

# How Should We Combat Corruption? Lessons from Theory and Practice

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***Making Sense of Corruption***, Bo Rothstein and Aiysha Varraich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 184 pp., \$79.99 cloth, \$24.99 paper.

***The Corruption Cure: How Citizens and Leaders Can Combat Graft***, Robert Rotberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 400 pp., \$35 cloth.

***Unmasked: Corruption in the West***, Laurence Cockcroft and Anne-Christine Wegener (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 288 pp., \$19.50 paper.

***Waging War on Corruption: Inside the Movement Fighting the Abuse of Power***, Frank Vogl (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 316 pp., \$28.00 paper.

Many practices are described as corrupt, including bribery, misappropriation of public resources for private ends, inappropriate use of influence, state capture, nepotism, and some conflicts of interest. Given this array, it is no surprise that corruption is one of the most prominent topics of global concern today. A 2011 BBC poll that surveyed 13,353 respondents across the globe found that corruption was the most talked-about problem, overtaking such issues as poverty, unemployment, and climate change.<sup>1</sup>

Given the prevalence of these concerns, recent prominent accounts of how to combat corruption are worth careful consideration; and the four books under discussion here offer numerous insights into root causes and possible remedies. While they cover much overlapping territory, they also target different aspects of this complex phenomenon, making for good complementary engagements. So, for instance, Robert Rotberg aims to provide a recipe for eliminating

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corruption in developing countries, whereas Laurence Cockcroft and Anne-Christine Wegener explore corruption in the developed world. The concerns that interest Bo Rothstein and Aiysha Varraich may be more theoretical than those that animate Frank Vogl's work. In any case, the four are well worth reading together, as the collection offers a comprehensive contemporary examination of the many forms and aspects of corruption, including both theoretical and practical issues. In the next four sections I explain and critically engage with some of their core claims. After briefly examining each book, in the fifth section I take stock of some of their collective successes, while also locating some areas for development in future work.

### THE ROTBERG PRESCRIPTION: START WITH TRANSFORMATIVE POLITICAL LEADERS

In *The Corruption Cure: How Citizens and Leaders Can Combat Graft*, Robert Rotberg offers a fourteen-step prescription for tackling corruption, the first of which sets the tone:

The nation seeks, elects, or anoints a transformative political leader embodying the new political will; this leader will commit herself or himself to an all-out battle against corruption in and throughout her or his administration. The leader makes advances against corruption a measure by which to evaluate the success, and potential for reelection, of her or his administration . . . Energetic and exemplary leaders of vision and credible integrity are essential. The anticorruption project cannot succeed without someone legitimate and forthright to stimulate such disruptive change (p. 310).

The subsequent thirteen steps proceed in a largely top-down fashion: removing corrupt officials, strengthening legal barriers, appointing an independent auditor-general, committing to a proposed International Anti-Corruption Court, and so on.<sup>2</sup>

There is much to admire about Rotberg's approach. It makes good use of harnessing new technologies that facilitate accountability. It draws on a wealth of important case studies. And it offers some bold ideas about tackling corruption, such as the establishment of an International Anti-Corruption Court, modeled along the lines of the International Criminal Court.<sup>3</sup> On the weaker side, however, offering a single recipe invites further thought, and here critics might see multiple vulnerabilities.<sup>4</sup> First, while Rotberg's fourteen-point plan might well be one path to success, we may wonder whether it is the only formula. In addition, critics may

question whether it really strikes at the heart of what drives corruption. This top-down model relies heavily on a transformational leader. By contrast, as I describe below, Vogl's account illustrates how civic involvement plays a much greater role than the fourteen-point plan suggests. As Vogl describes the actual struggles for combating corruption, the central drivers of change all come from the people.

