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The Power-Corruption Link in Politics: A Philosophical Analysis

Gontse Lebakeng
Department of Philosophy, University of Johannesburg, South Africa.
Department of Philosophy and Applied Ethics, University of Zululand, South Africa.
ORCID: 0000-0002-2052-3373
Corresponding authour: gontse.lebakeng@gmail.com

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Abstract: What best explains why corruption happens? To answer this question, it is crucial to understand what corruption is. Some define it as a moral issue involving "unethical behaviour through bribery or other unlawful means". The definition emphasises the ethical element of corruption. Others define corruption as an "abuse of power…for private gain". Here, the emphasis falls on the power element required for corruption. My position is that the two accounts are not mutually exclusive and should not be seen as inherently competing. I argue that an intimate link exists between the moral and power elements, and this link offers a holistic account of corruption. In this paper, I show that the moralising account is incomplete without the power account for at least two reasons. The first is that it runs the risk of endorsing moral relativism. The second is that it does not take full cognisance of the social factors surrounding corrupt transactions. I argue, therefore, that to understand why corruption happens, we should consider both the moral condition and the power of the individual committing a corrupt act. We can achieve a fruitful understanding of corruption if we explore the intimate link between corruption and power.

Keywords: Authority; corruption; moral; politics; power.

Introduction

What best explains why corruption happens? To answer this question, it is crucial to understand what corruption is. Imagine that a company accountant responsible for creating a budget for a government building project decides to add more zeros to a quotation than necessary. This is an instance of fraud. However, some would tag this action as corrupt based on the definition that corruption is a moral issue involving "unethical behaviour through bribery or other unlawful means" [1]. In this definition, the ethical element required for corruption is emphasised. Others would call this action corrupt based on the definition that corruption is an "abuse of power…for private gain" [2]. Here, the emphasis falls on the power element required for corruption. However, in my view, these definitions are too narrow to determine whether the accountant's actions are corrupt. The moral and power elements are not mutually exclusive. I argue that an intimate link exists between those elements, and this link offers a holistic account of corruption. Consider a second example in which the same accountant is elected as a city's counsellor. If, as a counsellor, he adds more zeros than necessary for a budget plan before signing it, this becomes an instance of corruption. I argue that the element that changes the previous example from an instance of fraud to corruption is power.

While it could be argued that the accountant possesses some form of power, I point out that this power differs from that of the public official. The significant difference is that the power possessed by the public official is bestowed upon him by the public, which awards him a responsibility to the public. This kind of power is referred to as authority because it comes with a legitimising force to control. The power of the accountant, however, is simply power to influence. Later in this paper, I discuss the distinction between this power and authority. While corruption requires immediate attention and action in South African politics, it is a widespread phenomenon evident in all areas of human endeavour. Thus, developing a compelling philosophical understanding of the phenomenon is imperative to potentially preventing further harm to states, organisations, and individuals. Therefore, in this paper, I provide a philosophical analysis and evaluation of the two accounts (which I dub the moralising and the power accounts). I show that the

moralising account (which provides an ethical interpretation to understanding the occurrence of corruption) is incomplete without the power account for at least two reasons. The first is that it runs the risk of endorsing moral relativism. The second is that it does not take full cognisance of the social factors surrounding corrupt transactions. In the above examples, I point out that the element absent from the first example but present in the second is power as authority**.** I argue, therefore, that to understand why corruption happens, we should consider both the moral condition and the power of the individual committing a corrupt act. My position is that the two accounts should not be seen as inherently competing. I argue in this paper that we can achieve a fruitful understanding of corruption if we explore the link between corruption and power (which I consider intimate).

I consider the works of Hellsten [1] and Oriare Nyarwath [3] to provide an analysis representative of the moralising account. Hellsten claims that corruption happens because of an individual's weakened will to do what is right and the different ethical codes contributing to private morality [1]. In contrast to Hellsten's view, Nyarwath claims that the main reason why corruption happens is not because of moral weakness (or any other factor) but because the corrupt lack enough knowledge about what is right and wrong. According to Nyarwath [3], this causes people to fall victim to ignorance.

In my view, theorists such as John Warburton [2] and Valerie Rosenblatt [4] best represent the power account of corruption. Warburton and Rosenblatt show the difficulties that I argue arise when we try to separate the moralising and the power accounts. However, I show in the last part of the paper that, despite their strengths, Warburton and Rosenblatt's views on power are, in fact, limited. I argue that while Warburton and Rosenblatt see power in its traditional sense, their position on power can be further strengthened. For this reason, I draw upon Michel Foucault's "microphysics" of power and his position on the difference between power and domination. Here, the significance of my paper becomes clear – by drawing on a more nuanced conception of power (and distinguishing it from domination), the phenomenon of corruption can be more clearly understood.

