

# 1. Introduction: How should we think about corruption?

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Like Caesar's Gaul, the contemporary literature on corruption can be divided into three parts,<sup>1</sup> with very little overlap between them. One part, by no means the largest or most influential, is, like this book, largely produced by professional academics. It is analytic and historical in character, focusing on how corruption has been or should be defined. The other two, while not uninterested in questions of definition, are more directly related to policy issues. They are produced by a shifting population of academics, policy professionals and activists who focus largely on the public sector and view corruption as improper conduct of a kind that, in the one case, has damaging economic effects and/or, in the other, deviates from the formal duties of public office. Few of those who write on corruption contribute to more than one of these literatures (notable exceptions are Euben, 1997; Johnston, 2006; Philp, 2007), although two of our contributors—Mulgan and Saxonhouse—make a point of relating their discussions of corruption in Western classical antiquity to the contemporary public policy treatment of corruption.

Much of the literature that focuses on the damaging economic effects of corruption is sponsored by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank and international development agencies, and the international anti-corruption non-governmental organisation (NGO) Transparency International (TI). This literature is concerned with the impact of corruption on economic growth and, accordingly, tends to see corruption as a particularly serious problem for non-Western countries. Not surprisingly, this perspective also suggests that an important part of the corruption on which it focuses is likely to involve the conduct of Western businesses operating in these countries. Susan Rose-Ackerman, who has worked closely with the World Bank in her studies of corruption, presents a clear example of this approach in her *Corruption and government* (1999). She begins by asking why so many poor countries have low or negative rates of economic growth even when well endowed with natural resources or a highly educated labour force, as some of them are. An important part of her answer is corruption, which, she argues, is likely to be particularly severe in countries with 'dysfunctional public and

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<sup>1</sup> Caesar's remarkably self-serving account of the Roman subjugation of the Gauls between 58 and 50 BC divides Gaul into regions inhabited by the Belgae, Aquitanians and Celts (whom the Romans call Gauls). Regions closer to Rome that were inhabited by Gauls, most of which had been brought under Roman control before Caesar began his campaigns, are not covered by his classification.

private institutions'. In her view, such institutional problems mean these countries will be characterised by 'a pervasive failure to tap self-interest for productive purposes' (pp. 1–2).

Rose-Ackerman takes as her benchmark for the identification of dysfunctional institutions 'the archetypical competitive market', which works to channel self-interest 'into productive activities that lead to efficient resource use'. She contrasts the workings of competitive markets with less desirable conditions in which people use resources not only for productive purposes, but also to obtain an advantage for themselves 'in dividing up the benefits of economic activity—called "rent-seeking" by economists' (p. 2). Since rent-seeking behaviour diverts resources from productive activities, it serves to restrain economic growth. *Corruption and government* suggests that, other things being equal, countries with high levels of public sector corruption will be poorer overall. The remedy lies in major institutional reforms of the kind promoted by the 'good governance' programs of the World Bank and other international agencies.

This developmental perspective commonly focuses on what it sees as the limitations of non-Western cultures, and especially on cases in which conduct that was once acceptable 'no longer fits modern conditions' (p. 6)—a focus questioned by Peter Larmour's chapter in this collection. In contrast, the problems that concern public regulatory agencies are largely within their own jurisdictions, so these agencies also tend to focus on the practical problems involved in their attempts to regulate the conduct of public servants and politicians. As part of this focus, such agencies clearly require a workable definition of corruption. For example, Section 8 of the Act that established the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), which is itself modelled on the Hong Kong ICAC, identifies 'corruption' as the type of conduct that adversely affects the honest or impartial performance of official functions, involves a breach of public trust or the misuse of information acquired by officials in the course of their public functions.

As for the academic literature on how corruption has been or should be identified, we can hardly do better than refer to important papers by Peter Euben (1989) and Mark Philp (1997). First, Euben points out that the original—and still very common—use of the idea of corruption is to identify some damaging impurity, intrusion or distortion that prevented something from developing as it should. A foreign element in a chemical compound, stones in a packet of rice or seeds or decay in meat or vegetables are all examples of corruption. He notes that the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives several related meanings of corruption, most of them 'having to do with decay, degeneration, disintegration, and debasement. Corruption implies decay, where the original or natural condition of something

becomes infected' (Euben, 1989, p. 221). The image of corruption as an infection or damaging impurity of the body politic appears throughout the history of political thought, as the contributions to this volume show.

Second, a seminal paper by Mark Philp (1997) offers a closely related argument. After noting that several competing definitions of corruption are in play in contemporary debate (corruption is defined, for example, as conduct that damages the public interest, as deviating from the formal duties of office, as flouting legal norms or as an abuse of authority designed to maximise an official's income), Philp argues that definitional disputes have obscured the fact that the basic meaning of corruption is not in dispute: 'it is rooted in the sense of a thing being changed from its naturally sound condition, into something unsound, impure, debased, infected' (p. 29). If there is a problem with the definition of political corruption, he argues, it does not lie in any disagreement about the meaning of corruption itself but, rather, in the practical application of this understanding to politics. This is the result of a lack of general agreement about the 'naturally sound' political condition and thus about what should count as a deviation from that condition. To address this issue would be to enter a field of intractable debate that most students of corruption have preferred to avoid. I should add that Philp's point about 'the basic meaning of corruption' applies equally well in areas other than politics. Arlene W. Saxonhouse's contribution to this volume is a case in point; she discusses the uses of the concept of corruption in relation to literary genres.

