CHAPTER FOUR
Types and Forms of Integrity

What the word ‘integrity’ means

In the most general sense, integrity is a concept that can be used in relation to anything that can be damaged. The Latin ‘integritas’ from which the English word ‘integrity’ derives generally denotes ‘the undiminished or unimpaired condition of a thing’.

It was used mostly in respect to undiminished strength of body and mind, purity (for instance of food but also in the sense of chastity and virginity), and a virtuous, unblemished character. But according to Glare’s Oxford Latin Dictionary, the verb ‘integer’ could refer to a whole range of different things: ‘whole, complete’, ‘not previously touched, tried, used, etc.’, ‘not exhausted by previous activity, fresh’, ‘not impaired by physical injury, undamaged, entire’, ‘virgin, not violated’, ‘unimpaired by ill health or disease’, unimpaired by age, youthful’, ‘mentally sound, unaffected by passion’, ‘morally unblemished’, (of abstract things:) ‘unimpaired, undiminished’, (of resources:) ‘not reduced or diminished’, (of persons, places etc.:) ‘not affected by war, depredation, or other losses’, (of armed forces:) ‘having suffered no losses’. Obviously the core meaning of the term is broader than any of its traditional applications. It seems that anything can be said to possess integrity as long as it is ‘entire’, ‘intact’, ‘unharmed’, ‘untouched’, ‘unspoilt’, or ‘inviolate’. Anything that is still in full possession of its powers and natural (or artificial) faculties, in other words: anything that is still as it should be, has kept its

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1 This is the general definition found in Lewis’s and Short’s classic Latin-English dictionary: A Latin Dictionary. Founded on Andrew’s edition of Freund’s Latin Dictionary. Revised, enlarged, and in great part rewritten by Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short (Oxford, 1879).