This paper focuses only on personal political corruption (a term I use interchangeably with political corruption). My use of personal political corruption is similar to Dennis Thompson's interpretation of individual corruption [5]. Thompson means situations where an individual is bribed in return for favours. In situations like this, the focus is on the private gain of the individuals involved in the corrupt transaction.

While my use of personal political corruption is similar to Thompson's individual corruption, an extension and a limitation are necessary to clarify my point. By way of extension in my use, I also refer to actions beyond bribery that public officials carry out for private gain. This involves acts such as embezzlement and nepotism. The most crucial factor here is that public resources or positions are used for private benefit. By way of limitation, I restrict my investigation to the political sphere. While the use and abuse of power can, as I will argue later, be said to exist outside of politics, my focus in this paper is limited to the political sphere.

By power, I refer to the idea of authority found in different forms within the fabric of society. As I show later in the paper, this view, which Warburton and Rosenblatt support, requires supplementation by Foucault's [26] idea of power. The supplementation adds an understanding of domination to understand social relations that contribute to corruption within the political sphere. I focus mainly on the power that allows one to control resources, influence policy decisions and achieve personal objectives. In the section on power, where I give an analysis, I also specify Warburton's conception of authority.

Based on the above clarifications, I intend to offer a fruitful understanding of why corruption happens by evaluating the two accounts highlighted above. I do not intend to show them as competing views, but rather one (the power account) as an extension of the other (the moralising account) and encompassing an adequate explanation of corruption. Therefore, it is not within this paper's scope to consider ways to combat corruption. That is a task I reserve for another occasion.

My paper unfolds according to the following outline: In section 2, I briefly survey different conceptions of corruption from the ancient Greeks up to theorists in contemporary times. In section 3, I explain the moralising account of corruption and follow this with its evaluation in section 3.1. In this evaluation, I point to how the moralising account cannot provide an account sufficient for understanding corruption holistically. In section 4, I analyse power and clarify how I refer to it. Subsequently, in section 5, I explain the power account of corruption and follow this with its evaluation in section 5.1. By way of evaluation, I provide reasons to accept this account as an essential addition to the moralising account. I then show how Warburton's and Rosenblatt's work needs to be supplemented with a more encompassing understanding of power and argue that it is in Foucault's work that this is to be found. Section 9 concludes my paper.

Corruption

In what follows, I provide a brief analysis of the different ways that corruption has been conceptualised. I begin with conceptions from ancient Greek times and end with selected contemporary conceptions of corruption.

Corruption is not new, and many scholars have theorised about it. In Ancient Greece, the commonly held conception of the occurrence of corruption was that it resulted from a decay of morals [6]. Plato sees the problem of corruption as one directly influenced by a poor education of the individual in the things that are good and bad [7]. He claims that good education is meant to assist the individual in deciding always to do that which is good over that which is bad:

Good nurture and education implant good constitutions, which take root in good education and improve more and more, and this improvement affects the breed in man as in other animals [7].

The most well-known example of corruption in the ancient world is perhaps that of Socrates. At the age of seventy, Socrates was charged with two crimes: impiety and the crime of corrupting the youth of Athens. The corruption charge in the ancient Greek world carried severe punishment ranging from excommunication to death, of which the latter was Socrates' choice [8]. As Cartledge [9] argues, these charges and punishments were entirely acceptable in a democracy of the Athenian type. What is significant about this ancient example is how the word corruption is used. Socrates was charged not simply for holding the atheistic beliefs claimed by his prosecutors but for teaching subversive ideas that *corrupted* the minds of his pupils [10]. The understanding of corruption is, hence, one that means causing or fostering moral deterioration [10] and so could be said to be in line with the moralising definition.

However, considering other works during ancient times, it also becomes clear that corruption was a kind of wrong linked to power. As Daniel Malamis [11] explains, in the works of Homer, *individual* wrongs are seen as essentially bipolar, having an offender and a victim. In these cases, there is a loss (e.g., loss of a loved one in the case of murder), and that loss can be fixed only by a proportionate redress (*ibid*.). On the contrary, within the works of Homer, institutional corruption is conceived of as a crime against the community itself [11]. It is the exploitation of an institution for the private benefit of a person entrusted with a position of authority within that institution (*ibid*.). In ancient times, corruption was seen as one of the "crimes of the agora" since it takes place in a communal context (ibid.), and so one intimately linked with power.

Scholars in contemporary times continue theorising about corruption. Nyarwath [3], for example, echoes Plato's sentiments and states that corruption is a moral badness resulting from ignorance and confusion. He argues that corruption is fundamentally a moral issue because it affects the general well-being of human life. According to Nyarwath [3], this also affects resource access.

In a similar vein, Augusto Lopez-Claros [12] defines corruption as a "violation of trust and the abdication of principles". He goes on to say that it is a destruction to human prosperity and an obstruction to sustainable development (*ibid*). In this sense, corrupt acts are caused by a breakaway from moral principles. Lopez-Claros refers to this as a violation of trust (*ibid*.). The trust being violated here is that of the populace by the leaders. In violating this trust, the populace are the ones who suffer when developmental goals are obstructed.