Furthermore, as step 1 recommends, we have to start with a transformational leader. What if no such leader can be found? Or what if the people cannot adequately distinguish between genuine transformational leaders and false prophets, thus unwittingly electing to power those who are least able or least inclined to "drain the swamp"? In addition, can we offer any advice to those for whom no transformational leader is in sight, for instance, those currently living in nondemocratic states governed by leaders who have no intention of relinquishing power for the foreseeable future? Vogl's book is very useful for such audiences, showing how many other successful paths to reducing corruption there are, while emphasizing the role ordinary citizens can play in this process.

Rotberg does an excellent job identifying the enormous range of costs associated with corruption. Along with the usual litany, such as how corruption distorts priorities, exacerbates inequalities, hampers economic growth, and often results in considerable harm, he also draws attention to others less frequently noted. For instance, corruption can be a huge cause of exit and migration (p. 41), and it also lies at the heart of some of the world's significant contemporary security challenges (p. 26).<sup>5</sup> Corruption is also destabilizing in and of itself. As former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has noted,

Corruption is not just a disgrace and a crime. It is also dangerous. There is nothing more demoralizing, more destructive, more disempowering to a citizen than the belief that the system is rigged against them, the belief that the system is designed to fail them, and that people in positions of power . . . are crooks—crooks who are embezzling the future of their own people.<sup>6</sup>

This point is central to understanding how to address corruption effectively. The sense of unfairness can drive massive, destabilizing change, for better or worse, depending on how the energy is channeled. In so many countries around the world, understanding these sentiments is at the core of appreciating what needs to be addressed to tackle corruption.

New institutions and strong political will are an important part of the story of rooting out corruption, but so are changed attitudes. A new norm needs to replace

settled assumptions about business as usual. Rotberg describes this new ethos as “ethical universalism.” For Rotberg, ethical universalism embraces a philosophy according to which “all inhabitants of a jurisdiction will be treated fairly, equally, and tolerantly—that minorities are entitled to the same privileges and opportunities as majorities, and that groups large and small can anticipate receiving similar rights and privileges” (p. 37). So, this new norm is essentially one of fair treatment. For Rotberg, corruption is not a principal-agent problem. Rather, the prevailing ethos is the key problem: you have to change attitudes and you need leaders to do this. You need to be able to persuade citizens that the state will treat them fairly and effectively and that consequently there is no need to resort to corruption. Rotberg adds,

The collective can only rid itself of corruption when and if new leaders impose ethical universalism, there is a gradual widespread public acceptance of and socialization to ethical universalism over time, and procedures and institutions are developed that provide credible hints that corrupt behavior is no longer normal. To achieve this transformation, there must be a spread of trust or social capital. There must also be a belief that citizens individually and collectively can achieve their goals and fulfill their lives without enabling or indulging in corrupt pursuits (p. 44).

The authors of the other books under consideration also see an important role for changing dominant attitudes in society and we return to these important issues below.

## CORRUPTION IN THE WEST

In contrast to Rotberg’s focus on the developing world, in *Unmasked*, Cockcroft and Wegener offer an analysis of corruption in the West. They show how political donors, offshore havens, big business, and other elites have created huge costs for us all, threatening democracy and the public interest. As they see it, corruption in the West is mainly about inappropriate influence, or “the buying of influence and the selling of power” (p. 2). The main drivers of corruption include the funding of political campaigns; political lobbying; “opaque processes involving individuals, associations, corporations, and banks; a weakened justice and police system; and failure of oversight, compliance, and regulation” (p. 6).

To make a central part of their case, the authors present interesting data concerning top political contributors and their lobbying costs along with figures showing how these efforts paid off in terms of total federal contracts and support

awarded, along with effective tax rates. For instance, during the period from 2007 to 2012, Goldman Sachs contributed \$16.5 million to fund political campaigns, spent \$12.4 million on lobbying, was awarded total federal contracts and support worth \$229.4 million, and had an effective tax rate of 23 percent. Lockheed Martin gave \$8.6 million in political contributions, spent \$84.1 million on lobbying, received \$332 million in federal contracts and support, and had an effective tax rate of 18 percent (p. 42). Drawing on their data, Cockcroft and Wegener conclude that there are also important relationships between lobbying, low effective tax rates, and rates of detection of fraud. In the European Union the link between lobbying and campaign finance is weaker, as there is more public funding for political campaigns. But lobbyists are still active in Europe, operating more through think tanks that, once funded and lobbied, may bend in the direction of corporate interests.

