



Article

The Scientific and Methodological Foundations of the Concept of Corruption

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Abstract: The social characteristics of corruption and the specific importance of its prevention, the results of identifying corruption through a philosophical approach, the negative impact of corruption on social life, and philosophical methods for eliminating it are described. This article provides a broad overview of the scientific and methodological foundations of the concept of corruption. The socio-economic, political and moral aspects of corruption are analyzed, and its negative impact on the development of society is scientifically described. The study studies the forms, causes and consequences of corruption, as well as effective mechanisms for its elimination based on an analytical approach. The article also emphasizes the role of education, raising legal awareness and culture in the fight against corruption. The author considers corruption not only as a legal or economic problem, but also as a complex socio-cultural phenomenon. The article also studies scientific and methodological approaches to the fight against corruption, an analysis of foreign experience and the possibilities of their application in national conditions. The results of the study are of significant theoretical and practical importance in preventing corruption, organizing a systematic fight against it, and forming an atmosphere of honesty in society.

Keywords: Social characteristics of corruption, fight against corruption, prevention of corruption, negative impact of corruption.

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1. Introduction

In 2003, the United Nations adopted the Convention against Corruption. During the preparatory stage of the Convention's draft, the Member States of the UN demonstrated diverse approaches to the conceptualization of corruption. For instance, the delegation of Peru proposed defining corruption as bribery, misconduct of public officials, and the use of their influence for such purposes, as well as the exertion of pressure on individuals to engage in such "illegal or irregular acts." The representatives of the Philippines, in turn, regarded corruption as misconduct and bribery of state officials, as well as any form of collusion, including that undertaken to preserve or acquire power [1]. The Pakistani delegation advanced a broader conceptualization of corruption, which encompassed the enrichment of public officials or narrowly affiliated groups through the misuse of entrusted public resources, the exploitation of their official status and position, as well as bribery and other forms of corrupt practices [2].

As a result, the Convention does not provide a precise definition of corruption; nevertheless, its substance may be inferred. Corruption may be understood, firstly, as the giving of bribes to public officials of national and international bodies; secondly, as the theft, embezzlement or misappropriation of various assets over which an official has

control by virtue of his or her office; thirdly, as the abuse of official position; and fourthly, as illicit enrichment [3].

2. Materials and Methods

One of the unconditional criteria for recognizing an act of abuse of official position as corruption is its conscious nature. The unawareness of such an act may be explained by the vagueness of official duties or the insufficient competence of the officeholder. At the same time, definitions of corruption—such as the one proposed by K.V. Kuznetsov—have shortcomings, as they do not necessarily imply that the abuse of authority is intended to secure specific benefits for the official [4].

In our view, the most comprehensive definition of corruption should include an element of deliberate activity. Any corrupt act is inherently active. Therefore, in accordance with existing norms, the essence of corrupt behavior should not be defined merely as “gaining profit,” but more precisely as “receiving benefits,” which implies a more accurate representation of the process [5].

Thus, in the narrow sense, corruption can be defined as the abuse of official duties for the benefit of others, consciously carried out by an official, with the obligatory acquisition of certain privileges for himself.

3. Results and Discussion

A variety of additional definitions of the phenomenon under study may be provided; however, all of them, in one way or another, may be reduced to the following: “*a general concept signifying the abuse of public office for private gain.*” In other words, in this sense corruption is a generic term denoting the exploitation of one’s societal position for personal benefit [6].

At the same time, a number of characteristic features can be identified across the aforementioned definitions of corruption, including:

1. the existence of a certain circle of individuals who possess power, status, and a particular position within society [7];
2. the unlawful use by these individuals of their office, authority, or available opportunities;
3. the presence of a selfish motive in the abuse of official position [8].

Recognizing the scientific and practical validity of the above-mentioned definitions, it should be emphasized that, in our view, the most comprehensive and methodologically accurate definition of corruption was provided by K. V. Kuznetsov, who argued that corruption is “the deliberate and voluntary abuse by an official of his or her duties in favor of third parties [9].”

Despite its broad scope, this definition reveals a number of advantages over others:

4. Any corrupt act represents an abuse by an official of his or her position, thereby contravening the obligations inherent in the nature of public service [10].
5. Corruption entails the misuse of duties in favor of other persons. Therefore, if an official exploits his or her position not for the benefit of others but solely for personal advantage, the matter should more properly be regarded as theft or embezzlement rather than corruption.

One of the unconditional criteria for recognizing an act of abuse of office as corrupt is its deliberate nature: the unawareness of the relevant act may be attributed to ambiguity in official duties or to the insufficient competence of the official [11].

At the same time, the aforementioned definition of corruption proposed by K. V. Kuznetsov contains certain shortcomings, among which is the failure to account for the acquisition of specific benefits by the official as a consequence of such abuse.

