What do we mean by academic integrity?

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Abstract

This paper examines the concept of *academic integrity*. Drawing on Calhoun's social perspective of integrity and on MacIntyre's goods-based view of practice, we propose to understand acting with academic integrity as standing before others and with others, firmly but non-dogmatically, to protect the integrity of academic practice and, therefore, its internal goods –which are not readily specifiable but nevertheless related to growth, learning, and knowledge production and sharing. This view differs from others that take academic integrity as compliance with rules and procedures of academic institutions, or as a general virtue closely related to honesty, that simply happens to be applied in academic settings. Some implications of our view include the fact that not cheating or breaking rules of academic institutions is not enough for acting with academic integrity, the need to be aware of and collectively resist internal and external –including societal– pressures and threats, and the demands on academic institutions and organisations to promote democratic climates that allow all their members to speak up, and to favour democratic-educative over causal-objective approaches –such as incentive-based and cheating-proof designs– to protect the integrity of academic practice.

Keywords Academic integrity, Integrity, Practice, Academic practice, Moral education, Democratic education

Introduction

The issue of academic integrity is attracting attention from many academic institutions and organisations around the world, as they declare their commitment to promote it and prevent its breaches. But what do we mean by academic integrity? Our non-systematic, non-extensive survey of policy documents in English and Spanish of such organisations in a few countries suggests that, in practice, the term *academic integrity* is mostly used to refer to student behaviours that follow rules of academic conduct, and is basically equated with *not* committing acts such as the ones found by Davis in her own more systematic survey (2023, p. 3): "plagiarism, contract cheating, purchasing customised essays from freelance writers, using wearable high-tech devices to communicate with accomplices, and obtaining examination questions beforehand and even bribing teaching assistants or tutors for inflated grades or correct answers". To a significantly lesser extent, some institutions also refer to the conduct of educators and researchers, again specifying some behaviours deemed morally problematic or illegal (Davis 2023). By way of an

understanding of academic integrity, this seems enough for some such institutions that do not explicitly define this term; but others do declare some sort of broad definition, usually equating it with honesty, and sometimes adding other virtues or values like trust, respect, justice, and responsibility (e.g., International Baccalaureate Organization 2019). As might be expected, these definitions are not accompanied by a discussion or justification for why they choose to define the term as they do. The International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) goes a little further by stating their much-referenced definition of "a commitment to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage" (2021, p.4), to then go in detail over their meaning and application in education. However, again, this list of values is only used in place of a definition but does not amount to one (Jamieson and Moore Howard 2019) and, furthermore, there is no attempt to justify it.

More startling is the almost inexistent corpus of systematic conceptual –i.e. philosophical– discussion of this term in academic research publications on this topic, including specialised journals like the *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, the *Journal of Academic Ethics*, *Canadian Perspectives on Academic Integrity*, and the *Journal of Higher Education Ethics*, or in other broader-scoped educational journals. Among the exceptions, we highlight Chapfika's (2008) argument for attending more to character, and particularly the virtue of integrity, and less to rules and duties when promoting ethical behaviour in higher education; Jamieson & Moore Howard's (2019) discussion about the distinction between the moral category of academic integrity and faulty intertextual practices like plagiarism and patchwriting; and Hagège's (2023) direct examination of the idea of educational integrity, perhaps the most systematic philosophical analysis of this concept that we encountered. However, in her discussion, educational integrity is attributed to educational institutions rather than taken as a virtue of persons, and therefore her analysis belongs to a different although complementary conversation.

Also surprising is this absence in the *Handbook of Academic Integrity* (Bretag 2016) or in the *Second Handbook of Academic Integrity* (Eaton 2024). In her introduction to the (first) *Handbook* section titled *Defining academic integrity: International perspectives*, Tracey Bretag states that "this is such a multifarious topic that authors around the globe report differing historical developments which have led to a variety of interpretations of academic integrity as a concept" (p. 3), and opts to defer the task of defining it to the international contributors to that section. In our assessment, however, which coincides with Jamieson and Moore Howards's (2019), none of the contributions to the section, or indeed the volume, attempts to carefully explain, let alone defend, any particular conception. The only chapter in the *Second Handbook* that explicitly discusses definitions of academic integrity is the introductory one, by its editor, Sarah Elaine Eaton. In it, she presents two such definitions –one basically drawn from ICAI's six-virtue version, comments on their implication that academic integrity goes beyond cheating and plagiarism and "[extends] to all aspects of the academy" (p. 3), and goes on to propose an eight-dimension framework addressing it with this wider scope. This framework is significant in its own right, but does not amount to a systematic attempt to explain what academic integrity is. In this *Second Handbook* there is also a contribution intended to argue for the importance of theory (Curtis and Clare 2024), which might be a natural home for addressing the conceptualisation of academic integrity. However, its authors admit that

it "does not discuss questions addressed by ethical theories, such as the question of what academic integrity and academic misconduct are" (p. 1652).

With Eaton, we also think it is problematic to reduce the idea of academic integrity to compliance with rules and procedures of academic institutions, or to avoidance of certain cheating behaviours such as those mentioned above. For one thing, we can miss key distinctions between behaviours whose labelling as breaches of academic integrity might be meaningfully questioned (Jamieson and Moore Howard 2019). Additionally, it does not help us understand why those behaviours might be judged as morally wrong, or whether other non-cheating and rule-complying actions can also sometimes be deemed problematic in terms of academic integrity. For instance, let us imagine the perhaps-too-common situation of a teacher who comes every day to the classroom doing the minimum necessary for their job and guaranteeing as much as possible a hassle-free provision of grades to their students, without any regard for whether they get anything out of all that. At the same time, their students do only what is minimally required, balancing their two goals of minimising effort and maximising grades. And all conversations and interactions between teacher and students revolve around instructions and criteria for marking and grades, without any interest in the contents or in learning. Here, neither the teacher nor their students are breaking any rules or doing any cheating; but education has arguably been corrupted and become just a sham. Might this reflect a lack of academic integrity from all parties?