Cockcroft and Wegener document a number of areas in which corruption has exploded through inappropriate lack of regulation or oversight. For instance, pressures to deregulate the financial industry were generated by campaign financing, lobbying, and a revolving door between Wall Street and Washington, paving the way for the recent global recession. Furthermore, rating agencies were paid by the securities they were grading, which incentivized giving high ratings even when these were not necessarily merited. These agencies also worked without regulation and oversight, thus enabling massive concealment of risk.<sup>7</sup>

What do Cockcroft and Wegener recommend to remedy the defects they document? There is a need for far more regulation and legislation, compliance, and improved governance (within companies, organizations, and beyond). In all cases there is a need for “first, improved measures of prevention and prosecution; second, [an] end [to the] cult of secrecy; and third, for action by civil society” (p. 203). Fortunately, as they see it, there is now a general “enthusiastic acceptance” of the need for credible mechanisms to reduce corruption, and already a number of changes have together made a difference over the last twenty years. Some of these include legal changes that criminalize transnational corrupt activities, stronger and clearer corporate codes and procurement rules, and better compliance and oversight. Blacklisting offenders has been effective as well.

In recent years norms about bank secrecy have also been significantly challenged, and anti-money laundering regulations have introduced more requirements that can assist in detecting corruption. For instance, under these regulations banks are required to complete “Suspicious Activity Reports” in

connection with individuals attempting to make multiple large deposits. Countless other initiatives, both small and large, have had important effects as well. One example is integrity pacts in which all transaction parties (such as buyers and sellers) voluntarily bind themselves to agreements to uphold particular standards of appropriate conduct in a particular range of transactions or domains, such as in bidding and procurement processes.

*Unmasked* will be especially useful in disabusing those who believe corruption is a problem largely or even only for developing countries. For those more familiar with the corruption literature, they may find the book documents familiar territory, though it is valuable to have the discussion of so many different domains in which corruption flourishes collected in one comprehensive volume.

## POWER TO THE PEOPLE

In *Waging War on Corruption*, Vogl explores several points that contrast sharply to the position advanced by Rotberg. For instance, unlike Rotberg, he believes there “is no one-fits-all solution to corruption, no model of a national integrity system for one country that can just be exported and succeed in another country” (p. 206). Additionally, there are a number of other ways in which Vogl sees the corruption landscape as somewhat different from Rotberg’s assessment. In his view,

A new era is dawning in the global fight against corruption. We are moving from a period where the focus was largely on raising public awareness of corruption and campaigning for policy reforms, into a period where securing enforcement takes center stage. The challenge for anticorruption fighters will be to ensure the implementation of pledges by world leaders, new national laws, and international conventions. This challenge will be met by mobilizing civil society organizations, grass roots activities, and citizens across the world to encourage and empower public prosecutors and judges to pursue the corrupt relentlessly (p. xiii).

Vogl’s aim is to show how civil society groups, especially Transparency International, put the fight against corruption on the global agenda. For him it is civil society that must “lead the effort to ensure anticorruption enforcement” (p. xiv). From the Arab Spring to mass mobilizations following the publication of the Panama Papers, people are taking action to protest abuse of power as never before. From enthusiastic public prosecutors, “armed with excellent forensic e-mail/computer technologies, cooperating with each other across national

borders, and keenly aware that they enjoy strong public support for their efforts” (p. 5) to energized civil society organizations, people are leading the fight against corrupt leaders and regimes.

As Vogl sees it, a powerful combination of forces is steadily amassing, helping national anti-corruption movements grow in strength every day. First, a large number of civil society organizations, full of committed members, have focused on tackling corruption. Second, national and international anti-corruption conventions, laws, and goals supported by all manner of global leaders are being closely monitored and performance is publicly reported. Third, new information and media technologies are also assisting in connecting peoples across traditional divides, such as state borders, leaving “the corrupt bribe takers and bribe payers with ever fewer places to hide” (p. 14). Fourth, there is increased academic research and support from philanthropic foundations in building the organizational capacity of civil society.