integrity. On the other hand, anything that has lost part of its powers, that is weaker or in any way worse than it is supposed to be or that it could possibly be in this particular phase of its existence or stage of development, has, to that extent, lost its integrity. Hence, if we take as a starting point the original meaning of the term, then clearly the concept of integrity is anything but purely descriptive. Rather, it has a strong normative content since it presupposes an ideal condition (or possibly more than one ideal condition) from which any divergence is not simply a change but an aberration and deterioration, that is, a change for the worse. A thing that has integrity is as good as it can be and cannot be improved. This explains why the Latin term ‘integer’ meant both the inviolate and the inviolable: that which has not been violated yet is also that which ought not to be violated. Since, per definition, the worse is to be avoided and the better (let alone the best) to be preferred, the state of full integrity (provided there is such a state which may not always – i.e., in respect to all objects - be the case) is a state that ought to be preserved whenever possible, that is, when there is no good reason for not preserving it. In other words, if all other things are equal, integrity is preferable to non-integrity. Thus any action that leads to a loss of integrity is in need of justification. However, it is not always, for any particular object, clear what constitutes damage and consequently a loss of integrity, and not even, whether it can be damaged at all. Not every change is necessarily a change for the worse, not every loss (or gain) a violation of integrity. Some changes do not endanger integrity. If this were not so then no living thing could have integrity, for there is no life without change. There must be some sort of a borderline that separates changes that are integrity-violating from those that are not. Where exactly this borderline runs will depend upon the nature of the object whose
integrity is at stake and upon this object’s ideal condition. In theory, there are two possibilities as to how to determine an object’s ideal condition. I say ‘in theory’ because it remains to be seen whether both possibilities are actually realized. In practice, there may be only one viable way of determining an object’s ideal condition. Again, whether or not this is so, is something that must prove itself during the course of this book. These are the two theoretical possibilities: Either the nature of the object is such that in order to find out about its ideal condition we do not need any external reference point, or it is such that we do. In the present context, a reference point is whatever provides the ground for marking out a certain condition as ideal. Without a reference point it would be impossible to say in what respect a certain condition stood out as ‘ideal’. Now, in the first possible case, it only depends on the thing itself, i.e. its intrinsic properties, whether it is to be considered whole or not whole, damaged or undamaged. Here, the reference point, which is needed to determine whether the object is still in a state of integrity or not, is imposed on us (that is, by anyone who contemplates it) by the object itself. In other words, we are not free to choose our own reference point. As soon as we know what kind of thing it is we are dealing with we can in principle also know when its integrity is impaired and when not. For lack of a better word, I will call this form of integrity autonomous integrity or auto-integrity. In the second possible case, the required reference point is not already given with the nature of the object so it is up to us to choose and/or accept one. As long as we have not done this, there is no way to tell whether the object’s integrity is damaged or intact. And we don’t have to make a decision at all. If we do not choose, there will be no reference point and therefore no integrity that could be damaged or stay intact. I will call this second form of integrity heteronomous integrity or hetero-integrity.
Let us first look at an example for hetero-integrity. Take for instance an inanimate object like a stone. Does a stone have integrity? It seems not, for in order to have integrity an object must be capable of being damaged, and it is hard to see how one should be able to damage a stone. Of course you can do all sorts of things to a stone, like, for instance, cut it in half or pulverize it, but this is not in any way damaging to the stone. The stone has just changed its appearance. It is different than before, and that is all. So by its own nature, a stone does not seem to possess integrity. However, even a stone may gain integrity if there is someone around who contributes an external point of reference by, for instance, adopting an aesthetic point of view. The stone may then be perceived – by virtue of, e.g., its form, surface structure, or colour - as beautiful (or in other ways aesthetically pleasing or interesting) and in so far as being in an ideal condition, so that any change in the appearance of the stone will either destroy or diminish its beauty or at least not enhance it (so that changing it will have posed at best an unnecessary risk). Or the stone may be perceived as ugly and hence as being far removed from the ideal condition, or as somewhere in between beauty and ugliness and more or less far removed from the ideal. If beauty or a desire for beauty is our reference point, then the stone can be said to have, or to lack, integrity in so far as it is beautiful or ugly respectively, or more precisely in so far as it is in a state conducive to the perception of it as beautiful or ugly. From an aesthetic standpoint anything that causes a loss of beauty (or, more generally, of aesthetic appeal) counts as damage, and whatever can be damaged has, in that particular respect, integrity. That is to say that, if the nature of the damage is aesthetic then the integrity is aesthetic in kind too. And since, as stated above, integrity is generally preferable to non-integrity, here too we should preserve integrity if we have no
good reason for sacrificing it – provided, that is, we adopt the aesthetic point of view or at least accept it as relevant. Given the endorsement of the aesthetic perspective, the beautiful stone should be left alone or, if we have to change it for whatever reason, to take parts away from it or add new parts, this should be done in a way that aesthetic integrity is preserved. The parts should still fit together and be in harmony with each other. This is what ‘integration’ means: the creation or recreation of integrity. It is the adaptation of a new part in such a way that the integrity of the object is preserved. Disintegration, on the other hand, is the process of dissolving an object’s integrity: of changing, subtracting or adding parts in a way that is not in accordance with its integrity.

Let us look at another example for hetero-integrity. Does a simple tool like a hammer have integrity? Or a much more complex tool such as a personal computer? Again, as inanimate objects, they have no integrity by themselves. Accordingly, neither can they be damaged, for it doesn’t make any difference to the hammer or the computer what happens to them. But of course, if we consider them not merely as inanimate objects (which they are whether we consider them so or not) but instead as tools (which they are only in so far as we consider them so or use them accordingly), then both hammer and computer can be damaged. And in so far as they can be damaged they have integrity. By considering the hammer or the computer as tools we provide them with an external reference point just as we did with the stone when we considered it as an aesthetically pleasing or displeasing object. We could, of course, also consider the hammer or the computer from an aesthetic point of view, but then the reference point would be different from what it is when we consider them as tools. Both perspectives provide the object with an external reference point which in its turn lends it integrity. Yet it is not the same point
of reference and consequently not the same type of integrity. The first is what we might call ‘aesthetic’ integrity and the second what we might call ‘functional’ or ‘instrumental’ integrity (in the following, I will use the term ‘functional integrity’). An object possesses functional integrity in so far as it is meant to be used in a certain way for a certain purpose. The required reference point is the function it is meant to fulfil. Thus the hammer has definitely lost its functional integrity when it can no longer be used as a hammer and at least partly when it does not fulfil its function as well as it used to or as can reasonably be expected from a hammer. Likewise, the computer has lost its functional integrity entirely when it can no longer be used as a computer and at least partly when it does not fulfil its functions as well as it used to or as can reasonably be expected from a computer of that make and year. Since for both aesthetic and functional integrity the point of reference is external, what constitutes damage in respect to aesthetic integrity does not necessarily constitute damage in respect to functional integrity, and vice versa. A tool can have lost its beauty but still work fine, or can be broken and useless and (possibly for that very reason) be more beautiful than ever before, so that restoring its functional integrity would mean destroying its aesthetic integrity.

