. Such proponents may simply deny that John's particular history makes any difference to his moral situation.

In turn, the most plausible form that such a denial might take is as follows. An agent's specific history might very well feature in the agent's identity-grounding projects. But the

agent ought to adopt an all-things-considered view of this history. This means that John, for instance, ought to refine his identity-grounding rejection of his mafia past, so as to make it more nuanced. If, given present circumstances, associating with the mafia in certain ways is morally permissible or even required, all things considered, then John should not see such association as threatening his integrity. And if that is true, then integrity turns out to be merely an output of all-things-considered moral judgments, rather than an input feeding into such judgments.

Two main responses can be made against this strategy. First, it too does not give a satisfactory account of the way in which agents' moral struggles unfold over time. To see this, we can consider another variant of John's story. Suppose that the police, having finally decided to act against the mafia that rules John's town, try to persuade John to serve as an informant, which would require of him to rejoin the criminals and to reengage in the most morally fraught actions that he has committed as a mafia member—for instance, the most extreme forms of violence. The difference is that this time (let us assume), John's participation in the mafia activities will be morally justified, all things considered. On the strategy that we are now examining, this difference should prevent John from seeing any conflict between his renewed entanglement with the mafia and his identity-grounding moral struggle to break free from his previous life. The fact that John is now imposing the same grave harms as he did in his previous life makes no difference. Nor does it matter that John wishes precisely to dissociate from his "previous self" that inflicted these very harms. The only thing that matters is that the infliction of these harms is currently justified overall, whereas previously it was unjustified. This fact alone means that there is no deep conflict between John's past moral struggle and his present mafia actions, no matter how violent. Yet many will think that there very much is a conflict here. While it may be true that wrongful acts of violence are not identical to justified acts of violence, it is surely also true that the two share much more than passing resemblance. And it is implausible to demand that John entirely ignore this fact if morality, all things considered, now favors his doing the very same deeds that he has so firmly sought to distance himself from.

Second, this concern again becomes more forceful when we consider cases featuring not one-offs but rather repeated departures from constitutive moral struggles. On the strategy that we are considering, there cannot be a fundamental difference between doing a morally fraught deed once and doing the same deed repeatedly. Thus, there cannot be a fundamental difference between John (for instance) engaging in mafia violence once and John doing so time and again,

4. Some may want to suggest that the issue here is actually about potential future victims—that if John reassociates with the mafia he will be more likely to act wrongly going forward. But it is not clear why this worry sets John apart from anyone else who may associate with the mafia.

as long as each instance of violence is, all things considered, justified from an impartial viewpoint. Yet it would surely be reasonable for John to think that engaging in repeated violence is qualitatively worse for him, because it would pose a far deeper threat to the coherence of his identity-grounding moral struggle to break free from his previous life. The fifth-wheel objection, however, has no way to account for this complaint: if any single act of violence that John commits is impartially justified, all things considered, then the objection will continue to claim that John ought to see his identity-grounding moral struggle as coherent rather than as irreparably ruptured. But this claim strains credulity.

FROM PERSONAL TO POLITICAL INTEGRITY

I suspect that at least some readers will feel a certain ambivalence regarding the claims of the last section: they may see the appeal of the historical defense of individual integrity, while also seeing the appeal of the fifth-wheel objection. Later on, I try to trace some possible causes of this likely ambivalence. But I believe that when we move to discuss a certain kind of political integrity, such ambivalence should not even arise. This difference, in turn, is one key reason in favor of the thesis that I develop in this and the following section. I want to suggest that it is actually easier to defend the normative significance of integrity arguments relating to liberal democracies as corporate agents than it is to defend the normative significance of integrity arguments relating to individual agents. In particular, I want to show that it is easier to mount a “historical defense” of integrity against the fifth-wheel objection, once we focus on the integrity of a liberal political community as a group agent.

In order for these claims to succeed, one must accept the idea that it is possible to speak about group agents in a way that is not merely metaphorical. I should therefore start by briefly indicating my assumptions on this score. The idea that group agency does not have to be purely metaphorical—a mere shorthand for the aggregation of individual agents—has become somewhat less controversial in recent years. Specifically, here I mostly follow a nonmetaphorical view of group agency associated with List and Pettit’s work (see esp. List and Pettit 2011). Their key claim is that group agents supervene on individual agents but are not readily reducible into the mere sum of individual agents. One important reason for holding this view is that there is often no easy way to translate the judgments of a group agent into any single collection of individual judgments, and in fact there might be cases in which the group agent’s judgments conflict with the judgments of each of its individual members (see, e.g., List and Pettit 2005). Another more general reason is that an account that refuses to treat group agency as a mere short-

hand for the aggregation of individual agents provides us with a much more holistic picture—causally and normatively—of the social world.