Some of the world’s most powerful leaders have also indicated their willingness to join the war on corruption, signing on to many agreements, including those on tax evasion, money laundering, and abuses of foreign aid. In contrast to Rotberg, Vogl notes,

It is not governments that are leading the anticorruption charge, rather it is a grand ad hoc coalition of civil society activists, journalists, philanthropists, and scholars. And in the years to come it will continue to be the case that these forces will set the agenda, press governments with mounting vigor and impact for reforms, and monitor the measures announced to see that they are effectively implemented (p. 55).

Transparency International (TI)—which Vogl co-founded—has been an important coalition-builder at both the national and international level, initiating many opportunities for civil society, governments, and businesses to explore constructive ways to curb corruption. TI has developed standards of conduct for governmental and business institutions, and has played an important role in raising public awareness of corruption.

In Vogl’s view, major Western governments are partly responsible for the *scale* of global corruption, especially in developing countries. Through “military and economic aid that is often poorly audited, by peddling a soft line on money laundering, and on the repatriation of stolen assets, they have collaborated in what amounts to corruption conspiracies. The gravest consequence of such Western governmental complicity relates to international security” (p. 101). Even though

some of the other authors under consideration note how corruption in certain parts of the world has found its source in the West, Vogl draws the connections most strongly. His verdict is as follows: “Much of the corruption on this planet stems from the willingness of the governments of rich nations to provide exceptional support to corrupt overseas leaders in exchange for arms deals; rights to oil, gas, and mining resources; and strategic relationships” (p. 23).

While there is still “an Everest of corruption” to climb, according to Vogl, we have reached base camp. Importantly, attitudes have shifted significantly, so whereas people may have been more tolerant of corruption in the past, they are no longer prepared to put up with the old ways of doing things.

## QUALITY OF GOVERNMENT

Bo Rothstein has been at the forefront of a large, highly impressive quality of government project, which has shown a connection between quality of government and almost every measure of human wellbeing, including life satisfaction, social trust, and the absence of violence and terrorism. Indeed, as Rothstein and Varraich argue, “without a reasonably competent, impartial, uncorrupted, honest, and effective public administration, representative democracy is unlikely to deliver or increase human well-being” (p. 5).

In *Making Sense of Corruption*, the authors trace some of the ways in which our understanding of corruption has evolved. They catalog different conceptions of corruption and close relatives—including clientelism, state capture, and patrimonialism—in an effort to explore how these concepts are connected. They also aim to examine the debate concerning what is the opposite of corruption and to offer “a single unified definition” of corruption. In addition, they show links between the anti-corruption literature and the human rights agenda. And they discuss the problematic case of China, which has improved human wellbeing massively over the last three decades but is also known to have high levels of corruption.

Rothstein and Varraich note that corruption “usually occurs at the intersection of public and private spheres, for example, where individuals engaging in corrupt behavior within private companies, for their own interest, affect the taxpayers’ money” (p. 14). For instance, in 2004 the CEOs of the five largest investment banks on Wall Street lobbied the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission to relax regulation requiring safer levels of financial reserves—reserves whose purpose was essentially to prevent the kind of global financial crisis that ensued.



Of course, the line between public and private—and also between proper and improper—influence is difficult to draw, and this can be part of the problem. Drawing interesting connections between corruption and other related concerns, the authors hold the view that “corruption can serve as a core concept that links together parts of what in other theoretical approaches is defined as forms of illegitimate use of power” (p. 70).