Leaving this last issue to one side for the moment, we can say that two assumptions, which this book aims to question, dominate contemporary discussion of corruption: *first*, that corruption is primarily an economic issue, both in its content (the exchange of money for favours) and in its most important effects (on economic growth, development, and so on); *second*, that corruption involves a blurring of the distinction between public and private. These assumptions are often joined by a *third*, which we also dispute: that, while corruption is universal, its most significant impact is likely to be found in developing countries. Corruption is thus presented as if it were a matter of misconduct on the part of public officials who are seen, especially in poor countries, as pursuing their own private interests and likely to act corruptly in return for money and other favours, thereby undermining economic development.

Our subtitle, 'Expanding the focus', suggests two closely related responses to this conventional understanding of corruption. One is that it is far too narrow and the other is that there is much to be gained from rejecting the view that the most important issues around corruption concern its impact on economic

activity<sup>2</sup> and, consequently, from taking a broader view of the significance of corruption. The essays in this book show that viewing corruption as a matter of public officials pursuing their private economic interests is considerably narrower than the view of corruption to be found in earlier periods of Western thought.

Before considering these chapters directly, however, it is worth noting a few of the ways in which corruption has been understood in the history of the West. We begin with the monumental *History of Rome (Ab Urbe Condita Libri)*, written by the Roman historian Titus Livius (Livy) (59 BC – AD 17). After noting how the Romans had acquired their empire, Livy's preface invites his imagined Roman reader to consider the Romans' 'morals, at first as slightly giving way...how they sunk more and more, then began to fall headlong until he reaches the present times, when we can neither endure our vices nor their remedies' (2006, p. 3). Livy's image of moral decay following the accumulation of wealth and power is significant for our purposes, not because it offers a new or interesting account of corruption, but because it re-emerges, many centuries later, in *The history of Florence* (1979 [1525]b, pp. 548–74), by Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527). Machiavelli had already written his own commentary on Livy (1979 [1525]a, pp. 167–418).<sup>3</sup> Machiavelli's views on corruption are examined more systematically in Chapters 4 and 5 of this collection. For the moment the thing to say is that *The history of Florence* turns Livy's story of the move from success to moral decay into an account of societal corruption—a dangerous infection of the political community that appears and reappears in a cyclical pattern. Echoing arguments developed earlier by the Arab historian Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406 CE/732–808 AH),<sup>4</sup> Machiavelli stresses that states 'always descend from good to bad and rise from bad to good':

For ability brings about tranquillity, and tranquillity laziness, and laziness chaos, and chaos ruin; and, in like manner, from ruin is born order, from order ability, and from this quality glory and good fortune. And so, prudent men have observed that literature develops after arms, and that in nations and city-states generals are born before philosophers. For after an effective and well-organized militia has produced victories, and these victories have ensured tranquillity, the strength of such brave

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2 The economist Jeffrey D. Sachs (2006) argues that the impact of corruption on economic development has been much overrated.

3 It is easy to read Machiavelli's *History of Florence* as if it were structured by his interpretation of Livy, but this, in turn, may have been structured by his reading of Book 6 of Polybius's *The histories* (Hexter, 1956), written some 200 years before Livy's work (2006).

4 See Ibn Khaldun (Kalpakian, 2008; Katsiaficas, 1997), especially Chapters 18 (headed 'Sedentary culture is the goal of civilization. It means the end of its life span and brings about its corruption') and 30 ('A refutation of philosophy. The corruption of the students of philosophy'). The parallels between Machiavelli's and Khaldun's cyclical accounts of the history of states are undeniable, but it is not clear whether Machiavelli knew of or was influenced by Khaldun.

minds cannot be corrupted with a more honorable laziness than that of literature, nor can this laziness enter into well-organized cities with a greater and more dangerous deception than with that of literature. Cato was well aware of this when Diogenes and Carneades, both philosophers, came to Rome as ambassadors to the senate; when he saw that the Roman youth began to admire these men, aware of the evil that could enter his native city as a result of the honorable laziness, he made it a law that no philosopher could be received in Rome. Nations have come to ruin because of this. (Khaldun, 2004, pp. 557–8)

Machiavelli and Khaldun see corruption as a product of the luxury that follows success. It would be easy to identify the corruption in this case with elite misconduct, as Syed Alatas's (1990) rendering of Ibn Khaldun's discussion suggests. Yet both Khaldun and Machiavelli treat elite misconduct as an important symptom of broader societal corruption, not as its cause. Corruption in this last sense—as a destructive societal condition—has what we would now regard as an obvious economic aspect in the form of luxurious consumption, but it is fundamentally a political problem, a weakness of the polity that manifests itself in various forms, including a militarily incompetent elite. Machiavelli offers a powerful view of corruption as a societal condition seen as neither an economic phenomenon nor a matter of blurring the division between public and private. Richard Mulgan's and Arlene W. Saxenhouse's contributions to this volume reinforce the point that corruption does not have to be understood as a matter of public versus private. Both authors show that, in the political thought of Western classical antiquity, the corruption of the body politic was not always seen in these terms. Instead, Plato and Aristotle viewed corruption in terms of a dualistic world view that contrasted an ideal realm of truth and goodness with the empirical realm of change and decay. To the extent that the ideal provided a standard with which to judge the empirical, any existing government could be seen as inescapably corrupt.

These examples show that, in the political thought of Western classical antiquity and late medieval Europe, corruption was commonly understood, as we believe it should be understood, as a condition of the body politic. Since the late eighteenth century this has not been the prevalent view held in the West and amongst the international agencies that the West dominates. In the past two centuries the term 'corruption' has been increasingly used to designate problematic behaviour on the part of one or more individuals, or behaviour that is often seen as a matter of using one's public office for the purposes of illicit private gain. Some commentators (for example, Euben, 1989, 1997) have deplored this development, seeing it as resulting from the triumph of liberal individualism and as leading to an individualistic and economistic view of corruption and a corresponding loss of concern with the public good.