This last point seems especially clear when reflecting on corporate responsibility (see Pettit 2007). Consider, for instance, the responsibility of British Petroleum (BP) for the calamitous Gulf of Mexico oil spill that occurred in 2010. The question “who is responsible for the BP oil spill?” clearly cannot be answered in an adequate manner by focusing only on the precise causal relationship that each BP employee had to the occurrence of the spill. This is true, moreover, not only for causal analysis or legal liability but also for moral responsibility. It seems extremely intuitive to think that, whatever special responsibility particular individuals may have had for the oil spill, the oil corporation as a group agent also has to feature in any plausible normative account of the oil spill: it has to feature in a way that goes beyond the mere aggregation of individual BP employees. A view that conceives of group agents as supervening upon, but not as readily reducible to, individual agents comports well with this intuition. And this is the view that I assume here.

With these remarks in hand, we can turn to see how the integrity arguments I have presented at the individual level might apply to a liberal democracy, as a particular kind of group agent. I present several reasons for why it should be at least *prima facie* plausible to view a liberal democracy as a group agent with identity-grounding projects, and thus with integrity that can be threatened.⁵ I then draw out normatively salient parallels between the moral history of a liberal democracy and the moral history that might underlie an individual’s identity-grounding projects.

A liberal democracy as a group agent

In order to treat a liberal democracy as having identity-grounding projects, in a sense that parallels the identity-grounding projects of an individual person, we must be willing to treat a liberal democracy as a group agent in some normatively meaningful way. Arguably, we are most inclined to do this in the context of liberal law. At least for the purposes of normative analysis, we are often inclined to view the law of a liberal democracy as the creation of the sovereign body politic, conceived in turn as a unitary group agent.⁶

5. This subsection follows Nili (2016).

6. I am assuming here, with much of mainstream contemporary theory, that any viable vision of liberal individual rights will make room for basic democratic convictions regarding majority rule and the sovereignty of the people, just as any viable vision of democratic sovereignty and majority rule will make room for liberal protections of individual rights. I further assume that a key shared task of (domestic) liberal and democratic theory is to explore different aspects of a bedrock commitment to the equality of citizens—and

The normative significance of this group agency is manifest when we consider questions of responsibility for paradigmatic moral failures embodied in the law. Take, for instance, the moral responsibility of the American body politic for the legal institution of slavery in the antebellum United States. What I said a moment ago with regard to BP's responsibility as a group agent seems to apply here as well. Thinking about responsibility for American slavery in purely libertarian terms—focusing exclusively on the behavior of each individual American toward each particular slave—is bound to strike many as inadequate.⁷ It seems far more normatively plausible to understand the institution of slavery as the responsibility of the American body politic—that is, the group agent that had imposed and retained the laws of slavery. And insofar as we accept this point, then we accept a normative sense in which collectively sovereign citizens form a group agent when making law. Borrowing a term from Dworkin's account of "law as integrity," we accept the normative assumption that the legal order they enact turns collectively sovereign citizens into a "community personified" (Dworkin 1986, 167).

Now, if we endorse these claims (at least for the sake of discussion), then we can already begin to see how a liberal democracy can have identity-grounding projects much like an individual person. If the law of a liberal democracy makes it a single agent in some morally salient sense, then the projects that underlie this law can be described as the core of this agent's identity. Moreover, we are not entirely in the dark when it comes to identifying at least some projects that ought to underlie liberal law. We can safely say that, whatever other projects it may adopt, no legal system can be liberal unless it is committed to the realization of the equal rights of all citizens: that is *the* core project of a liberal legal system. One way to see this point is to note that liberal law cannot revolve around a collectivist project: a polity cannot be liberal if, for example, it takes "the glory of the nation" as its ultimate goal, without any reference to the moral claims of individual citizens. At the same time, the law can only aim at the realization of the equal rights of all citizens, unless it is to embody a conception of natural moral hierarchy among individuals that liberalism firmly rejects. Therefore, insofar as the commitments that underlie the law can be seen as the core of a liberal polity's

identity, we can say that any liberal polity must understand the realization of its citizens' equal rights as an identity-grounding project.

In order to see how these thoughts lead to a picture of a liberal polity's integrity, and how this integrity might be threatened, we need to take one more step. We should note that for a society to have a liberal identity, it must formally and effectively instantiate equal rights through its legal system. One can accordingly say that from a liberal society's identity-grounding commitment to equal rights follows a certain set of *identity-grounding institutions* that guarantee equal rights for all citizens. To be sure, any attempt to offer an exhaustive list of such institutions is likely to be contentious. But our purposes here do not require such a complete list. We can instead settle for a fairly modest set of institutions, including, for example, legal protections of bodily integrity and property, freedom of speech, equality before the law, and a ban on racial, religious, and gender discrimination. Any tenable account of liberalism, I assume, will include these institutions as necessary corollaries of a commitment to citizens' equal rights.

