DISCURSIVE INTEGRITY AND THE PRINCIPLES OF RESPONSIBLE PUBLIC DEBATE

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POLITICAL COMMENTATORS often lament the "brokenness" of political discourse. Rather than constructive and thoughtful contributions to debate about how we should live together in a community of equals who sometimes disagree, contemporary political discourse is said to involve a lot of speaking out of both sides of one's mouth, pandering to the base, identity posturing, gaslighting, bullshitting, flipflopping, dog whistling, mudslinging, name calling, and outright lying. Many of these accusations trade on the impression that people speaking as part of public political discourse are not engaging with their interlocutors in a sincere way but rather trying to manipulate other people to advance some covert agenda. This is widely thought to be true of politicians who are often regarded as untrustworthy liars, willing to say whatever they have to in order to advance their political aims. But I suspect many people have this impression of at least some political commentators in the media and even disagreeable fellow citizens encountered in the new public square of social media.

Celebrating honesty, authenticity, and sincerity in public political life is a natural response. We see evidence of this response in the way some politicians have recently become successful through eschewing political correctness and appearing unafraid to "say it like [they think] it is" regardless of potential offense. There is also an increasing tendency for political figures to lean into crude and unsophisticated ways of speaking or slips in judgment in their private lives, seeking to own these as part and parcel of their authentic engagement with public life. Moreover, the recent philosophical literature contains several prominent defenses of sincerity and honesty as a very important interpersonal moral value at the heart of our public and private lives.[1]

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1 For instance, Shiffrin writes, "Reliable, sincere speech enables sophisticated forms of self-understanding, knowledge of others and of the world, moral agency, and personal relations of trust. The relation between communication and these foundational compulsory ends explains the strong presumption of sincere communication as well as our responsibility to strive for accuracy" (*Speech Matters*, 186). See also Hawley's argument that assertion

I doubt, however, that failures of honesty, authenticity, and sincerity are the main obstacles to constructive political debate in contemporary democracies. As a first step to explaining this doubt, I want to argue here that, although expressive sincerity is valuable, we should not ignore discursive integrity in thinking about how to address problems with contemporary political debate.[2] The first task for this paper then is to explain the difference, as I see it, between expressive sincerity and discursive integrity and to argue that they are two importantly different communicative ideals that we risk running together in thinking about what makes public political debate go better or worse. As an initial gloss on the distinction, expressive sincerity is about whether someone really thinks what they say, whereas discursive integrity is about whether someone takes responsibility for what they say in a way that warrants reliance on it.[3] These are related because liars and hypocrites do not typically take responsibility for what they say, so we usually should not rely on them. However, as I am thinking of it, discursive integrity is different from expressive sincerity. It is in large part about whether the claims someone makes as part of public political debate manifest recognition of the attending responsibility to back up, justify, motivate, or modulate what they say in the face of unconvinced audiences.

The second task for this paper is to explain why discursive integrity is important for public political debate. Once one sees how it is different from expressive sincerity, it will be pretty obvious that it matters in interpersonal communica-

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should be understood in terms of promising to speak truthfully (*How to Be Trustworthy*, ch. 3); and Miller's argument that honesty is a widely valued important virtue but understudied by philosophers ("Honesty"). To be clear, these philosophers are concerned with a much broader phenomenon than specifically public political debate, which is my concern here, and none of them claim that sincerity and honesty are the only important communicative virtues. Indeed, Hawley argues that trustworthiness requires sincerity *and* competence in getting things right, which can be related to the ideal of discursive integrity I will discuss. Williams offers a sustained discussion and defense of the value of sincerity, which he conceives in much richer terms than I deploy here, though saying what one thinks is a core element of his conception (*Truth and Truthfulness*). In connection to public political discourse, Williams also argues that stressing the value of sincerity (in the sense of non-deceitfulness) for government officials is crucial to the ability of liberal democracies to overcome the tyranny of corrupt governments (*Truth and Truthfulness*, ch. 9).

2   Markovits argues that obsession with sincerity was also a feature of ancient Greek politics, and argues on some similar grounds to me that this is not the most important communicative value for a thriving democracy (*The Politics of Sincerity*).

3   There are important conceptual distinctions between honesty and sincerity that I am here suppressing, and the precise analysis of both is a controversial topic that I am not going to address here, as I am more interested in the contrast between this nexus of concepts and discursive integrity. For useful discussion, see Eriksson, "Straight Talk"; and Ozar, "Sincerity, Honesty, and Communicative Truthfulness."

tion. However, I intend the theoretical articulation of the distinction I develop below to illuminate some more specific ways in which discursive integrity is not just a nice trait to manifest when we talk to each other but actually crucial for most constructive debate among political equals who disagree. To make this case, I shall develop three arguments from within the resources of political philosophy and epistemology, for thinking that advances toward an ideal of discursive integrity is an important step for repairing public debate in contemporary democracies. The thrust of these arguments is that our concern in contemporary political culture should not be entirely or even mainly with whether political actors are dishonest, insincere, or hypocritical; we should also be concerned with a different question: whether they participate in public political debate in a way that demonstrates an ability and willingness to back up, justify, motivate, or modulate what they say in the face of disagreement.

The final task of this paper is to consider a practical strategy for better incorporating the ideal of discursive integrity into contemporary public political debate. Appealing to a recent example of what I see as a good case of public political discussion of controversial issues, I will argue that public political discourse should include not only debate about first-order issues but also second-order debate about the "rules of the game" in an attempt to coordinate on a shared understanding of which laws and public policies are legitimate but also of how we should talk about controversial issues of mutual interest in our political community. It is an empirical question outside the scope of this paper how effective this strategy will be, but I do want to explain how the potential of this practical suggestion becomes easier to appreciate in light of my articulation of the theoretical difference between expressive sincerity and discursive integrity.

