

The Concept of Moral Integrity in Politics and its Contestations: Towards a Normative Approach

Samuel Okok

Department of Philosophy, Makerere University, Uganda

okoksamuel1@gmail.com

Archangel Byaruhanga Rukooko

Department of Philosophy, Makerere University, Uganda

rukookobe@gmail.com

Jimmy Spire Ssentongo

Department of Philosophy, Makerere University, Uganda

jsssentongo@gmail.com

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Abstract

For a long time, the concept of moral integrity in politics has been highly controversial. While many look at it from a moralist perspective demanding absolute observance of moral values and principles, some scholars, chiefly Niccolò Machiavelli and his many followers, believe that politics is typically devoid of moral considerations. Others, such as Demetris Tillyris, consider politics to be a distinct way of life with a moral yardstick distinct from ordinary moral standards. All these viewpoints are grounded on divergent understandings of the purpose of political power and how politicians ought to behave. This paper attempts to provide an exposition and critical analysis of the various contestations on integrity in politics. Through a normative ethical approach, it explores diverse theoretical perspectives with the aim of arriving at a comprehensive understanding of moral integrity in politics. The discussion and analysis in this paper are based on the theoretical lenses of the Aristotelian virtue ethics and the morality of power games.

Keywords

Ethics; Politics; Integrity; Moral Integrity; Common Good; Virtue Ethics

Introduction

Politics has been variously dismissed as a morally wanting domain (Flinders 2012, 2; Hatier 2012, 468). The perception shaped by Niccolò Machiavelli, among many other philosophers, who presents amoral attributes as ideal for political life in his masterpiece, *The Prince* (Machiavelli 1532), is cherished and practised by many politicians today. It is prominently held that the upholding of moral values such as justice, honesty and accountability by politicians has significantly deteriorated. This is evident through the experience of various political abuses such as vote rigging, embezzlement of public funds, manipulation of laws, and violence against political opponents, among others. As such, citizens have labelled politicians as immoral or having an integrity deficit (Hatier 2012, 468; Hay and Stoker 2009, 225). The alleged political integrity deficit follows citizens' perception that politics is a domain inhabited by liars and fraudsters who cannot lead a life characterised by integrity.

Due to political circumstances of non-adherence to ethics, political disenchantment is now rampant. It is widely perceived that in societies with massive political abuses, citizens' public trust diminishes and is followed by increased political protests. As a result, there emerges a distrust of politics and politicians, leading to a culture of political disaffection (Hay and Stoker 2009, 226; Norris 2011). Flinders (2012, 5) describes such a circumstance as one that entails dehumanisation of politicians and public perception of politicians as persons who are generally stripped of all positive moral traits. Therefore, one would argue that politics is an immoral domain and thus not worth getting involved in for anyone who is ethically sensitive. However, a number of scholars have challenged this perception by noting that politics is distinct and, therefore, ought to be judged with unique parameters (Berlin 1980; Hampshire 1989; Tillyris 2018).

In this paper we critically analyse the debate on moral integrity in politics. The paper seeks to answer the following questions:

- Should politicians be concerned about ethical values and principles?
- What, if any, moral principles ought to guide political decisions?
- Ought politics be concerned about the plight of citizens?
- If politics ought to be concerned about the plight of citizens, should the focus be on the individual good or the collective good?

Through the lenses of virtue ethics of the Aristotelian tradition and the morality of power games, the analysis gives a better understanding of moral integrity in politics based on the notion of the common good which follows key ethical principles in the management of public affairs.

The paper uses Conceptual Analysis (CA) and Critical Theory (CT) in its analysis. CA is mostly used in Meta-Ethics to accomplish two main tasks: to facilitate an understanding of the meaning of a concept used, and to determine how the concept relates to other philosophical concepts or problems (Gorovitz 1979). In this paper, CA is mainly deployed to analyse the conceptual contestation of moral integrity in politics by clarifying its meaning and drawing the relationships between it and other concepts such as society and the human person.

Critical Theory is advanced by scholars such as Jürgen Habermas, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. It aims to offer critiques of cultures and society at large with the goal of liberating human beings from worldviews and circumstances that enslave and skew their look at social realities (Horkheimer 1982). It uses a dialectical method that seeks to discern values, beliefs and motives of moral agents and their respective societies in order to reveal the underlying contradictions arising from the societal worldview and people's perception of reality. CT also unravels hidden structural injustices and power modes used by individuals or groups to dominate others (Comstock 1997). It is used to highlight the logical inconsistencies that arise from popular debates on moral integrity in politics - inconsistencies arising from the failure to draw a proper connection between politics and other relevant concepts such as society and the human person - a connection which has serious ethical implications.