A list of general personal values such as ICAI's (2021) goes a little further in understanding academic integrity. However, it still fails to help us see what is specific of integrity in *academic practice*, what is valuable in it that is vulnerable and in need of protection and revitalisation, or the corrupting powers that threaten it and that academic integrity is called to help resist and overcome. Instead, that definition seems to assume that this is just one domain like any other, in which a general idea of morality can be applied and demanded from its actors.

In this paper, drawing on Cheshire Calhoun's (1995, 2015) social view of integrity and on Alasdair MacIntyre's (1981, 1999) goods-based view of practice, we contribute to filling this gap in the research literature by proposing a conception of academic integrity. Calhoun's work helps us understand what the virtue of integrity demands when we take seriously the fact that, as humans, we are in social settings where we act *collectively* both to define and interpret our shared projects and to engage in them. MacIntyre's work provides a sound account of practices –academic practice being one of them– that helps us understand the goods and values they embody, and therefore what, in Calhoun's view, acting with integrity will help protect and pursue in our collective projects. Based on this analysis, we propose to conceive of *acting with academic integrity* as standing before others and with others to protect the *integrity of academic practice* and pursue the internal goods and values of excellence related to learning and growth, and to knowledge production and sharing, that define education and research as worthwhile activities whose value we collectively endorse and in whose collective interpretation we actively participate. It is to note that, in this view, acting with or without academic integrity is something that can be attributed to students as well as educators and researchers, and indeed to any other actors engaged in academic practice.

To construct and justify this proposal, in this paper we will first examine the discussions in philosophy around *integrity*, with a special emphasis on Calhoun's social view.

Then, we present MacIntyre's idea of a *practice*, and develop an understanding of the *integrity of a practice* and of *acting with integrity within a practice*. Importantly, in our formulation, in neither of these concepts compliance or violation of rules occupy a central place. Next, we locate this discussion specifically in academic practice, and thus, there we fulfil our promise of presenting a proposal for understanding *academic integrity* –i.e. of acting with integrity in academic practice. We also spell out some key implications of adopting this proposal: some –those concerning the demands of academic integrity on the individuals– in the same section, and some others –those concerning implications of our view for academic institutions– in the last main section of the paper.

Acting with integrity

The word *integrity* describes a property of something that is whole or uncorrupted in some sense. The term *academic integrity* is usually used in connection to the character of a person expressed in an academic or educational setting, and particularly a morally desirable property: a *virtue*. Lack of integrity is therefore a vice or corruption of one's character. We now explore some discussions about what this virtue of integrity entails.

Integrity as coherence and morality

The idea of *wholeness* has fed the development of what we might call *coherentist* theories of integrity: those that propose that integrity fundamentally is coherence between our actions and our ideals or values as well as between different instances of the latter. Lacking integrity would imply, therefore, not living up to our own ideals, in some sense betraying ourselves and falling to some temptations or pressures that lead us into not being coherent with ourselves. Two coherentist conceptions stand out (Calhoun 1995; Cox et al. 2013, 2021; Archer 2017). One, attributable to Harry Frankfurt and Gabriele Taylor (Frankfurt 1987; Taylor 1985; see also Archer 2017), starts by noticing the contradictions between many of our desires and preferences, and the consequences for not holding them wholeheartedly. Integrity would demand that we resolve such contradictions by appealing to higher order desires or preferences with an increasingly broader scope, in the search for a unified being (Calhoun 1995). The other main coherentist theory can be traced to Williams (1981, 2004), for whom the ideals with which we evaluate our actions are those values that most centrally define our identity, our image of what gives meaning and value to our lives. In both cases, strength of character is required for not being a wanton and for sticking to one's ideals in the face of pressures and temptations.

   Among the objections to coherentist proposals, one of the most important stems from the observation that someone could be very coherent yet openly immoral. But an openly immoral integrity would seem a contradiction in terms (Cox et al. 2021). To resolve this, the person acting with integrity would need to care for their ideals to be morally justifiable. This way, integrity would imply standing to defend personal values or ideals that are worth defending, which "is not just a matter of personal *identification* with [those] values; it is also a matter of insisting on the endors*ability* of those values" (Calhoun 1995, p. 246). Importantly, acting with integrity is not the same as behaving well; it demands from the individual to assess the morality of their ideals, and to stand to defend them and act based on that assessment. This, we shall characterise as acting as a *moral agent*.

Cheshire Calhoun and integrity's social turn

In her seminal essay *Standing for something*, Calhoun (1995) proposes understanding integrity as a *social virtue* and not only as an *individual virtue*. She points out that accounts such as those presented above are somehow self-indulgent: the good protected through integrity is the self, so that, in this individual perspective, "it is for the sake of my autonomy, my character, my agency that I stand by my best judgment" (p. 253), and "loss of integrity signals loss of an important dimension of selfhood" (p. 254). Those views seem particularly aligned with an individualistic, liberal, perspective, in which each one goes their own way, engaging in their own individual projects, with only some basic moral restrictions for not harming others while doing so. Calhoun's view instead acknowledges that life is to a great extent constituted by shared projects, and that this imposes some conditions on what integrity represents: "Integrity is not, or not just, a matter of the individual's proper relation to herself, but a matter of her proper relation to common projects and to the fellows with whom one engages in those common projects" (1995, pp. 256–257). Thus, my loss of integrity is not only, or not basically, a betrayal of myself, but a betrayal of *us* as a community who count on me to stand by my best judgement concerning what is best for *us*. The *we* that emerges in this social view is of a community of co-deliberators and –borrowing from Kant– co-legislators: "Integrity here seems tightly connected to viewing oneself as a member of an evaluating community and to caring about what that community endorses" (p. 254).

One possible misconception of this social perspective of integrity is to understand it simply as demanding that one's actions and ideals take others' wellbeing into account. This, we take to be a basic tenet of morality and something therefore already contemplated in individual conceptions of integrity that add morality criteria to the basic coherence principles. In a social perspective, what is key is that it is not about a self that critically deliberates alone, defines its ideals alone, and acts alone; but rather, as a member of communities, it deliberates, defines ideals and acts *with others*.