Yet we do not have to return to the classics or to Machiavelli's Italy to find influential alternatives to the view that corruption is primarily an economic phenomenon. Lisa Hill's discussion of Adam Ferguson in Chapter 6 reminds us that, in his analysis of the problems facing the commercial societies of his time, Ferguson drew on the same patrician story that Machiavelli had used of the moral decay of the Roman people with the rise of the Empire. Hill presents Ferguson as arguing that prosperous empires gave rise to specialisation, overextension and hedonism, which eroded the civic spirit. Although progress and commercialism were inevitable and natural, their effects should be countered by enhancing civic competence and awareness, including political activism. He saw conflict and factional divisions as providing citizens with the lessons that would underpin ongoing reform and promote the development of 'liberty and just government'.

I should add that about the time that Ferguson was speculating about the fate of commercial societies, we find David Hume (1711–76) worrying about the impact of political parties on the conduct of government but without using the term 'corruption'. His essay 'Of parties in general' (1987 [1777]) maintains that:

As much as legislators and founders of states ought to be honoured and respected among men, as much ought the founders of sects and factions to be detested and hated; because the influence of faction is directly contrary to that of laws. Factions subvert government, render laws impotent, and beget the fiercest animosities among men of the same nation, who ought to give mutual assistance and protection to each other. And what should render the founders of parties more odious is, the difficulty of extirpating these weeds, when once they have taken root in any state... They are, besides, plants which grow most plentifully in the richest soil and though absolute governments be not wholly free from them, it must be confessed, that they rise more easily, and propagate themselves faster in free governments, where they always infect the legislature itself, which alone could be able, by the steady application of rewards and punishments, to eradicate them. (p. 55)

Contemporary readers are likely to find that the most striking feature of this passage is its treatment of partisan politics as a kind of infection. Far from focusing on the economic impact of sects and factions, Hume is concerned with what he sees as their destructive political effects. The American Federalist James Madison (1751–1836) takes a related view in his discussion of the problem of faction:

By a faction I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some

common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community. (Madison, et al., 1987 [1788], p. 10)

It is worth noting that a faction in Madison's sense might well consist of a majority of the population. In contemporary terms, we might think of a faction as a pressure group, or simply as a person or organisation that is represented by one or more lobbyists. Madison's concern seems to be less with the overall effects of factions than with the possibility that a single faction might come to dominate legislation or other government action. Yet, as Hacker and Pierson (2011) argue with particular reference to the United States, there are grounds for concern, on the one hand, that the real business of government may be conducted less in cabinet offices and representative assemblies than in private negotiations between the government of the day and assorted lobbyists and, on the other hand, that electoral politics and factional disputes within and between parties may be little more than theatrical distraction. We might regard this condition as a kind of corruption, and one that is not attributable to the machinations of any single faction or interest.

If we were to accept Madison's view of the problem of faction, we would have to say that democracy itself is a significant source of governmental corruption, primarily because it secures conditions in which 'faction'—the partisan interests of a popular majority, or even of a powerful and well-organised minority—may be able to divert government from its pursuit of the interests of the community.

On the other hand, those who put their trust in democracy would have to say that the Madisonian distrust of faction is itself a likely source of corruption because elected officials and public servants who shared this view of the danger posed by popular majorities might be tempted both to ignore the issues raised by Hacker and Pierson and to subvert the machinery of democratic government.

Democracy was originally understood as one of three basic forms of government. Aristotle defined a state as 'a body of citizens sufficing for the purposes of life' (1988, pp. 21–2) and he went on to say that the state may be governed by the one, the few or the many. Democracy was the last of these cases: government by the many. Our contemporary idea of democracy, of government by the people, carries a similar sense. It is not a matter of government by the one, a king or a dictator, or by the few, an unelected ruling party or a military junta.

Aristotle was far from being an unequivocal supporter of democracy. Like other Greek philosophers, he regarded democracy as a source of a particular kind of political corruption (Farrar, 1988). The basic idea here is not very different from Madison's: that government by the people is in danger of being dominated by the poor—and poorly educated—majority, who might act collectively to form a

faction in Madison's sense. Whenever this happened, the conduct of government could be expected to reflect the ignorance and prejudices of this faction and it would be open to manipulation by unscrupulous demagogues. In fact, Roberts (1994, p. 11) argues that this negative perception of the majority dominated Western discussion of democracy until well into the nineteenth century.

When representative government began to develop about the end of the eighteenth century, it was not usually seen as a kind of democracy (in Federalist Paper No. 10, Madison called it a 'republic', arguing that a republic of this kind was superior to democracy) but rather as a defence against the dangers of popular rule. To be sure, it did give the people as a whole a limited role in government, and it was seen for this reason as a way of avoiding the kinds of corruption that had been associated with rule by a king or aristocracy (government by the one or the few). Yet, because it restricted the people to the election of those who would govern them, leaving the actual work of government in the hands of a minority of elected politicians and public servants, it was also seen as a way of avoiding the dangers that had traditionally been associated with democracy. The contemporary identification of democracy with representative government is a result of nineteenth and twentieth-century developments, and it involved a radical transformation of democracy's earlier meaning (Dahl, 1989, 1998).

I have argued that the view of corruption as a matter of public officials pursuing private interests is narrower than the view of corruption to be found in earlier periods of Western thought. Yet there is no reason to believe that the changing meaning of the term 'corruption' necessarily reflects any lessening of public concern with the condition of the body politic. While public-choice theorists may not draw explicitly on the older meaning of corruption, for example, it is clear that this group of economists and political scientists (Brennan & Lomarsky, 1993; Buchanan, 1978; Buchanan & Wagner, 1977) is very much concerned with what would once have been called corruption of the body politic; the same is true of the 'classical' liberalism of Friedrich Hayek (Gray, 1982). Or again, as I have argued elsewhere (Hindess, 2000), the early arguments in favour of representative government clearly present it as a means of keeping in check the corruption of government by any kind of factional politics that drew on the short-term interests of the poor and poorly educated majority. Much of the history of Western political thought since the emergence of this new form of government can be seen as focusing on the new sources of corruption created by the institutions it required—most especially, of course, on the opportunities it appears to create for politicians, public servants and business interests to pursue their own private advantage—or their factional view of 'the permanent and aggregate interests of the community'.