As we have seen, both aesthetic and functional integrity require an external reference point. That is what I mean when I call them instances of hetero-integrity. Many other types of hetero-integrity exist, for instance the integrity of a political system, a state, or a nation; or the integrity of a vintage book for the book-lover. The heteronomous character of the book’s integrity (by which I do not mean the moral integrity of its contents but its integrity as a special kind of material object) shows clearly in the fact that for a bibliophile a vintage book has lost some of its integrity when it was signed by a
former owner (unless that owner was very distinguished), but has not lost any of it when it was signed by the author. We can imagine an unlimited number of even more idiosyncratic integrities. However, not all types of integrity need to be heteronomous. As indicated above, there may be some that do not require an external point of reference at all since there already is a point of reference before anyone can bring one in. The point of reference would then be given with the nature of the object, so that the resulting integrity would be autonomous and not heteronomous. We do not know yet, though, whether there really is such a thing as auto-integrity. Yet if there is, then the element of arbitrariness that attaches to all types of hetero-integrity would be eliminated and possibly with it the accompanying character of non-obligation.

Now there are at least three different types of integrity that are, _prima vista_, plausible candidates for auto-integrity. The first is the moral integrity of persons, the second the integrity of ecosystems, and the third and for the purposes of this book the most important is the integrity of life, or more precisely: of living beings. I will call these types, respectively, personal integrity, ecological integrity (or in short eco-integrity) and biological integrity (or bio-integrity). Although it is the latter type of integrity that I will focus on in this book, we will be better equipped to understand what bio-integrity – the integrity of living beings _as_ living beings – is and what its ethical relevance may be by looking briefly first at personal integrity and (even more briefly) at eco-integrity.

**Personal Integrity**

In everyday life, the term integrity is most commonly used in the sense of personal integrity. Persons are said to have integrity or not, or to have more or less integrity. A person possessing integrity cannot be bribed, is honest, truthful, i.e., says what she
believes and acts in accordance with what she says. A person possessing integrity is
trustworthy; she does not fall apart in a real self and an apparent self. Rather, being and
appearance are properly (i.e. truthfully) related. We generally consider this to be a good
thing: When we say that someone has integrity, we usually mean it as a compliment, and
only rarely as a reproach. To have integrity is generally supposed to be a good thing. Of
course, circumstances may arise in which we detest someone for their integrity. The
integrity of another person can be quite a nuisance, when, for instance, we want to bribe
that person. But then so can another’s honesty, courage, benevolence or whatever else we
may normally consider a good trait in people. Sometimes those traits might be in our
way, might cross our interests. But we can still recognize them as fundamentally good
and desirable in people, and in principle a quality worth striving for. It is admirable and
to be respected. Such a quality is traditionally called a virtue.\(^3\) However, it is not quite
clear what that particular virtue which we call integrity consists in. How does it differ
from other virtues such as honesty, reliability, or truthfulness? And what exactly is a
virtue?