For Calhoun, integrity makes at least two demands: to take oneself seriously as an agent whose judgments concerning what we can do best to live well are valuable, and to also take seriously one's co-deliberators' judgements. Regarding the first one, to take oneself seriously implies committing to presenting one's best judgements publicly as contributions to a better understanding and evaluation of our common world and projects, and standing before others for what those judgements represent as one's contribution to us. As Calhoun explains,

> *lying about one's views, concealing them, recanting them under pressure, selling them out for rewards or to avoid penalties, and pandering to what one regards as the bad views of others, all indicate a failure to regard one's own judgment as one that should matter to others. (Calhoun 1995, p. 258)*

In our assessment, some commentators of Calhoun's perspective wrongly reduce it to this first aspect only and fail to grasp the full extent of its social implications (e.g., Scherkoske 2013; and Cox et al. 2013 & 2021). But the second demand, to take *others* seriously, is just as important. It implies that one should interact with them with a certain attitude that takes them as individuals whose judgements are worth considering. Again, Calhoun puts it clearly:

if integrity is the virtue of having a proper regard for one's own judgment as a delib-erator among deliberators, it would seem that integrity is not just a matter of stick-ing to one's guns. Arrogance, pomposity, bullying, haranguing, defensiveness, incivil-ity, close-mindedness, deafness to criticism […] all seem incompatible with integrity. (1995, pp. 259–260)

The social character of integrity, then, has less to do with one's attempt to get one's ide-als and values right, even morally right, and stick to the resulting convictions so that one does not betray oneself, and more with how one appears publicly before others and deliberate with them with a proper concern for our shared projects and for the ques-tion of how to collectively live well[1]. Integrity, then, applies to persons not only as *moral agents* but also as *social* or –better– *political agents*. This creates a duty for us to do our best to participate in this public interaction with others: to actively participate, to not remain silent as well as to not silence others, and to open our listening to others and demand from others their own openness in listening.

Compromise and the social demand of integrity

As the individual perspective's emphasis is placed on coherence, it pictures the person of integrity as *uncompromisingly* pursuing their values and ideals. However, we argue that the social perspective implies that *some* compromise may have a role to play.

To start with, there are dilemmatic situations in which it is just inevitable that some compromise has to be made, in some cases between an individual and a social form of integrity. Adapting a hypothetical example previously explored by both Williams (1973/2004) and Calhoun (1995), Nelsen (2010) asks us to imagine the case of Geor-gia, an educational administrator who is offered to be a school principal in the midst of a political situation in which she knows she will be asked to adopt measures that she opposes and considers deeply harmful to the educational community. Accepting the post might be seen as a compromise that violates her integrity; but, at the same time, she is also counted on to not abandon the school's educational community to their fate by letting someone else with less scruples assume the post. After all, if she accepts it, she will be in a better position to mitigate some of the harmful consequences to the commu-nity and, perhaps more importantly, to try to exert some influence to change the context that asks them to compromise their values and ideals. So, in either option, her integrity is challenged. Nelsen puts it this way:

Viewing the demands of integrity through this social lens, then, emphasizes that someone in Georgia's position can work within schools that challenge her moral integrity, but doing so requires a dual focus on both the personal and the social. On this account then, integrity does involve aligning one's actions with one's moral commitments, but it also entails influencing the context that gives rise to one's moral commitments in the first place. (Nelsen 2010, p. 62)

In Nelsen's analysis, which we endorse, Georgia can indeed be judged to act with integrity even if she takes the principalship, but then "she must seek to transform the

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[1] As one reviewer remarked, this social view of integrity would not apply to certain extreme cases such as those of the last living person or of a hermit. However, given that academic practice is clearly social, this discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.

social-moral horizon of the school so that her integrity (and that of those with whom she works) can be nurtured" (2010, p. 63).

We take this example as an instance of a more general type of situations in which we are part of a larger system of interconnected actions and meanings, and in which we may have to give in to some compromise in the values we hold in our best judgement for us as a community so that our broader social virtue of integrity is protected. This is so because of the basic fact that "we live and interact with other people and we need to find a collective way of doing this well" (Calhoun 2015, p. 12), so the "doing this well" engages us, collectively, in a shared project. This implies that integrity demands from us also that we acknowledge that we do not act on our own, but that we need to coordinate our actions with others. In order to do this, individuals have not only to contribute to the collective definition of the projects they share with others, but also to sometimes submit to the collective values and ideals that result from that interaction even if this involves some compromise of the ones they individually hold. There emerges a collective action, a "we act", which embeds the "I act". Of course, there will be limits to what kind of compromise is acceptable that, again, one can only determine by exercising one's best, non-dogmatic judgement; but it is also a basic fact of living with others, as well as a basic tenet of democracy, that we should not always stick to our guns.

We can now sum up the difference between the individual and the social views of integrity. From an individual perspective, our starting point is a characterisation of human action as: "I act, and in so doing I can be more or less faithful to my identity, values and ideals, which I may have defined in a more or less moral way." On this basis, my integrity depends on the one hand on the fidelity of my actions to my ideals, and on the other on caring for the morality of my ideals. From a social perspective, the characterisation of human action we start from is now: "I act, together with others, and in so doing I can be more or less faithful to our identity, values and ideals, in whose collective definition I may or may not participate publicly with my best judgement in a non-dogmatic way, in a more or less moral way". On this new basis, my integrity depends on the one hand on the fidelity of my actions, which are acknowledged as integrated and coordinated with those of others, to the ideals that we have jointly defined; and on the other hand, on my firm but open-minded participation in the joint definition and interpretation of those ideals, in which we care for their morality.

Acting with integrity within a practice

The Calhounian demands on the person acting with integrity apply in any kind of social setting; but, as we will see, they must now be interpreted specifically for the cases where one's engagement with others occurs in the context of a *practice*. This is important given that academic integrity refers to how one conducts oneself in a particular (academic) domain where action occurs in a coordinated way and a *practice* takes place. So, we now turn to the idea of a practice.