Lawrence Lessig's [13] position also highlights the moral dimension. For him, corruption results from dishonesty and the moral lack of individuals. He points out that institutional corruption, in particular, results from the institution's weakened ability to do what it was designed to do because of dishonesty and the moral lack of the individuals within the institution [13]. This, in turn, results in the institution's failure to carry out its purpose, which weakens the public's trust in the institution. This position implies that corruption results from an individual's moral lack in all its manifestations (personal and institutional). This moral lack of individuals affects institutions, and this, in turn, weakens the public trust in institutions.

Hellsten [1] provides an analysis that points to a similar conception of corruption. As previously mentioned, for her, corruption is an unethical behaviour characterised by dishonesty. Specifically, she asserts that it is "unethical behaviour by bribery, or other unlawful means in a situation where at least one of the parties knows that the transaction they engage in is unscheduled, illegal and unsanctioned" [1]. Chinenye Leo Ochulor and Patrick Edet Bassey [14] echo Hellsten's definition and refer to corruption as immoral behaviour threatening society's cohesive fabric and development.

Emma Chukweuemeka, Batrthlow J Ugwuani and Ngozi Ewuim [15] comment further on corruption as an issue affecting behaviour. They argue that it is a perversion and change of behaviour from good to bad [15]. They also point

out that the change encourages behaviour which deviates from the duty to do what is right. Robert Hughes [16], in addition to earlier mentioned definitions, offers a more detailed definition of corruption, which states that it includes a lack of accountability, transparency, and failure to follow the rules of the law [16].

As shown in the literature discussed above, the common trend in more contemporary attempts at defining corruption sees it as breaking from moral principles. These conceptions are linked to a deliberate form of wrong done by the person involved. In the following section, I elaborate on the core ideas for this account of corruption. As stated in the introduction, I see a problem with this account and argue that it is inadequate. The inadequacy I highlight is based on the insufficient attention paid to other social elements in corrupt transactions. Of these social elements, I focus on power. Before moving on to the role power plays in corruption, I provide an in-depth analysis and evaluation of the moral account in what follows.

The Moralising Account of Corruption

Up to this point, I have not provided a detailed explanation of the moralising account. In this section, I explain the account of the conceptions of two theorists, Hellsten and Nyarwath. Their conceptions of the phenomenon highlight the moral character and ethical values of the individuals involved as the leading cause of corruption. In this account, the corrupt is seen as being morally defective in one of the following ways: (a) in the sense that they are morally weak and unable to turn away from corruption [1] or (b) in the sense that they are morally ignorant and do not know what counts as good [3].

On the one hand, Hellsten [1], as already mentioned, defines corruption as its association with moral beliefs and posits that it '…refers to morally degenerated, perverted and/or unsound moral principles and values' of the corrupt. On the other hand, Nyarwath [3] defines corruption as not being an issue of moral belief but as being an issue of moral ignorance. In this sense, a corrupt individual is not corrupt because of skewed moral principles but because they are ignorant of what is good or bad.

In Hellsten's view, corruption is the result of two things: (a) moral weakness and (b) the different codes of ethics that exist within different cultures that allow people to become corrupt [1]. She claims that in addition to the individual's weak will to do what is right, the different ethical codes contribute to private morality, which influences the occurrence of corruption [1]. Hellsten argues that the will to do right is weakened because of an individual's search for different ways of dealing with public moral failure [1].

In contrast to Hellsten's view, Nyarwath claims that the main reason why corruption happens is because the corrupt lack enough knowledge about what is right or wrong and thus fall victim to their ignorance. He, thus, tends to base his arguments upon ancient Greek philosopher Socrates' claim that "whoever knows what is good cannot do what is bad" [3]. For Nyarwath, knowledge of what is good is essential because it reduces the chances of undermining the general well-being of society. The difference between the two views is that Hellsten's view refers to the corrupt's moral principles and moral values as either weak or absent. However, Nyarwath's view refers to the lack of knowledge of what is morally right or wrong. For this paper, the differences between the two views are not as significant as they define corruption as an issue of moral concern.

Other theorists attempt to explain how the process of corruption takes place within the moralising account. Ochulor and Bassey believe corruption begins as thoughts, which, secondly, become actions and, finally, habits through constant repetition. This results in an adverse change in the person's character or behaviour [14]. Gildenhuys also echoes this view by stating that corruption as an unethical conduct can be likened to "a public disease", much like the Greeks said it to be [17]. The idea of the moralising account is, thus, to attribute the explanation of how corruption happens by linking it to the mere weakness of will and lack of moral compass of the individual. This view is clearly expressed in de Sardan's explanation: The more corruption develops, the more it becomes engrained in social habits (the more deeply it becomes inscribed in the 'moral economy'), and the less possible it becomes to retreat [18].