If these claims seem contentious, I would say only that many of the concerns that were once associated with the idea of corruption still play an important

part in public life. My discussion here focuses on the issues of impurity (or contamination) and faction. Before proceeding with this discussion, it is worth noting that, while there is a sense in which democracy can be seen as a source of corruption, there is another in which corruption is a threat to democracy. Popular control over government and political equality are central to modern understandings of democracy (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2008), although both are clearly open to interpretation. Yet on almost any understanding of these terms, popular control and equality will both be subverted by corruption in the public sector. If the decisions of public servants are influenced by bribes or improper inducements offered by their political masters, there is no sense, however indirect, in which they are subject to popular control. Nor does the influence of bribery augur well for political equality between citizens.

Turning now to the issue of impurity, the political life of many contemporary states is organised, at least in part, around concerns about the presence of unassimilated alien groups within the community—Indians in Fiji, Muslims in Australia and the member states of the European Union, Christians and Muslims in India. The sense of impurity invoked in these cases suggests an obvious set of political solutions in the form of stricter immigration controls, citizenship tests or ‘ethnic cleansing’. This last term is a recent invention but the practices it refers to have played an important part in the history of most contemporary states (Mann, 1999). Impurity is at issue in another way in the anti-elitist appeals of populist politics. The underlying message of these appeals is that political and other elites—educational, cultural, economic—pretend to speak for the public interest but in fact represent only themselves (Sawer & Hindess, 2004). Populism is often regarded as a kind of extremism but it is a pervasive feature of modern states whose rulers generally claim to act in the interests of the people (Schedler, 1997).

While the word ‘corruption’ is not often used in relation to these issues, the concerns over alien intrusion and elitism both appeal to an underlying idea of impurity or distortion—in fact, to something like the original sense of corruption discussed by Euben and Philp. Using the example of New York City, Frank Anechiarico (Anechiarico & Jacobs, 1996) has argued that attempts to limit corruption amongst public officials may have destructive effects on the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service. The examples noted here suggest that there are dangers in taking the concern for purity too seriously. It is not obvious that corruption, in the sense of impurity, is something to be avoided.

I noted earlier that the problem of faction was a significant concern in the political thought of Hume and Madison. It has since been a major issue in liberal thinking about government. Indeed, if representative government can be seen

as avoiding one possible source of governmental corruption—the misguided enthusiasms of the people—it clearly opens the way for the corruption of government by professional politicians and public servants. This last has been the concern of populist politics on the one side and of public-choice theory and other forms of neo-liberalism on the other.

In fact, the history of representative government could be written as a story of attempts to limit the effects of the new sources of governmental corruption that it creates (Hindess, 2000). Populism addresses the issue by offering to replace conventional politicians with politicians of a different kind—that is, with political professionals who pretend not to be professional politicians. Inheriting the older tradition of distrusting the people, liberalism addresses the issue rather differently, through institutional design that aims to deal with the problem of faction: checks and balances, rational, bureaucratic administration and codes of conduct for public officials (Goodin, 1996). Where, as often happens, these devices are seen to be unsuccessful, it proposes a different approach: reducing the temptations of, or the opportunities for, corrupt conduct. Rose-Ackerman's influential study quoted above is an excellent case in point. Another approach is to reduce the amount of government responsibility—for example, by privatising government utilities and public services or by limiting the areas in which governments attempt to regulate economic activity. Rose-Ackerman's discussion focuses on the benefits of such changes. In effect, they promise to reduce the opportunities for corrupt conduct by reducing the scope for administrative discretion on the part of public officials, if necessary by privatising areas of government activity. Yet such reforms also have disadvantages, and it is far from clear that the positive effects always outweigh the negative. There are well-known problems with the process of privatisation itself—developments in Russia since the end of communist rule provide a host of flagrant examples (Krastev, 2004). There are equally familiar problems of a decline in standards—safety, security of employment, service provision—as a result of privatisation or a reduction in administrative regulation. My point here is not that privatisation is always bad or that state regulation and public provision of services are always good. It is simply that minimising the scope for certain kinds of corruption need not always be the most important concern.

Another of Rose-Ackerman's recommendations is that professional politicians and senior public servants should receive salaries that are competitive with those in private business. The assumption here seems to be that those who are well paid will be less susceptible to bribery than those who are not well paid. Yet, even if this were the case, this remedy would have the effect of creating a significant income gap between a cadre of professional politicians, senior public

servants and business figures on the one hand and the rest of the population on the other. It is likely to lead, in other words, to a version of the problem of faction.

This last point brings us back to the original, and still the most general, view of corruption as an infection of the body politic. In contrast with this view, the economic understanding seems both too narrow and too narrowly technical. It is too narrow because its focus on minimising economic corruption can obscure, and can even extend, more general problems in the workings of government. It is too narrowly technical because the identification of these more general problems depends on how we understand the common interest—a notion that is notoriously open to dispute. In this respect, to treat the problem of corruption as if it were amenable to technical solution is also to ignore the contentiousness of political life.

These then are the issues that underpin the collection of chapters that makes up this book. In exploring the multiple ways in which corruption has been conceptualised, these chapters collectively challenge the narrowness of conventional understandings of corruption. In addition, explicitly or implicitly, they suggest that there is much to be gained from taking a broader view of the significance of corruption, and, in particular, from refusing to accept that the most important issues concern the impact of corruption on economic activity.