Alasdair MacIntyre's goods-based idea of a practice

As we saw above, integrity relates to values and ideals, and one view of practices that significatively develops this feature is the one proposed by Alasdair MacIntyre. He explains:

> *By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of*

activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (1981, p. 187)

Not any activity fulfils the requirements to be considered a practice. Although the distinction is not sharp (Higgins 2010), some activities do not incorporate the main elements that MacIntyre posits as constitutive of a practice: the internal goods it pursues, the standards of excellence that practitioners aim at and which serve to assess their actions, their being socially established as part of a tradition that has been developed collectively, and, as we will see later, an institutional context that supports their existence. MacIntyre exemplifies: "Bricklaying is not a practice; architecture is. Planting turnips is not a practice; farming is" (1981, p. 187). By the same token, explaining concepts or theories to someone, or helping them become better at something are not practices; education is. Similarly, inquiring into some topics or questions is not a practice; academic research is.

Two elements from MacIntyre's definition merit some development: the *cooperative* nature of a practice and the idea of *internal goods*. Regarding cooperation, surely some of the activities participants engage in in a practice can be carried out individually. But the practice remains a collective cooperative enterprise insofar as the products of those individual activities are at least to some extent shared within the community and, collectively, contribute to the continuous formulation and reformulation of the standards of excellence and of the interpretation of the goods of that practice within the community. Additionally, "there must be some avenues for practitioners to share problems, breakthroughs, and stories of practice" (Higgins 2010, p. 257).

The second element is internal goods. A good is "is the telos of an activity, or *that for the sake of which* we act" (Higgins 2010, p. 238). Extracting MacIntyre's general claim from a specific example, in the next passage we can see his distinction between *external* and *internal* goods:

There are thus two kinds of good possibly to be gained by [engaging in a practice]. On the one hand there are those goods externally and contingently attached to [the practice] by the accidents of social circumstance, [like, for instance,] prestige, status and money. There are always alternative ways for achieving such goods, and their achievement is never to be had only by engaging in some particular kind of practice. On the other hand there are the goods internal to the practice [...] which cannot be had in any way but by [engaging in that practice]. (MacIntyre 1981, pp. 188–189)

Stating the internal goods of a practice in a few simple words may be difficult, and these are always open to debate by its practitioners; but arguably justice and health would be central to the definition of the internal goods of the practices of law and medicine, respectively.

External goods can also sometimes be instrumental to the practice, as when they function as *goods of effectiveness* (MacIntyre 1999): resources necessary for the practice to take place –such as funding. Now, the existence of goods of effectiveness and the need to secure them also lead us to acknowledge that an institutional context is needed for practices to develop, which can be more or less formal. But institutions, or the rules and procedures they establish, are not the same as the practices they enable. Hospitals and

universities are institutions, but they themselves are not the practices of medicine or of education and research, respectively.

MacIntyre's idea of a practice is, therefore, teleological, as it places its internal goods in the centre of what gives it its sense and purpose, and ultimately its meaning and value. In this, it differs from other approaches that postulate *rules* as the central element that defines a practice –for instance, Rawls's (1955) or other Wittgensteinian ones. Knight explains:

> *MacIntyre's practices are constituted not only by sets of rules that are followed but also, and more crucially, by goals or goods that are pursued and that are, if the practice is in good order, progressively actualized. For a practice to be in good order requires, therefore, less that its rules be followed than that its participants act with a common end in mind, giving point and purpose to their rule following and to their initial learning of those rules. (2013, p. 99)*

In other words, rules and institutions associated with a practice take second place with respect to internal goods, since the former can be questioned and evaluated with reference to the latter, but usually not the other way around. Rules are means to the practice's internal goods (Knight 2008).

One last characteristic of practice to point out here is its dynamic nature. Its values and goods are not static, but continually materialised in the practice itself, and adjusted and modified as participants redefine them in time. This can occur in many ways, including being imposed from outside by external actors –which puts at risk one of the most important elements of the idea of a practice: its self-definition, or that its goods and values are defined internally, which in turn can occur more or less democratically with power to (re)define values and goods distributed more or less equally.

The integrity of a practice

Despite the need for institutions that can sustain practices, MacIntyre warns us of their "corrupting power" (1981, p. 194), which stems from the fact that they are necessarily concerned with acquiring and distributing goods of effectiveness and other external goods (1999). Institutions need money, resources and power to sustain themselves as well as the practices they house, but they also generally "distribute money, power and status as rewards" (1981, p. 194). Hospitals and universities need money and resources in order to operate, and they are also sources of status, power and privilege. From the perspective of the practice, all these external goods should be means to the ends that internal goods represent; but they can sometimes acquire primacy and the internal goods become distorted, dismissed or subordinated. The integrity of the practice, therefore, depends on the success of those engaged in it to resist the tendencies and pressures that push in the direction of letting external goods, including goods of effectiveness, subordinate the practice's internal goods. As Higgins remarks, "institutions can also become bloated, officious, and disconnected from their corresponding practices. Mistaking themselves as ends in themselves, institutions can end up corrupting or destroying the very practices that spawned them" (2010, p. 265). Indeed, "the relationship between them is symbiotic but delicate" (p. 264).

By referring to the *integrity of the practice* as what may be harmed, we suggest that the problem is not merely one of becoming less efficient or effective in producing or

achieving its goods; at stake is its very identity as a practice. So, for Knight, institutions "typically use their power over practices to prioritize external over internal goods and to further subordinate practices to their managerial control. Insofar as they succeed, the practice is corrupted. If they succeed fully, the practice is destroyed" (2013, p. 111). The more the pursuit of the practice's internal goods is subordinated to the acquisition of external goods, the more that practice will become unrecognisable as such and the more it will become just a *sham*.

