

A TAXONOMY OF INSTITUTIONAL CORRUPTION*

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Abstract: *In this essay I take issue with the problem of institutional corruption. A number of scholars have recently established a discontinuity thesis, according to which an institution may be corrupt even if its members are not. Against this view, I defend a continuity thesis and argue that institutional corruption can always be traced back to the blameworthy corrupt behavior of individual agents. Certain instances of corrupt behavior spread their effects and tip in a way that subvert (and not simply violate) the public rules that govern an institution. This occurs, I argue, following either summative, morphological, or systemic modalities. I show that such a taxonomy of institutional corruption is useful for the purpose of disentangling and understanding the variety of mechanisms that generate the phenomenon. Most importantly, the taxonomy allows for a more nuanced way of attributing responsibility for political corruption, including collective responsibility. I conclude that a continuity approach offers the tools for diagnosing institutional corruption, but also facilitates the task of formulating answers to political corruption, both from a backward-looking and from a forward-looking perspective.*

KEY WORDS: Accountability, discontinuity thesis, institutions, political corruption, responsibility

I. INTRODUCTION

Several contemporary approaches to political corruption highlight its institutional dimension. This is not only the prerogative of republican theorists, such as Lawrence Lessig and Michael Sandel, who define political corruption, mainly, as institutional decay or deviation from institutional purposes.¹ A number of authors who have studied corruption from different angles and theoretical backgrounds suggest moving away from an understanding of corruption as a matter of “bad apples” (or of public officeholders who abuse public power for private gain) that need to be isolated in order to eradicate corruption.² Instead, they argue, institutions

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¹ Lessig Lawrence, “Institutional Corruption Defined,” *Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics* 41 (2013): 553–55; Michael Sandel, *What Money Can’t Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

² Mark Philp, “Conceptualising Political Corruption,” in Arnold J. Heidenheimer and Michael Johnston, eds., *Political Corruption: Concepts and Contexts* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007); Mark Warren, “What Does Corruption Mean in a Democracy?” *American Journal of Political Science* 48 (2004): 328–43; Gillian Block, “Institutional Integrity, Corruption and Taxation,” Edomond Safra Working Papers 39. Available at <http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/paperscfm?abstractid=2408183>. (Accessed 18 November 2017.)

themselves can be “bad barrels”—an environment that not only allows political corruption, but sometimes even creates incentives for it. To wit, political corruption here is not solely an individual wrong, but is most importantly a problem pertaining to institutional processes and purposes.

This way of looking at corruption has its roots in Dennis Thompson’s pioneering work. Thompson called for an institutional perspective on corruption to better understand the impact of corrupt behavior on the political system as such.³ When corruption becomes entrenched in institutional practices and routines, Thompson argued, it has more profound political and social impact than individual wrongdoing, and its negative consequences endure well beyond the time in which corrupt individuals remain in office.

This essay is largely sympathetic to the proposal of paying greater attention to the wider institutional picture. However, it challenges one central idea shared by many institutionalists, namely, the *thesis of discontinuity* between individual corrupt behavior and institutional corruption, according to which these are two irreducible kinds of problems (Section II). In its stronger version, defended, for example, by Lawrence Lessig, the discontinuity thesis also implies that institutions may be corrupt even if their members are not corrupt, or at least not blameworthy for political corruption.⁴

A prominent example of institutional corruption is the political influence exercised by interest groups on electoral campaigns in the United States. On pain of not being (re)elected, members of Congress have to seek funding from influential financial groups. As a consequence, they find themselves beholden to the interests of their sponsors, rather than legislating in the public interest. In the U.S. system it is foreseen that representative political institutions may pursue the partial interests of their constituencies, sometimes in return for a vote at the next general election. However, partiality in response to economic incentives creates improper dependence of

³ Dennis Thompson, *Ethics in Congress: From Individual to Institutional Corruption* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1995).

⁴ I take it here that being morally responsible implies blameworthiness. Institutionalists generally understand moral responsibility for political corruption in terms of intentional and free contribution to the undermining of the integrity of an institution, for example by causing it to deviate from its purpose (Seumas Miller, *Institutional Corruption* [Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017], 134). Dennis Thompson maintains a conceptual distinction between personal and institutional corruption, but recognizes that individual corrupt behavior may cause institutional corruption: “Institutional corruption occurs when an institution or its officials receive a benefit that is directly useful to performing an institutional purpose, and systematically provides a service to the benefactor under conditions that tend to undermine procedures that support the primary purposes of the institution” (Dennis Thompson, “Two Concepts of Corruption: Making Electoral Campaigns Safe for Democracy,” *George Washington Law Review* 73, no. 12 [2015]: 1036–1069; see also Lessig Lawrence, “What An Originalist Would Understand ‘Corruption’ to Mean,” *California Law Review* 102 [2014]: 1–24).

Congress on affluent donors and distorts democratic competition.⁵ In so doing it creates a deviation from what Lessig and Thompson regard as the proper purposes of the institution. As private campaign financing is legal in the United States this occurs without any rule violation by individual members of the Congress. So, for institutionalists it is only by focusing on the “bad barrel” rather than on “bad apples” that we can capture such improper financial dependence as a source of institutional corruption.⁶

Challenging this view, I defend a *continuity thesis*, which explains how institutional corruption can always and only be understood by spelling out the links between individual corrupt actions and institutional features (Section II). Exploring possible links between the individual and the institutional level, I develop a taxonomy that distinguishes between a *summative*, a *morphological*, and a *systemic* model of institutional corruption. I argue that there is no case of corruption that falls outside these three models. What is more, the three models are effective diagnostic tools, since they allow us to identify different mechanisms of institutional corruption, its causes, and effects (Section III).

The normative implication of the continuity thesis, I argue, is that corruption can be attributed to an institution and its practices only in a derivative sense, while corruption is always grounded in blameworthy individual behavior. What is more, only individuals can be held accountable for corruption, be punished for corruption, or take action against it. In keeping with this, a continuist approach attributes collective responsibility to an institution and its members only in virtue of the interrelatedness between them. The three models of institutional corruption can help us understand how to assign responsibility for political corruption in a way that takes seriously the difference among persons as well as the relations between them. In this sense they can offer a more nuanced perspective on assigning responsibility when compared with “discontinuist” approaches, which tend to discount personal responsibility and attribute the causes of political corruption mainly to impersonal mechanisms and to the institutional environment (Section IV).