## Outline of the book

Our principal concern in this book is to show that there is nothing natural or inevitable about a view of corruption either as an economic phenomenon or as blurring the distinction between public and private. Accordingly, five of our eight substantial chapters focus on conceptions of corruption that have been influential in the history of Western political thought, most of which view corruption not so much as an individual failure but as a societal phenomenon. Our three remaining chapters focus on contemporary issues.

We begin with two chapters on the Greeks of Western classical antiquity, especially Aristotle, Plato and Thucydides. I noted earlier that Richard Mulgan and Arlene W. Saxonhouse locate their contributions in relation to contemporary debates. First, Richard Mulgan presents Aristotle, and to a lesser extent Plato, to undermine what he sees as the moral absolutism of much discussion of corruption by contemporary political theorists. Aristotle uses the Platonic distinction between ideal forms and mundane realities to argue that existing polities are inevitably corrupt, whereas in modern thought 'corruption is seen as remediable, at least at the systemic level'. The Greeks recognised that existing regimes were always less than perfect. They did not use the ideal of a polity

without corruption to set an impossible standard or model of constitutional 'best practice' to which all states are expected to aspire—for example, as a condition of receiving loans from richer countries.

Aristotle sees the rule of law not as marking the difference between corrupt and non-corrupt government, but as a practical, if imperfect, means of restraining corrupt conduct, inhibiting rulers from making ad-hoc decisions to suit themselves. In many respects, Arlene W. Saxonhouse's chapter reinforces Mulgan's negative view of absolute standards while offering a rather different perspective on the Greek view of corruption itself. Using the 'basic' understanding of corruption identified above—as undermining the pure or natural condition of the thing corrupted—she shows that Plato and Thucydides corrupted existing literary forms to establish what they saw as a new grounding for knowledge, a knowledge that would be 'a possession for ever'. For both Plato and Thucydides, the incorruptible is not to be found in worldly politics but in 'the intellectual access to the truths to which their novel literary products lead us'.

Saxonhouse adds a twist of her own to Mulgan's distinction between the Greek view of corruption as inevitable and modern thought in which it is seen as avoidable, at least in principle. She describes Plato and Thucydides as 'political pessimists' and contrasts them with Hobbes—a political 'optimist' who believed that the science of politics as he taught it could lead to 'an incorruptible polity'. All three saw knowledge as rising above 'the corruptible world' but viewed this relationship in radically different ways. Hobbes's 'legacy to the modern world' was a dream of unity between knowledge and politics, whereas these ancient Greeks offered 'tools to understand and assess' the corruptible, political world but made few claims about the capacity of knowledge to transform it.

Before proceeding, let me make two further points about these two chapters. First, it is tempting to see Saxonhouse's distinction between optimists and pessimists as an example of the moral absolutism that Mulgan warns against. To say that corruption is inescapable is not to say that all forms of corruption are equally bad or that nothing can be done about any case of corruption that one encounters. In fact, far from suggesting that there is nothing to be done, Mulgan's Aristotle offers sound advice on how a community might avoid the most extreme varieties of corruption. In this respect, he is far from pessimistic. Second, I will have something to say later about the use of the word 'modern' in these and a few of the later chapters.

The next two chapters move us on from the world of Western antiquity to the medieval West. In Chapter 4, Manuhua Barcham identifies two European perspectives on corruption that were influential in the years between the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the Renaissance. First, Augustine viewed

politics as a form of restraint on humanity's earthly life necessitated by the Fall, and thus saw no intrinsic value in political life. From this perspective, it made little sense to think of politics as something that might or might not become corrupted. Second, the European rediscovery of a number of classical texts about the beginning of the second millennium CE resulted in a renewed interest in classical understandings of both political life and its corruption. In effect, the medieval Christian focus on the importance of moral values was brought together with the classical emphasis on the value of reason with the result that political and moral reason were readily seen as indistinguishable.

If, as Philp (1997) maintains, political corruption means a departure from the naturally sound condition of political life, we should expect the emergence of this novel view of political life to be accompanied by a correspondingly novel perception of corruption. Political corruption was thus perceived largely in terms of the adverse consequences of conduct that were contrary to natural reason: the exercise of power for other than moral ends and especially the rule of tyrants who pursued their own interest rather than the common good. Barcham shows, in conclusion, how this model of politics and its corruption eventually collapsed in response to the emergent late-medieval belief that different aspects of human life possessed their own intrinsic form of reason—a belief that effectively negated the possibility of appealing to an overarching natural reason as a guide for human action.

Bruce Buchan's Chapter 5 traces a different path through the same historical period, beginning with a view of corruption as both a personal vice and a failing of the polity, and then guiding us through the interplay between contrasting notions, for example, of private, individual morality and collective, social morality, 'the body politic' and 'the political community', and the loss of virtue and the decay of physical bodies. He brings his story through to parts of seventeenth-century Europe, and England in particular, where the appearance of 'commerce and trade as new and influential political forces bedevilled late-seventeenth-century British political thought'. In this period, he detects 'expansive understandings of corruption alongside narrower modern understandings'. The metaphor of the 'body politic' became increasingly anachronistic, while the political community came to be defined in terms of 'the requirements for a flourishing market and solvent state'.

We might quibble with Buchan's use of the term 'modern' in this context—just as we might with Mulgan's, Saxonhouse's and Hill's uses of the term in Chapters 2, 3 and 6 respectively. I turn to this issue below. We might also wonder whether commentators in seventeenth-century England understood the market and 'solvent state' in terms that would be familiar to us today (Walter, 2008).

