

## THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION: COULD MORALITY LEAD THE WAY?

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### ABSTRACT

Since time immemorial, almost all human societies and institutions have and still continue to suffer issues of corruption in one way or another. This makes the issue of corruption a global problem. The issue of corruption has garnered lots of attention over the years since it seems to be practically inevitable. It is one issue that most societies and institutions have tried to in so many ways to curb; however, it keeps rearing its ugly head. It is in this vein that this paper aims to find out if morality could help us in the fight against corruption. The paper also aims to find out if there is a way whereby corruption could be justified. Thus, the paper is organized into three parts. The first part is the introduction which generally introduces the paper. The second part deals with corruption in Ghana. The third part tries to find out if corruption can be justified by juxtaposing it with some moral theories. Finally comes some recommendations and conclusion.

**Keywords:** corruption, morality, egoism, utilitarianism, virtue ethics

### 1. Introduction

Corruption remains a persistent and pervasive issue that plagues societies across the globe. Its detrimental effects on economic development, social justice, and public trust are widely recognized. While legal frameworks, enforcement agencies, and punitive measures have been put in place to combat corruption, the question arises: Could morality play a more significant role in leading the fight against corruption? This article explores the intersection of morality and the fight against corruption by juxtaposing corruption with moral theories like egoism, utilitarianism and virtue ethics. The paper will also highlight the potentiality of moral values, ethical leadership, and societal norms to create lasting change in the fight against corruption.

Corruption is essentially conceptualized as a diabolical action. However, depending on the mental orientation of the moral agent, one may purport that corruption could be justified. The vindication of corruption supervenes the moral theory that the subject uses to asseverate their optimism with it. Several forms of corruption encompass society. Akeomoa (2017) highlights several forms of corruption. Namely, extortion, bribery, fraud, and embezzlement. These forms of corruption can be categorized into two types, petit corruption, and grand corruption. While petit corruption is “the form in which relatively smaller amounts of money are involved or whose impact holds lesser effects on the country”, grand corruption “involves more outrageous sums of money and its impact on the country is very huge and long-lasting” (Akeomoa, 2017). In the Ghanaian dispensation, there is a dissipation of the conscientiousness of the subject on petit corruption.

## 2. Instances of corruption in Ghana

Petit corrupt occurrences such as policemen asking for small amounts of money when they encounter a driver that unscrupulously violates road traffic guidelines are unwarranted. These drivers are allowed to drive without a driver’s license and use cars that cannot or have not passed the roadworthy test. This may eventually lead to catastrophic and devastating consequences on the road. On the other hand, grand corruption has the propensity to affect the country significantly. The embezzlement of state funds and corruption that involves large sums of money are forms of grand corruption. Stephen Morris (2011) precisely dichotomizes corruption into upper-level and lower-level corruption. These two coincide with grand corruption and petit corruption respectively.

The magnitude of corruption in Ghana is alarming. We gathered our statistical data on corruption in Ghana from the Corruption 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). According to the CPI, Ghana has ranked 73/180 countries on the index. Ghana has a score of 43/100. A brief explanation of how the score is calculated:

A country’s score is the perceived level of public sector corruption on a scale of 0-100, where 0 means highly corrupt and 100 means very clean.

A country's rank is its position relative to the other countries in the index. Ranks can change merely if the number of countries included in the index changes.

The rank is therefore not as important as the score in terms of indicating the level of corruption in that country (“Corruption Perception Index,” 2021).

Corruption in Ghana is at an astronomical high. Ghana is only 43% clean and consequently has an estimation of 57% in bribery, diversion of public funds, the use of public office for private gain, nepotism and many more forms of corruption. Let us discuss two infamous grand corruption scandals in Ghana.

An undercover investigation by Anas Aremayaw Anas revealed scandalous actions by the Ghana Football Association (GFA). The documentary published by British Broadcasting Cooperation’s (BBC) investigation unit, *African Eye*, displays various dignitaries receiving cash gifts to rig the results of football matches in Ghana. The *BBC* article titled *Ghana dissolves football association after cash gifts scandal* (2018) reads:

Kwesi Nyantakyi was pictured taking \$65,000 (£48,000) from an undercover reporter pretending to be a businessman keen to invest in Ghanaian football...It

shows more than 100 football officials - most of them West African referees - receiving cash gifts, despite Fifa rules expressly forbidding it...Among those caught on camera was Kenyan referee Adel Range Marwa, who was bound for the World Cup in Russia until he resigned after he was filmed receiving a \$600 "gift". He denies any wrongdoing ("Ghana Dissolves Football Association," 2018).