Only somewhat more controversially, I am also going to presume that among the requisite identity-grounding institutions there must be protections of at least the most minimal standards of universal human equality. Just as a legal system could not plausibly claim to be liberal if it treats people of color as at best second-rank citizens, or it sees women as the property of their husbands, so we can confidently hold that a legal system cannot be liberal if it fails to recognize even the most minimal moral rights of outsiders—for instance, if it allows its own citizens, with complete impunity, to enslave outsiders (hence our instinctive sense that a polity could not coherently claim to be a liberal democracy if, for example, it perfectly realized its own citizens' equal rights through conquest and colonial exploitation).⁸

Now, all of this matters here, because if in order to have a liberal identity a society must have specific effective legal institutions, then there is a fairly direct sense in which a society with a liberal self-conception would not truly be able to live up to its self-professed identity if these legal institutions did not exist, existed formally only and were ineffective, or were removed or distorted. Hence, just as a person's integrity is threatened when her actions fundamentally conflict with her identity-grounding commitments, we can say that the integrity of a polity with a liberal self-conception is threatened when the institutions that its law enacts clearly conflict with its own grounding commitment to equal rights—when

eventually to bring these different aspects into alignment. For different variants of this view, see Cohen (1994), Dworkin (2000), and Habermas (2001).

7. Partly because such an approach would give us no way to distinguish between Americans' responsibility for the institution of US slavery and the responsibility of any foreigner who could have influenced this institution from outside the United States. But this is a distinction that we should be reluctant to give up. For the latest discussion of this issue, see Zakaras (forthcoming).

8. See, in this spirit, Ypi (2013).

its law singularly fails to “speak with one voice” (Dworkin 1986, 165; see also Brettschneider 2012). A polity experiencing this kind of failure cannot, as a group agent, align its identity-grounding projects with its actions, much as an individual agent who suffers from a failure of integrity cannot align his identity-grounding projects with his actions.

These remarks, however, are likely to raise some queries. First, what is it that sets a liberal democracy apart from authoritarian societies, insofar as integrity is concerned? Why focus only on the former, but not on the latter, as a site of integrity? The main answer is that the discussion of political integrity presupposes—as we have just seen—a sovereign body politic that functions as a group agent. But the more authoritarian is the society, the harder it is to conceive of its body politic as such a collective agent. As a result, discussions of the society’s collective integrity may be fundamentally misplaced.⁹

Yet this distinction between authoritarian societies and liberal democracies, although important, still leaves open a second question: what are the benefits of describing political failures to realize liberal equality—or successes in advancing such equality—in terms of liberal integrity?¹⁰ While there are multiple benefits that one could mention in response, here I would like to focus on a specific benefit. The idea of liberal integrity, I now turn to suggest, captures normatively salient parallels between the history of an individual agent—the history has been driving our discussion of individual integrity—and the history of a liberal democracy.

Moral history—personal and political

In order to bring out the parallels I have in mind, it might be helpful to consider existing practices that play a significant role in the politics of at least some liberal democracies. Consider the myriad official ways in which many liberal democracies mark both their historical failures and their historical

achievements with regard to the realization of equal rights as failures and achievements that are constitutive of the national identity—of “who we are as a people.” Core curricula in public education, emblematic public monuments, national holidays, and official ceremonies are all part of the way in which liberal democracies strive to incorporate their successes and failures in realizing rights into their collective identity. One important virtue of thinking about the realization of rights as an identity-grounding project is that it allows us to make sense of such familiar political practices.¹¹

However, the idea of liberal integrity is not only a way to make theoretical sense of ongoing practices, which officially recognize successes and failures in realizing liberal values as constitutive of national identity. This idea also provides a way to ground the thought that it would be morally wrong if such official recognition did not exist. Our sense that this is so is easily indicated through some hypothetical examples. If the US Congress decided to abolish Martin Luther King Day, or to remove the Lincoln Memorial, this would clearly be morally alarming; the same would be true if the Bundestag voted to remove Berlin’s Holocaust Memorial or if the British Parliament voted to remove Gandhi’s statue from Parliament Square. The more general conviction that these specific examples make vivid is that a liberal polity ought to recognize, as constitutive of its identity, profound historical failures and achievements tied to the realization of egalitarian norms.¹²

These points suggest that it may be not only plausible, but in fact morally essential, to view a liberal democracy as the kind of agent that has its own normatively significant history. Accordingly, we can view identity-grounding moral struggles in which a liberal democracy engages over time as paralleling the identity-grounding moral struggles in which an individual might engage. In particular, we may think that a liberal democracy can strive to distance itself from its

9. “A group agent that is constructed around a dictator,” as List and Pettit note, “can be seen as just an extension of that individual’s agency rather than as a group agent proper” (2011, 59). A further consideration that could be mentioned here is that unlike a liberal democracy, the identity of an authoritarian society may feature no universalist elements. Hence, even the most profound gaps between domestic institutions and foreign practices—gaps that will be prominent in my analysis of integrity’s policy implications—may be irrelevant in the context of an authoritarian society.