In my conclusion (Section V) I argue that a continuity approach can offer a more accurate picture of the relations and mechanism leading to the corruption of institutional practices and of the normative implications

⁵ It is worth noting that the sponsoring system in the United States is a very complex and entrenched one. The equation of private sponsoring and sponsoring by affluent supporters and corporations is a simplification, because large numbers of small donors may also influence policies. This does not diminish, however, the force of Lessig’s example, which points at situations in which some groups keep politicians hostage to their preferences. What is objectionable is not only the kind of interests promoted but the way in which they are promoted, which Lessig and Thompson judge to be undemocratic.

⁶ Lessig, “What An Originalist Would Understand ‘Corruption’ to Mean”; Thompson, “Two Concepts of Corruption: Making Electoral Campaigns Safe for Democracy.”

in terms of assigning responsibility for political corruption. Furthermore, it shows that there is no institutional change or reform that alone can make institutions impermeable to corruption, because corruption is *primarily* a matter of individual behavior and responsibility.

II. INSTITUTIONAL CORRUPTION: A CONTINUITY THESIS

In this section I argue that we can understand the very relevance of attributing political corruption to an institution only by starting from individual behavior, and that this requires a continuity approach. One motivation for institutionalists to defend the discontinuity thesis is their desire to concentrate on the role of institutional mechanisms and procedures and the damages caused at the institutional level. They argue that this allows appreciation of the wider political and societal damages of institutional corruption compared to individual corrupt behavior that does not have any wider institutional consequences. I agree with institutionalists that in order to understand political corruption it is not enough to focus on individual behavior, but it is necessary to consider the interrelatedness of institutional structures and roles. I contend, however, that the continuity approach can better explain both the need for an institutional focus and the political significance of corruption in institutional practices.

In the relevant sense, institutions are organizations consisting of an embodied (that is, occupied by human persons) structure of differentiated roles. Each role is entrusted with some specific power that is regulated by a specific mandate that describes a set of rules, obligations, objectives, tasks, and privileges associated with it.⁷ Both the rules governing an institution and the terms of the mandate are public, in the sense that they are generally known and accessible. The conduct of officeholders can only be assessed by reference to the spirit or the letter of the power mandate within the specific institution in which they work.

So, for the sake of this essay, the definition of the roles of officeholders and the specific understanding of the problem of political corruption from which I proceed makes sense only in a well-ordered liberal democratic society, broadly described, where power is entrusted to officeholders by public mandate. It may not be appropriate, for example, for conceptualizing corruption in regimes where there is no rule of law and the duties of officeholders are otherwise specified, or in societies so deeply corrupt that is difficult to see patterns of legality in institutions. As Mark Philp has remarked, it is not possible to identify political corruption without making commitments to a specific conception of the nature of the political and of

⁷ Seumas Miller, "Institutions" in E. Zalta, ed., *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2011. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/social-institutions/> (accessed 18 November 2017).

the public order.⁸ For this reason, I will refer to a society broadly compatible with the Rawlsian idea of a well-ordered society. I find this idea preferable to giving concrete examples of rule-based societies, because it has the level of abstraction necessary to adapt to different cases. Other normative accounts may be compatible with my continuist approach. However, Rawls's emphasis on the role of institutions in mediating the relationships among citizens as politically free and equal, the focus on the regulative role assigned to the principles of justice and on the public character of the rules governing institutions make his approach particularly congenial to my model.⁹ For this reason I will use sometimes Rawlsian terminology. However, my interest is not in defending Rawlsian orthodoxy, and I will avoid making references to Rawlsian doctrine when it is not strictly necessary. In this way, I believe, my continuist model appeals also to democrats who are left unmoved by Rawls's theory and who, with the due adjustments, may want to adapt it to their preferred normative approach.

For Rawls, citizens have the duty to uphold institutions of justice as a guarantee of the stability of justice over time. Accordingly, institutions can be just or unjust both in their constitution and in their functioning. People who take part in institutional design (citizens through direct political participation, elected politicians, non-elected civil servants) have the responsibility to ensure that the statutory requirements of each institution satisfy the principles of justice. However, institutions that are just in their constitution also need to be kept on the right track in their functioning, and this is mainly the responsibility of the officeholders who operate in those institutions.

Each institution has a certain *raison d'être*, to which it must keep faithful despite the fact that its specific goals and purposes may change over time, for example as an outcome of a democratic process. For this reason, I will refer to the *raison d'être* of institutions, rather than to purposes or goals in the way some institutionalists of a republican tradition do. Officeholders have the duty to act in a way that makes it possible for an institution to be faithful to its *raison d'être* by keeping with the mandate that governs the power entrusted to their role. Their behavior in their institutional capacity is constrained by a fundamental duty of office: the duty of public accountability.

In this understanding—widely accepted as an interpretation of the public mandate in democracy and, in general, in rule-based societies—attributions of integrity (and, conversely, lack of integrity, including

⁸ Mark Philp, "Defining Political Corruption," *Political Studies* 45 (1997): 436–62, at 446.

⁹ For discussion, see Brian Barry, *Justice and Impartiality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 214; Thomas Pogge, *Realising Rawls* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 32. Rawls appeals to a sense of justice not as an ideal of the good life or as a virtue of character, but as a guarantee that the justice agreed upon will also be the justice we comply with; it makes us, as citizens, faithful to the original agreement and guarantees compliance with institutions that we should regard as just.

corruption) involve judgment on whether an officeholder exercises her power mandate according to a rationale that is publicly vindicable as coherent with the *raison d'être* of the institution.¹⁰

Corruption here does not simply describe the failure to abide by institutional rules or to appropriately contribute to institutional purposes (negligence may be at play, for example), nor does it pertain to judgments on the character of individual officeholders. It rather describes a specific class of behavior.