The paper also makes use of the philosophical tools of inquiry such as philosophical critique, prescriptive analysis, and constructive argumentation. Philosophical critique is derived from the Greek word *kritikós* which means making a philosophical assessment. It is used to unravel certain logically inconsistent positions and to draw logical conclusions. Prescriptive analysis and constructive argumentation play a normative role in developing an ideal understanding of moral integrity in politics and the principles that ought to be followed in political leadership.

The paper sets out with an analysis and critique of the various positions on moral integrity in politics. We then proceed to present an ideal meaning of moral integrity in politics by elucidating the key elements of what integrity in politics ought to entail, and the principles that ought to guide political action if we are to realise political leadership founded on integrity.

The Concept of Integrity

The concept of integrity is key to understanding moral integrity in politics and its contestations. It is on this basis that a proper elaboration of integrity is made. Though the concept of integrity is so complex, it has been variously understood as wholesome and consistent behaviour, upholding high moral values and principles, and consistent action for the common good.

Integrity is commonly defined as a moral agent's wholesome and consistent behaviour. This view is based on its etymological roots from the Latin word *integritas*, which means intact, whole, or harmonious (Becker and Talsma 2016, 33; Huberts 2018, 19). The Cambridge English Dictionary defines wholeness as “the quality of being or feeling complete and not divided or damaged”. Wholeness means a state of being intact - not having certain parts or elements disintegrated. Therefore, wholesome behaviour entails having a consistent pattern of conduct in all spheres of life (Montefiore 2005; Huberts 2018, 19). Consistency implies behaving similarly, not changing viewpoints or saying one thing and doing the other. It is worth noting that wholesome and consistent behaviour is a neutral

concept which may have positive or negative connotations. Huberts (2014) illustrates this neutrality with the example of a government minister who consistently behaves immorally:

In judging the integrity of a government minister, we are concentrating on his or her behaviour as a politician; hence, a first element of integrity is whether the minister is consistent and whole ... Nevertheless, consistency or wholeness is not sufficient. Some ministers are highly consistent in misusing their authority ... Thus, a corrupt minister can still be behaviourally consistent and fully integrated into a corrupt environment (Huberts 2014, 45).

Therefore, wholeness and consistency in behaviour is a necessary condition for integrity. However, with the shortcoming cited by Huberts (2014) above, more is needed to adequately define it. Indeed, as commonly understood, integrity has positive ethical implications, being associated with goodness or right conduct. Thus, integrity has been viewed as being tantamount to honesty. For instance, the Cambridge English Dictionary defines it as “the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles that you refuse to change”. This definition also entails the earlier element of consistency in behaviour. Yet while integrity has loosely been conceptualised as honesty, these concepts have significant differences. Honesty is specifically concerned about truthfulness or sincerity, while integrity is much broader, as it embraces more virtues in addition to honesty. Therefore, a form of behaviour that passes the test of integrity, over and above being whole and consistent, ought to exude high moral values and principles, as well as upholding certain virtues such as justice, honesty, temperance, and steadfast reliability, among others (Rorty 2005, 111-112). It follows, then, that a person of integrity ought to be free from vices such as greed, cruelty, deceitfulness and unfairness.

Hence, integrity can be attributed to a moral agent if he or she wholesomely and consistently upholds high moral values and principles in his or her behaviour. While this definition satisfies major conditions of integrity, it nonetheless fails to highlight the purpose of integrity: it portrays integrity as a concept that is intrinsically good, hence ignoring its instrumental role. Indeed, the listing of wholeness, consistency, and the commitment to uphold high moral values and principles is not an adequate account of integrity.

In the light of the observations above, it is evident that integrity is a virtue, that is, a morally desirable trait of character. However, there is need to evaluate the extent of this desirability. This raises questions such as: is integrity good because of its usefulness for some other purpose, or as a means to what is good? Is it good because the experience of contemplating it is good or rewarding in itself? Is it good because it contributes to an intrinsically good life, or is it part of it? In ethics, moral values are usually categorised into intrinsic and instrumental ones. Frankena (1973, 80) observes that for something to have intrinsic value implies that it is good because the experience of contemplating it is good in itself. Therefore, a moral agent who has integrity often finds satisfaction in his or her character. This implies that integrity has intrinsic value. However, it also serves a higher good, making it an instrumental good as well.