An important part of their project is to explore the question: What is the opposite of corruption? The opposite of corruption is not “no corruption.” This would constitute too low a standard for those in public office (p. 131). For Rothstein and Varraich the opposite of corruption is “impartiality.” This entails being influenced by the relevant considerations and resisting those that should remain irrelevant, such as personal connections, willingness to pay a bribe, or ethnicity. It is notoriously difficult to explain precisely when and why impartiality is appropriate, but the idea is that impartiality rules out some abhorrent behaviors, such as clientelism, patronage, nepotism, and political favoritism. The account Rothstein and Varraich give of impartiality is focused on the activities of civil servants and those in public service. They insist that “when implementing laws and policies, government officials shall not take anything into consideration about the citizen/case that is not beforehand stipulated in the policy or the law” (p. 136).

The authors try to defend their view in response to criticisms that the impartiality norm would rule out *appropriate partiality*, such as in the case of affirmative action policies. They argue that while governments may permissibly implement schemes of partiality, such as that may privilege women or other disadvantaged groups, there is still a place for the impartiality norm even when operationalizing such schemes. They also consider a further challenge to their view raised by those who posit that a Nazi-like extermination camp could theoretically be administered in an impartial way, suggesting that impartiality in the exercise of power cannot alone account for the state of affairs we are aiming at in working out the opposite of corruption. For Rothstein and Varraich, this represents a ludicrous case, and the historical evidence points against the plausibility of such an example. Nevertheless, their responses seem unsatisfactory and the force of these concerns still lingers.

Perhaps realizing these limitations, the authors instead shift ground to talking up the virtues of offering a procedural rather than a substantive account of how to understand the importance of impartiality as the essence of avoiding corruption. In their view, a substantive account is less likely to achieve an overlapping

consensus “because there is not much agreement in many countries of the world on what should constitute what economists argue are ‘sound policies’ or the philosophers claim to be the right ‘moral status of the laws’” (p. 143). They also contrast their single unified approach with those who argue for a multidimensional strategy. On accounts that they reject, quality of government involves decisions in public administration that adhere to specific goals such as “‘efficiency’, ‘public ethos’, ‘good decision making’, ‘transparency’, ‘accountability’ and ‘stability’” (p. 143). They argue that the disadvantages of this kind of approach include treating an empirical issue as one of definition, along with the idea that thicker conceptions will not be able to attract widespread agreement. In their view, the procedural account is superior on both of these grounds.

But Rothstein and Varraich’s apparent retreat to thin conceptions of corruption and its opposite on the basis that these can gain more widespread agreement may not, in the end, get us as far as we might hope to go. Even the thin account can be contested, or the contribution that a thin account makes can be dismissed as inaccurate or not really telling us anything very interesting. Furthermore, critics may say that even if these accounts capture one prominent kind of corruption and its opposite, they are not very comprehensive in terms of the range of corrupt practices across multiple domains. For instance, can this account adequately locate what is wrong with corruption in public administration that does not involve partiality, such as misappropriation of public funds? Also, there is plenty of corruption not perpetrated by government officials in which agents are not required to act impartially. Consider the pharmaceutical industry’s role in corrupting healthcare. To take just one example, drug manufacturers sponsor doctors to attend conferences, resulting in behavior that promotes the interests of the drug manufacturer. But because drug manufacturers are not required to act impartially, we cannot easily locate and identify the corruption. So, we see how even if Rothstein and Varraich may have captured one important aspect of corruption in government, the account may not apply to other forms of corruption prevalent in a host of other domains.

## TOWARD A MORE COMPREHENSIVE ACCOUNT OF COMBATING CORRUPTION

Taken together, these four books offer a wealth of important insights on how we might effectively tackle corruption. The many common elements explored include

the importance of political will, reforming national and international laws and institutions, a vigilant and courageous civil society and media, diligent auditors-general and prosecutors, independent judiciaries, and generally building coalitions with the many agents who have an interest in reducing corruption.