Numerous philosophers have tried to give a coherent and plausible account of
personal integrity.\(^4\) For some, personal integrity consists in organizing one’s desires,
volitions, commitments, values and actions in such a way that there is no conflict
between them. Thus a person possesses integrity if the various aspects that constitute
their ‘self’ are fully integrated. Whatever they do they do, as Harry Frankfurt puts it,

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\(^4\) For an excellent concise overview on the subject see Damian Cox/ Marguerite La Caze/ Michael Levine,
URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2005/entries/integrity/>. For a more detailed treatment see Damian
‘wholeheartedly’.\(^5\) In this manner, Gabriele Taylor thinks that to have integrity means to keep one’s ‘inmost self intact’, to have a life that is ‘of a piece’ and a self that is ‘whole and integrated’.\(^6\) In order to achieve this, Taylor maintains, one has to be rational in a number of related ways. One has to be consistent in one’s behaviour, must not ignore relevant evidence and not act on insufficient reasons.

Unfortunately, if that is what personal integrity means (or at least if it is \textit{all} that it means) then it seems that a person can possess integrity and yet be thoroughly self-oriented and anti-social or even positively evil at the same time. There seems to be no contradiction in imagining a person who is ‘fully integrated but evil’.\(^7\) On the self-integration account of integrity, even mass-murderers could be said to have integrity as long as they pursue their gruesome business ‘wholeheartedly’ and thus keep their selves intact. Yet if that is no contradiction then it seems that integrity is wrongly considered a virtue. Taylor is aware of this but does not think it invalidates her account. Integrity might, contrary what people tend to think, not be a virtue after all.\(^8\)

Another view that is mostly associated with Bernard Williams, puts emphasis not on successful self-integration but on the maintenance of identity. A person possesses integrity when they have some commitments that they consider so important and so entwined with what they are that they always act in accordance with them, even in the


\(^7\) Cox et al., \textit{Integrity and the Fragile Self}, p. 32.

\(^8\) For a defense of this view see Nancy Schaub, ‘Integrity, Commitment and the Concept of a Person’, \textit{American Philosophical Quarterly}, 33/1 (1996): 119-129. Schaub argues that if the possession of integrity is understood as ‘being true to our passive commitments’ - i.e. those commitments that, since they are involuntary, constitute our real self - then it is ‘virtually unavoidable’ (122). ‘Since action ultimately presupposes passive commitments on the part of the person who acts, one who acts possesses integrity. This is to say that integrity is built into any adequate conception of a person.’ (126)
most adverse circumstances. For giving those commitments up would be tantamount to
agent (1) subscribe to some consistent set of principles or commitments and (2), in the
face of temptation or challenge, (3) uphold these principles or commitments, (4) for what
the agent takes to be the right reasons.’\footnote{Lynne McFall, ‘Integrity’, \textit{Ethics} 98 (1987): 5-20. A problem for this approach is the apparent
assumption that, instead of being in permanent flux, the self remains the same throughout its history. As Cox et al., \textit{Integrity and the Fragile Self}, p. 104, point out, the self is not fixed, but instead “an unfolding
narrative, or rather set of narratives, embedded in a complex network of relationships”.} Like Taylor, McFall recognizes that someone
who has integrity in this sense may still be able to do things that most of us would find
abhorrant. Her solution to this is to distinguish between personal integrity and moral
integrity: Although one cannot have moral integrity without personal integrity, it is well
possible to have personal integrity without moral integrity. The reason for this is that
moral integrity requires an unconditional and unwavering commitment to some or other
moral principles and hence an unconditional and unwavering commitment. But having
unconditional and unwavering commitments (to whatever one identifies with most) is
what personal integrity means. Since, however, one can have strong commitments
without having strong \textit{moral} commitments, there obviously can be personal integrity
without moral integrity.

To make further distinctions \textit{within} the category of personal integrity is certainly
helpful. It releases us from the need to give a straightforward answer to the question
whether a person possesses integrity or not. Because the answer depends on what type or
sub-type of integrity is being asked for. One could, for instance, commit oneself to be
‘the baddest man (or woman) in town’ and uphold this commitment even when one feels
tempted or under the social pressure to do good. In that case, one could perhaps claim (some sort of) personal integrity but not of the kind we call moral integrity. Or one could, for instance, have strong artistic commitments that override any moral concerns that oneself or others may happen to have. Such a person would then dedicate their life completely to the creation, promotion and refinement of art and would even kill\(^\text{11}\) if that seemed necessary in the light of their commitment. They would not hesitate to betray people but would never ever betray art. In that case one might be said to have artistic integrity, but certainly not moral integrity. Both artistic integrity and moral integrity could be understood as particular sub-types of personal integrity. However, along the lines of the integrated-self and the identity picture of integrity, personal integrity (be it moral or artistic or some other sub-type) is essentially a relation that one has to (aspects of) oneself and not a relation one has to others.