10. From this point on, I refer to “liberal integrity” rather than “liberal-democratic integrity” primarily for terminological ease and secondarily in order to bring to the fore the liberal connection between the equality of all citizens and the equality of all human beings (more on which below). At the same time, it is worth noting that there is no reason why democratic theory must be hostile to this liberal connection (in this I agree, e.g., with Abizadeh [2008]).

11. These claims naturally ally with accounts of liberal nationalism, although I am more focused here on group agency than many of these accounts, and I ultimately try to elucidate policy problems that are more concrete than those that liberal nationalists typically address (see, e.g., Miller 2007; Muller 2007; Stilz 2009; Tamir 1993; see also Margalit 2002).

12. Some may wonder whether the real fear here has less to do with collective identity and more with the thought that recognizing the significance of monumental rights violations is important as a way of reducing the probability that such violations will recur. But we can imagine circumstances in which this probability is extraordinarily low (e.g., the relevant polity may have limited geopolitical clout and may know that, if it reverts to blatantly illiberal conduct, it will be severely sanctioned by other, far more powerful nations). In such circumstances, future-oriented fears cannot account for the (enduring) intuition about the significance of incorporating past failures and successes in realizing rights into the polity’s identity.

“past self,” much as in the individual-level examples discussed above. A democratic society can mark this kind of self-transformation through diverse means, ranging from radical reform of core curricula in public education (consider educational reforms in post-Soviet countries), through the removal of public monuments (consider Russia itself with the collapse of the Soviet Union), to the awarding of prominent political honors (think of the morally fraught history of the US Medal of Honor; see Wilson 2014). And of course, all of these means can be pursued in tandem (consider Germany’s “never again” ethos and its pervasive impact on the country’s politics). There are thus numerous means through which a liberal democracy as a group agent may say of its past self “that is no longer who we are,” in much the same way that an individual agent might say of his or her past self “this is no longer who I am.”¹³

At this point, many readers might wonder how far I wish to take this parallel between the individual and the political level. Earlier, I made much of identity-grounding moral struggles in which individuals might engage over time. I invoked such potential elements of individual agents’ moral histories to defend the idea that their identity-grounding projects can be an independent factor in moral deliberation. Do I really want to say that all of this is also true for the identity-grounding projects of a liberal democracy?

The answer is yes. Moreover, I believe that this answer is not only correct but also more intuitive than it may at first seem. To show this, it might be helpful to consider a further example. In 1986, the US Congress enacted the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act “to prohibit loans to, other investments in, and certain other activities with respect to South Africa.”¹⁴ The moral justification for this act seems overdetermined. However, suppose that during the debates preceding the act, the victims of South Africa’s apartheid regime would have publicly opposed it, out of fear of its unknown economic consequences. We can easily imagine these victims saying that the regime ruling them is blatantly

violating their rights and that in an ideal world this would not happen. But given manifestly nonideal realities, they nonetheless prefer that outsiders continue their customary commercial dealings with the regime, because the repercussions of an economic boycott of their country might very well be worse.

Now, it seems safe to say that even in such a scenario, something like the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act would still have moral appeal. But what explains this appeal? This question cannot be adequately addressed simply by invoking familiar liberal vocabulary. Suppose, for example, that one defended the act by invoking the rights, autonomy, or dignity of apartheid’s victims. It would seem perfectly sensible for the victims to respond that it is precisely because of their rights, autonomy, and dignity that outsiders should defer to their call not to pursue such an act. And, along similar lines, if one appealed simply to the injustice of the apartheid regime, we could imagine its victims claiming (as the Reagan administration claimed) that “constructive engagement” with the regime will be more effective in gradually mitigating its injustice.

The idea of liberal integrity, however, fares much better as an explanation of our enduring hesitation regarding US ties with apartheid, even in a context in which apartheid’s victims would have wanted these ties to continue. Such ties would have conflicted with the United States’ own identity-grounding historical struggle to break free from its racist heritage. These ties would have conflicted with the acknowledgment of the tremendous sacrifices made through generations for the sake of ending racial discrimination within the United States. And they would have conflicted with the “promissory note” of which Martin Luther King famously spoke—a promise to treat racial discrimination as constitutive of what American society is not going to be, endorse, or condone (see King 1986). In all of these ways, continuing customary ties with South Africa would have threatened the integrity of American liberal democracy.

WHY IT MIGHT BE EASIER TO DEFEND POLITICAL INTEGRITY

This analogy, however, might actually be “underselling” the importance of a liberal polity’s integrity. For there are several reasons why it might actually be easier to defend the normative significance of this integrity than it is to defend the normative significance of individual integrity. One set of reasons has to do with the normative force of agents’ particular moral histories. The other set of reasons has to do with the broader place of moral commitments in an agent’s identity. I discuss each set in turn.