This analysis helps us understand why there is a difference between violating some institutional element –such as rules and procedures– and harming or corrupting the integrity of a practice, a difference we can only see with a goods-based idea of practice, such as MacIntyre's, but not with a rules-based one. As rules are generally there to support the practice, in most cases breaking a rule will be detrimental to the practice, and complying with the rules, beneficial. However, this is not always so. One interesting case is that of *gamesmanship*, as analysed by Palmiter (2019). This term can be used in many contexts, but in its origin in sports it refers to "advantage-seeking strategies players use that violate good sportsmanship but nonetheless are permitted by the rules and thus not 'actually cheating'" (Palmiter 2019, p. 1). For example, some years ago there were no rules in football (soccer) forbidding players to pretend they had been hit by an opponent when within the penalty area, in an attempt to deceive the referee into calling for a penalty kick. But that was dirty playing, as they were trying to gain unfair advantage over the other team even if no rules had been broken. However, when criticised for behaving in a way that harms the *spirit* of the game or practice –its internal goods and the values of excellence it represents, people acting with gamesmanship usually defend themselves by claiming they are not breaking any rules.

Nevertheless, as Palmiter argues, the same three reasons why cheating –intentionally breaking the rules, trying to deceive others into thinking one is not– is usually judged wrong also apply to gamesman behaviour: Just like the former, the latter "(1) violates the fair play principle, (2) distributes the benefits of the practice on an unjust basis, and (3) creates a constitutive failure that destroys the internal goods of the practice and leads to other wrongdoing" (2019, p. 16). All three reasons emphasise the social nature of a practice; but, perhaps most importantly, the third one points at its corruption by means of destroying its internal goods, and therefore its meaning and value. On the one hand, the very justification of the practice depends on its internal goods and the values of excellence involved in their achievement. By ceasing to pursue its internal goods, the practice is no longer justified: "The proper object of a practice is the practice's internal goal, the direct pursuit of which makes the practice as a whole justifiable according to practice-independent reasons" (Palmiter 2019, p. 16). And, on the other hand, when only seemingly engaging in a practice while at the same time detracting from the pursuit of its internal goods, one is betraying the *shared will* assumed by those involved in the practice and thus, effectively, harming the community defined by it. Let us quote Palmiter, who in turn cites Tamar Schapiro (within quotation marks):

> *A practice is a procedure that seeks to promote an end through the creation of a shared will. "In a practice, actions are attributable to a shared will because and insofar as participants make reciprocally binding claims upon one another […]." The ability to pursue the ends of a practice through a shared will is vital because it allows groups to arrive at common solutions to contested problems without sac-*

> *rificing each individual's autonomy. Practices "[define] a way of making a problem, along with its solution, count as ours." (Palmiter 2019, p. 10).*

By engaging in a practice, one shares in a will by taking its goals as one's own, and is therefore part of a collective enterprise with a collective goal. Such a shared will is recognisable as such only in direct connection to the practice's internal goods and the values of excellence that go with it.

This understanding of the social nature of a practice and of the fact that it entails a shared collective project strongly resonates with Calhoun's social perspective of integrity. So, in what follows, we will briefly return to that discussion to better spell out what acting with integrity *within a practice*, or *as part of a practice*, might mean.

Acting with integrity within a practice

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, the two notions linking integrity and practice that we have so far encountered –integrity *of* a practice and (acting with) integrity *within* a practice– are intimately related: Acting with integrity within a particular practice requires that one actively protects the integrity of that practice. This implies that it is not simply the same as acting with integrity, in general, just that one's actions now happen to take place within a particular practice. This possible mistake might derive from a common distortion made by some interpretations of MacIntyre's practical ethics, pointed out by Higgins (2010): to take it as *applied* morality. If we do that, "we miss the fact that the very idea of application runs counter to MacIntyre's fundamental insight about practices. For MacIntyre, practices are not simply local contexts where general dispositions may come in handy; they are themselves moral sources" (2010, p. 51). Within each practice, the specific internal goods that are constitutive of its identity are in principle taken as something *valuable* which is worth pursuing by at least those engaged in the practice, but also by others. Of course, those goods and values can be questioned on moral or other grounds, and actually it is of the dynamic nature of a practice that they are so questioned; but nevertheless they are the sources of meaningful and purposeful living.

Let us now recall that Calhoun's social perspective of integrity makes two demands: firstly, that one stands before others for one's ideas and visions of what is right for *us* to desire and to do well, collectively, in our shared projects; and secondly, that one takes one's fellows seriously as moral agents who can also have something to say and contribute to those projects. Practices are just such shared projects, and pursuing the achievement of their internal goods and of the values of excellence there established is what we, collectively, "need to do well" (Calhoun 2015, p. 2). So, the medium where our integrity is tested is the practices we engage in. Acting with integrity within a practice therefore implies standing before others to protect the integrity of our shared project of achieving the internal goods and values that define it, as well as taking seriously one's fellow participants in the practice as co-deliberators when they stand before us for the same purpose. Integrity, then, takes distinct shapes for different practices, as it implies protecting their different internal goods and values, as well as resisting the corrupting powers of the different institutions involved more or less directly with them, and more generally the temptation to seek external goods and obtain individual advantages and benefits at the expense of the internal goods of the practice.

It is important to note that demanding integrity from individuals can only be meaningful if they have the opportunity to speak up and stand for what they believe is right

for the collective, or in this case for the practice, without risking in the process too much of other fundamental values in their lives; that is, if the pressures on them are not so extreme that they would have to sacrifice too much and become martyrs in order to act as moral and political agents to defend the integrity of the practice. In other words, some minimum level of democracy is necessary within that practice. This does not mean that only practices whose structures are organised democratically have a chance to protect their integrity. The institutions supporting a practice can be utterly authoritarian and still it may be sustainable and its integrity protected if participants comply with the rules there established, and, moreover, if they act guided by its internal goods. But, in such a case, it will be difficult to talk about their individuals *acting with integrity within that practice*, for they cannot be truly considered moral or political agents in that context. That is, for the two notions of *integrity of a practice* –in the goods-based MacIntyrean perspective– and acting with *integrity within a practice* –in the Calhounian social perspective– to actually become intimately articulated, it is necessary that the practice's institutional context allows its participants to develop both as moral and as political agents.