The idea is that when people continue taking part in corrupt transactions, no matter how small they may be, the components of their character begin to change in a way that allows for a continuation of that corrupt behaviour. This may permanently negatively impact the society's ethical standards or "moral economy" [18]. In the moralising account given so far, an emphasis has been placed on the individual's moral character, and no regard has been given to their social position. De Sardan [18] rightly points out that there needs to be a corruptor and a corruptee involved for corruption to take place. However, all that this acknowledges is that corruption happens among different parties. It says nothing about the social position of the parties involved. Therefore, I believe something seems to be missing in this account. In the evaluation that follows, I tease this out. I argue that the missing link between the moral attitude of the individual and the social nature of corruption is power.

Evaluating the Moralising Account of Corruption

Although it is essential to look at corruption in terms of morality (as my exposition above has shown), this position has significant flaws. I show this by delving more closely into Nyarwath and Hellsten's positions on corruption and showing how inadequate they are. Here, I reveal that there are two problems with the moralising account. The first is that the account risks endorsing moral relativism, and the second is that it leaves out the essential element of power.

The first problem I find with this account is more directed to Nyarwath's position on knowledge. The problem is that leaving corruption to the individual's knowledge means that someone being corrupt depends on the individual's idea of corruption. Looking at corruption in this way means that the idea of what it is can change from person to person. This is problematic because corruption does not happen in isolation but happens among individuals in spaces that are not subjective. This implies that a suitable measure for corruption should have an objective standard and not be left as a private issue. Based on the above, taking Nyarwath's view might lead to a risk of endorsing moral relativism. This means that if the knowledge of corruption relies on the individual's distinction between good and bad, the question, 'Who decides what counts as good and bad?' becomes paramount. It is difficult to base moral principles about corruption on individual ideals, so an objective standard of morality is needed. This objective standard is not captured in Nyarwath's conception. This is because his position can lead to moral relativism in society since an individual being corrupt depends on what they, as individuals, know to be bad.

A second problem with the moralising account becomes clear if we delve more closely into Hellsten's position. Here, I elucidate a crucial point from Hellsten that will serve as the focus of my evaluation. As previously mentioned, moral weakness is required for corruption (2003:63). This supposes that as long as individuals remain morally upright, corrupt practices will end. I argue that moral weakness alone is not a sufficient condition for corruption, even if it is a necessary element. Another crucial and equally sufficient element is the social structure or interaction around the act that is considered corrupt.

To clarify this point, consider the example mentioned in the introduction, relating how the accountant commits fraud. If found out, he will be taken as someone who has done something immoral. His punishment would, thus, be along these lines. He will be tagged as a thief if he is to be tagged. In the same vein, consider when, as a politician, he steals money. This will also be seen as an instance of moral infringement. However, the tag of being corrupt would be added to the politician and not merely the tag of a thief". My view is that a factor in the social position of a politician is responsible for this.

The factor responsible for this is the politician's position of power and how it came into play in the example above. In my view, political corruption is not only a question of breaking away from principle but also a matter of so doing, given the individual's social position and the mere condition they can. In my view, the "can" factor is sustained by power. Since the social relations of the two parties differ, the acts of the accountant (though immoral) have a different impact on society. This is due to his position in the social hierarchy.

The position of the accountant relies on a type of personal power that does not have the legitimising force that the power of the politician has. Thus, while the accountant can be said to have power in one sense, he does not have authority in the sense that I use power to mean (as mentioned in the introduction). The politician, however, holds a position in the social hierarchy that makes his crime unique. This uniqueness stems from his election into a public office and the legitimising power he possesses. This power (authority) is, thus, what makes his actions corrupt. It is, therefore, safe to conclude that if one does not have power, they cannot be said to be corrupt.

To substantiate this, as [2] points out, looking at corruption in terms of morality alone fails to deal with the social forces at play when a corrupt transaction occurs**.** He argues that corruption occurs because of specific interactions between people in society [2]. The existing power relations between the individuals involved influence these interactions. As a result, Warburton concludes that understanding power relations is essential to understanding how corruption happens, especially in terms of political systems.

Like Warburton, De Sardan [18] argues that the social aspect of corruption requires exploration beyond morality. For this reason, De Sardan uses the term "moral economy" to describe how people in positions of power use their positions for trading favours amongst each other and the social norms which influence such trade [18]. De Sardan argues against the idea that it is through culture that people are determined to act in a corrupt manner.

Instead, De Sardan argues that corruption can be understood as being but part of what he calls the "corruption complex" [18]. This means that the definition of corruption should encompass issues such as abuse of power,

nepotism, bribery, etc. How do these issues eventually form part of societal norms? If we look at the political system, we cannot say that it is only in certain types of states that we find corruption because it is a global issue.[1].