These points aside, the conclusion to Buchan's narrative leads us directly into Lisa Hill's careful examination of the contributions of the Scottish Enlightenment's two Adams, Ferguson and Smith, whose work, she argues, marks 'a transitional moment' in late-eighteenth-century understandings of the term 'corruption'. Both saw a danger of corruption in the rise of commercialism and its accompanying changes. The differences between them lay in their aetiologies of 'progress and the commercial age'. Ferguson was 'deeply ambivalent about progress', which he saw as inducing corruption. In his analysis of the problems of his own time and in proposing remedies for them, Ferguson draws on the patrician account of the decline of Republican Rome, which we noted above in Livy and again in Machiavelli. This leads him to the familiar conclusion that prosperous empires give rise to specialisation, overextension and hedonism, all of which erode the civic spirit. Although progress and commercialism were inevitable and natural, their effects should be countered by enhancing civic competence and awareness, including political activism. He saw conflict and factional divisions as providing citizens with lessons that could promote ongoing reform and the development of liberty and just government.

In contrast, Smith was essentially 'optimistic about the effects of commercialism'. Hill describes his ideas as 'eccentric' in his own time, but as nevertheless working towards a 'modern' conception of corruption in defending the now conventional liberal values of impartiality, universalism, neutrality, formal equality of opportunity and rule of law. She describes Smith's approach as 'classical' in its conception of corruption as encompassing not only the conduct of public officials, but also features of whole societies, and in adopting the old dichotomy of the 'healthy' or 'corrupt' republic. Yet, in contrast with the classical view, what he actually saw as health and virtue related to commercial rather than civic values: 'the good polity is the natural market economy of self-regarding, lawful and mutually forbearing agents.' Rather than imagining an ideal polity as a standard against which corruption could be judged, Smith envisaged the natural, spontaneous order of the system of natural liberty and the market: 'agents must be permitted the freest possible use of their bodies, minds and properties provided there are no violations of either the public interest or the system of natural liberty.' Both individuals and societies could be corrupted by relics of the pre-commercial age: laws and regulations, slavery, dependency, religious fanaticism and political factionalism—all of which obstruct progress.

The division of labour, in Smith's view, was one of the few corrupting features of the new economic order but, weighing this against the wealth it produced, it yielded more rather than less human happiness all round. His remedy for all forms of corruption was more progress, including education to inculcate patterns of civility suitable for people who participate in market society. Thus, while Ferguson identified hedonism (Epicureanism), privatisation, civic quiescence

and the breakdown of exclusivist social categories as corrupting elements that inhere in progress and modernity, Smith saw these elements as possible solutions to the potentially corrupt state. Conversely, the elements that Ferguson sought to recover—national identity, social intimacy and civic virtue—were those that Smith saw as remnants of a pre-commercial age that ought to be purged in order to prevent corruption and promote the flowering of a natural (broadly liberal) free state.

I noted earlier that one could quibble with Bruce Buchan's use of the word 'modern' in his chapter. The same might be said of Richard Mulgan's and Lisa Hill's chapters. Christine Helliwell and I have argued elsewhere that 'modern' and related terms—'modernity', 'modernising', 'pre-modern' or 'postmodern', and so on—are problematic, not least because, unless their use is very carefully qualified, they invoke a Eurocentric ideology of progress, suggesting that inhabitants of Western Europe, along perhaps with America, Japan and a few other places, are more rational than and, in other respects, some distance ahead of the rest of humanity (Helliwell & Hindess, 2011; Hindess, 2008). As a result, it is difficult to use these terms without implying the disparaging judgment that, while much of the contemporary world and many of our contemporaries are indeed rational and modern like us, the remainder have yet to reach this exalted condition. Similarly, when the modern or 'modernity' is said to be found at some period in the past, the suggestion is that a small part of the world shared some of the characteristics that we now regard as modern and that the rest of the world in that period did not.

Of course, 'modern' is often used without any disparaging intent, as it is, for example, in the chapters noted here. In most of the instances where it appears, 'modern' could be replaced with a term that is less obviously loaded—'recent', 'contemporary', 'post-reformation', and so on—without any serious loss of meaning. Yet, even when there is no disparaging intent, the progressivist connotations of 'modern' are hard to escape.

Along with the progressivist connotations of the 'modern' we find the belief that anything 'modern' will often be eccentric compared with what has gone before, if only because the modern world takes earlier developments just a little further. This, indeed, would be one way to interpret our claim in this book that the modern understanding of corruption is out of line with the history of Western views of corruption: 'Yes, of course it seems to be eccentric, but that is because it is modern and therefore more advanced!' Yet this interpretation is far from what the editors of this book and our contributors have in mind when we contrast contemporary views of corruption with what has gone before. Our point, to reiterate, is to show that these contemporary views are seriously deficient: it is to insist that what from one modernist point of view might seem to be the most advanced perspective is not necessarily superior to its predecessors.

I noted earlier that contemporary discussion of corruption often reflects an all too common view of the differences between Western and non-Western societies: that the latter are lagging some way behind the former. With regard to corruption, this suggests that while corruption is universal, its most significant impact is likely to be found in developing countries. The assumption here is that 'modern'—that is, already developed—countries have advanced well beyond the level of corruption to be found in countries that are not yet 'modern'.

Leaving this issue aside, however, the three contributions that follow the five historical chapters discussed above address issues that are entirely contemporary in character. First, responding indirectly to the Smithian celebration of the market outlined by Lisa Hill and adopting a less than entirely positive view of 'modernity', John Clammer views corruption from the standpoint of a sociologist with an interest in recent developments in social systems analysis. Clammer sees our globalised world—'modernity'—not simply as a collection of many discrete societies whose responses to the threat of corruption can be compared and contrasted to produce measures of success or failure, but rather as a large-scale system held together, *inter alia*, by networks of national and international trade. From this perspective, corruption appears as less a product of particular societies—something to be managed by 'better policing, moral education or institutional adaptation'—than a systemic problem arising in large part from dysfunctions in the social system itself. It can be seen as an index or an outcome 'of the entropy of a particular form of socioeconomic system (globalised neo-liberal capitalism)'. 'Modernity' itself generates 'forms of social disorganisation' which, in turn, generate corruption.