Academic integrity

In our discussion so far, the expression *academic integrity* has referred to two different things: the integrity *of* academic practice and (acting with) integrity *within* academic practice. So we now turn to examine the idea of academic practice and the senses in which it can be said that its integrity is either corrupted or protected.

Academic practice and its goods

For our discussion, the term *academic practice* includes, *grosso modo*, education and research, or any of them, or, at its best, the two together in an integrated way, perhaps also with the third activity usually named *service* (MacFarlane, Zhang & Pun 2014). Some authors distinguish educational integrity from academic integrity: institutions associated with academic practice would only include universities whereas any educational institutions would be associated with educational practice (e.g. Hagège 2023). However, for our purposes here we include educational integrity in academic integrity, and take primary and secondary schools as also engaged in academic practice.[2]

In this paper, we certainly do not want to state a well-defined conception of the goods and values of academic practice or of its corresponding conceptions of education and research. To do that as if they could be easily specified would be contradictory with the very idea that this is what participants in academic practice debate and put in question as the practice evolves. Indeed, throughout time, we have witnessed such evolution in the emergence and disappearance of some elements that define it and in the plurality of versions presently exercised in academic institutions. For instance, the purpose of education has been a hotly contested issue with some arguing –or simply assuming– that it is to provide qualified human resource to corporations, to ultimately aid the country's economic growth (e.g. Ríos 2020); whereas others state its role in helping individuals

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[2] MacIntyre once stated (MacIntyre and Dunne 2002) that teaching is not a practice, for he considered it as merely an introduction into other practices, with the implication that its goods were not internally defined. However, the debate immediately sparked by his remark shows, convincingly in our opinion, that he was not considering the full extent of what teaching entails (e.g. Dunne 2003; Noddings 2003). However, we do not have the space to address that debate here.

flourish through learning (e.g. Oakeshott 1989), or defend democracy (Nussbaum 2010), or develop a critical consciousness about injustices and oppressions and create the conditions for collective action to tackle them (e.g. Freire 2010). It has also been questioned what the right understanding of the idea of knowledge should be as what students in academic institutions acquire or develop (e.g. McCowan 1998). Additionally, traditional epistemological debates between positivistic and hermeneutic paradigms have been enhanced with the emergence of feminist epistemologies (Haraway 1991; Harding 2015) and epistemologies of the South (Meneses & Bidaseca 2018), among others, to question what research is and should be, the role of notions like *truth* in it, and more generally the place of universities in society.

Some of these clashes between conceptions of education and research also occur inside academic institutions. Apart from some visible conflicts among faculty regarding what counts or does not count as research, we would like to also point at the rather common situation of students complaining about the meaninglessness of much of what they are required to study as another example of conflicting views around the internal goods of education.

But, at any rate, those engaged in academic practice, in any role, are supposed to generally commit to the goods and values related to learning, growth and knowledge production and sharing that are materialised in education and research, however they are interpreted. Other, external, goods that are regularly sought after, acquired and distributed by the academic institutions usually include financial resources for their operation, but also things like prestige, salaries, diplomas, good entries in one's curriculum vitae, and intellectual authority. Additionally, they have incorporated in their institutional rules, procedures and policies ways of supposedly measuring the performance of its members –e.g. grades, for students, or citation indexes and numbers of publications in Q1 and Q2 journals, for faculty– in ways that bear a strong relationship with the aforementioned external goods –e.g. grades give access to diplomas, and citation indexes give access to better or worse salaries, posts, and to funding for the very activity of research. But, of course, good grades and diplomas do not imply good learning, and high citation indexes and large numbers of publications do not imply high-quality research; if they did, maximising grades would be the same as maximising learning, and maximising numbers of publications and citation indexes would be the same as maximising research quality. Moreover, in fact, they sometimes lead in different or even opposite directions.

Acting with academic integrity

After all these discussions, we have now reached a point where we can finally do what we set out to do in this paper, and posit that *acting with academic integrity* means standing before others and with others, both from inside and outside of academic institutions, to protect the *integrity of academic practice* and pursue the internal goods and values of excellence related with learning, growth and knowledge production and sharing that define education and research as the type of worthwhile activities whose value we collectively endorse and in whose collective interpretation one actively participates.

This proposed understanding of acting with academic integrity has various implications worth pointing out. Firstly, and significantly, behaving in ways that do not harm, or even protect, the integrity of academic practice is not the same as acting with academic integrity. Of course, if someone does the latter, they will strive to do it in ways

that protect and do not harm the integrity of academic practice. But the difference lies on the agentic way of being aware of the moral character of our actions (Zimmerman, in Hagège 2023) and understanding oneself as someone morally responsible for protecting the practice, and not, for instance, as simply responding to incentives to so behave: e.g. to obtain external goods or to avoid punishment. In other words, academic integrity requires that we act as moral and political agents in pursuing academic practice's internal goods and in protecting it against forces threatening to corrupt or destroy it.

A second implication concerns the need for the person acting with integrity to identify the particular threats –some more global, some more locally situated– faced by the academic practice they are engaged in. These threats are very real. As Higgins puts it, regarding higher education:

> *No one doubts that a college or university needs to recruit students, collect tuition, move them through programs, grant diplomas, and so on. And it is true that professors left to their own devices might well keep their eyes so internally focused on their worlds of practice that heating bills would go unpaid. Still, it must be said that many institutions of higher learning have become so caught up in the complex, competitive business of making ends meet that they lose touch with the real ends of teaching and learning. Students are not 'instructional equivalents', teaching is not 'a load', and accumulating credits is not the same as becoming educated. (2010, pp. 264–265)*

The internal goods of learning, growth, and knowledge production and sharing associated with education and research are regularly threatened by the external goods that can be gained with them. This way, for instance, acting with integrity in education demands to resist the pressures and temptations to act only to maximise grades and minimise effort, on the part of students, or to simplify assessment in order only to minimise effort and avoid conflicts with students, on the part of teachers, at the expense of sacrificing good learning and growth at the service of morally and politically worthwhile educational ends. It also demands from us to participate with others, publicly, using our best judgement in a non-dogmatic and non-deaf-eared way, in debating in our academic institutions what the purpose of education and what the best means to achieve it should be, or whether we are or are not achieving them.