1. TWO MODELS OF COMMUNICATION

In this section, I distinguish two lines of thought about linguistic communication and meaning.[4] I do not intend to defend either view but rather to use the distinction as a lens through which we can view practices around public political debate, suggesting different aspects to focus on in our attempts to understand what makes debate among political equals who disagree go better or worse.

The first conception of communication traces back at least to Locke, who wrote that "words in their primary or immediate signification signify nothing

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4   I discuss this distinction much more in the context of metaethical debates about the meaning of normative claims and the metasemantic interpretation of formal semantic models of compositionality in Chrisman, *The Meaning of "Ought,"* ch. 6. See also Chrisman, "Two Nondescriptivist Views of Normative and Evaluative Statements."

but the ideas in the mind of him that uses them" capturing a natural intuition about what is going on when someone says something meaningful.[5] The basic claim is that the core function of meaningful speech is to express what is antecedently in one's mind as part of communicating with others. If this is right, it is natural to think the meaningfulness of words and sentences should be understood primarily in terms of their ability to serve this function, and the communicative norms governing speech should be understood fundamentally in terms of how individuals express what is antecedently in their minds to others. Or, put slightly differently, we can say that Lockeans in the philosophy of language place a lot of theoretical weight on the idea that a speaker intentionally expresses thoughts, ideas, and attitudes to an audience by articulating these mental states in words whose meaning derives from their usability to get an audience to know what thoughts, ideas, and attitudes are in the speaker's mind.[6]

The second conception of communication I want to highlight traces back at least to Peirce, who wrote, "An act of assertion supposes that, a proposition being formulated, a person performs an act which renders him liable to the penalties of the social law (or, at any rate, those of the moral law) in case it should not be true, unless he has a definite and sufficient excuse."[7] The basic idea, as I understand it in this context, is that the norms governing language use should be understood primarily in terms of collections of agents self-consciously performing mutually recognized linguistic moves in a social space of responsibilities and commitments, and the meaningfulness of words and sentences should be understood primarily in terms of their capacity to mediate such moves. There is controversy among Peirceans about what exactly one commits to in saying something, but the version of the view that is relevant for what follows is one that focuses on contexts where speakers are expected at least to some extent to try to justify or modulate what they have said in the face of disagreement.[8] Accordingly, on this Peircean view, communication is analyzed most fundamentally in terms of the

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5   Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, III.2.2.

6   This gets picked up and modified in various important ways in the expression-based tradition in theorizing about meaning. See especially Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words*; Schiffer, *Meaning*; Bennett, *Linguistic Behaviour*; Davis, *Meaning, Expression and Thought*.

7   Hartshorne, Weiss, and Burks, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 2.315.

8   Although endorsing the Peircean picture, Hawley argues that the commitment to speak truthfully does not entail a commitment to justify what one says or to retract what one has said when unable to justify what one says (*How to Be Trustworthy*, 50–57). Her main target is Robert Brandom's idea about "taking the commitment involved in asserting to be the undertaking of justificatory responsibility for what is claimed" (Brandom, "Asserting," 641). For discussion of modulation and retraction, see also MacFarlane, "What Is Assertion?" I side with Brandom and MacFarlane here for the specific context of making claims in public

mutually recognized undertaking of a specific kind of commitment rather than in terms of the expression of an antecedently held mental state in the mind of the speaker.[9]

In sum, the Lockean conception stresses the attitude-expressing function of communicative speech whereas the Peircean conception stresses its commitment-undertaking function. I suspect they both capture important parts of the phenomenon of communication, which is why I do not propose to argue that one or the other is correct.[10] Rather, I have extracted these two lines of thought from discussions in the philosophy of language so I can next explore the different sorts of communicative ideals that attach to them.

2. TWO COMMUNICATIVE IDEALS AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Much of what we take ourselves to know comes from the word of others, but people do not always tell the truth. So how can the fact that a speaker says something justify the audience in believing what the speaker said. This is known as the problem of testimony in epistemology (where "testimony" is being used broadly to include ordinary conversations as well as making statements in formal settings such as law courts).[11]

More colloquially, we can put the question in terms of *trust*: When should we trust what other people say? And we can generalize this question of trust beyond

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political debate but leave it open whether that is the correct Peircean view of assertion more generally.

9 This gets picked up and modified in various ways in the commitment-based tradition in theorizing about meaning. See especially Sellars, "Some Reflections on Language Games" and "Meaning as Functional Classification"; Searle, *Speech Acts*; Brandom, *Making It Explicit*; Alston, *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning*; Kukla and Lance, *"Yo!" and "Lo!"*

10 Lance argues that it is wrong to separate the attitude-expressing and commitment-undertaking aspects of speech ("Some Reflections on the Sport of Language"). His idea is that a *mere* "game" of giving and asking for reasons could lack the sort of psycho-physical connection with agents' dispositions to action that are a crucial part of why we talk with each other in the first place. He illustrates with a degenerate case, highly relevant here, of a politician who is good at justifying what he says and retracting things in the face of good objection but who lacks the integrity to act on what he says because he does not really believe it. This is related to the dual aspect of what Grice calls the "Maxim of Quality" for cooperative speech, which subsumes both not saying what one believes to be false and not saying that for which one lacks adequate evidence. See Grice, "Logic and Conversation."