Before going in-depth into the influence of power on corruption and what the power account entails, I will give a preliminary analysis of the concept of power in the next section and explain how I use it in this paper.

Power

So far, I have considered varying accounts of the concept of corruption. Central to these accounts is the idea of a moral lack. In evaluating this idea of corruption, I pointed out that it is insufficient. What I consider to be lacking in this account is the concept of power. In what follows, I provide an analysis of these different conceptions. This will serve as the entry point for my criticism of the traditional views of power in a later section.

Valerie Rosenblatt posits that power is a higher social position in the social hierarchy. In this position, one can influence accepted norms and practices in society. The position also allows them to influence social factors to remain dominant [4]. This influence reflects the will of the powerful and creates a system that ensures they remain in power. In this sense, power can be seen as something a few in society possess.

Karl Marx [31] also had important things to say concerning power, the class and their ideas. The famous line Marx says, “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” [31]. For Marx, the ideas that govern are from those with power and not from the masses. In other words, when one is in a position of power, s/he can influence decisions on how to govern the subordinates. This conception of power bears similarities to the idea of power put forward by Rosenblatt, as I have highlighted above. For both, power lies with the mighty few and is used to influence societal practices in favour of these mighty few. Max Weber has also weighed in with his definition of power; according to him, “power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be able to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which the probability rests” [19].

That is, power consists of the ability to get their way even when others oppose his/her wishes. This definition speaks of power as an imposition of one’s will in the face of resistance to achieve personal goals. In this sense, Weber sees power as having the ability to give rise to strong dispositional qualities. This means that person A is in a position of power that can change the usual attitude of person B in a way that allows person A to carry out his/her own will. From Rosenblatt to Marx et al. to Weber, power is seen as something the few possess. Power in these definitions is exhibited or realised in its ability to influence social policies and practices favouring the few.

Warburton [2] sees power as "…the state of being of an actor that possesses, has control of or has access to resources that allow her to actually or potentially promote her interests over the interests of others". In this sense, power is understood in terms of what it avails a person to do in line with the person's intentions. This, in turn, coerces the other to act against their will. The intention is primarily achieving the goals of the subject who has power. According to Warburton [2], "In practical terms, if one has power, then either one has the resources to achieve a particular goal potentially, or one has the resources to achieve that goal". It is evident here that Warburton's understanding of power is much broader than that of Rosenblatt.

Regarding political power, which I am concerned with in this paper, Warburton suggests that the term authority would provide a better description. This is because authority pays homage to the political legitimacy that validates the power held by politicians in Warburton’s view. In this sense, authority refers to ‘…being given administrative control of decision-making processes and control of scarce resources on behalf of the public to be administered on its behalf’ [2].

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[1] A commonly held notion is that corruption is only a third world problem. This is because the higher levels of poverty and lower levels of development make it more visible in third world countries than in first world countries. The truth of the matter is that while corruption is less visible the first world countries, it does, in fact, exist there, making it a global issue [30]. For a detailed analysis see: Pranjal Sharma’s “Corruption is a first world problem, too”. Available at: https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2014/11/corruption-is-a-first-world-problem-too/ [Date accessed: 20th October 2018].

This distinction between power in the general sense and authority in the particular sense is crucial to my argument in this paper. While the influence of power in a big industry, for example, can lead to an instance of fraud, this act cannot be considered corrupt because I use corruption. The focus must be political corruption to understand that I use corruption. With the idea of political corruption, the relevance of the *authority* account of power becomes apparent. This is because it speaks directly to the use and influence of power within the political sphere. In the following section on the power account of corruption, my reference to power means power in the sense of authority.

The Power Account of Corruption

In my paper so far, I have looked at the moralising account of corruption and evaluated it. This account of corruption represents one side of a split I noticed in the literature. On the other side of the split, I find what can be called interpretations relating to power and social position.

This division in defining and understanding corruption has been the main reason for my investigation in this paper. The split raises the question as to which of these interpretations offers the most convincing means to understand how best to explain why corruption happens. The following analysis provides an overview of how corruption has been defined according to the latter part of the "split", which focuses on defining it in terms of power.

On this power side of the "split" are theorists such as [2] and Rosenblatt [4], who are of the opinion that corruption can be explained in terms of the social dynamics of society. These social dynamics are determined by the ones who hold power and those who do not. Unique to this account is the claim that the occupation of a position of power has enough effect on the individual to cause him/her to become corrupt.

Ideas in the power account of corruption are characterised by the popular definition of power: 'misuse of public office for private gain' [20]. This definition implies two things. First, there is a person in a position of power (or who is meant to serve the public); second, instead of looking after the public's interest, he seeks and looks after his interest at the expense of the public.