But, more broadly, the source of many of these threats can be located in the wider context and many of its tendencies, such as, for instance, the prevalence of old colonial powers in universities in the context of globalisation (Sharonova et al. 2018), and the relatively recent neoliberal assaults on education (Giroux 2016). Kezar and Bernstein-Sierra (2024) provide a very informative analysis of some of the mechanisms by means of which capitalist values are taking over universities, with "the potential to compromise the integrity of the academic enterprise" (p. 1868). Two examples of such values are *consumerism*, "a collection of beliefs and behaviors, which stem from the central premise that higher education is a service for sale and that students are discerning customers of their own future" (p. 1873), and *credentialism*, "the view that degree completion, not learning, is the goal of higher education" (p. 1873). Acting with integrity, then, also requires us to actively participate in interpreting the context and in organising our collective action to resist those external pressures and threats, and stand by our collectively defined ideals.

A third implication we want to point out concerns the relationship between academic integrity and breaking or complying with institutional rules. It is easy to see why the behaviours normally labelled as breaches of academic integrity, such as those mentioned at the beginning of this paper as regularly characterised as *cheating*, can *most of the time* be appropriately so judged, as they frequently amount to attempts by students to acquire external goods –e.g. good grades, diplomas– at the expense of corrupting the meaningfulness and sense of value and purpose of education. (Although, interestingly, as Jamieson and Moore Howard (2019) have argued, many actions characterised as plagiarism and patchwriting should not be seen as breaches to academic integrity, but simply as mistakes made in the process of learning how to write.) But we can now also more clearly see why the case we presented in the introduction of a teacher and their students doing the minimum necessary to do their jobs, without at all caring for or about learning and growth, is also an example of lack of academic integrity by both teacher and students, despite the fact that no rules are being broken and no cheating occurs. It is precisely that lack of caring for and about learning and growth in the service of worthwhile educational ends –the internal goods of education– that makes it so. The fact that a great deal of the interactions and conversations between teacher and students in that example revolve only around marks, grades, rules and instructions also signals the fact that education has there been emptied of its meaning and value; or, as expressed by Waghid and Davids (2019, p. 5), it "becomes hollowed out, it becomes devoid of substance". But, furthermore, we can also now see why actually complying with institutional rules and procedures established for serving macro-tendencies that strip educational institutions off their educative ends might be also judged as breaches of academic integrity. And something similarly happens with research: For example, even when there are no illegal or rule-breaking behaviours involved, such as falsifying data, if criteria like getting the largest number of quotes or maximising salary bonuses dominate in one's decisions about what to research and where and what to publish, over considerations of what knowledge society and science need or who should benefit from that knowledge, then one will be acting without academic integrity.

These three implications of our proposed conception of academic integrity concern how we understand what it is for academic or educational actors –usually researchers, teachers, students and administrators– to act with or without it. But there are also important implications worth exploring for educational and academic institutions. We turn to them in the following section.

Two implications for academic institutions

We will focus now on two key implications for the institutions that house academic practice, which we have termed the *democratic requirement* and the *duty to promote academic integrity*. Indeed, as we will see, they are intimately related.

The democratic requirement

To state it briefly, a minimum level of democracy in academic institutions is necessary if we are to judge in any meaningful way that someone acts with or without integrity within that practice. As already discussed at the end of the section *Acting with academic integrity within a practice*, demanding integrity from individuals can only be meaningful if they have the opportunity to speak up and stand for what they believe is right for the

practice without risking too much and becoming martyrs in the process. If this condition is not met, then it is hardly expectable from them to do anything other than follow the rules imposed by the powerful or pretend they follow them when actually they do not –to cheat. Neither of these options corresponds to acting with integrity. For instance, let us consider the case of students in authoritarian schools and classrooms who feel that what their teachers are asking them to do does not make sense, or that it serves an ethically questionable educational purpose; but who, considering the likely grave retaliations they would get if they decided to speak up, decide instead to resist the oppression by their teachers by taking the path of cheating in their exams. Under such undemocratic circumstances, it is more difficult to describe their actions as acting without integrity, because the conditions do not allow for their participation in a public domain that would enable the in-their-view positive transformation of academic practice.

However, there is an important obstacle for academic and educational institutions to be democratic in this sense, which derives from something almost intrinsically inserted in their core: the fact that they usually operate based on the inequality principle that states that some of its participants –usually teachers and professors who lead research– know much more than others what the practice is about and how to go on with it. Although academic practice is not alone in this, this tendency seems to be particularly strong here because it is arguably by being based on that inequality principle that much of what it does is socially legitimised.

There are numerous ideas and actions to attempt to democratise education (e.g. Apple and Beane 1995; Power & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008), and there are multiple dimensions that should be considered when tackling issues of democratisation of classrooms and educational institutions and organisations (Mejía et al., 2022). To be clear, we are not suggesting that we should start believing that there are no differences in terms of knowledge and capacities to teach others or to lead research activities, and organise academic institutions accordingly. But, in any case, if we want to advance in the development of academic integrity, we need to carefully consider and address the institutional rules, procedures and other elements that create and maintain power inequalities through bearing a strong relationship with external goods like grades and diplomas –such as the teachers' power to fail or pass their students. And we need to find creative ways to establish democratic conditions for safe public participation of all members despite and in the midst of those power inequalities.

The duty of academic institutions to promote academic integrity
Institutions must protect the practices they house, and therefore they have a duty to do something about those behaviours of its members that may corrupt or in some way harm the integrity of that practice. However, drawing inspiration from Peter Strawson's (1974) distinction between an *objective attitude* and a *participant attitude*, we postulate two differing approaches to doing this. The first implies treating participants in the practice as *objects* who respond to *causal forces* and who can and must be induced into behaving in desirable ways that protect the internal goods of the practice –e.g., in academic settings, not cheating in exams, or not making data up to fit research hypotheses– or simply be removed from the institution if they constitute a threat to the practice's integrity. Punitive approaches for unwanted behaviours are one instance, but in general any strategy that employs positive or negative incentives would be appropriate examples too.