This documentary created incandescence among society at large. Corruption in the sports industry has detrimental effects on the gross domestic product of the country. This is axiomatic given the amount of foreign exchange gained through tourism in sports. Kearney (2014) writes:

Found that the market for sports events (i.e. revenues for tickets, media rights and sponsorship) is worth close to US\$80 billion. Between 2009 and 2013 there was an annual growth of 7 per cent, faster than the GDP of most countries. Moreover, the sports industry generates as much as US\$700 billion annually or a 1 per cent of global GDP when sporting goods, apparel, equipment, and health and fitness spending is included (Kearney, 2014).

The vast contribution of the sports industry to the GDP of the state makes it indispensable to actualizing development in the state. We can infer that the corruption scandal in the GFA had horrendous ramifications on the economy and thus affected the GDP of Ghana. This impedes growth in various facets of the state. We will now turn our discussion to the infamous judicial scandal.

The impropriety that occurred in the legal fraternity of the Republic of Ghana astonished the public. It is petrifying to think that the arm of the nation that is responsible for bringing law and order into society is not effectively performing its function. If justice is sold, then citizens in the country are unsafe. In the fullness of time, this leads to chaos and lawlessness in the state. Another documentary by Anas captured thirty-four superior court judges and a hundred court officials involved in bribery in Ghana. This had repercussions on the verdicts that befell prosecutors and defendants. Sammy Darko (2015) articulates:

Journalist Anas Aremeyaw Anas says he has nearly 500 hours of video evidence on tape, showing judges alleging asking for bribes and demanding sex. The seven are the most senior judges to be suspended so far in what is the biggest corruption scandal to hit Ghana's judiciary. Chief Justice Georgina Theodora Wood had established a "prima facie case of stated misbehaviour against them", the statement by Ghana's Judicial Council said (Darko, 2015).

It is appalling to note that judges would let an alleged criminal have liberty due to the payment of a sum of money. And more horrifying to conceptualise the reality of innocent people being given unmerited jail sentences. These are the diabolical effects of corruption on Ghanaian society. Another grand corruption worth noting is the subversion of the national health insurance scheme by some employees. Having been informed of a few instances of grand and petite corruption, let us examine whether corruption can be justified. We will use three normative ethical theories to aid in this discourse: egoism, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics.

### **3. Justification of corruption**

#### **3.1 Egoism**

Egoism is a teleological ethical theory that justifies the rightness of actions based on whether the actions satisfy the self-interest of the moral agent. Egoists can be said to uphold the mantra, “strive to commit actions that satisfy your self-interest”. Corruption emanates from a moral agent’s desire to have an unscrupulous edge over people in a given society. The individual obviates any deontological paradigm in their decisions. The main focus of the moral agent is actualizing the intended consequence of the action, regardless of what must be done to achieve this consequence. It is thus for this reason that it seems veracious for one to morally justify corruption through the use of egoism.<sup>1</sup> However, we opine that egoism does not justify corruption.

##### **3.1.1 Conditional egoism**

Apart from the three types of egoism<sup>2</sup>, we will adapt Alexander Mosley’s ‘conditional egoism’ to implore our position on the unjustifiability of corruption. Conditional egoism is a type of ethical egoism that postulates that “egoism is morally acceptable or right if it leads to morally acceptable ends” (Mosley 2023). Mosley further writes on conditional egoism:

As Smith himself admits, if egoistic behaviour lends itself to society’s detriment, then it ought to be stopped. The theory of conditional egoism is thus dependent on a superior moral goal such as an action being in the common interest, that is, the public good (Mosley, 2023).

The central tenet of conditional egoism is that any action that satisfies the interest of the moral agent must not be pernicious to the interest of society. In other words, moral agents are morally right to pursue actions that benefit them. Moreover, actions that appease the subject are good on the condition that they are not inimical to society in any way whatsoever. Conditional egoism truncates any form of pervasiveness that may arise from following an egocentric trajectory. While giving countenance to a moral agent’s pursuit of self-interest, it imposes collectivism on the mind of the subject.

It follows that ethical egoism, particularly, conditional egoism, impugns the justification of corruption. On that accord, we can rightly assert that it is counter-intuitive for one to use egoism to justify corruption. Conditional egoism does not endorse the actions taken by the people involved in the GFA and the judicial scandal.<sup>3</sup> Let us examine the plausibility of utilitarianism justifying corruption.