Following Aristotle's virtue ethics, while the practice of such virtue may in itself be rewarding, it ought not to be cultivated for its own sake: there ought to be a reason behind their cultivation. As Aristotle contends in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, at the core of virtue is the notion of *eudaimonia* - human flourishing. Thus, since integrity promotes human flourishing or well-being, it possesses an instrumental value.

What then is human flourishing or well-being? In Aristotle's *Politics*, he observes that the ultimate reason why people organise themselves into a political community is to create conditions necessary for the thriving of all its members. Human flourishing is achieved if certain conditions that contribute to everyone's wellbeing in society are created and sustained. These conditions are what some thinkers refer to as the common good (Rawls 1999, 205). Therefore, integrity plays an instrumental role in delivering a higher good of enhancing human well-being through the promotion of the common good, which is an aspiration of society.

Consequently, a more comprehensive definition of integrity incorporates all the above-mentioned elements. *First*, integrity ought to entail wholesome and consistent behaviour. *Second*, the wholesome and consistent behaviour ought to

uphold high moral values and principles. *Third*, consistent and wholesome behaviour in line with high moral values and principles ought to aim at promoting the common good. Hence, integrity is the quality of behaviour that wholesomely and consistently upholds high moral values and principles with the goal of promoting the common good.

Contestations on Moral Integrity in Politics

The question under contestation is whether or not moral integrity has a role to play in politics, and if so, what role, and if not, why not. This question has given rise to three main responses, namely, the moralist view, the amoralist view, and the view that the standard of moral integrity in politics is distinct from ordinary moral standards.

The Moralist View of Moral Integrity in Politics

The moralist view is one of the common understandings of moral integrity in politics. It considers political morality to be akin to ordinary individual morality. According to this view, similar moral standards ought to judge one's integrity both in the public domain and private life (Niebuhr 1932). This perspective is reflected in the philosophical thinking of Immanuel Kant and other duty-based ethicists who underscore the necessity of upholding moral duties irrespective of the consequences. Thus it considers a politician with integrity to be one who resolutely acts in line with moral duties without calculating the consequences of his or her decisions and actions. This position leaves no room for compromise in governance, even in circumstances of obvious political necessity. A case in point would be a politician strictly adhering to the moral requirement of being honest even when it is ascertained that such honesty would cause serious tension, fear or anxiety among citizens. Weiner (2019) succinctly expresses this view by stating that a politician with integrity ought to "let justice be done even though the heavens fall." In short, the moralist view prescribes certain moral imperatives, often leaving no room for prudence.

Thus according to the moralist view, a politician with integrity is one who strictly and resolutely upholds moral duties such as honesty and truth-telling,

transparency and accountability, observance of the law, respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, and unflinching respect for the principle of the separation of powers and the attendant independence of institutions, among others. In certain instances, the moralist view of politics even specifies certain ethical standards that apply to individuals' private lives such as sexual mores and dress codes. It insists that these moral values ought to be uncompromisingly followed, leaving no room for exceptions.

At face value, the moralist view of integrity in politics seems to be morally praiseworthy. However, upon critical reflection, it reveals serious shortcomings. *First*, anchoring the management of public affairs on such an understanding of political integrity is problematic in an open and pluralistic society. There is a risk of some moralistic politicians propagating moral imperatives such as dress codes and rules touching on sexual conduct that may be in some sense undesirable. In a pluralistic society, politicians embracing such an outlook may even, in extreme cases, parade certain sectarian positions at the expense of others. As Karl Popper (2002) observes, society is diverse, and to champion certain moralist substantive positions is against such diversity. The imposition of such moral standards would curtail people's liberties and rights, hence undermining their dignity. Some of the values that may be paraded in line with this outlook simply do not apply to everyone. Consequently, a political system committed to integrity ought to promote universal moral values rather than sectarian ones.

Furthermore, while some of the moral ideals required of a politician may be praiseworthy, sometimes upholding them may harm society. For instance, to rigidly uphold the virtue of honesty is problematic in the light of the fact that divulging some information can cause severe tension, fear or anxiety in society. Furthermore, while the position champions absolute respect for human rights, such rights are not absolute: in certain circumstances, such as in the interest of public order and security, certain human rights ought to be limited for the greater good. Similarly, upholding the absolute independence of public institutions can breed corruption and other maleficent forms of conduct.

In a nutshell, if we strictly and absolutely followed the moralist view in the management of public affairs, the good life and the good society would not be realised.