In Clammer's view, social subsystems of the contemporary global order interact with each other to produce three key elements in current forms of corruption: 'mal-' (or distorted) 'development', violence and 'capitalist-led globalisation'. Corruption is thus 'built into the system itself'. Distorted 'development' and 'globalisation' are 'expressions both of one another and of the underlying philosophy of neo-liberalism'.

Our collection closes with two contributions that, directly or indirectly, address what, in a different context, might be seen as the link between culture and corruption. I say 'a different context' because the concept of culture has had a chequered history in the social sciences (Bennett, 1998). Culture is normally seen as an ideational unity, a more or less coherent collection of beliefs, injunctions, norms, values and other ideas that is shared by members of a community. A community's culture is thus thought to both unify it and distinguish it from communities with other cultures (Helliwell & Hindess, 1999). Culture, in this sense, can be seen as providing a number of tools that members of a community can use in deciding on a course of action, yet it is often understood in a more directly prescriptive sense—that is, as requiring, justifying or excusing particular

actions. This last understanding of culture has been perhaps the most important source of objections to the concept because it suggests that people are ‘cultural dopes’—that they are pushed around by their culture (Hall, 1981; Phillips, 2007). A distinctive version of the concept, ‘political culture’ (Almond & Verba, 1963), was influential for a time in political science. The concept was originally designed to capture differences in attitudes towards political authority between relatively stable democracies (the United Kingdom and the United States) and other less-stable countries, on the assumption that differing attitudes towards political authority would account for significant and observable differences in patterns of political behaviour between these countries. This notion of political culture is predicated on the assumption that cultural differences would, in fact, be reflected in conduct. The concept was later accused of lacking objectivity—that is, of favouring the UK and US experience—and has since fallen out of favour (Elkins & Simeon, 1979; Somers, 1995).

Accordingly, we have made limited use of the concepts of culture and political culture in this collection. Without directly invoking the term ‘culture’, John Uhr’s chapter focuses on the attitudes and values of elected politicians, which could easily be viewed as important components of a society’s culture. Attending to these elements, rather than the private interests of officials, Uhr aims to shift our concerns away from corruption in the conventional sense. Rather than offer an alternative account of corruption, he promotes the ideal of an ‘ethical politics’, of a kind that would strengthen democratic processes, particularly the public discussion of political responsibilities. Uhr argues that analyses of corruption are generally premised on distrust of office-holders. They seek to show how ‘external’ accountability mechanisms can be used to regulate the behaviour of those holding political office. In contrast, ‘ethics analysis’ focuses on office-holders’ sense of ‘personal responsibility’—that is, on their capacity for self-regulation. It builds on trust rather than its contrary and seeks to stimulate the ‘praiseworthy political management of official relationships of power’; however, in contrast with the treatment of officials’ corrupt conduct as a personal failing, the focus on ethical self-regulation is not simply individualistic. The determination of standards in a democracy requires responsible public deliberation about the conduct of relationships between all those sharing political power, including the basic organising offices of citizen and government.

Uhr builds his argument through the example of the Australian ‘children overboard affair’, in which ministers and other elected officials misrepresented facts in what they seemed to think were the interests of the ruling party (acting, that is, in what Dennis F. Thompson [1995] calls their ‘political’ rather than their ‘private’ interests). Uhr uses this example to illustrate tendencies that, in his view, are corrupting the relationships between government and citizen. In

this case, no laws were broken or openly subverted and the ‘personal decency’ of the politicians involved was not in question. Nevertheless, the government practised a form of deception that many Australians saw as undermining the norms of the various political offices constituting Australian democracy, thereby demonstrating that political corruption can advance in many guises. The chapter concludes that a ‘relationship-centred’ approach, rather than a ‘rule-centred’ approach, requires disputes over standards to be ‘managed through collective political deliberation over appropriate relationships of power’.

Finally, Peter Larmour considers the way the concept of culture has been used in a recent series of studies of corruption in island states of the South Pacific. Culture is often invoked in the prescriptive sense noted earlier as an explanation for events in the region, which echoes complaints by the anti-corruption NGO Transparency International that the ‘myth of culture’ has been used as an excuse for corruption. Yet culture is sometimes seen as the thing that is corrupted. Just as the word ‘corruption’ in English carries a strong sense of decline, so its use seems to presuppose a pre-corrupt golden age. In the Pacific Islands, for example, there is talk of the ‘corruption’ of traditional cultures and of a loss of standards that had been upheld in the past. Thus chiefs today are said to behave more badly because of the influence of Western culture, institutions or opportunities. At the same time, PNG officials today are thought to behave more corruptly than their colonial predecessors.

One of the difficulties faced by the studies discussed in the chapter is that some of them could find no exact translation for the word ‘corruption’ in local languages. For example, in Kiribati there were several words with proximate meanings but people used the phrase ‘the corruption’. In Tonga the closest word was *angakovi*, which denotes unkindness. In Marshall Islands the opposite was *kien jimwe inmoi*, which translated as uprightness.