In contrast, Cheshire Calhoun has emphasized that integrity is essentially a *social* virtue.\(^\text{12}\) Even though it might be necessary for a person possessing integrity to have a properly integrated self and strong commitments with which she identifies, this is not the whole picture, for in order to possess integrity she must also ‘stand for something’, namely for ‘what, in her best judgment, is worth persons’ doing.’ In other words, she does not only speak for herself but also for others. She has a proper regard for her own judgement but also knows that it is limited and she might learn from others. She

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\(^{11}\) The ‘wholehearted’ artist or art-lover will most likely regard such a killing as a necessary ‘sacrifice’, just as the dedicated scientist will see herself justified and even obligated to ‘sacrifice’ research animals in the interest of a progression of knowledge. In doing so she will remain true to her identity as a scientist and in that sense preserve her scientific integrity against possible moral demands arising from the animals’ evident will to life. For a discussion of this see Chapter ?, pp. ?

\(^{12}\) Calhoun, ‘Standing for Something’. Similarly, in *Integrity and the Fragile Self*, Cox et al. point out the distinction between authenticity and integrity, and explicitly demand that the latter include moral considerations: “An authentic individual may be a moral monster, but a person of integrity may not.” (12) If that is so, integrity must mean more than just authenticity. For Cox et al. this additional component is the willingness to take one’s own life and the life of others seriously (72).
understands herself as a ‘deliberator among deliberators’ and thus acknowledges others ‘as deliberators who must themselves abide by their best judgment’ and who must be listened to. ¹³ A person possessing integrity keeps herself open to criticism. Hence, on Calhoun’s view, a fanatic who, because he feels that he simply cannot be wrong, sticks to his principles no matter what others might say against it does not have integrity. Neither, of course, does someone who changes her opinions as soon as opposition arises. Where integrity ends and fanatic zeal begins is therefore not always easy to determine.¹⁴

I do not wish to argue for or against any of these or other accounts of personal integrity. In vain would we ask which of these accounts was correct, for there is no such thing as a correct account of a word unless the word has been coined in a specific, for instance scientific, context and been introduced with a precise definition. And ‘personal integrity’ is not one of these words. Therefore it is rather unlikely that we all speak of personal integrity always in the same way and with the same meaning attached to it. Since its meaning is determined by the way it is being used, it is hopeless to try and find only one correct meaning and discard all others as false. So why do philosophers bother to argue about the meaning of the word ‘integrity’? And why philosophers in the first place? Wouldn’t sociologists do a much better job by conducting qualitative interviews and simply asking people what they mean when they use the word? It seems to me that philosophers argue about integrity for the same reasons Socrates argued about the meaning of the words ‘courage’, ‘piety’, or ‘temperance’. Not in order to find out what these words ‘really’ meant but rather to find out what people should be like, what personal properties they should cultivate, what is worth doing, worth striving for in

¹⁴ Which may be considered a weakness in Calhoun’s account. See Cox et al., ‘Integrity’, p. 5.
ourselves, and worth admiring or at least respecting in others. Thus the whole discussion about integrity is only partly about what we mean when we say that someone possesses integrity. Mostly it is about what makes a good human being, or what is to be counted as an ideal condition in humans. For ‘integrity’ is not only a normative concept in the objective sense described above, namely in the sense that it presupposes a reference point setting the norm without which a violation of integrity can not meaningfully be stated. ‘Integrity’ is also a normative concept in the subjective sense that we cannot attribute it to something without bringing in our own values and recommending it as an ideal condition. Accordingly, whether we grant someone integrity who has artistic or some other type of personal integrity but no moral integrity, strong commitments but no moral commitments, an integrated self but few moral scruples (or moral scruples but not the right ones) depends on whether we are willing to admire someone for their steadfastness and unity and recognize those qualities as ideal conditions of some sort, or we think that without moral integrity (and what we imagine moral integrity requires) no other kind of integrity is of any value and hence should not be given the honorary title ‘integrity’ at all.