The Amoralist View of Moral Integrity in Politics

The amoralist perspective has prominently shaped modern-day politics. The term amoral refers to something that is neither ethically desirable nor ethically undesirable. Put simply, to be amoral is to be outside the realm of rightness and wrongness, virtue and vice, that is, outside the realm of morality (Baggini and Fosl 2007). An amoral person does not tag ethical considerations on his or her actions. Therefore, an amoralist view of politics is an outlook in which ethics or moral considerations are completely divorced from politics - both in acquiring and running a political office. Amoral politics is deeply anchored in the general theoretical position of political realism or 'real politics'. This perspective has its historical roots in the philosophies of the political thinker Thucydides who highlights the notion of power politics by underscoring that those who are strong ought to absolutely rule the weak since they are endowed with the power to do so (Thucydides 1954). This view was further developed by Niccolò Machiavelli in *The Prince* (1532).

At the core of amoral politics lies the assumption that power is (or ought to be) the primary goal of politics. In essence, amoral politics underscores the view held by Thrasymachus that "justice is what is good for the stronger" or "might makes right" (Plato, *The Republic*, Bk 1). This view is similar to what Thucydides states regarding the strong using power to rule the weak. Indeed, it is popularly held that political power must not be concerned with matters of right and wrong, justice and injustice, good or bad or about the welfare of the governed generally. According to this view, then, political power is an end in itself, and not a means to a higher moral goal of promoting social welfare (Machiavelli 1532). The amoral political view bases its arguments on two major convictions:

1. The acquisition, preservation and expansion of power is the ultimate goal of politics.

2. Therefore, the rulers must do whatever it takes to keep themselves in power and even expand this power (Machiavelli 1532).

The underlying attitude of politicians who subscribe to amoral politics is self-interest that is essentially blind to the legitimate interests of others (Grant 1999, 11). The politician pursues his or her interests in total disregard for the interests of others unless their interests contribute to his or her own. Thus the mode of relationship that characterises amoral politics is what Martin Buber (1923) describes as the "I-It" mode of relating, where one regards the other human being as a mere "it" - not as a person possessing rights, but as a mere object to be manipulated and exploited for the exploiter's benefit. This mode of relating depersonalises human beings, stripping them of their rights, and turning them into mere objects or implements for use by others (Buber 1923). Such politicians put measures in place to control their oppressed, exploited and dominated compatriots in total disregard for their needs and interests. They use all means at their disposal, including state institutions and laws, to achieve their selfish ends. To realise their goal, amoral politicians deploy power games (Foucault 1980). Some of the major ways through which such power games are exercised in amoral politics are elaborated below.

Manipulation

Manipulation in amoral politics follows a style of power game that Foucault (1980) describes as covert/subtle. The rulers repeal or amend existing laws, or introduce new ones, all with the aim of entrenching their power and suppressing dissenting voices. They also influence state institutions to formulate policies that promote the rulers' own interests. The policies are carefully crafted to give the impression that they are a result of due process and for the public good. Grant (1999) lucidly describes manipulative behaviour in amoral politics thus:

To enlist the support of the other party requires flattery, manipulation and pretence of concern for his needs. The Machiavellian ruler seeks to ensure that he will be the manipulator and not the manipulated by acquiring enough power to secure his autonomy to rely on his "own arms" (Grant 1999, 13).

Threats and Violence

Machiavelli (1532) holds that it is better to be feared than to be loved, and that as long as a leader keeps his subjects united and loyal, he ought not to be concerned about being criticised as 'cruel', as this helps him maintain his/her power. In line with this view, amoral politicians often issue threats to anybody who attempts to undermine their power. Sometimes, those with dissenting views are charged with fabricated offences such as inciting violence and treason, and are subsequently imprisoned for them (Tangri and Mwenda 2010, 33).

Amoral politicians also use state and non-state security apparatuses to unleash physical violence on anyone they consider to be holding dissenting views. This is often witnessed especially in quelling protests, violence against opposition politicians and their supporters during electioneering, and even during heated debates in the legislature that have a bearing on the regime's survival. Physical violence sometimes involves gruesome torture, and, in extreme circumstances, murder of regime opponents. Rationalisations are often given for these violent actions, such as the use of 'reasonable force' to ensure public order and security. Underlying these rationalisations is usually an ulterior motive of suppressing any possible attempt to challenge bad leadership and to keep the citizens in fear.