13. Here I again follow List and Pettit (2011, 200).

14. See Pub. L. No. 99-440, 100 Stat. 1086 (1986), <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-100/pdf/STATUTE-100-Pg1086.pdf>. Note that a key part of what made the act “comprehensive” is that it prohibited both various forms of US government ties with the apartheid regime and private firms based in the United States from dealing with the regime. One way of understanding this combination is to say that the act altered not only what the US legal system officially called for (it not only prohibited official government cooperation with the apartheid regime). It also altered what the legal system merely allowed through its silence (since private actors’ dealings with the apartheid regime that the US legal system previously condoned were now prohibited). I say more below on the moral significance of the law’s silence.

Political integrity, moral history, and the fifth-wheel objection

As I hope to have shown throughout, the appeal to agents' particular moral histories, and to the role that these histories might play in agents' identity-grounding projects, is a promising strategy for defending integrity's normative significance. Yet is in fact more promising at the political than at the individual level.

One immediate reason is that we can imagine individuals whose (personal) moral history is fairly uneventful. We can imagine an individual who has never committed any serious wrong in her personal conduct, who has never been the victim of seriously wrongful conduct by others, and who has no special relationship to any perpetrator or victim of serious wrongdoing. In this kind of case, it will be difficult to appeal to the agent's particular history to explain why her identity-grounding commitments have independent normative significance. Yet such cases are much harder (if not impossible) to find when reflecting on liberal polities as group agents: one would be hard pressed to identify any (let alone many) existing liberal democracies that lack a morally fraught past—or, for that matter, liberal democracies whose morally fraught past does not clearly affect their present.¹⁵ Nor is this surprising. After all, while individuals are always born innocent (at least for those not theologically inclined), political communities never are, insofar as their founding is virtually always intertwined with various forms of violence.¹⁶ This observation alone should suffice for us to think that in the political context, much more than in the personal one, we can reliably expect agents to have histories featuring concrete significant wrongs. And given that this is the case, we can much more reliably expect political communities—at least of a certain kind—to constitute key parts of their identity around particular moral struggles, which will in turn have independent normative force in the manner described above.

But there is also a deeper difference here between individual and political integrity, which we can best discern if we return to an earlier stage of our discussion. At the end of the second section, I discussed a forceful variant of the fifth-wheel objection. That variant focused on the thought that while individual agents may orient their identity-grounding projects around a rejection of their previous actions or associations, this rejection should itself “incorporate” all-things-considered morality. So a reformed criminal, for instance, should not see a categorical rejection of ties with

criminals as an identity-grounding commitment, but should instead see this rejection as central to his identity only when associating with criminals is all things considered morally problematic. Earlier, I tried to undermine this variant of the fifth-wheel objection but also noted that it will likely have enduring appeal for at least some readers.

In turn, I believe that this enduring appeal stems primarily from two intuitions. The first intuition is that there does not seem to be any obvious cost when an individual manages to “take the broader view” and adopts all-things-considered lessons from his or her history. If John the ex-mafia member, for instance, only saw associating with the mafia as a threat to his integrity when such association was all-things-considered wrong, this would not be problematic in any obvious way.

The second important intuition is that there is something suspicious about normative arguments that appeal—as I did earlier—to individuals' motivational limitations. According to this intuition, it may indeed be psychologically difficult for individuals to refine the particular identity-grounding moral commitments that they adopt against the background of particular histories, so as to incorporate morality's all-things-considered requirements directly into these commitments. But this is merely a psychological pitfall that individuals ought to overcome as much as possible, rather than something that is normatively salient.

One may offer responses to undermine the force of these intuitions even in the realm of individual ethics. But what matters more at this stage is that when we move from discussing individual integrity to the integrity of a polity, both of these intuitions seem much weaker to begin with.

Start with the question of whether there are any obvious costs to the agent incorporating all-things-considered moral requirements into its identity. When the relevant agent is a polity, there are such costs, given intense disagreement about the overall requirements of political morality. In fact, the construction of a polity's identity, even when morally driven, can often be interpreted as an attempt to put aside the overall requirements of political morality, precisely because these are so controversial. When a polity, for example, officially commemorates particular wrongs done to particular social groups, it is effectively saying “we agree that remembering those victims ought to be essential to our identity, whatever other issues of public morality we disagree about.” Similarly, when a polity celebrates the heritage of individuals who led antidiscrimination movements, it is effectively saying: “we agree that these individuals are role models, and that the particular moral aims for which they fought are essential to our identity, even if there are many moral questions that we contest intensely.” The construction of a polity's identity,

15. See, in similar spirit, Spinner-Halev (2012).

16. This is arguably the key insight of the literature on the “democratic boundary problem” (see, e.g., Abizadeh 2008; Näsström 2007).

especially when driven by moral projects, is an exercise in incompletely theorized agreement.¹⁷ But it does not seem that this exercise can succeed if it is performed on the terms proposed by the fifth-wheel objection. So the intuition that there are no obvious costs to incorporating all-things-considered morality directly into the agent's identity is quite vulnerable when we move from individual agents to a polity as a collective agent.