It is likely that in terms of its actual usage ‘integrity’ is indeed, as Cox et al. argue, a ‘cluster-concept’, ‘tying together different overlapping qualities of character under the one term’. Yet in order to avoid confusion we are well advised to distinguish those qualities and find suitable subheadings such as artistic integrity, intellectual integrity, professional integrity, etc. Each type of integrity relates to a different reference point that marks a specific condition as ideal. Each ideal condition is related to a specific

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15 This is recognized by Calhoun, ‘Standing for Something’, p. 255, when she describes self-integration as a valuable character trait. To seek the meaning of the word ‘integrity’ in the integration of the self is to emphasize the value of autonomy. The ability of self-determination makes one a better person than a proneness to let oneself be guided by contingent desires.

16 Cox/ La Caze/ Levine, ‘Integrity’, p. 9.
way of being good. We can, for instance, be good persons, not in the moral sense, but in
the restricted sense of being good as persons where ‘person’ is understood in John
Locke’s sense of being ‘a thinking intelligent Being, that has Reason and Reflection, and
can consider itself as itself, the same thinking Thing in different Times and Places’. Or
we can be good social agents who always act in a way that is conducive to the smooth
flow and continuity of society. Or we can be good politicians or good teachers or good
nurses. In each case we embody a particular kind of ideal condition or state of distinction.
In each case there are things that we cannot do without departing from this ideal
condition and thus losing our (or part of our) specific integrity.

Now, in most of these cases, the required reference point will without doubt be
judged to be external rather than internal. The specific integrity of the politician, the artist
or any other professional is tied to a set of tasks they are supposed to fulfil, a role they are
supposed to play and which they have, to a certain degree, voluntarily chosen. It is in the
light of this role and the associated expectations that integrity is attributed or denied here.
But also the integrity one can have as a social agent or as a person in Locke’s sense of the
word might be argued to depend on a certain set of expectations, on ends that are deemed
important and worthy of pursuit. In the absence of such external evaluations we would
not be able to recognize a specific condition as ideal because such recognition does not
seem to be imposed on us by the nature of the object, which in this case is a human being.
Even moral integrity may be thought external and quite alien to the nature of a human
being if it is regarded as nothing but a certain character disposition that agrees most with
what we expect from others in terms of their general actions and obedience to rules of

17 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1753), Vol. 2, Ch. 27 (Of Identity
and Diversity), § 9.
behaviour. If we did not expect others to behave morally, that is, to act in accordance with certain moral rules, then there might not be a basis for judging a lack of moral concern in a person as something that is damaging to them. However, moral integrity and also personal integrity in the widest sense, understood as the possession of a fully integrated self and the firm will and ability to remain true to oneself, need not be regarded as external at all. In the next chapter, I will discuss Plato’s concept of justice which is a good example for an internal conception of personal and moral integrity and which will provide a bridge between personal integrity and biological integrity. But first we need to have a look at ecological integrity.

**Ecological Integrity**

The by now firmly established use of the term ‘integrity’ in environmental ethics goes back to a remark that the American forester Aldo Leopold made at the end of his influential *Sand County Almanach*: ‘A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.’\(^{18}\) When American philosophers discovered the environment as a subject of moral concern in the early 1970s, thereby creating a whole new subject area in philosophy, they derived much of their inspiration from Leopold and his call for an extension of traditional ethic to a ‘land ethic’ that would recognize and promote the intrinsic value of the non-human environment. However, Leopold, who was not a philosopher, did not explain what he meant when he used the term ‘integrity’ in respect to what he called the ‘biotic community’ or ‘the land’. Apparently, he assumed that its meaning was fairly clear. However, there is one other passage in the book where he uses