11 Much of the debate in this area concerns whether testimonial knowledge can be reduced to other kinds of knowledge (e.g., perceptual and inferential knowledge) or whether testimony should be treated as a *sui generis* source of knowledge. For an overview, see Adler, "Epistemological Problems of Testimony." Below I discuss and cite some reductionist and nonreductionist views in more detail.

belief by noticing that many of the nonbelief attitudes we have stem in large part from adopting the attitudes of others because we trust them. This kind of reliance is a normal and pervasive feature of human communication.

Because of this reliance, it is very natural to prize trustworthiness in our interlocutors. This is of course true in private personal communication, but it is also true for my topic here: public political discourse. So, I now want to use the distinction between Lockean and Peircean accounts of communication and meaning to generate two importantly different articulations of the ideal of trustworthiness for the public political sphere. This will provide a *prima facie* case for distinguishing two communicative ideals in thinking about what is important for constructive political debate.

You probably see where this is going. Lockeans focus on the relation between what people say and what they think. This focus encourages investigating possible mismatches that would undercut reasons we otherwise have for accepting something because someone else says it. Although such reliance is a pervasive feature of human communication, there are cases where evidence suggests that the speaker does not really think what they say—evidence, that is, of *expressive insincerity*. Sometimes people do not believe what they say, sometimes they do not have the positive or negative attitude toward something that their words convey, and other times they do not really intend to do what they say they are going to do. I am counting all of these as cases of expressive insincerity. They undercut the normally good inference from *S said that p* to *I should accept that p*.[12] Accordingly, the Lockean ideal of trustworthiness turns on how individuals treat others in speaking—whether they really think what they purport to think. When they do not or we have enough inductive evidence to warrant doubt, this pervasive route for expanding one's own views by relying on the testimony of others breaks down.

Peirceans focus instead on the kinds of commitments that are mutually acknowledged in normal communication. As we saw above, their core idea is that a speaker undertakes responsibility for what they say, and I proposed to focus on communicative contexts where this responsibility includes a commitment to back up or modulate what one says in the face of disagreement. This is a key way that the speaker and others become entitled to take what was said as a premise in collective reasoning toward further views about what we collectively should think, feel, and do. This Peircean focus encourages investigating potential short

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12 It may not be initially clear how this applies to the case of trusting people to do what they say they are going to do, but I think of that as a case where the speaker says (in effect) "I'm going to ϕ," but lacks the intention conventionally conveyed by these words, which means that the audience should not accept that the speaker is going to ϕ, despite what has been said.

circuits, where a speaker does not acknowledge or cannot meet their responsibility to back up or modulate what was said. This lack of *discursive integrity* is bad for communication because it undermines reasoning collectively through mutually acknowledged responsibilities and entitlements to shared views about what to think, feel, and do. Accordingly, the Peircean ideal of trustworthiness turns on how speakers relate to each other in taking up what is said in collective reasoning. When we think a speaker cannot be relied upon to live up to the discursive commitments carried by their words, downstream collective reasoning about what to think, feel, or do can break down.

So far, I have used the distinction between Lockean and Peircean models of communication to articulate two different ideals of trustworthiness in communication: expressive sincerity and discursive integrity. Speakers may often live up to these ideals to similar degrees, but they can come apart. Someone can be sincere in what they say without meriting trust that they are committed to back up what they say in the face of disagreement. For example, we all know people who concede, "Well, it's just my opinion," in response to any disagreement, or people who seem to meet any challenge to what they say with distracting ad hominem attacks. Likewise, although it is less common, someone can manifest discursive integrity without meriting trust that they are being sincere. For example, I certainly know philosophers who seem prepared to offer arguments ad nauseum for what they say but who comport themselves in a way that leaves me feeling unsure whether they really believe what they say.

Now let us apply this distinction to public political debate. When someone accuses a politician of being an untrustworthy liar, who speaks out of both sides of his mouth, saying whatever he has to say to get elected, often two importantly different ideals are being evoked. On the one hand, the concern may be with the politician's sincerity: he does not really think what he says he thinks. On the other hand, the concern may be with the politician's integrity: he is not really acknowledging responsibility for backing up or modulating what he is saying in the face of disagreement, at least not in a way that entitles himself and others to rely on it in further collective reasoning.[13] In most cases, the critic is probably thinking vaguely about a bit of both of these failings. But my point in marking

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13 In a related vein, Richardson argues that an important problem with Donald Trump's public political speech is often not insincerity but rather the fact that he speaks in ways that undermine attempts to attribute specific assertoric content to what he says ("Noncognitivist Trumpism"). Richardson suggests that Trump often fails to put forward such content because of the way his political speech tends to foreground insults, engage in explicit but unexplained contradictions, and float polarizing suggestions approvingly but seemingly unseriously. In my view, these are failures of discursive integrity.

the distinction is that these are different concerns, and ameliorating suspicion of insincerity will not always address suspicion of lack of integrity, and vice versa.

Similarly, when we lament a polarized media landscape, worrying that certain prominent political commentators are mainly advancing covert agendas rather than engaging in good-faith discussion of matters of public intertest, often two importantly different ideals are implicitly evoked. On the one hand, the concern might be with whether we can trust the person in the Lockean sense of assuming that they really think what they say. On the other hand, the concern might be with whether we can trust the person in the Peircean sense of expecting that they will acknowledge and meet responsibilities for backing up what they say. As before, it is probably often a bit of both that we are vaguely worried about, but they are separable concerns, and strategies for mollifying or avoiding them are going to be different.