An officeholder is corrupt when in the exercise of her office she uses her power mandate for the pursuit of an agenda whose rationale may not withstand a test of public accountability.¹¹

Namely, not only is an officeholder's action corrupt when it instantiates a misuse of power aimed at personal gain (for instance when accepting a bribe), but also when his or her action aims at advancing an agenda whose rationale cannot be vindicated publicly as in line with terms of the officeholder's power mandate. Public accountability is the quality of being vindicable (at least in principle) by an appeal to publicly known rules and to the terms of the institutional mandate, which govern the exercise of power of office. Note that such an idea of public accountability also constrains the actions of those officeholders who—because of the very nature of their mandate—need to act secretly, typically those working for the secret services. As any other officeholders, secret service agents should ask themselves whether the rationale of their agenda in principle would withstand a public accountability test, or could be vindicated by appeal to their public mandate.¹²

Of course, an officeholder may face hard choices among a plurality of conflicting public values (or interpretations of those values), or may find it necessary to make a choice for something morally bad in order to prevent the worst, like in dirty hands cases. There may also be cases of deep conflict between acting out of personal moral convictions and acting coherently with the *raison d'être* of institutions, for example in cases of civil disobedience.¹³ Note however that, unlike corruption, choices of this sort can pass the public accountability test. In this sense, the idea of public

¹⁰ On discretion see, for example, Kenneth Culp Davis, *Discretionary Justice: A Preliminary Inquiry* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 4.

¹¹ The groundwork for this definition of political corruption is presented in Emanuela Ceva and Maria Paola Ferretti, "Political Corruption, Individual Behavior and the Quality of Institutions," in *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 17, no. 2 (2018). First Published October 3, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470594X17732067>.

¹² For an extended discussion of the duties of public accountability as understood here and a defense of the definition of political corruption as a relational injustice, see Emanuela Ceva in this volume (Emanuela Ceva, "Political Corruption as a Relational Injustice").

¹³ On the distinction between cases of corruption and civil disobedience, see Ceva and Ferretti, "Political Corruption, Individual Behavior and the Quality of Institutions"; and Emanuela Ceva and Maria Paola Ferretti, "Political Corruption," *Philosophy Compass* (2017);12: e12461. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12461>

accountability is useful to distinguish between corrupt and non-corrupt behavior—even conceding that there may be controversial interpretations of what specific actions are coherent with the public mandate, and, therefore, fulfill duties of accountability.

There is, of course, a multiplicity of personal goals and interests that can be rightfully pursued within the framework and limits set by the rules of public order that guarantee that citizens are treated as free and equal. So, for example, it is perfectly possible that officeholders pursue a cause or goal that they judge personally important, but by a legitimate means and within their mandate. This means that it is not the nature of the agenda (for example whether one pursues self-regarding or other-regarding goals) that defines corruption, but rather the coherence of the rationale of the agenda with the terms of the mandate and the *raison d'être* of the institution. Imagine for example a public officer who is motivated mainly by economic gain. She seeks all possible economic advantages that her position allows, including promotions, not because she thinks she may better serve her institution but to increase her salary. There is nothing corrupt about her actions until the goal of economic gain enters into conflict with her institutional duties and, say, she accepts a bribe.¹⁴

One important point that emerges from this sketch is that individual corruption cannot be reduced to unlawful behavior, or violations of rules.¹⁵ There are lawful uses of discretion that are corrupt insofar as they promote an agenda that cannot pass the test of public accountability. This seems a plausible explanation of why we may regard as corrupt members of the U.S. Congress who promote regulations that favor the commercial interests of their electoral sponsors in order to ensure continuous financial support. This behavior does not entail a rule violation, but cannot be publicly vindicated as expression of a democratic decision “for the people.” This also explains why it is not the practice of private donations per se that appears to be problematic in terms of corruption, but the improper influence on political decision-making exercised by affluent donors or corporations.

This understanding of corruption focusing on the actions of officeholders in relation to their mandate within an institution has the virtue of revealing the very mechanism of institutional corruption.

With respect to individual officeholders (and individual moral agents in general), fulfilling their duties is an achievement that reaches beyond the satisfaction of their natural needs and inclinations and, as such, deserves moral praise. We may think that officeholders are naturally driven by their

¹⁴ For a discussion of possible conflicts of interest between personal beliefs and institutional purposes see Thompson, *Ethics in Congress*; Andrew Stark, “Beyond Quid Pro Quo: What Is Wrong with Private Gain from Public Office,” *American Political Science Review* 91, no. 1 (1997): 108–120.

¹⁵ See Ceva and Ferretti, “Political Corruption, Individual Behavior and the Quality of Institutions.”

own agenda and it is morally praiseworthy that they prioritize their duties of office. Not so for institutions, however, whose very *raison d'être* is to fulfill their statutory requirements. Political institutions are by their very nature "duty-related" entities.¹⁶ In this sense, when officeholders fall short of the duties for which they are publicly accountable they undermine the institution in its very *raison d'être*. Corruption is one of the ways in which officeholders can do so and with their behavior become "internal enemies" of the institution.

This makes corruption a particularly serious political problem in consideration of the role of institutions in guaranteeing citizens' rights and duties over time. This wrong is amplified by the fact that—because of the interrelatedness of the different roles constituting an institution—corrupt behavior may be such that a certain institutional practice responds to a rationale that cannot be vindicated as coherent with the *raison d'être* of the institution. Suppose for example that some experts working for a public agency for risk assessment are involved in the authorization of the marketing of a certain product. Some of the experts deliver a favorable opinion that is officially based on scientific evidence, but secretly responds to economic incentives offered by the producer company. Some experts express a minority opinion, which however does not prevail. In this case the agency as an institution wrongly grants the authorization despite the fact that not all its members were corrupt. This is because the rationale of the individual action of experts who expressed a minority opinion was vindicable in terms of public accountability, but the practice of authorization as such is corrupt.

From this example, supporters of a discontinuity thesis would probably argue that even if it is possible to identify corrupt behavior in cases of institutional corruption and explain its political relevance, a focus on individual misbehavior does not help in producing an appropriate diagnosis of the problem at stake. It is clear, they would argue, that the relevant question to be asked is above all one about the nature of procedural decisions, institutional mechanisms, incentives and networks that favor corruption. Given the relevance of institutions in stabilizing citizens' relationships in terms of equal rights and duties, making sense of those mechanisms is of paramount importance. In reply to this, in the next section I propose that in fact a continuity approach is particularly suited to highlight the links between institutional roles, relationships and institutional practices, and corruption.