Larmour argues that there are differences in the salience and scope of corruption in these countries. The report on Vanuatu found ‘very little outcry’ about it. In Nauru, by contrast, issues of governance and corruption were ‘widely talked about’. There, people defined corruption very broadly to include ‘leaders who do not go to church and who party and travel overseas frequently’. Similarly, in Solomon Islands ‘street talk’ the word *korapt* was often applied to ‘personal as well as official indiscretions’. Early publicity for the leadership code in Papua New Guinea showed cartoons of politicians dancing with their girlfriends as well as receiving cash in envelopes. Salience and scope seemed to be the most extreme in Solomon Islands, where systematic corruption growing out of the forest industry had led to what the report called ‘insidious tolerance’—namely, it is assumed both that every official is corrupt and that nothing could be done about it. The chapter goes on to consider three crosscutting themes in empirical studies: the contrast between gifts and bribes, petty corruption and

the presumed role of ethnic minorities in corruption. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the problematic role of cultural relativism in discussions of corruption.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this introduction, I noted that recent discussion of corruption has been dominated by two assumptions: *first*, that corruption is largely an economic issue in both its content and its most important effects; and *second*, that it involves a blurring of the distinction between public and private. I also noted that these two assumptions often go together with a third that reflects an all too common view of the differences between Western and non-Western societies: that while corruption is universal, its most significant impact is likely to be found in developing countries.

At this point, it is time to sketch the conclusions that the editors believe might be drawn from this book. The first and most important point to make here is that, taken together, the assumptions just noted produce a view of corruption that is narrower in scope than almost any of the earlier views examined in this book. I have argued that broader understandings of corruption, such as the idea of corruption being a form of decay of the body politic, still resonate strongly with current concerns.

Neither the editors of nor the contributors to this book would argue that earlier views of corruption are superior to later views simply by virtue of their coming first. But we do claim that the differences between earlier and later views should give pause for thought. It is at least worth considering what has been gained and what may have been lost in the change from one period to the other. The image of corruption as one or more people behaving badly pales in comparison with the view—advanced by Machiavelli and Ibn Khaldun amongst many others—that corruption is a disease of the body politic that may both encourage improper behaviour on the part of many individuals and discourage those who recognise this behaviour to hold the perpetrators to account. This is not, of course, to suggest that we should not be concerned about people behaving badly. There is much to be said for Richard Mulgan's argument that while it may be appropriate to apply moral absolutes to the conduct of individual public officials, where individual corruption appears to be widespread, the problem is best viewed as a systemic issue—an 'absence of the rule of law or an accountability deficit'—rather than as one of many bad apples.

If the understanding of corruption as men or women behaving badly is an unfortunate narrowing of an earlier, more robust view, the same can be said of the view that corruption is best understood as an economic issue, in both its

content and its effects. One familiar problem with the view that corruption is best seen as a matter of individuals pursuing their own private interests is that it takes no account of what Thompson's *Ethics in congress* calls 'institutional corruption', a mode of corruption in which the benefit gained is 'political rather than personal' (1995, p. 7). Thompson also acknowledges that institutional corruption may be difficult to identify 'because it is so closely related to conduct that [it] is a perfectly acceptable part of political life' (ibid.). If it is hard to distinguish between 'corrupt' and 'perfectly acceptable' conduct then current views of what is acceptable would seem to be problematic and to indicate that there is more to corruption than a few individuals behaving badly.

At another level, the arguments of Bruce Buchan and Lisa Hill suggest that the rise of an economistic or liberal-individualistic view of corruption should be seen as a by-product of the emergence of commercial society or perhaps—as the subtitle of Albert Hirschman's *The passions and the interests* (1977) has it—of the 'political arguments for capitalism before its triumph'. It goes without saying, of course, that the existence of such a provenance should hardly be seen as sufficient to undermine the economistic view. Once again, it is worth asking what has been lost, and what has been gained, in the shift from a structural/political view to an economistic, market-based view of corruption.

The chapters in this collection show that broader understandings of corruption, such as the idea that it is a form of decay of the body politic, still resonate strongly with current concerns. More often than not these concerns are subsumed under the rubric of discourses other than corruption, such as the role of factionalism in political life.

By 'expanding the focus' of conventional understandings of corruption, this collection aims to bridge the gap between two literatures: first, the large and extremely diverse practice-oriented literature devoted to identifying the causes of corruption, assessing its incidence and working out how to bring it under control. Second, the somewhat smaller literature produced by social theorists and intellectual historians that explores the rich tradition of social thought about corruption in the West and in other parts of the world. The latter group of works sees corruption not only as a matter of illegal or improper behaviour on the part of individuals, but also as a societal issue—for example, a disease of the body politic. By opening up discussion of what it is that constitutes corruption we hope to challenge conventional, largely economistic understandings of corruption. The papers included in this volume aim to raise broader questions concerning the ability of citizens to participate in public and political life and to open the vocabulary of the health of the body politic to practitioners who work on the issue of corruption.

Let me conclude this introduction with two further points. The first is to suggest that one important result of the narrow focus of conventional discussions of corruption is the restricted sense of its political significance. Business scandals in the United States, the European Union and Australia suggest that corruption in the private sector can have public consequences that go well beyond the familiar problem of the 'capture' of regulators by the regulated to affect the funding of political parties and of factions within them; the American energy and services corporation Enron was reported to have contributed massively to the US Democrats while President Clinton was in office and later to have contributed to George W. Bush's campaign funds. In this case, what seems at first sight to be economic corruption could also be seen as a disease of the body politic.

Second, it is worth noting the striking results of a survey conducted a few years ago on behalf of TI, whose views on corruption are among the targets of this book. The TI survey examined public opinion in 47 countries around the world and found that, in three countries out of four, people singled out political parties as the institutions from which they would most like to have corruption removed (TI Press Release, 3 July 2003). It seems, and this is my final point, that while the contemporary international anti-corruption movement's treatment of corruption as primarily an economic issue addresses important questions relating to economic development and the eradication of poverty in much of the world, it nevertheless avoids the substance of widespread public concerns about the conduct of political life.

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