#### **3.2 Utilitarianism**

Utilitarianism assesses the rightness of an action if that action produces pleasure over pain for the majority of people in a given population. It is axiomatic that corruption does not produce pleasure to the majority. This is because corruption unfairly benefits the bourgeoisie

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding the GFA and judicial scandals (pp. 2-4) the perpetrators were not focused on the effect that their decisions may have on the economy. They were solely focused on satisfying their personal interest.

<sup>2</sup> Psychological egoism, ethical egoism and rational egoism.

<sup>3</sup> The effects of corruption by GFA and the legal fraternity are egregious and hinder development in the nation. This can affect the economy and cause an upsurge in crime in society. Thus, it is antithetical to the common good of society.

and debilitates the proletariats in society.<sup>4</sup> This would mean the rich people in the society would benefit, while the downtrodden, the proletariats, would wallow in poverty. Let us look at the astounding statistics of corruption cases between public officials and citizens in Ghana. The *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime* (UNODC) in 2021 outlines:

1. More than 17.4 million bribes were paid in 2021.
2. 26.7% of the adult population paid a bribe to a public official: The frequency with which bribes are paid is another important dimension of public sector corruption. Bribe-payers paid an average of five bribes in twelve months...resulting in an average of 0.98 bribes per adult in Ghana.
3. With a prevalence of bribery of 40.6%, people with a master's degree and/or a bachelor's degree are much more likely to have been asked to pay a bribe than those with no formal education. According to the survey, people with the highest level of (tertiary) education were 1.7 times more likely than people with no formal education to have paid a bribe, or been asked to pay a bribe but refused to do so, when in contact with a public official.
4. Who takes bribes: Police officers- 53.2%, Ghana immigration service officers- 37.4%, Lands Commissions- 32.4%, Teachers, lecturers or professors- 9.5% ("United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime," 2021).

Since 26.7% of the adult population paid bribes, the numbers conclusively depict that approximately 70% of the adult population would be affected negatively by corruption. The understanding is that people only engage in bribery if it will benefit their interests. Given that we live in a society, once one gets an unwarranted advantage in society, there is a high propensity for that to subjugate the rest of the society to difficulties in the social and economic facets of their life.

Social security is non-existent in society. As we can see from the numbers, 53.2% of corruption cases involve police officers. How will the rest of the society feel secure in a society in which the people responsible for instilling justice and harmony do that on condition that the citizens can aid them monetarily or materially? Delinquents will subvert national security and boldly victimize members of society. This will cause trepidation in various communities. Forbye, corruption incidents in the immigration service and the Lands Commission also affect the shelter of society. People in society who can attain good lands for building their homes are those who can bribe their way through the Lands Commission in Ghana.

We can see that utilitarianism does not justify corruption. The fact is statistics show that the magnitude of corruption in Ghana has pervasive effects on the majority of the people in the country. A staggering 70% of people in Ghana are victims of this diabolical phenomenon. The effects are dire and do not in any way bring pleasure to the majority of people in society. A prodigious amount of pain will hover through society. Here is a question; Could virtue ethics vindicate corruption? On the contrary, we aver that virtue ethics can profoundly alleviate corruption.

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<sup>4</sup> Karl Marx divided society into three classes. The bourgeoisie is the class that owns the means of production, the landowners who make income through interest, and the proletariat who own their labour and sell it for wage (Rummel, 1977).

### **3.3 Virtue ethics**

The cultivation of moral virtues in the moral agent is significant to obviating corruption in society. Virtue ethics is centred on the character of the individual. The character of the individual is determined by the habits of the moral agent. In Book Two of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle elucidates on virtue and character:

Therefore, if this is true in every case, the virtue of man also will be the state of character that makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well (Brown, 2009, p.29)

The habits that the subject practices should be a mean between excess and deficiency. For instance, the mean between rashness (excess) and cowardice (deficiency) is bravery (virtue). This implies that bravery is a virtue and thus it is a character that every subject must strive to have. The excess and deficient habits of bravery are vices. Aristotle further writes:

Now virtue is concerned with passions and actions, in which excess is a form of failure, and so is defect, while the intermediate is praised and is a form of success; and being praised and being successful are both characteristics of virtue. Therefore, virtue is a kind of mean, since, as we have seen, it aims at what is intermediate (Brown, 2009, p.30).

About corruption, we can outrightly determine that corruption is a vice, while honesty and integrity is virtuous. Any subject that engages in corrupt practices instantaneously jeopardizes their integrity. Through the use of phronesis,<sup>5</sup> the subject can extricate themselves from any corrupt predicament regardless of the magnitude of gift or benefit that will emanate from that act.