As the analysis in the above section on the moral accounts of corruption demonstrates, most theorists place much of their focus on the latter part of the statement (concerned with personal interest), thus, the dominant moral definitions. While this is not incorrect, I argue that the theorists fail to offer a satisfactory understanding of the phenomenon because they tend to ignore the former part of the definition and its implications on the perpetrator. Paying attention to the person's position of power and the effects the position may have on the individual's reasoning ability and decision-making skills (which are meant to be in the best interests of the public) is essential to understanding exactly how corruption happens. This is also essential to understanding what measures can be implemented to address it better.

Alpha Shah's [21] conception of corruption also follows the popular template provided by the World Bank, which sees corruption as a "misuse of public property, office or mandatory power for private gain" [21[. In this definition lies the exposition of the underlying elements of dishonesty and moral depravity on the part of the public officer who seeks to look after his/her interests as opposed to those of the public. Valerie Rosenblatt [4] echoes this and argues that this misuse of power is motivated by the dominant's desire to secure their position by maintaining the social hierarchies [4].

Rosenblatt uses the social dominance theory (SDT) to explain the factors that contribute to how society is structured and how these factors allow for the unchecked occurrence of corruption. According to Rosenblatt [4], corruption (organised corruption) continues because society maintains different social hierarchies. This means that in society, there are social differences and inequalities that come with different social positions. These inequalities come with their favouritisms and discriminations, which, she argues, result in a lack of awareness of the abuse of the power position. This lack of awareness leads to organised corruption, allowing its continued unchecked occurrence [4].

On the one hand, she argues that the lack of awareness among people within dominant groups often results from entitlement. On the other hand, the lack of awareness on the part of the subordinate groups, she argues, results from favouritism toward members of the dominant groups. Like Warburton (to be elaborated shortly), she argues that corruption occurs due to specific social interactions between people. However, in contrast to Warburton, she argues that these social interactions between people belonging to different social groups and occupying different social positions are guided by the dominant group's institutional norms and practices [4]. She argues that these norms and practices are weaved into society through informational ambiguity and driven by the dominant group's will to stay in power.

The power account of corruption, as explained by Warburton, sees corruption as an activity of power relations [2]. For him, corruption is not merely a moral lack on the part of the individuals involved. However, it results from the

power available to the two or more parties involved. Warburton [2] argues that seeing corruption as a moral issue fails to account for the social forces influencing the political system. According to him, corrupt transactions occur between power holders and power seekers who possess power in an unusable state until a corrupt transaction occurs.

Consider this example to elaborate on the workings of usable and unusable power between two parties. For this illustration, the parties are a government official with a lousy reputation seeking re-election and a journalist seeking permission to publish without censorship. The two parties are both power-holders and power-seekers in their own right. On the one hand, the government official is a power holder because he is in a position of authority to grant the journalist permission to publish without censorship. However, he is a power-seeker because he seeks re-election and needs the journalist to publish news in his favour to help him gain re-election. On the other hand, the journalist is a power-holder because he controls what scandal is published in a newspaper. He is a power-seeker because he seeks to publish without restriction or censorship. A corrupt transaction occurs once the government official and the journalist accept each other's terms.

This transaction is deemed corrupt because it involves using one's position to grant unmerited favour to another, which results in personal gains for both parties. This instance of granting and receiving unmerited favours represents swapping power and converting it from unusable to usable form, which Warburton talks about. Beyond the corrupt act that has transpired, there is also that relational element of corruption, as highlighted by Warburton, that is only possible because of power among both parties. Warburton suggests that the social forces between individuals within different groups (the politician and the journalist, in this instance) operate due to specific interactions [2]. These interactions, he argues, are characterised by the desire to achieve goals, the goals from which corruption is the result [2].

While some theorists like Rogow and Lasswell [22] see corruption as an abuse of power that affects the public interest, Warburton [2] sees it as the "function of power relations". For Warburton, corruption is the tool by which power is "swapped" or "converted" from unusable power to usable power. By unusable power, he means power that cannot be used to achieve a desired goal (usually of personal interest) until a corrupt transaction occurs. The transaction is of such a nature that it allows for the individuals in interaction to be "power-holders" and "power-seekers" in the sense that each party is one or the other.

Warburton argues in favour of this view by stating that "power is the function of corruption and not the cause of it" [2]. He argues that power should not be seen as the reason corruption exists but as its purpose for existing. Warburton [2], thus, defines corruption as the interaction between two parties whereby both seek to act in a way that will result in personal gain. Consider the political leaders who have often chosen not to meet the needs of the suffering masses but their own [23].

Beyond the ideas of corruption highlighted above, corruption can also occur in other forms. Bribery, for example. This can be defined as a "…gift or favours as a condition for performing one's legal or assigned responsibility [24]. This can be seen when a public official demands or receives gifts or favours as a requisite for performing their official duty. This brings to light the fundamental link between corruption and bribery. This link shows that corruption cannot be limited to a moral lack alone but that corruption happens when power relationships come into play.