Political Corruption

Politicians involve themselves in unethical behaviour such as embezzlement of public funds, bribery, and crony capitalism as a means of enriching themselves and members of their families, friends and close allies. They also employ political corruption to capture, preserve and expand power by manipulating state institutions through appointments and inducements, bribery of voters and polling officials, use of state financial and human resources to run and win elections, building clientelism and patronage networks, nepotism, favouring businesses for political support, and corrupting the judiciary and the legislature to serve the politicians' will, among others (Amundsen 2019, 4; Mbabazi and Pyeong 2014, 59).

Skewed Resource Allocation

Instead of utilising public resources to meet the needs of the citizens, amoral politicians spend heavily on ventures that maintain their regimes in power. Thus,

priority is given to strengthening the army and enriching members of the cabinet so that they can help consolidate the power of the leader. All this fuels inefficiency in the management of public affairs, thereby diminishing human well-being through the lack of essential services. Nevertheless, several amoral regimes allocate resources to the provision of services to the public in order to make them popular and thus keep them in power.

Moral Integrity in Politics as Distinct from Ordinary Moral Standards

This perspective is closely related to the amoral view of integrity in politics because both of them front the deployment of power games in the interest of politicians. The striking difference between them is that for amoral politics there is complete disregard for ethics in the management of public affairs, while this view acknowledges that ethical parameters play a role in politics, but insists that a distinction needs to be made between ordinary moral standards and the ethical standards necessary for living a political life. Besides, although they both employ power games, politicians who subscribe to politics as a distinct entity are not necessarily selfish: in many instances, they apply crude or violent methods, but avowedly for the good of the citizens they serve. This perspective is reflected in the consequentialist ethical thinking where politicians' actions are justified by the outcomes they generate.

Thinkers such as Isaiah Berlin (1980) and Stuart Hampshire (1989) champion this position. In contemporary times, it has been expounded further by thinkers such as Demetris Tillyris (2018). Their view is a response to the popular notion that politics suffers from an integrity deficit. They challenge the moralistic understanding of moral integrity in politics: they argue that in view of the absence of an ideal political morality, describing politics as an area suffering from an integrity deficit is a misdirected position. According to Tillyris (2018, 3), it is erroneous to assume that the purification of political life - the complete extirpation of vices from politics - is even possible. He holds that "our crisis is not moral per se but primarily philosophical in nature: it relates to the very concepts we employ - the qualities of character and context we presuppose whilst pondering over

political morality and integrity" (Tillyris 2018, 1). Thinkers inclined towards this view believe that politics ought to be considered a distinct entity, with its unique demands, practices and standards of integrity that stem from within politics itself and not from abstract moral parameters. Besides, they hold that assuming that there is even a possibility of leading a morally upright life while holding a political office is a manifestation of ignorance regarding the ideal requirements of political life. For Berlin (1980), one has to choose between saving one's soul by leading a life of integrity or involving oneself in politics, but one cannot do both.

According to the proponents of this view, to effectively judge the integrity of a politician, one ought to consider the context in which politicians operate, certain goods that are intrinsic to a virtuous political life, and the quality of character required to achieve these goods. They affirm that politics is characterised by vices such as betrayal, antagonism, deceit, intrigue and generally unhealthy competition, and that for one to succeed in political life, one has to exhibit certain political virtues that ought not to be judged by abstract moral standards. More specifically, one has to learn to employ the very qualities of deceit, betrayal and intrigue if one is to have a successful political career and to render services to citizens. To Hampshire (1989, 163), "political integrity ... resembles the integrity of a 'burglar' who is ready to change direction when he runs up against an obstacle in the dark." Hence, to lead a political life in line with ordinary moral standards and principles such as honesty, loyalty and justice would render one a political failure. Thus Tillyris (2018) cautions:

Practicing the virtues of faithfulness, loyalty, and truthfulness come-what-may, categorically upholding one's principles, values and commitment might be conducive to a morally admirable life and moral integrity but comes at a cost of political powerlessness and impotence... If one innocently indulges oneself with one's purity and moral integrity whilst leading a political life, one had better stay away from politics. Innocence, purity, and consistency might be morally admirable but are not political virtues. They are vices (Tillyris 2018, 9).

Hence, according to this perspective, to succeed in politics, one must appreciate the realities of politics, that is, the circumstances in which politicians operate, and thus adhere to certain political 'virtues'. The proponents of this view hold that political integrity entails a politician's capacity to manoeuvre such a messy terrain

as he or she boldly competes for a political office, with a considerable ability to win over allies, make compromises, and conceal or reveal his or her intentions depending on necessity. In short, he or she also ought to deploy deception, betrayal and hypocrisy whenever he or she deems it necessary to do so. Hence, according to this view, the actions of politicians are largely utilitarian, as they are assessed on the basis of their social consequences. In sum, this view holds that a politician with integrity is one who consistently deploys the political ‘virtues’ listed above as he or she runs for and manages political office.