III. A TAXONOMY OF INSTITUTIONAL CORRUPTION

As we have seen in the last section, corruption is a particular way in which an institution fails to fulfill the statutory requirements that are its very *raison d'être*. My argument is that the phenomenology of what

¹⁶ Anita Konzelmann Ziv, "Institutional Virtue: How Consensus Matters," *Philosophical Studies* 161 (2012): 87–96.

is generally called “institutional corruption” can be traced back to blameworthy corrupt behavior of officeholders that tips in a way that subverts the public rules that govern an institution. Corrupt behavior is an “internal enemy” that acts from the inside and transforms even well-designed institutions into corrupt ones. Thus conceived, the corruption of institutional practices is not simply a violation of rules, but a process that subverts and modifies the actual rules that govern that institution. Because the quality and quantity of the relations between the members of an institution that instantiate such a “tipping” phenomenon are diverse, I will illustrate here three kinds of institutional corruption and show the continuity between corrupt behavior and institutional corruption. In order to map the variety of mechanisms generating institutional corruption I will distinguish between a *summative*, a *morphological*, and a *systemic* model of institutional corruption.

A. *Summative corruption*

The first kind of institutional corruption has a *summative* character. When many of the officeholders in an institution are corrupt we may say that the institution itself is corrupt. How many corrupt officeholders are necessary to generate institutional corruption is an empirical question. What matters is that in this case the sum of blameworthy individual behavior undermines the *raison d'être* of the institution. Call this the summative explanation of institutional corruption. For example, if a border official allows the smuggling of bulk cash in exchange for the payment of a bribe, then proceeds of drug trafficking may pass the border. The officeholder's behavior is corrupt, but the rule against bulk cash trafficking holds. If instead a good number of inspectors at a border control agency regularly allow bulk cash smuggling, this will become a safe channel for money smugglers, and the formal rule against smuggling will be substituted by an informal bribe-and-smuggle rule. Thus the action of the border officials, taken as members of the same institution, creates a tear in the net that should keep people from money smuggling. Once the informal bribe-and-smuggle rule is established we should consider the political corruption instantiated by their interrelated actions, rather than simply pointing to the misbehavior of discrete officeholders taken in isolation. It is the sum of their actions that undermines the very *raison d'être* of the institution.

B. *Morphological corruption*

There are other cases in which corruption of institutional practices cannot be explained merely by the sum of discrete acts of individual misbehavior. Rather, as I argue, it can be captured only by focusing attention on the interrelatedness of the differentiated roles and the constellations in which officeholders work in a particular institution.

In order to understand why this is so, consider that tasks and obligations cannot be discharged if they are not coordinated (or do not stand in a relationship of subordination in a hierarchy) with others. This has to do with the architecture of the institution, in the context of which each officeholder is both empowered and constrained in her action.¹⁷ Because of this interconnection, corruption of one particular officeholder may also imply that other officeholders are incapacitated to pursue the tasks entrusted to them, even if they are not corrupt. Consider for example the case of an administrator who has the task of selecting a pool of experts to seek advice on the weighted dangers of a new pharmaceutical product. The administrator is bribed by the producer of the drug in order to appoint some expert who will deliver a favorable scientific opinion. Because it involves a bribe, this is a classic case of corruption of an officeholder. Suppose now that there are other officeholders called to make a decision on the marketing authorization for that pharmaceutical product. They base their judgment on the expert's report and find evidence in support of marketing authorization. In doing so they may be able to defend their individual behavior in terms of public accountability. However, they would not be able to vindicate the institutional practice in terms of public accountability, because the entire procedure has been compromised by the corrupt behavior of one bribed administrator. All the officeholders participating in that practice have in their interrelated work undermined the institution in its *raison d'être*.

When used in this sense, corruption can be attributed to a group of people who together constitute an institution in the same way in which synchrony can be attributed to, say, rhythmic gymnasts, when they morph into a cohesive group. It may take just one individual to distort the shape that the group will take. Because of the behavior of one member of the group they may in fact be doing something different from what they had been planning to do and what was their agreed goal. In the eye of an external observer they succeed or fail as a group, even if the failure is caused by the behavior of one single gymnast.

Call this second instance of institutional corruption *morphological* corruption. In this case, even if not all, or not even the majority of the members of an institution are corrupt, their work as a group is. Because of their corrupt colleague their performance is different from what it should be. So, in the same way as the gymnasts may be doing a different exercise because of one single colleague who is not synchronized, the members of an institution working together may betray the *raison d'être* of their institution because of their corrupt colleague.

Another possibility is that one of our gymnasts makes a mistake and others, in response, readjust their own performance with marginal changes.

¹⁷ Seumas Miller, "Social Institutions"; and "Collective Moral Responsibility: An Individualist Approach," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 30 (2006): 176–93; Peter French, *Collective and Corporate Responsibility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 13–14.

The end result may look slightly better to the observer than complete asynchrony but is still noticeably different from the original plan. Analogously, cases of institutional corruption may arise as a consequence of the readjustment of the institution faced with an act of corruption of one institutional member. For example, the managers of an institution cover up a minor case of corruption with the intention to limit the negative consequences, but by doing so they generate a chain of improper behavior that ultimately results in subversion of the institutional *raison d'être*. In covering up a case of corruption, the managers neglect their supervisory duties, which in turn may encourage other members of the institution to seek benefits corruptly. Such cases show that it may be a mistake to point to single agents as causes of institutional corruption, understood as a certain negative effect on institutions. Instead, a focus on the officeholders' work in interrelatedness explains how they may have, as a group, violated duties of public accountability.

C. *Systemic corruption*

The corrupt behavior of some institutional agents can result in a parallel rule or system of rules, which replaces the public system of rules. This most extreme case of institutional corruption, which I call *systemic* corruption, is often a combination of summative and morphological corruption. It ramifies across several interrelated institutions in a stratification of practices, rather than being limited to some episodic acts of isolated individuals or small groups. The difference between this and the previously discussed models of institutional corruption is that the causal relations, mutual incentives, and interconnections are so intricate that looking retrospectively it is generally impossible to point to specific agents of corruption. We see the wood and we know there are trees, but it is difficult to distinguish them for what they are.