Now consider the other intuition that seems to support the fifth-wheel objection—the suspicion toward normative arguments that invoke individuals' motivational limitations. Even if one adopts this kind of suspicion at the level of individual moral philosophy, it is clearly less natural in the realm of political philosophy. That political philosophy should take individual motivational limitations as fundamental is very much a mainstream view. Rousseau's insistence that political philosophy must take "men as they are" when reflecting on "the laws as they might be" is only one canonical instance of this view. Rawls's rejection of utilitarianism as incompatible with individuals' motivational limitations is another (see Rawls 1999, secs. 18, 29). For these and many other political theorists, it is clear that the core business of political theory—the design of political institutions—must be sensitive, at least to some degree, to "the capacity of human nature" (Rawls 1999, 154).¹⁸ And this is true even if one grants that theories of individual ethics can be less sensitive to this capacity.

Finally, more specifically, it is worth noting that motivational considerations provide a further explanation of why it seems so counterintuitive for a polity to incorporate all-things-considered judgments directly into its identity. It does not seem very controversial to suggest that concrete moral struggles have greater motivational pull than much more abstract appeals to morality's overall requirements. This motivational concern is important, if nothing else, because we want to motivate individual citizens to contribute to the key moral struggles in which "we the people" have been engaging. Yet, motivationally speaking, it seems far better to conceptualize these struggles as responding to concrete moral problems rooted in a particular history, rather than to an extremely abstract notion of "morality's demands." Identifying with political struggles to end racial or gender discrimination, for example, is surely much easier than identifying with political struggles to "do the morally right thing."

17. The term is, famously, Cass Sunstein's (see, e.g., Sunstein 1999).

18. Although this mainstream view obviously has its critics (see, e.g., Estlund 2011).

Moral and amoral commitments

We have now considered one set of reasons, associated with agents' history, for why it might be easier to defend the normative weight of a polity's identity-grounding commitments as compared to the commitments of a person. But we do not have to rely on history alone to support this thought. We can also note a simple fact: defending the normative weight of an agent's identity-grounding commitments is much easier when these are recognizably moral commitments.

This fact matters here, because while at the individual level it seems permissible (at least in some cases) for all of the agent's identity-grounding projects to be amoral ones, this is not the case at the political level. We can imagine a liberal individual with an amoral identity—an individual whose identity is compatible with the equal moral worth of all human beings, and who obeys the moral constraints generated by others' equal rights and standing, but who does not see morality as an identity-grounding project. However, I have argued that this cannot be true of a liberal polity. Any liberal polity must treat its moral struggle to realize rights through certain institutions as constitutive of its identity, whatever other projects it may adopt. And, in certain situations, any such polity should accordingly see these identity-grounding institutions as compromised. This is true even when the relevant situations do not bear on its particular history.

To make this point concrete, we can consider again the hypothetical apartheid scenario I examined above. Earlier, I suggested that if the victims of South Africa's apartheid regime would have opposed foreign divestment from this regime because of fear of divestment's economic repercussions, a polity such as the United States would still have important integrity reasons militating in favor of divestment. But in fact, in such circumstances, any polity with a liberal self-conception would have integrity reasons pushing for divestment. Given the United States' particular historical struggle against racism, these reasons of integrity would be especially forceful in the American case. But these reasons would nonetheless be operative even for a liberal polity that lacked any history of racism: any such polity ought to see sustained ties with a thoroughly racist regime as a threat to its identity-grounding institutions.

CURRENT POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Let me now turn to some of the main practical implications that the idea of liberal integrity carries for liberal democracies' current international dealings. One way to evince these implications is to try to identify the general lesson to which our hypothetical apartheid scenario points. It would have

been perfectly possible, at least in theory, for each liberal democracy to sustain its identity-grounding legal institutions at home, even while continuing foreign ties with a regime such as South Africa's apartheid. But if that is the case, then we need some general principle in order to support the powerful intuition on which I just relied, that continued ties with the apartheid regime would have undermined the identity-grounding commitments of any liberal democracy.

I would like to propose the following principle. When considering foreign political and economic practices, a liberal democracy concerned about its integrity must ask what would happen if it were to implement the relevant foreign practices within its borders. Specifically, a liberal democracy must ask whether implementing the relevant practices would distort its own identity-grounding legal institutions beyond recognition. Where the answer is positive—where it is clear that the relevant practices would render identity-grounding legal institutions incompatible with any plausible interpretation of the polity's identity-grounding commitment to equal rights—then a liberal democracy has reasons of integrity against legitimating, perpetuating, or benefiting from these practices through its own law.