The Amoral View of Integrity in Politics and the Distinct View of Moral Integrity in Politics: A Critique

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*, politics refers to “the activities involved in getting and using power in public life, and being able to influence decisions that affect a country or a society.” It is also defined as the science of managing society through the making of common decisions (Shively 1997, 4-5). From the two definitions above, the aspect of society is central to politics. Gonsalves (1981, 297) defines a society as an enduring union of a number of persons morally bound under authority to cooperate for the common good. This definition underscores key elements of the concept of society. *First*, society is only possible where there are free and rational individuals whose union is based on agreements about specific goals. Based on the definition above, members in such a union cooperate to attain certain ends that are equally to everyone's advantage (Rawls 1999, 37).

Second, a society is held together by certain moral bonds of means and ends. These bonds can be expressed in the form of agreements, contracts, or pledges. In most cases, such bonds are expressed in terms of guiding laws and policies. Rawls underscores this view by noting that “society is a more or less self-sufficient association of persons who in their relations to one another recognise certain rules of conduct as binding and who for the most part act in accordance with them” (Rawls 1999, 4). However, for all these elements to work together towards the attainment of a common end, society must be equipped with a moral power,

namely, authority - the right to determine a common goal and to direct members towards it.

It follows that politics is an efficient cause of society, and is intertwined with its various aspects. As such, its purpose ought to be to hold society together and to direct it towards attaining the common good, which is society's ultimate goal. The management of society involves using public resources contributed by citizens, as well as those extracted from nature. Therefore, to use public resources such as the security apparatuses and public funds to pursue selfish political aims is morally indefensible. Hence, it is erroneous to consider politics to be a distinct way of life where politicians are free to deploy any means to attain their own ends. For instance, the amoral view that advocates for the preservation of power even in disregard for the will of the governed is a selfish act contrary to the ethical purpose of holding political office, which is to promote the public good (Raz 1995, 45).

Furthermore, politicians lead fellow human beings whose dignity they ought to respect. One of the most fundamental aspects of the human person is rationality - the capacity that presents one as a self-conscious being with desires or will and able to distinguish between right and wrong (Gonsalves 1981, 122; Hacker 2007, 199). According to Kant (2002), the obligation to treat people with respect derives from their very essence as beings who possess a superior attribute of human rationality, which implies possession of the intellectual and willing capacities. Thus Kant avers that human beings deserve respect because they have the ability to make informed choices. It is in this context that Kant famously asserted that the human person ought to be treated as an end in himself or herself, and never as a mere means. In other words, human beings are endowed with inherent dignity which implies the imperative to respect their choices. Yet the second and third positions on political integrity above assume a kind of superiority of politicians who purportedly hold a 'license' to take actions even without regard for the citizens' consent. Therefore, to deceive, manipulate, intimidate or physically assault citizens, among other common practices in politics, violates the dignity of those whom they lead, which is ethically impermissible.

The argument above can be objected to on the grounds that certain political actions such as coercion may be morally admissible in instances where they promote the citizens' own interests or in pursuit of the common good. Rawls (2005, 19) observes that human beings possess two major capacities - "a capacity for a sense of justice and a capacity for a conception of the good". Going by the second capacity, human beings are capable of initiating, adjusting, and rationally pursuing what they consider to be good. However, this capacity may be undermined by certain factors such as inadequate information (Gonsalves 1981, 37). Nevertheless, the use of coercion for the citizens' own good poses a serious ethical challenge in that it hinders the development of their capacity for rational agency, and ought therefore to be used most judiciously and sparingly.

In the light of the shortcomings associated with the two views on integrity in politics examined in this section, an adequate conception of integrity in politics ought to be presented, one which is sensitive to ethical concerns and therefore capable of delivering the good life and a good society, and to this we now turn.