Finally, think about the all-too-regular occurrences on social media of someone gaslighting a person they disagree with, posting memes with offensive presuppositions, or spreading an ideologically convenient but ill-sourced account of how some newsworthy event happened. Why does behavior like this undermine constructive communication in the public sphere? One concern is that it is dishonest because its motivations are something other than conveying what the speaker really thinks. Another concern is that such communication is irresponsible because it does not involve undertaking commitments to justify or modulate what is said in the face of disagreement, and so any support provided for further views about what to collectively think, feel, and do is mostly arational and non-justificatory. In the case of social media, I suspect the latter concern is usually more pressing, but my point at this stage is only to highlight the differences between such concerns, where one is based on the ideal of expressive sincerity and the other is based on the ideal of discursive integrity.

My first aim in this paper has been to explain the difference between expressive sincerity and discursive integrity, conceived as two importantly different communicative ideals. There is a risk of running these together in thinking about why contemporary political debate is "broken." This is especially true where we take trustworthiness to be an important ideal in constructive political discussion. Hence, in this section, I have sought to explain how the Lockean and Peircean orientations toward communication yield two important but different conceptions of trustworthiness in public political discourse. In the next section, I turn to the second main aim of this paper, which is to consider some arguments for thinking that discursive integrity is crucial for constructive political debate, and that we will not repair the political debate of contemporary democracies by exclusively or mainly focusing on expressive sincerity.

3. DISCURSIVE INTEGRITY AND PUBLIC POLITICAL DELIBERATION

At the beginning of this paper, I noted that it is natural to call for greater honesty among political agents in response to the way contemporary political discourse seems broken, which motivates politicians to highlight their own authenticity and drives the media to focus on insincerity and hypocrisy. We are now in a position to appreciate how this response turns on a communicative ideal of expressive sincerity. It is about expecting people to communicate in ways that reveal what they really think. Expressive sincerity is important to all sorts of interpersonal communication, but I suspect it is most important in the sphere of personal communication with family and friends, where our dependence on others is deep, repeated, reciprocal, and multidimensional. In these relationships, it is important to know that we can regularly and easily learn what people think about things by listening to what they say, since we depend on this knowledge in iterated coordination of collective action, not to mention our mutual and ongoing emotional well-being and moral development.

It is tempting to extend this ideal to the public political context, wanting to view political agents as an extension of our friends and family. And there is certainly some place for the ideal in this context. However, as we saw above, there is another kind of trust based on the distinct communicative ideal of discursive integrity. Demanding increased sincerity from political agents is important, but when it comes to the sort of large-scale collective deliberation that politics ideally manifests, we want people not only to say what they think but also to take responsibility for backing up what they say and to tread carefully in reasoning together to further conclusions about what to think, feel, and do.[14] Of course, expressive sincerity facilitates discursive integrity, since one will not usually take responsibility for what one says unless one really believes it (see below for some potentially important exceptions). But these ideals are not identical, and there tends to be too much focus on sincerity over integrity in the political culture of contemporary democracies. So, next, I want to advance three more specific arguments for the importance of the ideal of discursive integrity in thinking about what facilitates constructive political debate.

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14 Shiffrin argues that it is important for our mutual moral development in community that we sincerely express our thoughts (even when these are vicious or offensive) (*Speech Matters*, ch. 3,). She uses this idea to generate a moral argument for honesty and moral-political argument for robust protection of free speech. Although it may not initially seem to be, this argument is consistent with what I go on to argue here. As I see things, our moral development occurs primarily in our interpersonal and often private interactions with friends and family, whereas I am focused here on public interactions among political equals who disagree deeply but who intend to live together peacefully in a political community.

The first argument stems from debates about what makes legitimate the sort of majority rule characteristic of a democracy. Deliberative democrats provide a prominent case for thinking that decisions about public policy will be legitimate only under certain circumstances that give those in the minority reason to go along with the majority. The circumstances are ones (roughly) where decision making has been pursued in a way that facilitates genuine collective deliberation rather than mere aggregation of preferences.[15] Such deliberation is conceived (again, roughly) as an opportunity to not only express one's view but also to give reasons for one's view and to consider reasons for opposing views in a way that improves those views with the integration of new information and the refinement of our mutual understanding of the relevant issues.[16]

I do not want to rest the argument of this paper on the success of the deliberative democrats' case for the legitimacy of democracy based in collective deliberation, but I do think their theory represents one of the main ways to address skepticism about the legitimacy of majority rule. And to the extent that it does, the legitimacy of majority rule depends implicitly on valuing not just expressive sincerity but also discursive integrity.[17] According to the deliberative democrats, it is not enough for political legitimacy that people are free to (sincerely) express their opinions in the course of making collective decisions in a democracy. Those opinions must also be subject to a fair process of giving and taking reasons in pursuit of a refined collective view about what to think, feel, and do.[18] And my claim is that achieving legitimacy in this way requires more of political agents than mere sincerity; it requires that people take responsibility for what they say,

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15 This is partially inspired by Habermas's discourse approach to grounding moral principles in the constitutive preconditions of engaging in a specific sort of public dialogue about collective decisions (*Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* and *Between Facts and Norms*). My aim in this paper is not to add to the discussion of whether anything like a universal morality can be derived from these conditions, but I do argue below that reflecting on what we are doing when engaged in public political discussions of contentious issues might help us identify some principles of responsible public debate that I think should count as constitutive preconditions for engaging in such debate in a democracy.