A typical case is a corrupt system of public procurement. There are many ways in which corruption can manifest itself in public procurement. However, for simplicity, consider the practice of tenders. Many governmental agencies subscribe to the rule that calls for tender must be widely advertised so as to encourage competition and provide a greater pool of offers to select from, and to give all potential tenderers a fair chance of making a successful offer. The offer that best meets all requirements and provides value for money should win the contract. However, as a matter of practice, in many cases, respondents know that the purchasing officials involved are corruptible. For example, it may be known that a tenderer, after payment of a bribe, can submit a "low bid" with the understanding that the officials in charge of the contract implementation and audit will approve later price increases, or amendments to the original contract.

In this context, the officeholders in charge of bid evaluation are not necessarily corrupt, as contract renegotiation at a later stage may not even

involve these administrative officials. Instead the substantial renegotiation of the contract may be introduced in the form of a number of incremental changes that may be approved, for example, by on-site engineers. In each particular case, the practice of corrupt “low bid” may have been introduced at some point by some corrupt agents under payment of a bribe. However, where corruption has a systemic character, the individual behavior of some agents triggers a long process in which a multiplicity of corrupt reward mechanisms can no longer be traced back to the actions of the corrupt agents who initiated it. For example, it may be that that direct bribing no longer plays a role, but a system of reticence and fear of scandals provides incentives for officeholders not to expose the rules that *de facto* govern their institution.¹⁸ In response to that, bidders may have formed a cartel in order to minimize the costs of participating in a tender, and may pressure purchasing officials to apply the rule of the “lowest bid,” while having internal agreements in place to compensate for failed bids, or assigning “turns” for winning public tenders. For officeholders this may facilitate the contract selection phase because there is just one clearly winning proposal that clearly wins. In this scenario, all the involved agents—across institutions—act following an agenda whose rationale is not coherent with the *raison d’être* of the practice of public tender, which is to ensure fairness in public contracting. The rule of the best offer in terms of “value for money” is subverted and enduringly invalidated, and the ruling practice is that of the “lowest bid.” Tenderers who are not corrupt and make realistic offers in terms of costs will be out-bidden.

It is worth noting that in a system in which corruption becomes the governing practice, corruption prospers in a way that is parasitic on the public rule. Both the corrupted and the corruptor have an interest in maintaining the public rules governing an institution because the very possibility of abusing the power of office entrusted to them is based on the stability of those rules. Consider, for example, the possibility that citizens could denounce or rebel against an institution that awards too expensive contracts. This is much harder, however, when these contracts are the outcome of a (formally fair) tendering procedure. What is interesting here is the covert nature of corruption that on the one hand attributes privileges to some (in terms of public contracts) and, on the other hand, escapes public accountability.

If in “pure” cases of summative or morphological corruption it was possible to identify individual corrupt actions, systemic corruption presents a complexity that makes it difficult to isolate and morally assess specific causal contributions of individual officeholders.

In fact, I believe that most institutionalists would agree that the three models of corruption that I described can capture the dynamics of

¹⁸ On the relevance of information and the power of blackmail see Donatella della Porta and Alberto Vannucci, *The Hidden Order of Corruption* (London: Ashgate 1999): 55–56.

institutional corruption, which are analyzed in terms of individual behavior, interrelated with the behavior of other agents occupying institutional roles. However, there is a further reason for proponents of discontinuity to insist that we should keep the focus on the institution as such, and this is the problem of *assigning responsibility for political corruption*.

The conceptual distinction between individual and institutional corruption is usually accompanied by the claim that the logic of finger pointing to individuals for corruption in order to assign responsibility and blameworthiness is misplaced.¹⁹ Accordingly, an institutional approach is necessary because in most cases corrupt practices are so entrenched in the political culture that it is hard to discuss them in terms of the responsibilities of individual agents. Instead, if institutional corruption can be explained mainly starting from institutional features and mechanisms, which provide the background against which officeholders operate, then the practical implication is that in order to fix political corruption one should attend to the background and structural conditions rather than asking who is responsible. I disagree with this conclusion and will discuss the problem of responsibility in the next section.

IV. WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?

One principal preoccupation of those who argue for the discontinuity thesis is that responsibility is often difficult to assign when corruption is pervasive in an institution. When the institution as such is corrupt it may be very hard for individuals to act in a noncorrupt manner, and even more difficult to assign causal responsibility for corruption when it is actually the product of complex interactions of multiple agents, and of repeated interactions at different points in time. This is of course true when responsibility is understood as *causation* or *contribution* of an agent to a certain outcome.²⁰ This creates difficulties for causal reductionist approaches of the kind defended by Seumas Miller, according to which those who cause institutional corruption are responsible for it.²¹ Moreover, the dimensions of the *contributions* of each agent involved are often incommensurable or difficult to assess. This is a variety of what in the literature has sometimes been called the “problem of many hands.”²²

¹⁹ “The charges are brought against the few “bad apples” who misbehaved, even if the conduct in less egregious form is widespread and cultivated by the institution” (Thompson, “Two Concepts of Corruption,” 16).

²⁰ To say that an agent is causally responsible for a certain outcome normally implies that the action of that agent was necessary and sufficient to generate such an outcome; the conditions both of necessity and sufficiency are relaxed when considering contributory responsibility.

²¹ Seumas Miller “Corruption,” in: E. Zalta ed., *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/corruption/> (accessed 18 July 2017).

²² Dennis Thompson, “Moral Responsibility of Public Officials: The Problem of Many Hands,” *The American Political Science Review* 74, no. 4 (1980): 905–16; Ibo Van de Poel and Lamber Royakkers, *Moral Responsibility and the Problem of Many Hands* (London: Routledge, 2015).

Especially for those who maintain that causal responsibility can generate moral responsibility only when it entails some degree of intentionality (or at least excludes acting in ignorance or under compulsion), it seems particularly hard to prove when institutional corruption falls under the responsibility of an agent. Often, the damage done at the institutional level is an unintended by-product. Sometimes, from the point of view of the agent, the institutional corruption that her action may generate in combination with other agents' actions is not even foreseeable. Under those circumstances, can we say that causal responsibility also entails moral and political responsibility?