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the term, and there we at least get a clue. In this passage, Leopold draws attention to the fact that most members of a biotic community have no recognizable economic value, so that a conservation policy that is solely economically motivated does not cover them. Yet according to Leopold, each of these many economically useless species should be protected so that they continue to exist, not the least because the stability of the biotic community ‘depends on its integrity.’ Integrity is important because the land’s stability, that is, its healthy functioning, depends on the interplay of the economic with the uneconomic parts (i.e. species) and therefore on the continuing existence of all parts. Thus it seems that, according to Leopold, the integrity of a biotic community is impaired when a species that is part of it, is eliminated, or, presumably, a species that has not belonged to that particular community before is brought into it. But does an ecological system’s stability necessarily suffer when one of its members is gone or a new member joins in? What does stability mean anyway, or health? There will certainly be changes in the interaction between members of the community when its composition changes. But why should there not be changes? What makes the given composition so special that it should whenever possible be preserved? Is it because the consequences are unpredictable so that negative economic results cannot be ruled out? In that case the reference point would be economic utility and hence external. Or the reference point could be aesthetic in such a way that each change would be regarded as a loss of beauty. However, there seems to be no reason why a change in the composition of a biotic community should not enhance rather than diminish beauty.

\[20\] Ibid., p. 214.
In spite of its lack of clarity the concept of ‘ecological’ or ‘ecosystem’ integrity has since appeared in various legal documents, especially in the USA and Canada,\(^ {21}\) and is now one of the cornerstones of the celebrated Earth Charter.\(^ {22}\) Again, the core idea of the term ‘integrity’ is also present in the notion of ecological integrity. Here, too, integrity has something to do with intactness and wholeness. However, both of these latter terms share the normative implications of the former (just as health and stability). That is to say it is fairly unclear what counts as intact and whole as long as the reference point is obscure. It is all very well to identify integrity with intactness and wholeness but it doesn’t bring us one step further if we don’t know in respect to what intactness and wholeness are maintained. Laura Westra, who has put integrity at the centre of her approach to environmental ethics, seems almost surprised to realize that, despite her efforts to nail the notion of integrity down, the term remains elusive. She even goes so far as to say that integrity ‘can mean anything you choose it to mean’.\(^ {23}\) However, she does not take this to be a sufficient reason to drop the term ‘integrity’ entirely because she is convinced that it represents an important value. Whatever it is, it is ‘first of all, a desirable state of affairs’.\(^ {24}\) The term suggests that ‘that which is naturally one should not be interfered with or torn asunder.’\(^ {25}\) According to Westra, ‘integrity’ is an umbrella concept which covers among other things ecosystem health and well-being and the

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\(^ {21}\) See Laura Westra, *An Environmental Proposal for Ethics. The Principle of Integrity* (Lanham, 1994).

\(^ {22}\) The Earth Charter is the result of a collaboration of various NGO’s and is a ‘declaration of fundamental ethical principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society for the 21\(^ {st} \) century.’ Meant to be globally accepted as international law, it has as yet not been ratified by any country in the world. From sixteen principles four are grouped under the heading ‘Ecological Integrity’ and one explicitly demands to ‘protect and restore the integrity of Earth’s ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.’ ([www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org)) For a discussion of the Earth Charter’s principles see Peter Miller/ Laura Westra (eds.) , *Just Ecological Integrity. The Ethics of Maintaining Planetary Life* (Lanham/ Oxford, 2002).

\(^ {23}\) Ibid., p. XII.

\(^ {24}\) Ibid., p. 22.

\(^ {25}\) Ibid.
'ability to deal with outside interference, and, if necessary, regenerate itself following upon it.'\textsuperscript{26} However, integrity goes beyond health: ‘Substitution of one species for another would be a clear case of interference with the integrity of an ecosystem, while its health or even its stability would not necessarily be diminished.’\textsuperscript{27} This distinction between health and integrity is certainly helpful, especially since Westra illustrates her point very nicely by comparing the ecosystem to a single living body. If we, for instance, cut off a finger from one of our hands, we need not be less healthy as a result. When the wound is healed we can be as healthy as before. Yet we lack a finger and that constitutes an impairment of our physical integrity. Likewise, if we have a kidney removed from our body we do not necessarily damage our health. But whether or not our health has been damaged, our physical integrity definitely has.\textsuperscript{28}