16 This is a controversial and widely discussed view in democratic theory. For articulation and defense see especially Cohen, "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy"; Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*; Gutmann and Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*; Peter, *Democratic Legitimacy*; and Fishkin, *When the People Speak*.

17 For a similar point, see Markovits, "The Trouble with Being Earnest."

18 One might worry that this stress on justification makes democratic deliberation more susceptible to confirmation bias. However, see Landemore for an argument that public justification is a corrective to confirmation bias (*Democratic Reason*). See also Mercier and Landemore, "Reasoning Is for Arguing."

seeking to back it up with reasons when appropriately challenged or modulate it when met with plausible counterarguments.[19]

Moreover, and more intuitively, failures of discursive integrity threaten pursuit of mutually acceptable and practically actionable collective decisions in a way that is distinct from failures of expressive sincerity. Consider, for example, the hypocrisy involved in saying people should behave in some way while failing to manifest in one's own actions a belief that this injunction applies to oneself. Or consider the persistent devil's advocate who raises critical points that they do not really believe. Or consider the public official who justifies state use of force on grounds she does not really believe but that she knows will convince those who are affected.[20] These examples of insincerity can certainly be annoying, and they may even be morally bad in certain circumstances.[21] However, that does not mean that the claims made cannot be supported with convincing reasons

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19 Cass Sunstein argues that public discussion within groups sharing common viewpoints tends to harden opinions and lead people to adopt more extreme versions of their original views ("The Law of Group Polarization"). It is not my intention here to assess whether this is a problem for deliberative democrats' account of legitimacy. But there is a natural explanation of this phenomenon having to do with expressive sincerity and the sorts of affective alignment that go hand in hand with political polarization. In choosing whom to hang out with, whom to be friends with, whom to live with, people are possibly more concerned with alignment of feelings toward things than whether someone takes justificatory responsibility for what they say. If so, expressive sincerity in personal relationships provides a means for increasing affective alignment within these relationships. My suggestion, then, in emphasizing discursive responsibility, is to highlight some common ground between deliberative democrats and their critics on this point. We all agree that collective decision making improves when we move beyond affective alignment; there is just disagreement about whether robust public deliberation facilitates that.

20 Brian Carey argues that a weaker honesty principle should replace a stronger sincerity principle in characterizing the ideal of public reason justifications of state coercion ("Public Reason—Honesty, Not Sincerity"). Roughly speaking, he thinks that we should be honest about whether we believe the reasons we offer in public justification of state use of force, which is consistent with not sincerely endorsing those as one's own personal reasons for viewing such force as justified on a particular occasion. I see this as an interesting middle ground between the ideals of expressivist sincerity and discursive integrity, and I am sympathetic to the claim that, insofar as we hold certain state decisions to a standard of public reason, an honesty principle is more realistic than a sincerity principle. My topic here, however, is the broader category of public political assertions, and honesty about one's reasons for one's views is a step toward taking discursive integrity—but it does not get us all the way there.

21 For discussion and critique of the moral condemnation of hypocrisy, see Dover, "The Walk and the Talk"; and O'Brien and Whelan, "You're Such a Hypocrite." For a defense of the democratic value of attempts at persuasion even when they are not aimed at consensus, see Garsten, *Saving Persuasion*.

or that better collective decisions cannot be reached by engaging with these reasons. On the flipside, however, if these people were to also refuse to try to justify or modulate what they say in the face of disagreement, it would be hard to know how to take the discussion forward in pursuit of some mutually acceptable collective decision about how to behave.

So, in short, my first argument for the importance of discursive integrity for fixing contemporary political debate is that efforts to live up to this ideal seem crucial for achieving the sorts of conditions for collective decision making that deliberative democrats and others have long been advocating as improving and possibly legitimating democratic governance. To be sure, contemporary democracies often fall short of the ideals of deliberative democrats, but these ideals reveal how the legitimacy of majority rule might depend on achieving certain levels of discursive integrity, conceived as a separate ideal from expressive sincerity.

The second argument stems from debates in epistemology of self-knowledge about when it is appropriate to attribute a mental state to someone, including oneself. On the one hand, in everyday discourse we tend to accord people a significant degree of first-personal authority about the contents of their own minds, deferring by default to statements about what they believe, want, and feel.[22] On the other hand, attributions of such mental states figure in explanations of people's behaviors and various psychological studies suggest that our minds are far from transparent to first-personal introspection.[23] Consider for example the idea that fossil fuel consumption is causing dangerous climate change or the view that a diet including meat causes extreme pain and cruelty to animals. Many people profess belief in these propositions, yet they act in ways that seem to be inconsistent with such belief. What do these people really think (believe, feel, intend) about climate doom or animal cruelty?

I will not venture an answer on this vexed question. My point in raising it is simply to highlight the fact that it is not always clear that people can even follow the injunction to be sincere.[24] For it is not always clear, even to speakers themselves, what exactly they think about controversial and complicated issues.

22 For discussion, see Burge, "Our Entitlement to Self-Knowledge"; Wright, "Self-Knowledge"; Moran, *Authority and Estrangement*; and Bar-On, *Speaking My Mind*.

23 For discussion, see Bem, *Beliefs, Attitudes, and Human Affairs*; Lycan, "Tacit Beliefs"; Gopnik and Meltzoff, "Minds, Bodies and Persons"; Carruthers, "How We Know Our Own Minds"; and Mandelbaum, "Thinking Is Believing."