Fighting corruption involves the efforts of national and international actors, and some parties can rightly be expected to do a great deal more than others. If Vogl is correct and much corruption in developing countries stems from Western agents or institutions, those agents might have a much greater share of responsibilities in the war against corruption—for instance, to help with the necessary institutional or legal reforms and to ensure sufficient resources for adequate oversight and monitoring.<sup>8</sup>

### *Culture and Corruption*

There is some important agreement among the authors on the relationship between culture and corruption, along with some unfinished business. Notably, all of the authors argue against the idea that corruption may simply be in the eye of the beholder and against the view that whether corruption is even recognized as such varies dramatically among cultures. Proponents of these ideas often complain that those who believe corruption is an evil fail to take account of cultural diversity. This complaint, the authors argue, is misguided. Rotberg, quoting political scientist Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, emphasizes that no known culture “values dishonesty and unfairness” (p. 32). Furthermore, “there is very little evidence that the nature and practices of corruption vary from culture to culture or that the corrupt act itself is viewed more permissively in some societies than in others” (p. 27).

There are several further points of agreement among the authors on the relationship between culture and corruption. For instance, they endorse the idea that there is something akin to a universal understanding of what corruption is, even if there are differences in how corrupt acts are expressed. For evidence of the universality of corruption, Rothstein and Varraich consider Afrobarometer’s 2006 survey in eighteen African countries, which solicited views on several scenarios. These included decisions in which an official “decides to locate a development project in an area where his friends and supporters live”; “gives a job to someone from his family who does not have adequate qualifications”; or “demands a favor or an additional payment for some service that is part of his job” (p. 47). A high majority of the 25,086 respondents viewed all three actions as involving wrongdoing that deserved punishment.

Having noted that corruption in one form or another is universally condemned, there remains some unfinished business here. We need to show how norms of ethical universalism can co-exist reasonably harmoniously with other practices that recommend in-group favoritism where this might still be permissible. I think there is still some residual space for some partiality norms to operate, for instance, in the private sphere rather than the public, though drawing that distinction neatly is notoriously difficult and likely to seem quite problematic to many of the unconvinced. Corruption is a complex phenomenon that is enmeshed with other forms of social interactions and practices involving gift giving, norms of reciprocity, friendship, kin ties, and identity. Corruption scholars need to show those who believe such forms of social interaction are powerful sources of motivation just how and when they can co-exist with the preferred ethos (such as impartiality or ethical universalism) that is being recommended. Can a norm of, say, ethical universalism reasonably accommodate cultural practices in which some favoritism toward fellow members (such as members of one's village, tribe, or ethnicity) is permissible? If so, fleshing out the legitimate scope for such norms would be valuable.

#### *Creating and Sustaining a New Ethos: Further Challenges*

The authors all agree that there is much scope for institutional and legal reform to play a constructive role in working toward solutions, and there is considerable overlap in the reforms they argue are needed. They also believe changing attitudes is central. All of this is sensible. We do clearly need to change the ethos while also embarking on extensive institutional and legal reform.

What is the best way to understand the desired new attitude? Is "ethical universalism" a better term for the idea than "impartiality"? It is not easy to describe the ethos that is characteristic of low-corruption environments. While both of the proffered terms capture something important, perhaps there is room for further improvement, since both suggest a rigidity that is likely to be resisted when there is appropriate scope for sensitively dealing with individual circumstances. While this nuance is captured to some extent in both theorists' detailed understandings of the relevant attitudes, the term "ethical universalism" is likely to signal the wrong understanding for too many readers.

Emphasizing the link between the desired attitude and people's actual lived realities is also significant. Recall that for Rotberg a new political culture of ethical universalism is an essential part of the story. For him, ethical universalism

“presumes that all inhabitants of a jurisdiction will be treated fairly, equally, and tolerantly—that minorities are entitled to the same privileges and opportunities as majorities, and that groups large and small can anticipate receiving similar rights and privileges” (p. 37). To my mind, then, “ethical universalism” is code for something that is more accurately described as a belief in fair treatment for all. Rotberg also emphasizes that in moving toward a population that embraces ethical universalism, we need to “persuade entire citizenries that they are better off without . . . corruption and that the state will serve them effectively and well without lubrication” (p. 43). This is why he believes there is such an important role for political leadership since, in his view, only leaders can do this effectively.