So far, in this section, I have provided an analysis of the power account of corruption. Central to this account is the social dynamics of the individuals involved in a corrupt transaction. In the section that follows, I provide an evaluation of this power account of corruption. In this evaluation, I show how merging the moral and power accounts is vital to providing a wholesale conception of corruption.

Evaluating the Power Account of Corruption

While the ability to influence the other is common to most conceptions of power highlighted in the section above, I favour the conceptions that look at the social relations involved in instances of power manifestations. From this, I use Warburton's specific conception of power as authority. I further looked at the power account of corruption. In this account, I highlighted the recognition given to the element of power and its influence on corruption.

In my view, a brief analysis of George Orwell's [25] *Animal Farm* is useful to show how the two accounts of corruption can be merged. *Orwell wrote Animal Farm* as an allegory depicting the political situation of Russia under the reign of Joseph Stalin and Vladimir Lenin. Animal Farm begins with the story of a utopia where the animals live together with no human to oppress or control them [25]. The animals were to work towards this through a principle called Animalism, which was all about equality among the animals. These principles were formulated by three young pigs called Snowball, Napoleon, and Squealer [25]. Based on this principle of animalism, the animals could overthrow

Jones, the human who owned the farm [25]. The animals lived harmoniously at the early stage of the new-found life of freedom. However, after a while, things changed. Napoleon and Snowball, the animals' leaders, became worse than Jones, and the other animals could no longer tell the difference between the pigs and the humans.

The point from *Animal Farm* is the link between the moral and the power elements of corruption. At the beginning of the revolution, Snowball and Napoleon could be seen as morally upright characters because they held principles that were for equality. After stepping into positions of power, however, they changed. This is almost a clear manifestation of the popular saying by Lord Acton that power tends to corrupt, and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely.

In the first instance, the Pigs could be seen as morally upright, but this was not the case. The middle factor between the morally upright and immoral pigs was the power they got in between. This points to the main argument I make in this paper. While the individual's morality is necessary to understand corruption, it is insufficient. Similarly, while the position of power is a necessary factor in understanding corruption, it is also insufficient. Therefore, a proper understanding of corruption requires that we take the power and moral elements as necessary factors.

However, I believe there is a problem with the accounts of power that I have discussed in this paper. Not all accounts have a sufficiently broad understanding of power; instead, they rely on narrow traditional accounts. However, this is not a problem that requires rejecting the power account. In my view, Michel Foucault's conception of power can supplement Warburton's conception of authority in a crucial way to provide a richer understanding of power and its role in corruption.

It is important to note that Foucault's account does not constitute a "theory". Foucault makes this point explicit that he is not developing a theory of power: "The ideas I would like to discuss here represent neither a theory nor a methodology. First, I would like to say my work's goal during the last twenty years. It has not been to analyse the phenomena of power or elaborate the foundations of such an analysis. My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects." [26]. Why is his work not a theory? A theory of power needs an ontology and an explanation of why power exists. On the contrary, Foucault's account of power is exclusively concerned with describing and analysing *how* power functions and is part of his main focus – the problem of the subject. This notwithstanding, his understanding of power remains very useful in understanding corruption.

According to Foucault [26], the two dominant traditional conceptions of power are liberalism and Marxism. The liberal conception of power understands power as a right that is possessed, used, and transferred. In this way, power is seen as a commodity that can be owned. On the other hand, the Marxist conception of power understands power as a force of production that maintains relations between production and class domination. In Foucault's view, both conceptions understand power solely in economic terms, and they too narrowly focus on the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate uses of power. Foucault rejects the liberal-Marxist conception because it distorts non-economic relations of power and certain oppressive forms of it. In the work of the theorists I have discussed who write about corruption, it is evident that they rely on this conception of power.

To make this reliance on the traditional understanding even more precise, it is worth considering Foucault's position on power - that it is not only possessed by the mighty few. Instead, power has an intrinsically relational character. For Foucault, 'power is inextricably linked to every part of the social body' [27]. In other words, power can be best understood as being everywhere; that is, power is better in its relational sense, where all members of the society can possess a certain level of power. To understand the implications of this, Foucault makes four claims by rejecting four notions of power that Pieter Spierenburg explains succinctly.

The first notion he rejects is that "power is something which certain people possess while others are excluded from doing so" [27]. This idea can be seen in Rosenblatt's conception, which is highlighted above. In his rejection of this notion, Foucault claims that power subsists equally in every aspect of society, from the family (which offers informal control to society) to state institutions. In other words, power is not just held by one person in a place and time. For example, we cannot say that the president is all-powerful because he might be powerless in certain relations (possibly within his church or household). Therefore, Warburton and friends only do this to a minuscule extent when discussing power and corruption.