One way to bypass the problem of attributing causal (or contributive) responsibility may be to hold public officials responsible from an externalist point of view, independent of their intentions and their degree of freedom to act otherwise. One could hold them *liable to punishment* simply as occupants of a role in a corrupt institution. As Anthony Duff noted, although generally speaking liability presupposes responsibility, there are cases of liability in which causal and moral responsibility are absent, or at least the conditions for assigning moral responsibility are weakened.²³ An example is *respondeat superior* liability, in which officeholders have vicarious liability for the crimes of their subordinates within the scope of their office mandate, even if the superiors cannot be considered blameworthy for those acts. Liability in these cases presupposes that it is among the duties of those officeholders to make sure that their subordinates obey their duties. This kind of vicarious liability is a well-established notion in many legal systems, including the U.S. one. However, according to many legal theorists, making superiors liable to punishment because of the faults of their subordinates in the total absence of contributory fault of the superiors (and, possibly, even if the superiors had no control over the behavior of their subordinates at all) is unacceptable by our moral and legal standards. Such a scenario would resemble a scapegoat practice or a political ritual, rather than a way to establish moral responsibility and administer justice.²⁴

More generally, by accepting Miller's causal account, it seems that we can hold officeholders responsible for institutional corruption only in proportion to their direct or indirect contribution (both in terms of

²³ Anthony Duff, *Answering for Crime* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2007), 19–25. For a taxonomy of responsibility see H. L. A. Hart, *Punishment and Responsibility* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968): 210–37.

²⁴ Joel Feinberg discusses this and points out that under current criminal law, holding of superiors liable for crimes entirely done by their subordinates will be considered uncivilized. In fact, often this kind of liability captures some minimal forms of blameworthiness, such as negligence. Joel Feinberg, "Collective Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 65, no. 21 (1968): 674–88, at 676. See also Thompson, "Moral Responsibility of Public Officials: The Problem of Many Hands," 906. For a discussion of possible justifications of strict liability see Kenneth Simons, "When Is Strict Criminal Liability Just?" *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 87, no. 4 (1997): 1075–1110.

actions and omissions). What is more, the fact that an agent is working for a corrupt institution seems to be an element that discounts, at least in part, personal responsibility. Responsibility is weakened in proportion to the freedom that the agent had to distance her behavior from the net of behaviors leading to corruption. To go back to an example from the previous section, it is difficult to say what exactly the causal responsibility of contract officials is in a tender procedure when the actual corrupt exchanges occur between the construction companies and on-site engineers. In the context of corrupt institutional practices, rules have often been subverted long before corruption was denounced. It may be that, like the gymnastics team members who suddenly realize that they are doing something other than their original plan, members of an institution realize that they are working in a corrupt manner without being able to identify the individuals who initiated the process of corruption that infected the whole institution.

Given the difficulties with the assignment of causal responsibility for political corruption, would there be advantages in assigning responsibility for political corruption to a group of agents, rather than assigning personal responsibility? In the version of institutional corruption that I defend, corruption is assigned to an institution mainly because of the interrelations between its members and their roles. In virtue of that interrelatedness, it is reasonable to regard the institution as corrupt because the conduct of the officeholders as an institution responds to a rationale that is not publicly vindicable as coherent with the *raison d'être* of that institution. Thus the officeholders as interrelated members of an institution have failed to act in a publicly accountable way and in this sense they are "interrelatedly responsible."

This interpretation of responsibility resonates with Larry May's explanation of what a collective action is by pointing at the interrelation between the members of a group, rather than as a manifestation of trans-individuality.²⁵ This explanation, which reconciles individualism and collectivism in the idea of interrelatedness of institutional roles, is congruent with the Rawlsian framework that I defend, in which the distinction among persons counts. To wit, the recognition of continuity between individual behavior and institutional corruption suggests that there must be a way of conceiving the corruption of an institution as a collective failure to keep the institution faithful to its *raison d'être*. Even if individual actions are explanatorily basic, institutional corruption can hardly be explained exhaustively by the different actions in isolation. So we talk of the members of an institution as if they were a collective, but only to point to their interrelated roles.

²⁵ Larry May, *The Morality of Groups* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997): 55.

So understood, the notion of “interrelated responsibility” sheds light on the idea that an institution, because of the relational structures that it creates, may have sustained or even encouraged the misbehavior of certain individuals. The situation is analogous to one in which a group of friends smashes a window while playing football together in a yard. Of course the one who kicked the ball into the window was one particular player, but in some important sense and according to the circumstances of the case, the group may think that smashing the window was a result of their playing together. For example they may realize that they set the goal too close to the window and the keeper performed poorly, and thus it is more appropriate to say that “they” smashed the window. Attributions of interrelated responsibility in the specific case of institutions follow the same logic, and it is a way to articulate the observation that the misdoing is the result of the behavior of various individuals interrelated along specific institutional dimensions.

The assignment of collective responsibility understood in terms of interrelatedness is valuable in terms of giving an accurate picture of what went wrong and generated institutional corruption. Yet perhaps more importantly, it allows us to decide what kind of answers the assignment of institutional corruption requires. In the case of political corruption, holding officeholders responsible means asking them to acknowledge their failure to act either as individuals or as interrelated individuals in accordance with the duties of public accountability and, in this sense, to accept that they are blameworthy for political corruption.

There are, it seems, two kinds of response to charges of political corruption in institutional settings. The first group consists of *backward-looking* remedies, such as punishing corrupt public officials and dismantling networks that supported corruption. However, an important aspect of institutional corruption is not simply what happened in the past, but is above all about the behavioral patterns that corruption commands and the fact that it tends to be entrenched in institutional practices. Thus, the second kind of response requires a *forward-looking* perspective. For the agents concerned, recognizing interrelated responsibility means acknowledging the importance of attending to the problem of political corruption as a group of interrelated individuals. This means, on the one hand, drawing a picture of how things have gone wrong for them as a group of interrelated individuals, so they may better understand the wrong of particular instances of corruption. On the other hand, it also draws attention to the division of roles and the distribution of prospective responsibilities that can ensure that the institution will be able to fulfill its *raison d'être* in the future. So conceived, “forward looking responsibility” is not a separate category of responsibility, but an additional answer to the question of why we assign responsibility in the first place, and in the specific case of

interrelated responsibility for political corruption.²⁶ It is worth noting that, even if we can attribute corruption to an institution, only individuals are blameworthy, can be punished, or can take action in order to get the institution back on track. Therefore, even if there are reasons to focus on the corruption of institutions, the question of assigning responsibilities within institutions is inescapable.