For such persuasion to be successful, however, it needs to be matched with *actual changes* in the direction of fair opportunities for all in the society, so the attitude can be grounded in reality and be a rational one for citizens to adopt. To sustain low-corruption environments, residents of that society *must actually have, and believe they have*, fair opportunities for good lives, and these opportunities must be accessible to all. People need to know and feel that they have a fair chance for a decent life. Take away that basic sense of a fair chance to flourish and various destructive patterns set in. Without an overall commitment to implementation of fair treatment in society, corruption becomes a more rational course of action and mode of being.

For the new ethos to take hold, we would do well to remind ourselves of a key driver of corruption that John Kerry references in his remarks cited above: that nothing is more demoralizing, destructive, and disempowering than the belief that the system is rigged against you. And the issue is compounded when coupled with the belief that the leaders are the ones blocking fair opportunities for citizens to lead a good life. In so many places, understanding these sentiments is the core of understanding what needs to change and to addressing some of the reasons why corruption persists, even after some of the recommended institutional and legal changes have been made. The key to tackling corruption has to involve taking seriously these substantive links with actual fair treatment and the belief that fair treatment prevails. Otherwise, we will have no chance of sustaining any gains in eliminating corruption that the various prescriptions recommend.

While some of these ideas might be part of or implicit in Rotberg’s analysis, they deserve much more emphasis and attention than he has given them. There are two important steps that need to be taken. The first is actually making the changes in the direction of fairness. This is likely to be an enormous project,

especially in highly diverse societies with competing views about what fairness requires. The second, and even more difficult, is the work of getting people to believe *and feel* that they have fair opportunities for good lives. This latter project is particularly challenging no matter what the reality of the fairness situation is.<sup>9</sup> People do not easily update their beliefs and feelings, even when quite dramatic changes have taken place to improve their situation in the direction of fairness. The “deep stories” of their lives are very difficult to shift. We need more research on how to facilitate changing beliefs and sentiments effectively, even when constructive changes have taken place, since the adjustment in beliefs, sentiments, and attitudes seems to involve separate processes.

All in all, these four books offer significant advice and insight. If they share one weakness, it is perhaps that they do not sufficiently emphasize how important it is to deal with the problems that *sustain* corruption. Future work on corruption would do well to focus on these issues.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Elitza Katarova, “The National Origin of the International Anti-Corruption Business,” Paper presented at the International Studies Association Annual Convention, Montreal, March 16–19, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> The remaining thirteen steps, starting with step 2, are summarized as follows: (2) Once the leader takes office, she removes anyone tainted by the old corrupt practices and discharges any new appointees who try to maintain corrupt ways; (3) The executive and legislature strengthen legal barriers against corruption. An anti-corruption commission, headed by a tough-minded prosecutor, is given a broad mandate to investigate and prosecute corruption everywhere, even at the highest levels. Independence and adequate resourcing for the work of the commission are assured; (4) A person with “skills and vision” is appointed to a new (or refreshed) office of auditor-general. Auditors have responsibilities to investigate all government officeholders and to report on findings to the nation; (5) The nation commits to the provisions of the International Anti-Corruption Court (which Rotberg proposes), thereby offering citizens further protection and avenues for addressing corruption-related grievances; (6) Public asset declarations become mandatory for the head of government, along with all political appointees, judges, and civil service employees above a certain rank. The auditor-general is charged with the responsibility of reviewing these and should report to the nation on the contents; (7) Life-tenured senior judges of high repute are appointed and their salaries are placed in an escrow account (with provision for regular raises) to ensure their independence; (8) Press and media freedoms are well respected. There is a permissive freedom of information law; (9) The anti-corruption commission introduces corruption prevention programs, such as integrity training for corporations. There is a high level of public education about the harms corruption can bring, along with citizens’ rights in the face of corruption. Educational programs are designed to create new national expectations and norms about appropriate behavior; (10) A publicity campaign to ensure citizens are aware of their entitlements and how they can expect to be treated is reinforced through supporting mechanisms such as ensuring a list of rights is visible in offices where citizens interact with bureaucracies. Shifting as many processes online as possible further reduces bureaucratic discretion and thus opportunities for corruption; (11) Multiple channels for receiving complaints concerning corruption by public officials are introduced such as through telephone hotlines, text messaging, and video recordings. Whistle-blowers are supported (including financially); (12) The anti-corruption commission adopts methods to ensure those involved in large-scale spending of public resources are spending state funds appropriately; (13) Regulations and tariffs that require human discretion are simplified to reduce further scope for corruption; and (14) National laws are checked against international conventions and agreements to ensure they are brought into line with international expectations concerning corruption. This includes ensuring the national laws conform with the UN Convention against Corruption, the OECD Convention against Bribery, and other