24 For similar reasons, Ridge argues for a weaker form of the sincerity norm for assertion, which requires only that people assert what they believe that they believe, rather than more simply what they believe ("Sincerity and Expressivism"). For an even stronger conception, see Eriksson, who argues that sincere communication requires the speaker to be justified in what they think in order to communicate sincerely ("Straight Talk"). I think Ridge's version

This is especially true in the context of public political discourse. In personal communication about uncontroversial matters with friends and loved ones, it is perfectly fine to assume that people generally know what they think about something, and we evaluate people as honest or dishonest in communicating to the extent that they say what they really think (even if what they think is sometimes that they are not quite sure what to think about something). In other contexts, however, especially when communicating about broad and important societal values or complex matters of fact, I suspect there is often no completely cut and dry answer about what someone really thinks.

Dispositionalist and functionalist accounts of belief can support this idea. These views identify psychological states as complex sets of cognitive and behavioral functions or dispositions.[25] And this opens up the possibility that, when it comes to complex or controversial issues, people often have some kind of in-between state.[26] That is to say, they have some of the dispositions associated with thinking that p but not others, or they manifest the relevant dispositions in some circumstances but not all of the circumstances we would normally expect. Because of this, there may simply be no fact of the matter about whether they really think p, and so no fact of the matter about whether they are being sincere when asserting p.

I do not want to rest my case here on any particular theory of folk psychological states or on the controversial idea that there are "in-between" states. My point in referring to these ideas is simply to make vivid a difficulty with implementing the ideal of expressive sincerity when it comes to discussions of complex and controversial issues. This difficulty does not arise (or at least does not arise as starkly) for the ideal of discursive integrity. Living up to that ideal requires taking responsibility for what you say, being prepared to either offer considerations in its favor or to revise your stance in light of countervailing arguments. To be sure, this process of collective deliberation requires some degree of self-awareness of what one is inclined to think in various circumstances, and one must

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is too weak and Eriksson's version is too strong, but their motivations for weakening or strengthening the norm support my point above.

25 For relevant dispositionalist theories, see Audi, "Dispositional Beliefs and Dispositions to Believe"; and Schwitzgebel, "A Phenomenal, Dispositional Account of Belief." For relevant functionalist theories, see Loar, *Mind and Meaning*; and Leitgeb, *The Stability of Belief*. Although they do not identify belief as one of these kinds of mental states, similar points apply to the sorts of interpretationist accounts defended by Dennett, *The Intentional Stance* and "Real Patterns"; and Davidson, "Rational Animals."

26 See especially Schwitzgebel, "In-Between Believing" and "Acting Contrary to Our Professed Beliefs, or the Gulf between Occurrent Judgment and Dispositional Belief."

have some idea of the reasons on which one is basing one's view.[27] But some of the apparent indeterminacy or in-betweenness of our views about broad and controversial values or complex matters of fact can be explained by our intuitive appreciation of the tenuousness of our reasons in favor of these views and our natural tendency to modulate in light of ongoing debate.

So, my second argument for the importance of discursive integrity is that this ideal, unlike the ideal of expressive sincerity, is less vulnerable to failures of self-understanding and indeterminacy about what one really thinks. If our focus in public political debate is on finding mutually acceptable views by collectively considering reasons for and against various views and the consequences of any particular view, then what individual contributors antecedently think and whether they sincerely express it is not going to be the main thing that matters. Instead, the most important issue will be whether we can achieve mutual recognition of what we are collectively entitled to assume for further democratic reasoning toward conclusions about what to collectively do, think, and feel.

The third argument that discursive integrity deserves more attention when thinking about fixing contemporary public political debate has to do with how testimony is normally thought to transmit epistemic justification but sometimes seems to fail to transmit justification in discussions of complex and normative issues. As mentioned above, we get all sorts of everyday knowledge from the testimony of others, and theories of the epistemology of testimony seek to account for the way that epistemic justification can transmit from speakers to their audiences via testimony. Reductive views seek to explain the transmission of justification in terms of other kinds of epistemic justification, whereas nonreductive views claim that the kind of justification that testimony transmits from speakers to audience is not reducible to other forms of justification. Whichever way one goes on the question of reduction, the Lockean view of communication combines with the epistemology of testimony to suggest a picture whereby access to other people's thoughts via sincere testimony is one of the main processes by which groups of people increase their mutual understanding of the world. When someone says something ordinary, we are usually automatically justified in believing what they said. Of course, we have to employ various strategies for avoiding gullibility, but very many of the beliefs we share with other people are acquired through uncritical acceptance of what other people say. This is, for example, why Wikipedia is so useful.

This picture may be accurate to large swaths of justified beliefs held within a group of people. However, the picture is plainly inadequate for most of the sorts

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27   For a useful discussion of some of the main views and a proposed alternative view of knowledge of our own reasons for attitudes, see Keeling, "Knowing Our Reasons."

of views we seek to form in public political debate. Political matters are, unlike most ordinary cases of learning something through testimony, controversial and often morally tinged. For anything someone says about a matter of public policy, complex scientific fact, or deep moral value, we can usually find someone else who would say the opposite; and even when we do not know someone who disagrees, we can usually easily imagine the sort of fellow citizen who would disagree. Because of this, it is not nearly as plausible that testimony—whether from politicians, political commentators, or friends and neighbors—can automatically transmit justification about such matters, and we generally need to form our own views about such matters in a more careful and critical way.[28] One cannot look up answers to controversial questions of public policy on Wikipedia.