Now, if applied to individual organisms it is quite plausible to distinguish between health and integrity. However, there are two problems. The first is that if a thing’s integrity can be impaired without its health being damaged then it is not quite clear why we should seek to preserve integrity at all. If we can live with one liver just as well as with two, why should we not dispose of it if we feel like it (or if we make some profit from selling it)? And, more importantly, why should not others, or the state in behalf of these others, make us part with a liver if it is needed by others and can be put to good use? The common reply would probably be that such an intrusion would violate our autonomy. But of course, our autonomy is often overridden for the sake of a greater good or common interest. Why not in this case when we can just as well live with only one liver? (Or when we are in the process of dying and don’t need any liver at all?) Perhaps

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 25. 
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 40. 
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 26.
the reason is that it belongs to us? But people will unnecessarily die when we refuse to part with our surplus organs. This is surely more important than a mere property right. Or is it? At least we care for our property, and even more for our autonomy. The question is why we should care for our integrity. Of course, as I have argued above, the very term ‘integrity’ implies that we should take an interest in it. If we accept that to make us part with one of our organs, even if we can live without it and do not experience a loss of health as a result, is a violation of our physical integrity, then we have also implicitly accepted that what we call our physical integrity ought not to be violated. However, as yet it is unclear why we should accept that there is a physical integrity in the first place.

The second problem with Westra’s comparison is that whereas it makes sense to speak of the unity of a body and to distinguish between its health and its integrity, it is not so clear whether it makes sense to speak of the unity of an ecosystem. We understand what it means when it is said that an individual living body is ‘naturally one’, but can any ecosystem or, to use Leopold’s phrase, any biotic community be ‘naturally one’? What does that mean? A living body has definite borderlines, that is to say, it is quite clear what belongs to it and what not: my hands and feet are part of my body but the gloves I wear on my hands and the shoes I wear on my feet are not. My fingernails and my hair, though growing out of my body, are not quite part of my body since they are constantly in the process of separating themselves from it. A biotic community, on the other hand, or an ecological system (which is constituted by such a community and the environment with which it interacts), have no clear beginning or end. You can, at least in theory, count the number of individual living beings but you cannot count the number of biotic communities or ecosystems on the planet because they blend seamlessly into another.
The only exception might be the planet Earth itself which can be regarded as one huge ecosystem and perhaps the only ecosystem that truly deserves to be called ‘naturally one’. But generally, in order to analyze a particular ecosystem one must first define its borders, that is, make an artificial separation between entities that belong to the system and other that do not. In other words, the unity of an ecological system or a biotic community is not natural but artificial in the sense of being the product of human decisions.

This makes it difficult to understand how the integrity of an ecological system should be a ‘desirable state of affairs’, unless we hinge its desirability on certain human interests. However, this is precisely what Westra does not want. Rather, a certain state of affairs is meant to be regarded as intrinsically desirable, and thus ecological integrity as a type of auto-integrity rather than hetero-integrity. In order to make this claim plausible Westra needs to treat ecological systems as individuals that can, just like individual living beings, fare better or worse. In other words, they need to have some sort of objective well-being. The concept of objective well-being is borrowed from Aristotle who claimed that every living being has a certain ergon: a function it is meant to fulfil and which defines what it is. Well-being is achieved when a being does what it is meant to do. If it could be shown that ecological systems have such an ergon, too, the notion of ecological integrity (understood as a type of auto-integrity) would become more convincing. This is why Westra proposes to rephrase the question of the meaning of (ecological) integrity as: ‘What is the ergon of an ecosystem?’ In contrast to Westra, I don’t think there is such an ergon to ecosystems, but I do think that the question is indeed the right one in the

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30 Westra, *An Environmental Proposal to Ethics*, p. 45.
sense that it leads us where we must look in order to find a plausible example for auto-integrity.

In the next chapter I will present and discuss two such examples which will get us an important step closer to that type of integrity which this book is mainly about, namely biological integrity. The two examples are Plato’s concept of justice and Aristotle’s concept of virtue.