prominent programs such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. For more on these steps, see pp. 310–12.

- <sup>3</sup> Though one might well wonder what prospects there are for achieving this, given our current political moment.
- <sup>4</sup> It is also striking that Rotberg uses various turns of phrase that suggest more decisive victories are available than I fear the subject matter permits. Consider, for instance, “This cancer can be cured” (p. 10) and, “This book embraces the notion that corruption, as unlikely as it may seem, can be conquered, frontier by frontier and territory by territory” (p. 11). The language of curing cancer and conquering an enemy suggests the core phenomenon at issue can be decisively dealt with once and for all. This perspective is misleading. Corruption is something of a “wicked problem” in that it can be managed and controlled, but not as decisively eliminated as some of this prose suggests. Rotberg surely knows this, and he becomes much more measured in the latter parts of the book. Thus, the claims he makes early on are much stronger, such as when he suggests that following his fourteen-step plan will eliminate corruption.
- <sup>5</sup> Corruption also compromises security, stability, and even world peace. For instance, corrupt officials allow arms and materials used to produce nuclear weapons to cross borders; and questionable banking arrangements facilitate funds crossing borders, hence ensuring that organized criminals and terrorists can continue their disruptive practices.
- <sup>6</sup> John Kerry, “Remarks on Community Building and Countering Violent Extremism,” Sokoto, Nigeria, August 23, 2016.
- <sup>7</sup> Of course, Europe has had its own share of prominent corruption events, such as the massive collusion in fixing interest rates in the LIBOR scandal.
- <sup>8</sup> Agents from the Global North can indeed have much greater responsibilities, and I have elsewhere discussed some particular cases concerning global financial, taxation, and accounting matters. I have shown how different responsibilities track various factors, such as historical and current contributions to corruption, patterns of benefits from that corruption, and the capacity to make changes. There is more work to be done on tracing these responsibilities in various domains. For a start, see Gillian Brock, “Institutional Integrity, Corruption, and Taxation,” *Harvard University Working Paper Series*, Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics, Working Paper No. 39, March 13, 2014, [papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2408183](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2408183); and Gillian Brock and Hamish Russell, “Abusive Tax Avoidance and Institutional Corruption: The Responsibilities of Tax Professionals,” *Harvard University Working Paper Series*, Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics, Working Paper No. 56, February 26, 2015, [ssrn.com/abstract=2566281](http://ssrn.com/abstract=2566281).
- <sup>9</sup> Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York: The New Press, 2016).

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Abstract: Four recent books, taken together, offer a wealth of important insights on how we might effectively tackle corruption. All of the books’ authors agree that there is something akin to a universal understanding of what corruption is, and all dispute the idea that corruption may simply be in the eye of the beholder. However, there are also sharp disagreements—for example over whether corruption is best eliminated from the top down, or whether bottom-up approaches are more effective. If the books share one weakness, it is that they do not sufficiently emphasize the importance of getting people to believe and feel that they have fair opportunities for good lives, even after institutional and legal reforms are made. Tackling corruption involves taking seriously the substantive link between actual fair treatment and the belief that fair treatment prevails. This will require further research examining how to shift and update people’s deeply held sentiments.

Keywords: corruption, bribery, nepotism, regulation, good governance, fairness, impartiality, ethical universalism