That is not to say that we should ignore what other people say when thinking about political matters. Far from it, what I want to suggest is that, when it comes to public policies, complex scientific facts, or moral values, it is more important than in quotidian cases of testimony to listen to people's *reasons* for their views. And this is why discursive integrity is so important in public political debate. If people are prepared to say only, "This is how I see things; it's my sincere opinion that *p*," then when it comes to controversial and important matters, their testimony is not going to be very helpful for forming well-justified collective views. Public political debate also needs people who are prepared to say, "The reason I think that *p*, is *q*, *r*, and *s*." And even "To the objections *a*, *b*, and *c*, I would try to respond with *e*, *f*, and *g*, but I might need to modulate my original position somewhat, in which case I'd still endorse *p**."

There are epistemic reasons that such inferential intercourse with fellow members of a polity is more likely to lead individuals to form robustly justified views.[29] In my view, however, it is equally important that discussions proceeding under a mutually acknowledged ideal of discursive integrity also promote a kind of mutual understanding and shared values that are not otherwise available. In justifying our views to one another in public political debate, ideally we are not primarily trying to convince other people of our views by giving our personal reasons for these views or giving reasons we believe our audience should accept

28 For discussion of the related issue of the strangeness of deference to moral testimony, see Nickel, "Moral Testimony and Its Authority"; McGrath, "The Puzzle of Pure Moral Deference" and "Skepticism about Moral Expertise as a Puzzle for Moral Realism"; and Fletcher, "Moral Testimony."

29 See Landemore, *Democratic Reason*, 124–30, for an argument that participation in collective democratic reasoning as part of a large group with diverse views and abilities has ameliorative effects on failures of individual reasoning. For further discussion of the essential collectivity of the pursuit of knowledge, see Chrisman, "Believing as We Ought and the Democratic Route to Knowledge."

as their personal reasons for sharing the views, we are also seeking to legitimate our collective decisions for a potentially broader group. To this end, what matters in justifying myself is not just what convinces me, nor what I think will convince you, but what should convince (all of) "us."[30]

Of course, in reality, nothing convinces everyone, and maybe nothing should. But if we conceive of a public justificatory standard as the regulative ideal of collective reasoning, then taking on the sort of discursive responsibility I am suggesting we expect each other to take on when making contributions to public political debate will not just move the relevant "us" toward broader common knowledge but also serve to constitute and expand the domain of our shared concerns and our mutual understanding.

In summary, then, my third argument for the importance of discursive integrity is that such debate is often about controversial, complicated, and moral issues where we should not take other people's word for things but need to investigate reasons collectively. For that, we need something other than expressive sincerity; we need discursive integrity. The complexity and controversy can extend to other domains such as scientific or philosophical debate (where I also think discursive integrity is an important ideal), but in the political realm I have suggested there is also a moral reason that this is important having to do with the way collective reasoning aims to not only explain and convince but also to constitute shared concern and mutual understanding capable of fostering cooperative collective action.

Earlier, I sought to distinguish the communicative ideals of expressive sincerity and discursive integrity. Once distinguished, I think it is fairly clear that discursive integrity is important to communication, but the relative importance of discursive integrity for good public political debate is not widely appreciated in the popular political culture of contemporary democracies. So, in this section, I have developed three independent arguments for thinking that discursive integrity deserves significantly more attention than it presently gets. Even if these arguments convince you of their conclusion, they may leave you wondering

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30 I do not mean here to endorse the so-called public reason requirement on justification of state policy, but debate about it is relevant to our appreciation of discursive integrity. For discussion, see especially Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 36–37, 55–57; Gaus, *The Order of Public Reason*; and Quong, "What Is the Point of Public Reason?" I am inspired here by Postema, who makes a similar point to the one in the text above arguing for a robust conception of public justification, which he contrasts with two thinner conceptions having to do with articulating one's own personal reasons and having to do with articulating reasons one hopes to use to convince specific interlocutors ("Public Practical Reason"). According to him, neither of these is ideal public justification because of the way they fail to treat reasoning as a collective project.

what anyone can do about failures of discursive integrity among political agents, especially in a political-media landscape where scandal sells and reasoned arguments never go viral. In the final section I venture speculation about how things might be improved.

4. SECOND-ORDER DEBATE ABOUT THE RULES OF PUBLIC POLITICAL DEBATE

Public political debate is a social practice. And social practices are partially constituted by the mutual (even if only implicit and often imperfect) acknowledgement of a set of norms by participants in the practice. This sort of mutual acknowledgement partially constitutes individual actions as part of some collective activity. For example, we queue to get into a concert, applaud when the song is finished, chant "encore" if it was good, go silent when the band returns to the stage. Or we sit down together for a meal, pass the food around, use the correct utensils, say "cheers" while clinking glasses. These are social practices that lack explicit rules, but they seem to involve mutual acknowledgment of norms, and individual actions seem to make little sense absent reference to the collective activity partly constituted by this mutual acknowledgement. In a similar fashion, we should view the diffuse activity of public political debate in liberal democracies as a social practice with implicit norms whose mutual acknowledgment is crucial for understanding individual speech acts as part of the relevant practice.