Undoubtedly, it is veracious that once citizens nurture Aristotle's moral virtue, corruption will be highly alleviated from society. The character of the individuals will foster integrity in society regardless of the social status of the moral agent. It indeed follows that similar to egoism and utilitarianism, virtue ethics does not justify corruption. We avow that virtue ethics is the most plausible theory that can aid in increasing the score of Ghana on the Corruption Index.<sup>6</sup>

### **4. Recommendations**

The paper also explores some measures with the view that when they are employed these measures can help in the longstanding battle against corruption. The recommended measures include the promotion, inculcation and cultivation of moral values, ethical leadership, and societal norms especially in the younger citizenry. The understanding is that such measures have the potential to instill in them moral uprightness and this can go a long way to help in the fight against corruption. Let us take a closer look at these measures starting with moral values.

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<sup>5</sup> This is a Greek word that means practical wisdom. It is the kind of wisdom that instills creativity and intelligence such that the moral agent is able to determine the prudent virtue to undertake given the circumstance the subject is faced with.

<sup>6</sup> See page 2

#### **4.1 The Power of Moral Values**

Morality serves as a compass that guides individuals in making ethical choices and upholding virtuous behaviour. In the fight against corruption, the cultivation of moral values can act as a potent deterrent. Instilling integrity, honesty, and accountability in individuals from an early age through education and ethical training lays the foundation for a society that rejects corruption. By promoting moral values as a core component of education systems and public discourse, societies can foster a culture of ethical behaviour and encourage citizens to resist corruption temptations. The next measure is ethical leadership.

#### **4.2 Ethical Leadership as a Catalyst**

Leaders play a pivotal role in shaping the moral fabric of society. Ethical leadership not only sets the tone for organizational and governmental conduct but also influences public perception and behaviour. Leaders who exhibit transparency, integrity, and a commitment to serving the common good inspire trust and engender a sense of moral responsibility among their followers. By promoting ethical leadership and holding leaders accountable for their actions, societies can create an environment where corruption is less likely to flourish. Last but not least, we look at societal norms.

#### **4.3 The Role of Societal Norms**

Societal norms and collective values significantly impact individual behaviour. When corruption becomes socially unacceptable and stigmatized, the fight against it gains momentum. Communities can actively engage in promoting anti-corruption norms by fostering a sense of collective responsibility, encouraging whistleblowing, and supporting those who speak out against corruption. Through social pressure and public campaigns, societies can redefine what is morally acceptable, reinforcing the notion that corruption undermines the welfare of all and is incompatible with shared values. Now we turn our attention to the challenges and limitations facing morality in the fight against corruption.

#### **4.4 Challenges and Limitations**

While morality holds great potential in combating corruption, it is not without challenges. Cultural relativism, varying interpretations of morality, and the influence of external factors can complicate the universal application of moral values. Moreover, corruption often thrives in environments where basic needs are unmet, and institutional weaknesses prevail. Addressing these root causes requires a multifaceted approach that combines moral principles with effective governance, economic development, and social justice initiatives.

### **5. Conclusion**

This paper has examined whether corruption can be justified. We have examined to what extent, through the use of ethical theories, it can be justified. We have seen the magnitude of corruption in Ghana by providing substantive research findings on this scandalous phenomenon.

The fact that corruption scandals have occurred in the significant institutions that create harmony and peace in society is disquieting. We have adumbrated some cases in the judicial institution and the GFA and discussed the outcome that these acts have on the

economy. The effects cannot be unnoted as pertinent facets such as the GDP is highly depleted.

One may purport to justify corruption by using egoism. Conversely, with adherence to conditional egoism, we have validated our position that egoism cannot vindicate corruption. Moreover, utilitarianism and virtue ethics impugn the notion of justifying corruption. We deem the instilling of virtue ethics in the people as the plausible theory that can truncate corruption in society. Once moral agents inculcate virtuous habits, they will develop virtuous characters. With virtuous characters, individuals will not conceive of engaging in corrupt activities.

In addition, the fight against corruption demands a comprehensive approach that encompasses legal frameworks, enforcement mechanisms, and societal change. Morality, with its inherent power to shape individual behaviour and societal norms, can provide a compelling foundation for this fight. By emphasizing moral values, promoting ethical leadership, and cultivating anti-corruption norms, societies can take significant strides towards eradicating corruption. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the battle against corruption must be fought on multiple fronts, addressing systemic issues and ensuring the provision of basic needs and opportunities for all. Only by synergizing moral principles with practical measures can we hope to create a future free from the scourge of corruption, where integrity and transparency prevail, and societies thrive.

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