It is crucial to stress that a liberal democracy can fail this principle—it can legitimate, perpetuate, and benefit from foreign practices through its own law—even when its legal system is merely silent in the face of the relevant foreign practices. While this may seem like an overly demanding standard, note that it follows naturally from a plausible view of domestic liberal integrity. Thus, for example, a liberal democracy that declares its commitment to the equality of all citizens regardless of race could hardly claim to have its integrity intact, if its law is “merely” silent in the face of pervasive social discrimination against people of color. Similarly, a liberal democracy that professes a commitment to gender equality could hardly claim to be true to this commitment, if its law was mute in the face of pervasive, but informal, social discrimination against women.¹⁹

The observations of the last two paragraphs have practical importance, because together they suggest that a host of foreign practices in which liberal democracies are currently implicated through their own law pose a threat to liberal integrity. I particularly have in mind here cases of customary commercial dealings that, as in the apartheid scenario, seem to run counter to important moral claims of vulnerable populations, but where it is not obvious that ending those

dealings would produce greater justice and where the relevant populations themselves may very well consent to the continuation of the relevant ties, as the “least worst of possible worlds.”

Massive-scale purchases of sweatshop goods are arguably one prominent example. Customary natural resource trade with various kleptocrats is another example. In both of these cases we can identify clear victims of customary practices—whether sweatshop workers whose labor rights are grossly violated or people whose ownership of state resources is ignored by strongmen abusing public coffers. In both of these cases, it is far from obvious that enacting legal prohibitions against customary trade will improve the lot of its current victims. Therefore, at least some of the relevant victims might accordingly prefer customary trade to continue. Even if sweatshop workers believe that their employers are violating their rights, it does not necessarily follow that they also believe liberal democracies should prohibit their companies from dealing with their employers or that such prohibitions would improve their circumstances. Similarly, many populations living under autocrats may agree that customary oil trade, for example, allows their rulers to systematically steal publicly owned wealth (see, e.g., Pogge 2002, chap. 6; Wenar 2016; see also Nili 2011, 2013, 2015). But it does not necessarily follow that these populations would actually want liberal democracies to prohibit oil corporations based in their jurisdictions from trading with these rulers or that such a prohibition would make the peoples living under autocrats better off. So in these painfully real cases, just as in the hypothetical apartheid scenario, victim-related reasons seem quite indeterminate.

The idea of liberal integrity, however, helps us step away from this indeterminacy by drawing our attention to a different set of reasons. This idea highlights the fact that the laws of affluent liberal democracies are involved in the relevant customary practices. The laws—simply through their silence—allow the purchases of the relevant resources. Moreover, whether considering natural resource transactions or sweatshop goods purchases, it is clear that if the relevant foreign practices were enacted within the borders of liberal democracies, their identity-grounding institutions would be distorted beyond recognition. Legalizing child labor in sweatshops, for example, would take affluent liberal democracies back to Dickensian realities they had left behind almost two centuries ago. Even more obviously, institutionalizing at home the practice that allows *de facto* rulers to treat state property as their own personal property would fatally undermine the foundational commitment of liberal democracy to the sovereignty of the people—and particularly to the idea that the sovereign people, rather than those who wield effective

19. Elsewhere, I argue at length that such attention to the silence of the law has radical implications for democratic political authority (see Nili, forthcoming).

political power, owns state property.²⁰ These points suggest that our enduring inhibition regarding liberal entanglement in such foreign practices is well captured in terms of a threat to liberal integrity—a threat that is amplified given that all of these cases involve repeated interactions rather than “one-off” departures from liberal commitments.

Confronted with these claims, some readers might suspect that, at the international level at least, reasons of liberal integrity are self-absorbed. Such reasons push liberal democracies to refuse to treat the victims of certain foreign practices in certain ways, even when these victims consent—and perhaps actively want—to be so treated. But—the complaint might go—such rigorist refusal is morally lopsided. When considering their international dealings, liberal democracies ought to focus on the needs and preferences of the world’s poor and oppressed, rather than on their own moral purity.

This is an important complaint. But we should be careful not to overstate its force, for at least four reasons. First, there might very well be excessive rigorism in seeing liberal integrity as always trumping any other moral consideration. But nothing in the arguments presented above commits one to such a drastic stance. Arguing that liberal integrity is an independent and nontrivial moral factor bearing on policy choices is not the same as arguing that it is always a decisive factor. We can and should recognize—as I have been recognizing throughout—that there are circumstances in which the claims of integrity will be outweighed by countervailing moral considerations.²¹

Second, even if there is a danger that a focus on integrity will yield reforms that are counterproductive for the world’s most vulnerable, we must also bear in mind the opposite danger, of painting the current condition of the world’s poor and oppressed in overly rosy terms. This point is especially important given the way in which uncertainty about the consequences of reform often feeds *self-seeking rationalizations* of the status quo. When oil corporations, for example, defend their dealings with some of the world’s most brutal and corrupt dictators by appealing to the danger that divestment will pose to the victims of these dictators (see, e.g., Coll 2011, 521), we have ample reason to suspect that

their real concern lies not with these victims but with profit making. When corporations that rely on sweatshop labor argue that they are in fact helping sweatshop workers, we similarly have good grounds for questioning whether the welfare of these workers is a genuine corporate priority (see, e.g., Kates 2015). It is important to have a stable normative basis for challenging such self-serving rationalizations of the status quo. And the idea of liberal integrity provides this much-needed basis.