Towards a Comprehensive View of Moral Integrity in Politics

As earlier indicated, politics is concerned with the management of societal affairs. Usually, the one who manages such affairs utilises public resources that are collectively raised by the populace, or that are acquired directly from nature and that therefore ought to be collectively enjoyed. These resources include human capabilities, finances, security apparatuses, minerals and water, among others. Consequently, the one entrusted with managing such resources is morally obligated to act as a steward by serving the general interest of those who entrusted him or her with them. This general interest is catered for if the leaders pursue policies and programmes that are aimed at promoting the public good. Aristotle believes that the purpose of a political community is to provide the good needed for the thriving of all its members, commonly referred to as human well-being or flourishing:

It is clear that all partnerships aim at some good, and that the partnership that is most authoritative of all and embraces all the others does so particularly and aims at the most authoritative good of all. This is what is called the city or the political partnership (Aristotle, *Politics*, Bk 1).

The notion of the common good is traceable to Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Aquinas. In contemporary times, it is mainly associated with John Rawls. It is a total sum of conditions necessary for societal members to attain well-being and lead fulfilling lives. Rawls defines the common good as “certain general conditions that are in an appropriate sense equally to everyone’s advantage” (Rawls 1999, 217). It consists significantly in having institutions, social systems, and the environment upon which all human beings depend for the benefit of all. Some of the essential dimensions of the common good include accessible and affordable public health care and education systems, an effective system of public safety and security, peace among the nations of the world, a just legal and political system, an unpolluted natural environment, and a flourishing economic system (Velasquez *et al.* 1992). A deeper appreciation of the common good can be attained by considering its three essential characteristics.

First, the common good aims to promote the well-being of every member of society irrespective of their social status. Nevertheless, this well-being is not only material, but broadly helps to develop the human person morally, intellectually, and spiritually. It aims to develop distinctive human qualities to perfection to enable people to live well and enjoy human life to its fullness (Aristotle, *Politics*, Bk1). *Second*, the common good is more than an aggregate of individual well-being: its benefits are shared amongst all members of the community. Therefore, while they attend to the well-being of an individual, this does not imply a sort of private advantage. To enjoy the dimensions of the common good, active participation of other community members ought to be guaranteed (Raz 1995, 34; Douglas 1980, 104). *Third*, the common good involves an essential aspect of political authority. While all members of society contribute towards the common good, the political authority plays the most fundamental role since it is entrusted with public resources. The political authority therefore ought to plan and direct resources into programmes aimed at securing the common good: this is the core ethical purpose of political authority.

Ethical Principles upon which Moral Integrity in Politics ought to be anchored

If the moral purpose of holding political office as described above is to be realised, there are key ethical principles upon which management of public affairs ought to be anchored - principles that ought to guide political decisions and actions. The word principle is derived from the Latin word *principium*, denoting “the beginnings or foundations”. Principles, therefore, provide the fundamental, general, and universalizable standards upon which other ethical ideals are founded. These principles are elaborated on below.

Respect for Human Life

Based on the conviction that life is sacred, this principle enjoins respect for human life at all costs. It is only on this principle that society exists: without living people, society ceases (Gonsalves 1981, 297). In politics, this principle underscores two major obligations for managers of public affairs.

First, the principle underscores the negative obligation of managers of public affairs to respect citizens’ lives by refraining from undertaking activities that would endanger them: “the deprivation of life by the authorities of the state is a matter of utmost gravity. The law must strictly control and limit circumstances in which a person may be deprived of one’s life by the authorities of the state” (General Comment 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights).

Second, the principle requires managers of public affairs to take positive steps to protect the lives of the people without discrimination of any kind. By implication, it also requires politicians to develop a mechanism for managing errant security operatives whose actions threaten the lives of citizens. In addition, in circumstances where there has been arbitrary deprivation of life, there ought to be a mechanism to access legal redress through impartial, independent, and fair arbitration, irrespective of any considerations such as political affiliation.

Therefore, politically sanctioned violent actions that undermine the lives of people are a manifestation of a deficit in the moral integrity of politicians. In addition,

failure to put systems in place for protecting people's lives is tantamount to abetting criminal actions that may lead to loss of lives.

Respect for Human Dignity

Respect for human dignity entails treating human beings as ends in themselves and never as mere means to others' ends (Kant 2002, 151). The principle proscribes the perceiving or treating of people simply as instruments or objects of the will of others. Any attempt by politicians to use others against their will through deception, manipulation, intimidation or force undermines this principle. Hence, high priority ought to be accorded in political, social and legal arrangements to protecting the freedom of the individual in matters such as belief, attitudes and ways of life. This ultimately entails respect for all the inherent rights of persons. Politicians of integrity ought to be mindful not to suffocate the exercise of human rights, most importantly civil and political rights, as these serve as a basis for advocating for other equally important human rights such as socio-economic rights. Respect for human rights obligates political leaders to uphold tolerance of difference as an essential value in an open society (Popper 2002). The virtue of tolerance requires that deliberate efforts are made to recognise and respect the opinions, practices or behaviour of others provided they do not harm others. It is grounded on the conviction that all human beings are equal, with similar aspirations for liberties and rights. This virtue ought to be a foundation for respect of rights, especially the civil and political ones. It implies that if political integrity is to be realized, divergent political opinions must be appreciated, and that dialogue rather than brutality on regime dissenters ought to be the norm.