So would be pedagogical strategies that, by design, attempt to simply make assessment cheating-proof, such as not asking students to write their own ideas and arguments – given the vulnerability of such assignments to cheating and plagiarism and now to get artificial intelligence tools to do the job for them– and turning instead to oral examinations in which these behaviours are much more difficult. 'What works' approaches to research, with their emphasis on *causal relations* between strategies or treatments and behavioural performance results, can also be seen as relating to this objective attitude. We call this way of protecting the integrity of academic practice, the *causal-objective approach*.

The second alternative one implies treating participants in the practice as fellow moral and political agents who, just like us, have their own understanding of what internal goods are valuable and merit protection, if any, and who may act in accordance or not to that understanding. An object is not a moral or political agent, for it is seen as simply acting in response to causal forces exerted on them, whereas an agent is seen as acting moved by their understanding –which is affective as well as cognitive– of what is valuable in the world and of the state of the world around them. Strategies that treat people with a participant attitude are *democratic* insofar as they imply appearing in the public or semi-public spaces of communities of practice and institutions to advance and confront visions and understandings of what the internal goods of the practice should be and how they should be pursued. They are also *educative* insofar as they are based on critically developing and improving such visions and understandings, which amounts to a form of moral and political cultivation. They propitiate the sorts of personal transformations suggested by MacIntyre (1981) as the result of learning to become excellent in the practice, in which one gets "to hone one's perception, deepen one's sensitivities, and develop one's powers" (Higgins 2010, p. 247), in this case of a moral and political kind. We call this second way of protecting the integrity of academic practice, the *democratic-educative approach*. Two possible examples of strategies leading in that direction are the 'reflective' approach reported by Dalal (2015), focusing on "empathy, reflection, dialogue, and understanding of the prevalent digital culture of young adults" (p. 2), and the 'educative' approach described by Fudge et al. (2022).

As Hagège (2023) argues, institutions and organisations committed to education –differently from mere training or instruction– are expected to embrace the development of ethical *responsibility* of their members as a central aim. Interestingly, this is how she defines *educational integrity*: "the quality of any institution (such as a university, school, family, etc.) that has an explicit or official purpose of education (not to be confused with training or instruction) and that implements efficient means to educate for responsibility" (Hagège 2023, p. 9).

Educating for responsibility or, in the words we have been using, moral learning and growth of their participants, their cultivation as moral and political agents, feature prominently in the internal goods of the academic practice sustained by an educational institution. This condition implies that they must favourthe democratic-educative approach over the *causal-objective* one; that is, if academic institutions are to be faithful to their educative identity and not betray themselves, the largely preferred way to protect the integrity of the academic practice they sustain must be the promotion of the development of their members' academic integrity. Using approaches that treat individuals with an objective attitude like incentive-based strategies to prevent breaches of

academic integrity –punitive or otherwise– means that the academic institution is giving up, at least to some extent, on its educative purposes.

There are further implications of this conclusion worth pointing out. One of them regards the decisions by an academic institution or organisation to permanently exclude one of its members, usually students. As deciding to permanently exclude someone means the institution accepts it has failed to fulfil its vocation to educate them, it should only truly be a last resort to protect its own integrity.

Another implication related to both the prevention and the handling of breaches of academic integrity is the need to shift conversations from being mostly about rules and punishments for breaking them, to being about how the goods and values of the practice are to be interpreted and how we are protecting them or not with our actions. This implies a broader shift from a legalistic perspective to an ethical-political one, attempting to allow both individuals and communities of academic practice to develop the agency needed to redefine and seek their collective values within the practice. For instance, when students have committed some act of fraud, there is a significant difference between on the one hand talking about what rules have been broken and on the other talking about how that behaviour harms academic practice –if it does– and the community of practice in the educational institution.

A last implication we will mention concerns the need for democracy in academic institutions and organisations. Cultivation of the moral and political agency needed to act with integrity requires that participants in academic practice have the opportunity to interact with others, in order to stand by their best judgment to protect the practice as well as to enrich their understandings without risking too much in the process. In fact, this implication is closely related to the previous one: When conversations are based on how the rules have or have not been breached, power differentials for creating or judging them are not brought to the light to be publicly questioned, thereby perpetuating institutional inequalities between members, usually between educators and students. Given the aforementioned ingrained tendency of academic institutions to be based on anti-democratic principles of inequality, this is perhaps one of the most challenging demands of academic integrity.

Concluding remarks

In this paper we have advanced a proposal for understanding what acting withacademic integrity could mean, as intimately connected to one's development as a moral and political agent who stands for the protection of the integrity of academic practice. Furthermore, we also argued that, specifically for academic institutions, their educative identity imposes on them a moral duty to favour those ways of protecting the integrity of academic practice that promote the moral cultivation of their members –i.e. their academic integrity– in democratic spaces of interaction, rather than on strategies based on positive or negative –i.e. punitive– incentives or on cheating-proof designs, which treat their members with an objective attitude. After all, protecting academic integrity within an educational institution by means of educative democratic strategies is at the same time a way of pursuing the internal goods of academic practice related to moral growth and learning. For this, we explained why a shift in our usual focus from rules to the internal goods and values of the practice is key.

This understanding of academic integrity conveys our particular endorsed political stance. It emerges as a response to our perceived loss of sense of purpose and meaning for education and research in many institutions espousedly engaged in academic practice. However, we still share some of the optimism expressed by Higgins (2010) when he remarks that practices, especially those collectively examined through the lens of integrity, have the capacity to "generate new ends and new conceptions of ends (when the moral life of a community has become impoverished) and to rediscover the live ethical insights (recovering the richness and thorniness of what have degenerated into slogans and pieties)" (p. 268). We aim to reclaim an emotional and affective value of academic practice that we consider possible, desirable, and, moreover, something to yearn for.

Abbreviations
ICAI   International Center for Academic Integrity

Declarations

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