Third, very much related, even when the consequences of all-out liberal disengagement might be too drastic for the vulnerable, the idea of liberal integrity can still be useful in shifting the practical presumption and in challenging misleading binary presentations of the relevant policy options. In particular, if they are to act with integrity, liberal democracies must demand that corporations explain, on a case-by-case basis, precisely why the only alternative to their customary business practices are drastic threats to the most basic interests of millions abroad. Liberal democracies ought to demand of oil corporations, for example, to explain what would be wrong with measures such as legislation that freezes bank accounts, denies visas, and prevents business opportunities for senior figures in foreign dictatorships that are credibly associated with theft of their people’s natural resource wealth.²² Liberal democracies similarly ought to demand of corporations reliant on sweatshop labor to show precisely why alternatives such as a global minimum wage are not within our reach.²³ The idea of liberal integrity, capturing the moral duty not to accept binary presentations of policy choices at face value, can thus make a practical difference alongside, rather than at the expense of, attention to serious costs that policy changes might involve for the world’s most vulnerable.²⁴

Finally, the complaint about liberal integrity’s self-absorption derives much of its appeal from a thought that is

20. As Buchanan writes, the “gospel of liberalism, at least in its democratic variants [has involved] the message that the state . . . is not the property of a dynasty, an aristocracy, or any political elite, but rather ‘belongs’ to the people” (2003, 234).

21. Moreover, even in such circumstances, liberal integrity remains a useful idea, if nothing else because it captures the tragic aspect of policy choices that are, on the whole, morally necessary (think, e.g., of liberal democracies aligning with Stalin to beat Hitler).

22. The Magnitsky Act that was passed in the US Congress in late 2012 with regard to corrupt Russian officials is a good example. See <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-112publ208/html/PLAW-112publ208.htm>.

23. For a defense of this alternative, see Shapiro (2016).

24. I do not mean to suggest that an appeal to integrity is the only possible way to contest such binary framing of policy options or, more generally, self-seeking rationalizations. What I am suggesting is that integrity provides an especially immediate challenge to such rationalizations. Consider an individual who claims to be deeply committed to certain moral principles but who repeatedly tries to exempt himself from the hold of these principles, whenever following them requires nontrivial sacrifices. It would be reasonable to question whether this individual is actually committed to the principles he trumpets. And indeed, it be reasonable to question this individual’s integrity (see, in similar spirit, Carter 1996, chap. 1; Rubinfeld 2001, 172). The same is true for a liberal democracy as a group agent.

intuitive but also misleading. The thought is this. A liberal democracy that lets the dictates of its own integrity guide its treatment of the vulnerable, even when its integrity pushes in the opposite direction from that of the vulnerable's rights and preferences, is bound to treat the vulnerable in ways that are detrimental to their position. The problem with this thought is that there are cases in which the dictates of liberal integrity do clearly push in the opposite direction from the vulnerable's rights and preferences but in which acting on these dictates will, equally clearly, improve the position of the vulnerable.

To illustrate this point, we can consider the case of South Africa's apartheid one last time, but this time without any counterfactual modifications. With the demise of the apartheid regime, the democratic South African government faced the question of how to handle the sovereign debt of the apartheid era. Concerned with South Africa's reputation in international credit markets, the new government decided to assume rather than repudiate this debt (see Lienau 2014, 191–92). Now, it seems clear that the new government had the moral right to make this decision as a representative of the South African people. One would therefore be hard-pressed to explain why liberal democracies that held apartheid-era debt had a duty toward the South African people to contest this decision.²⁵ But it seems less difficult to say that liberal democracies owed it to themselves, as a matter of their own integrity, to refuse to accept payments by the new South African government for apartheid-era debt.

Of course, the principles laid out above explain why liberal democracies had, *ab initio*, reasons of integrity against contributing to (and benefiting from) the accumulation of this debt. But these principles also explain why affluent liberal democracies in general—and especially those affluent liberal democracies with their own racially fraught history—ought to have rejected the Mandela government's offer to pay back apartheid-era debt. This is true even if Mandela's government clearly had the right to make this offer as the legitimate representative of the South African people and even if the offer genuinely represented the people's informed preferences. This, then, is a case in which reasons of liberal integrity pushed in the opposite direction to that of the rights and preferences of a deeply vulnerable people. But had affluent liberal democracies upheld the dictates of liberal integrity, the result would not have been detrimental to this people's position—on the contrary.

25. Arguably, the only relevant explanation here would be one showing that the people's right to refuse to pay this debt was somehow inalienable. But it is not at all obvious how such an explanation would proceed.

CONCLUSION

It seems appealing to think that an agent's integrity must be derived from morality's overall requirements and therefore cannot inform our understanding of these requirements. But I have argued here that we should resist this thought. Moreover, I suggested that it is easier to resist this thought when reflecting on the integrity of a liberal democracy as a group agent than when considering the integrity of an individual person. Finally, I spelled out some of the practical implications that follow once we take the integrity of liberal democracy seriously.

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