Furthermore, in our view, the most comprehensive definition of the phenomenon under study must necessarily incorporate the element of activity: any act of corruption is an active deed. In this regard, and in accordance with established norms, the essence of corrupt behavior is more accurately reflected not by the expression “to gain benefits” (a

formulation frequently encountered in the literature), but rather by the term “to obtain benefits.” For instance, as noted by S. I. Ozhegov and N. Yu. Shvedova, to receive is conceptually easier than to obtain, which points to the passive nature of merely accepting something [12].

Taking the above into account, we consider the following definition of corruption in the narrow sense to be the most accurate: corruption should be understood as the abuse by an official of his or her duties in favor of other persons, with a deliberate intent, and with the obligatory acquisition of certain benefits for himself or herself.

Undoubtedly, this definition lies within the general framework of the existing conceptualizations of corrupt acts. In this sense, it cannot be claimed to constitute a novel contribution. However, in our opinion, it delineates the scope of corrupt behavior with the greatest possible precision [13].

Whenever a corrupt act is committed, the objectives established by law, the state, and society at large are replaced by the personal interests of the official. These interests manifest themselves in concrete actions, and it is at this point that corruption “begins.” In other words, it may be argued that the foundation of any corrupt act lies in the official’s desire to obtain certain privileges shaped by specific social interests. At the same time, actions carried out on the basis of such interests often deviate from the socially accepted ideals of official conduct.

Among the additional factors contributing to corruption are the following: poorly elaborated regulations, excessive regulation and extensive oversight that grant officials exclusive power, thereby creating broad opportunities for bribery and the misappropriation of material wealth belonging to society. In many countries with underdeveloped civil society—political parties, public organizations, and groups representing diverse interests—there is virtually no such significant counterbalance to state power.

It should be emphasized here that the use of power is not itself corruption unless it is abused for private interests; it is the misuse of power that is regarded as corruption within society. *For example, if an individual employs personal influence in a way that ultimately benefits society, such actions are often perceived, at the very least, as acceptable* [14].

Thus, although corruption is commonly defined as a form of abuse of public office, the significance of such use of office cannot be assessed in a universally uniform manner. Because of the inconsistency between abstract definitions and their application in the real world, some scholars distinguish between “white” (socially accepted), “grey” (partially condemned), and “black” (universally denounced by law and society) corruption. The first refers to practices on which there is public consensus: such actions are not considered blameworthy and are, in fact, integrated into cultural norms, thereby not perceived as problematic. Black corruption, on the other hand, constitutes another consensus object, in that such acts are condemned across all strata of society. Grey corruption, meanwhile, pertains to practices around which social consensus has not yet developed. Controversies and scandals most frequently arise in connection with this grey zone of corruption.

The differentiation of these types of corruption essentially represents an attempt to distinguish between conceptions of corruption as a morally acceptable or unacceptable phenomenon, and thus to divide corruption into distinct categories. The classification of certain actions as either corrupt or non-corrupt may also be grounded in the relationship between private and public interests.

In this sense, corruption may be said to exist insofar as matters of broad public significance are resolved predominantly on the basis of personal considerations and interests. A “distorted” or “anti-corruption” phenomenon arises where such interests are not of a commercial nature but are instead based, for example, on an individual’s subjective understanding of the common good. Illustrative cases include a judge rendering decisions in disputes influenced by personal biases, or a physician refusing to provide medical assistance on the grounds of ideological, racial, or other prejudiced views [15].

In the narrow sense, corruption encompasses not only the abuse of one's position but also the unlawful enrichment of at least one citizen. In other words, such practices involve the enhancement of an individual's economic status relative to others. This distinctive feature of corruption is generally associated with the low economic condition of the official, the desire to improve his or her financial standing, as well as the tendency of public officials to regard state resources entrusted to them for management as their own personal assets.

It is perhaps for this reason that corruption plays a significant role worldwide, irrespective of the type of society. In this regard, Rose-Ackerman observed: "Of course, among different nations we observe subtle differences in culture and core values. However, there exists one universal and fundamental motivator of human activity that can account for the variations in the socio-cultural experience of different peoples. This motivator, often described as self-interest, encompasses the aspiration to ensure the well-being of one's family and social group. Critics may refer to it as greed, while economists describe it as the maximization of utility. We, however, call it self-interest."

4. Conclusion

The processes of corruption prevention are complex and multifaceted, exerting negative effects on all spheres of society. In the economic domain, corruption performs a constraining function: under market economy conditions, it undermines competition, contributes to the decline in product quality and the increase in prices, and leads to an unequal distribution of resources. In the social sphere, manifestations of corruption significantly diminish the effectiveness of laws, erode public trust, and contribute to the deepening of social stratification through the redistribution of societal resources in favor of narrow groups.

Corruption should be regarded not merely as the occasional acceptance or offering of bribes by officials, but rather as a systemic phenomenon grounded in the regular receipt of material and other benefits from third parties in return for the advancement of their interests. What distinguishes corruption from other types of crime is that it frequently entails the involvement of an official's relatives, acquaintances, or loyal associates, who, by violating existing laws, facilitate the official's pursuit of personal gain through a wide range of unlawful activities.

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