Against “one size fits all” approaches, I propose that the three models of institutional corruption described above can suggest different ways of assigning, disentangling, and distributing responsibility in different cases, and they can generate different proposals about what can be done to respond to such corruption.

When institutional corruption is of the *summative* kind, there is a case for saying that each and every member of an institution has blamably contributed to corruption, at least in terms of being a bystander and failing to denounce or fight corruption that was clearly visible. It may be that each single behavior taken in isolation is of minor moral relevance, but that each member is equally blameworthy (or proportionally so, assuming that different members contributed differently) for the wrong that they generated in the performance of their interrelated actions. What is more, each and every officeholder has fallen short of his or her duties of public accountability and in this sense is blameworthy for political corruption, even if these officeholders did not act explicitly in concert.

In a backward-looking perspective, the appropriate response to attribution of interrelated responsibility is to hold individual members of an institution liable to punishment. The question remains whether, in a forward-looking perspective, the task of restoring the institution can be left in the hands of corrupt agents. It seems that this task may require the intervention of an authority external to the institution, in order to make sure that the officeholders who remain in office or are newly appointed have a clean personal record and qualities that suggest better prospects in terms of integrity (for example in terms of reduced conflict of interests); or introduce better mechanisms of control on the work of institutional members; or distribute roles and duties differently; or a combination of all those measures, so as to bring the institution back on track and uphold public accountability. This is because it seems difficult, if not impossible, that corrupt officeholders can together reach a credible anti-corruption commitment without an external intervention that demands institutional change.

In cases of *morphological* institutional corruption, as observed in the example of corrupt use of scientific expertise, blameworthy corrupt

²⁶ Iris Marion Young has written that political responsibility is mainly to be understood in terms of forward-looking responsibility. In the political context, blaming and finger pointing lead more to defensive behavior than to constructive action (Iris Marion Young, “Responsibility and Global Labour Justice,” in Gorana Ognjenovic, ed., *Responsibility in Context: Perspectives* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010): 53–66.

behavior is appropriately attributed to one official (a bad apple), while the other institutional members may have been unaware of it, or have contributed to institutional corruption in ways that did not involve, strictly speaking, corrupt behavior. However, as interrelated officeholders they have undermined the institution in its *raison d'être*. For example, it may be that they have left their corrupt colleague alone to face powerful interest groups (such as the pharmaceutical or construction industry), which are known to be motors of corruption. Or members may have recognized an internal lack of organization able to prevent, stop, or detect corruption. In this sense they may be responsible because even if preventing corruption was not feasible for each of them individually, *as an organization* they could have managed.²⁷

What actions they can take in order to repair the wrong they did as an institution and avoid future corruption depends on the way they operate as an organization. From the normative point of view, they have a joint duty to act in ways that allow the institution to be faithful to its *raison d'être*. Taking responsibility means not only trying to figure out retrospectively what went wrong, but also asking prospectively what can be done in order to improve the situation—for example, how the institutional culture can be transformed in order to discourage corrupt behavior; whether there may be changes in the institutional procedures or in the division of tasks that may favor integrity; how whistle-blowers can be encouraged and protected, and so on. This cannot be a private commitment of individual members, but, in order to be valid for the group, must be an explicit and institutionalized commitment (which requires officially endorsing specific anti-corruption policies) to uphold accountability and restore the integrity of the institution. When institutional corruption is of the *morphological* kind, unlike in the summative case, the majority of the institutional members were not corrupt. It therefore seems realistic to expect that they have the moral and organizational resources to take on such an anti-corruption commitment.

To summarize, in cases of morphological corruption we see a mix of individual and interrelated responsibility for political corruption. Retrospectively, corrupt individuals may still be prosecuted and other agents should be held liable on the basis of their contribution to the corruption of the institution. The assessment of individual responsibilities must take into account the interplay between their actual contribution (in terms of actions and omissions) and their position and duties of accountability, which relate them to other institutional members and their actions. In a prospective way, individuals can discharge the duty of keeping their institution faithful to its *raison d'être* only in cooperation with other institutional members, by institutionalizing the commitment to anti-corruption.

²⁷ An analogous case is discussed by Joel Feinberg, "Collective Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 65 (1968): 674–68.

Systemic corruption is most recalcitrant in terms of assigning responsibility, and this is not only because a wide variety of cases fall into this category, which may require differentiated strategies. Under systemic corruption, a plurality of institutions—including private and public organizations, but also criminal organizations, or elites dominating the social life of a country—entertain an incredibly complex network of corrupt exchanges over a long period of time. Mapping this system is very helpful in understanding the crucial links and relationships that require attention, and possibly to disentangle summative and morphological components of the corrupt system. However, distinguishing between causes and effects, establishing which sort of behavior has reinforced which other behavior, and thus disentangling specific causal responsibilities, seems to be a hopeless task. Thus, the institutionalist may object that I picked “easy” examples, and the test tube of whether my taxonomy is useful is systemic corruption. What can we say about the responsibility of actors who contribute to a corrupt system just by virtue of being in it? Who has the responsibility to fix corruption when it is induced by industrial companies in a capitalist economy, or by criminal organizations?

In systemic cases, attempts to assign individual responsibility will lead either to finding scapegoats, or to holding everybody responsible. Proponents of discontinuity rightly look at both options with suspicion because neither seems to offer solutions on how to dissolve corrupt relations and contrast corrupt practices that are in place. In particular, these proponents warn against *responses* to assignments of collective responsibility that criminalize all those involved. With the intent of discarding “bad apples,” very large numbers of actors may be excluded from public office, resulting in a dispersion of skills, experience, and commitment, which could be instead capitalized on for improving the institutions. Furthermore, collective punishment may not even bring about the expected changes in the system, because, even if the agents change, corrupt relations remain in place, and relapses into corruption must be expected.