A second notion that Foucault rejects is "the idea that power can be localised" and seen as an "auxiliary structure" [27]. This can be seen in the view highlighted by Marx et al above. This gives a sense that power cannot exist elsewhere outside of the ruling class. According to Foucault, this is a somewhat limited view because the state/ruling class (formal control) is only one part of a much more significant nexus of power. This nexus intertwines with formal and informal social control (influenced by the family).

Foucault's idea provides a way to understand corruption better and develop better strategies to combat the abuse of power. Pieter Spierenburg [27] uses the example of the police in the ancient French regime to illustrate that their power could have been "effective only because of the pre-existing structures of paternal authority and religious community". In the South African context, why can corruption happen in government? Foucault would refer to this occurrence because of the existing paternal authority and religious community. This paternal authority gives the image of a "big man up there" who cannot be questioned. This is similar to what is present in religious communities and their image of God. This filters down and underpins how people in positions of power are seen.

The third idea Foucault rejects speaks of "power as subordinate to or derivative of a mode of production" [27]. Foucault says that power is a constitutive element of the prevailing mode of production. Only through power mechanisms are people prepared to devote a considerable part of their lives to labour instead of doing other things such as resting, having sex or engaging in robbery [27]. This means that, for Foucault, power is not merely a function of the means of production within the labour relations system but a constitutive element.

The fourth notion Foucault rejects speaks of power as "rooted solely in physical force" [27]. He claims that power is repressive but also productive and integrative. According to Foucault (*ibid*), making a "…distinction between force and ideology" is quite erroneous. It is, rather, that "…every situation in which power is exercised is also an instance of gathering knowledge". He uses the example of how, in the nineteenth century, people in authority had to produce reports on implementing their superior's commands. In this way, Foucault shows power as more than "repressive" but integrative and productive in its effects.

To supplement Warburton's conception of authority with Foucault's conception of power, I take the idea from Foucault that power exists within every societal relationship. By taking this element, I acknowledge that power exists outside the political realm. This acknowledgement accounts for power within family relations, business relations, etc. However, the point of power in the sense of authority Warburton gave is crucial to my argument. This is because it emphasises the existence of power within one relation – the political. This particular emphasis is essential due to the scope of my investigation. The scope of my investigation is the political space, and I argue that power in this sense of authority is crucial for corruption to happen. What is important to note is that Foucault is not opposed to power per se but to domination. He insists that 'power is not evil' [26]. Power is an unavoidable element of human existence which makes no sense to oppose. Because power saturates human life, opposition to power necessarily implies and perpetuates power [28].

However, Foucault is opposed to certain forms of power that dominate humans. In contrast to violence, which eliminates freedom and resistance, domination effectively limits freedom and similarly neutralises resistance [29]. Domination, in other words, is a form of power characterised by two features. First, while power generally works to occasion one possibility against others, domination significantly abridges the set of possibilities such that freedom is effectively limited [29]. Secondly, since domination does not eradicate freedom, resistance is necessarily present in relations of domination, but this resistance is effectively neutralised. Foucault argues in 'The Subject and Power' that domination is achieved because it successfully globalises local relations and strategies of power [29]. While the idea of dominance is pointed out in Rosenblatt's usage of the social dominance theory about corruption, it is construed by Foucault and is more succinct. This can be seen in the distinction between power and domination highlighted by Foucault, another crucial addition to Warburton's conception of authority. In a nutshell, while authority, according to Warburton, is seen as a necessary factor for corruption, authority is not a negative element. On its positive side, authority is a societal controlling tool within its legitimising scope. It also helps to navigate the power dynamics that is present in the society. However, on its negative side, political corruption is possible because of the presence of authority – albeit a misuse of authority. This misuse of authority is seen in Foucault's conception of domination.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that the link between power and corruption is essential to understanding the phenomenon of political corruption. In order to expose this link, I investigated two main accounts that explain why corruption happens. I called these the moralising and power accounts, respectively.

I showed that the moralising account (which provides an ethical interpretation to understanding the occurrence of corruption) was incomplete without adding the power account for at least two reasons. The first is that it runs the risk of endorsing moral relativism. The second is that it does not take full cognisance of the social factors surrounding corrupt transactions. I then showed that despite its strengths, the power account, as represented by Warburton and Rosenblatt, was based on a traditional conception of power that is limited. I briefly proposed that drawing upon an expanded understanding of power that Michel Foucault presents could further strengthen the power account. The

problem is not power but rather domination. While it was not within the scope of the paper to offer ways to combat corruption, it is necessary to point out that if society is to understand corruption in the way I have presented it, the tools to work towards eradicating corruption may be easier to identify. Developing such a compelling philosophical understanding of the phenomenon, thus, becomes of critical importance.

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About the authors:

Name: Gontse Lebakeng

Gontse Lebakeng is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Johannesburg and a lecturer at the University of Zululand. Her research interests include epistemic injustice, structural injustice and imposter syndrome in academic philosophy.

Tel: 0712282929

e-mail: gontse.lebakeng@gmail.com