Besides, respect for the dignity of all persons leads to strong emphasis on the consent of the governed. If this consent is to be realised, effective citizen participation in public affairs ought to be the norm. Besides, political decisions that have a bearing on the public's interest ought to be arrived at by consensus and not through manipulation or force. It means that the coercive rule of one or the few over the many is not in line with due respect for the dignity of persons, and is thus a signal of a political integrity deficit. It also means that political leaders ought not to impose beliefs and attitudes on those subject to their rule, or to extend authority into areas of human life that are essentially personal. Infringement of the

individual's liberty, if any, ought to follow the harm principle, where coercion can only be used on an individual to prevent harm to others, since one's own good is never a sufficient warrant for interfering with his or her liberty (Mill 1859, 13).

This principle further enjoins holders of political offices to attend to citizens' material needs and to uphold the ideal of social and distributive justice. A person in abject poverty, deprived of adequate means of subsistence or denied the opportunity to work, suffers an affront to his or her sense of dignity. Consequently, economic and social arrangements cannot be excluded from considerations of the demands of human dignity.

In addition, respect for human dignity obligates recognition of human equality - the conviction that every person is as valuable as every other person. Thus, political leaders ought to desist from directing preferential consideration to specific groups on grounds such as political affiliation, ethnicity or religion. Instead, they ought to promote ethical ideals of equal opportunities, constitutionalism, and the rule of law. Thus, a political leader of integrity impartially enforces the laws designed to serve the interest of the society at large. Furthermore, with respect to constitutionalism, political leaders of integrity appreciate the principle of the separation of powers. Interference with the operations of state institutions is a mark of a deficit in moral integrity in the political leaders involved.

Preferential Treatment for the Poor and the Vulnerable

The common good invites us to exercise special concern for the poor and the vulnerable. This principle is akin to Rawls' difference principle (Rawls 1999). Public authorities ought to develop policies tinted with preferential attention for the poor and the vulnerable. Those with a public voice ought to always stand out as advocates for the voiceless and powerless in society. Systems ought to be put in place to address their special needs so that they can participate fully in society, and thereby live as truly human persons. Hence when formulating public policies, the preferential treatment of the poor and vulnerable ought to be kept at the forefront. In fact, as Rawls (1999) correctly observes, the morality of any society is measured by how much it attends to the plight of its most vulnerable members.

Stewardship in the Management of Public Resources

This principle obligates political leaders to manage public resources in their custody efficiently and effectively in the interest of their actual owners, namely, the public. More specifically, it enjoins the political leaders to refrain from deploying public resources for selfish ventures such as personal or group aggrandisement, or for the retention of power. In compliance with this principle, a political leader of integrity upholds transparency and accountability - an approach to the management of public affairs which enables citizens to freely observe the workings of government and to seek explanations for decisions and actions taken, and thus to ascertain if the government promotes the public good. Inadequate public access to information allows corruption to flourish and backroom deals to determine spending in the interest of the few rather than the many.

Hence, actions such as embezzlement of public funds, manipulation of laws and state institutions, as well as election malpractices are a betrayal of moral integrity in politics, since through them political office-holders use public resources to satisfy their selfish goals.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the conceptual contestations on moral integrity in politics. It has observed that some scholars insist that moral integrity in politics ought to be viewed from the ordinary moralistic stance, while others contend that politics is free from all moral considerations because it is characterised by intrigue, betrayal, and other manifestations of unhealthy competition. A third school of thought holds that politics is a distinct domain whose morality ought not to be measured using traditional moral standards, but rather by deploying pragmatic criteria that enable the politician to acquire and retain power in service of the citizens. While the second and third positions have largely shaped contemporary politics, they fail to appreciate that politics is not distinct from society and the human person, a fact which has serious ethical implications. Consequently, the paper has advanced the view that integrity in politics ought to entail the resolute promotion of the common good by adherence to certain ethical principles such as respect for human life, respect for human dignity, preferential

treatment for the poor and the vulnerable, and stewardship in the management of public resources.

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