I share these worries. It may be that looking retrospectively to systemic corruption, even if we find some blameworthy behavior, we cannot hope to solve the problem by discarding the “bad apples.” However, there are ulterior reasons for attributing responsibility even in systemic cases. In Section II, I explained that officeholders should act according to an agenda whose rational is consistent with the *raison d’être* of their institution. Failure to fulfill duties of accountability entails moral and political responsibility for political corruption, and officeholders cannot be exempted even if they operate in a highly corrupt environment. Even if there may be other noble considerations that justify being in a corrupt system, such as the fact that more “actively” corrupt individuals could occupy the same position, this does not seem to absolve the officeholder from responsibility for political corruption, at least in a forward-looking perspective. It is hard to imagine any step to restore integrity that does not start from institutional members

understanding the political wrong of political corruption and accepting responsibility for it. To give an example, scholars who point out that anti-corruption must find “cultural entry points” in order to create virtuous circles leading to integrity, must recognize that taking responsibility for corruption is a necessary step toward any cultural change.²⁸ To the extent that political corruption is considered morally excusable because it is not attributed to responsible human beings, but to a “system,” it is difficult to imagine from where the impulse toward a positive cultural development could come. There is a normative advantage in understanding institutions as corrupt only in a derivative sense, because it points to the fact that anti-corruption is a task for all those who together form an institution, even if the remedial action can be taken, in the end, by individuals only.

For this reason I share the institutionalist view that institutional corruption is a useful analytical category that points to the complexity of certain situations in which corruption occurs. I also agree that disentangling the different causal responsibilities of all participants in a system is often a hopeless task, and the idea of collective punishment is not very promising as an anti-corruption strategy. However, I do think that in a forward-looking perspective accepting responsibility for political corruption, including interrelated responsibility, is a first step to move forward. Some institutionalists suggest that, given the complexity of certain systemic constellations, the only hope for anti-corruption is a “big-bang” or a radical change of the system.²⁹ My suggestion, instead, is that an accurate analysis of the summative and morphological components that contribute to systemic corruption may give us an indication of the social links and relationships that need to be addressed, not simply for the sake of punishment but also, and perhaps above all, to devise strategies to move out of a corrupt system. This makes the objectives of anti-corruption appear more feasible, rather than pointing to radical changes of the system as such, for example, “abolishing capitalist structures” or “eradicating criminal organizations.”

Empirical studies show that the anti-corruption strategies adopted so far to target systemic corruption (especially in terms of anti-corruption legislation, accountability, and transparency instruments) have had modest success, and a second generation of reforms is needed in order to find different entry points to induce systemic change. It would be presumptuous to indicate practical solutions in the framework of this mainly conceptual essay. However, it is safe to say that one of the main problems with those approaches is that they rarely start from an analysis of the specific

²⁸ On the importance of “cultural entry points” see for example Roberto Laver, “Systemic Corruption: Considering Culture in Second-Generation Reforms” (June 5, 2014), *Edmond J. Safra Working Papers*, No. 45. Available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2446657&rec=1&srcabs=2433257&alg=1&pos=6 (accessed 18 November 2017).

²⁹ Bo Rothstein, “Anticorruption, An Indirect “Big-Bang” Approach,” *Review of International Political Economy* 18, no. 2 (2011): 228–50.

mechanisms of corruption, and the institutional relations within organizations and beyond.³⁰ The taxonomy presented in this essay can offer some instruments for a more fine-grained reflection on what kind of strategies could offer viable solutions to various cases of institutional corruption.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In this essay I defended a continuity approach to institutional corruption. Against conceptions that understand institutional corruption as an impersonal mechanism, I argued that institutional practices can be corrupt only in a derivative sense and, as a consequence, that only individual public officials are accountable for it. Drawing on Rawls, I argued that both citizens and decision-makers in charge of institutional design have the responsibility to ensure that institutions can be faithful to their *raison d'être*. However, officeholders have special duties in this respect. They exercise entrusted power in an institutional capacity and ought to act in keeping with the mandate that governs their role. This implies that they have a duty to act according to an agenda whose rationale is coherent with the *raison d'être* of their institution, and in this sense they are publicly accountable. Political corruption was defined as a deficit in accountability, either in officeholders' individual actions in their institutional capacity or in their involvement in corrupt institutional practices. There is no institutional design that can immunize an institution from corruption, because only the behavior of the individuals working for that institution can ensure its integrity. For the same reason, when attending to cases of corruption it is important that officeholders accept responsibility for restoring what corruption has disrupted and introduce changes in their interrelated behavior that break up networks of corrupt exchanges and discourage future corrupt behavior. Taking officeholders into consideration as interrelated individuals focuses analytical attention on the actions that they can take and avoid as part of the institution.

I then identified three modalities in which institutional corruption can occur: a summative, a morphological, and a systemic one. This taxonomy of institutional corruption points to a differentiated ways of assigning interrelated responsibility, rather than to a "one size fits all" approach. Moreover, it suggests different anti-corruption strategies. In cases of *summative* institutional corruption, all officials are blameworthy for their individual actions and have fallen short of their duties of accountability. In cases of *morphological* corruption, not all (or the majority of) members of an institution are individually blameworthy of corruption. However, in their interrelatedness they may have failed to be accountable, and

³⁰ See for example UNODC, 2003, *UN Guide for anticorruption policies, Global Programme Against Corruption*, Available at http://www.unodc.org/pdf/crime/corruption/UN_Guide.pdf (accessed 18 November 2017).

in this sense only are blameworthy. In this case individual agents may be held responsible for their particular contribution to certain particular negative outcomes of their behavior. However, the value of attributing interrelated responsibility to all officeholders participating in a corrupt institutional practice is mainly in mobilizing institutional resources in order to promote anticorruption, for example by redistributing duties and tasks in ways that favor publicly accountable behavior. In cases of *systemic* corruption, the attempt to assign contributory responsibility among the various agents and to hold them liable to punishment brings generally modest results in combatting corruption. However, taking interrelated responsibility for failing to fulfill their accountability duties and recognizing that the impulse for anti-corruption can only come from inside the system seems to be a more promising attitude compared to the idea of attributing failure to the system understood as an impersonal entity. What is more, the effort to understand and disentangle the summative and morphological elements of the system of corruption may facilitate a better understanding of the relations characterizing instances of political corruption, and possibly guide anti-corruption interventions. In practical terms, what can be actually done by individual agents or by interrelated groups of agents may have limited impact on the system. However, I do not see any plausible alternative. Of course, more empirical work is needed in order to find out which anti-corruption strategies are more fruitful in different cases. Because of its conceptual nature, the contribution of this essay is by design limited to showing what can be gained from an attribution of interrelated responsibility in different cases, and what kind of response could be adequate depending on the type of institutional corruption at hand.

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