With examples of "broken" political discourse in mind, however, one might worry about whether there actually are any mutually acknowledged norms of public political debate. I suspect the best way to answer this question is to ask participants to try to make more explicit their understanding of rules of the practice, and then to engage in debate about the second-order issue of how best to treat each other when discussing controversial issues of mutual concern.[31] My expectation is that this would foster more explicit discussions of principles for responsible political debate, both among regular citizens and among politicians and political reporters. For instance, if we can insist that political agents tell us not only what they propose regarding first-order issues but also that they suggest and seek to justify views about how public political debate should be conducted, we will be positioned to develop a more constructive mutual understanding

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31 This is not meant to deny the political importance of expressions of emotions such as anger, self-respect, and feelings of solidarity. For important discussion, see Boxill, "Self-Respect and Protest"; Bell, "A Woman's Scorn"; Shelby, *Dark Ghettos*, ch. 7; Delmas, *A Duty To Resist*, ch. 6; Pasternak, "Political Rioting"; and Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger." I see these sorts of expression as first-order contributions to public political discussion (and sometimes debate), and think they highlight the need for more second-order reflection on when and how such expressions are legitimate.

of responsible political debate—one that will improve operationalization of the ideal of discursive integrity.

So much of public political debate is about first-order questions, such as whether there should be a wealth tax, how we should reform the criminal justice system, and which energy policies are supported by the best climate science. There is also a lot of discussion of particular politicians and their parties, for example: whether Donald Trump is hiding something in his tax returns, whether the British Labour party is protecting anti-Semites, whether the rise of the Conservatives in Canada will block increased environmental protection laws, and whether Narendra Modi implicitly supports attacks on Muslims in India. We can view this discussion of representatives as a sort of second-order debate, one level removed from the issues that matter to shared understanding and collective action in a polity. However, there is another sort of second-order discussion that we do not often have, which is more important; and when it does happen, it seems to get relegated to places such as subcommittees on party convention or conference rules, backroom dealings about the structure of TV debates, and arcane procedural debates in our legislative bodies. This is public political debate about what we might think of as the "rules of the game" in public political discourse. If we could have public debate about the principles of responsible public debate, I think first-order debate would manifest more discursive integrity.

To make this suggestion vivid, I want to close this paper by considering the example of the subreddit r/changemyview, which is an online space self-conceived as "a place to post an opinion you accept may be flawed, in an effort to understand other perspectives on the issue."[32] Users are encouraged to "enter with a mindset for conversation, not debate." A post on the website is titled "Religious institutions should have the right to refuse to marry LGBT+ couples if homosexuality goes against the religion's beliefs."[33] What follows is a six-paragraph explanation of the view and why the person posting thinks it is correct. Then there is a tree of responses and counter-responses that are rated and displayed according to an internal "delta system" whereby users can acknowledge when a response or counter-response changed their view about something related to the original post at least to some degree. The sorts of free democratic debate hosted by this website are often highly informative for those without enough knowledge about an issue to have an opinion. And even when one already has a strongly held opinion about an issue, the back-and-forth discussion often helps to understand reasons for another view and to appreciate nuances of the issue

32 https://www.reddit.com/r/changemyview.

33 https://www.reddit.com/r/changemyview/comments/nwvk7g/cmv_religious_institutions _should_have_the_right, accessed June 10, 2021.

and elements where one's own confidence might be modulated without fully changing one's original view.

It is fairly clear how the site manages such constructive discussions of controversial issues: It has an explicit set of rules that the designers seek to explain and justify and that are enforced through informal reputational policing and explicit moderation. Moreover, within these, it is revelatory of an implicit commitment to the ideal of discursive integrity that the site's first rule for responding to a post is that "Direct responses to a submission must challenge or question at least one aspect of the submitted view." This means the site's designers want to avoid responses that are mere "likes," restatements, and expansions of the original post—however sincere these may happen to be. Noting that they want to avoid echo chambers, they explain this as follows: "If we allowed responses that reinforced the [original poster's] view as top level, [Change My View] would quickly become an echo chamber where only popular opinions were allowed. It would also increase the likelihood that people would come here to soapbox rather than take a critical look at their own viewpoint."[34] So, in the designers' view, it is through respectful challenges that constructive discussion of contentious issues best starts.

Of course, it is not realistic to expect most public political discussion to be designed from the outset with a hyperlink to the rules for engagement or for there to be formal moderators to enforce those rules. And, to be clear, I do not think such explicit reflection on the "rules of the game" will overcome problems with lying and dishonesty. Nevertheless, as long as we understand public political debate as a shared practice with implicitly acknowledged norms, we might begin to improve it by getting participants to reflect more on what they think the norms are and should be and to discuss this second-order issue more explicitly.[35] On the backdrop of the assumption that public political debate in liberal democracies should increase shared understanding of complex and controversial issues and use this to pursue widely acceptable collective decisions about how to live together, we—ordinary citizens, political commentators, and politicians—

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34 https://www.reddit.com/r/changemyview/wiki/rules#wiki_rule_1, accessed June 10, 2021.

35 Peter defends a congenial interpretation of Rawls's idea of public reason in *Democratic Legitimacy*, ch. 6. According to her preferred "pure proceduralist" version of a public reason requirement on democratic legitimacy, it is not substantive governmental policy that must be justified by public reasons (i.e., reasons not dependent on substantive and disputed conceptions of what is good) but rather the rules or principles that frame the decision-making process by which political equals who potentially disagree about substantive goods engage in debate about public policy. Although not focused here on the idea of public reason, Peter's kind of pure proceduralism encourages just this sort of second-order public debate about the principles of responsible debate.

might all usefully try to develop and agree to a charter for responsible debate, i.e., a set of rules, which we seek to explain and justify on the model of r/change-myview, for norm-governed contributions to that social practice. For the reasons explained in the previous section, although norms concerning expressive sincerity are going to prove important, norms concerning discursive integrity are going to be even more important to promoting the purpose of this activity.[36]

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