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What can we learn about corruption from historical case studies?

Mark Knights

Abstract

The chapter shows how a historical approach can offer a productive and useful data set and tools to understand corruption and anti-corruption. Since corruption has existed across time and space, and is multi-faceted, involving politics, economics, law, administration, social and cultural attitudes, it can best be studied in a multi-disciplinary way that includes the study of the past as well as the present. A historical approach offers ways of thinking about change and continuity, and hence also about how and why reform processes occur and are successful. Historical case studies can test and challenge social science models but also offer different, more qualitative, evidence that can help us to reconstruct the mentalities of those who refused to accept that their behaviour constituted 'corruption', as well as the motives of those bringing the prosecution or making allegations. Historical sources, often offering multiple perspectives of different participants, can also enable us to form a more holistic view of corruption scandals and of the important role of public discussion in shaping quality of government.

Keywords: History; corruption; change; continuity; reform; public; private; law; path dependency; mentalities; context

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This chapter will argue that history can offer something important to the study of corruption and quality of government – and of course can in turn learn from other disciplines. This may seem a surprising claim when quantitative studies, based on large data sets from opinion surveys, such as the various indices that are routinely subjected to mathematically-informed interrogation, are simply not available for the past. But what may seem like an obstacle to cross-disciplinary conversation may actually be an advantage, since the historian is freed from sometimes dubious data-sets, correlations and abstractions; is able to test some of the models and conclusions put forward in other disciplines; and can offer vital contextual analysis. Indeed, history offers a mass, and many different types, of data – press reports, legal cases, legislative debates, diaries and correspondence, and governmental inquiries, to name but a few - that are seldom explored by social scientists because they does not easily lend themselves to treatment by some of their methodologies and perhaps because the past is conceived of as ‘not relevant’ to the present. But historians have studied quality of government and corruption, albeit in a somewhat patchy way, and there are always echoes and resonances of their themes across time as well as space (Aylmer 1980; Burns and Innes 2007; Dirks 2006; Geltner, Kroeze and Vitoria 2017; Graham,2015; Harling 1996; Harling and Mandler 1993; Hellmuth 1999; Hurstfield 1973; Kramnick 1994; Kreike and Jordan 2004; Marshall 1976; Peck 1990). So this chapter is a plea for a multi-disciplinary approach that includes history far more than at present, though it is not an argument for the superiority

of that discipline over others. If we accept that concerns about good government, and corruption in particular, are not just a 'modern' phenomenon, history offers a huge array of data to help us explore which reform processes worked, which didn't and why. History offers the scholar and the policy maker another important and useful tool.

The discussion that follows seeks to set out how a historical approach based on the collection and analysis of empirical, archival data can be useful. The focus will be on corruption as a quality of government issue, though quality of government more generally generated a vast and useful pre-modern literature, as numerous treatises and pamphlets were written as advice and counsel to rulers, primarily to monarchs but also assemblies, republican regimes and the wider public. Political theory considers works by Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu and others but these writers were part of a much larger public discussion about good kingship and good government that penetrated far down the social scale, not least because the Reformation in church government, rebellions and revolutions in Britain and across Europe, and participation in both local government and imperial ventures required many to take a position about whether government was working well, needed reform or had to be overturned. Analysis of this extensive public debate would merit a book in its own right, so the sub-theme here of corruption will be used to illustrate some broader themes.

The chapter's brief is to explain the methodology of the historian – *how* we can learn about corruption through historical case studies and *why* we should embrace them - rather than the conclusions of *what* particular lessons history might suggest, though some of the latter will nevertheless surface and more are available in a freely downloadable report written for Transparency International (Knights 2016). Both the latter and subsequent observations in this chapter are informed by my work on corruption and office-holding in Britain between 1600 and 1850 (Knights forthcoming). During that time there were some very significant changes in the way that corruption was conceptualised, how it proliferated and how it was

reformed (for the wider evolution of the concept see Rothstein and Varraich 2017, chapter 3). Corruption shifted from what was primarily a religious concept to one concerned with politics, economic and the state; opportunities for corruption expanded as the state and empire expanded; and reforms abolished the sale of office, curbed gift-giving and embezzlement, defined what constituted public money and introduced an actionable concept of ‘abuse of trust’. In other words the ‘early modern’ period, as it is known, was a key one in the evolution of about the evolution of corruption and anti-corruption and therefore worthy of study for what it can tell us about the development of good government.

1. The Importance of Case Studies and Context

History is a broad discipline with a range of different methodologies, ideologies or concepts (for overviews of history and its methods see Tosh 2008, 2015, 2018; Jordanova 2006, 2012). Nevertheless, most historians use archival material that is often generated by institutions or individuals, enabling historians to marshal evidence and create or test theories through compilations of case studies. Some in the social sciences may find this approach problematic as overly concerned with a particular moment in the past at the expense of broader conclusions. Case studies can indeed be unhelpful when the love of telling a particular story or the detail of reconstructing the past obscures the wider point that such evidence can illuminate or when the compilation of evidence becomes an end in itself, with little analytical framework to guide the reader or draw out more general conclusions; but the latter is simply poor history rather than a reason to avoid history altogether. A good case study will, in fact, highlight the importance of context for understanding the challenges facing government, something that anti-corruption studies are gradually accepting as more and more important (Heywood and Johnson 2017; Heywood 2018; Johnston 2006, 2012; Nicoletti 2017). Indeed, there has been something of a ‘historical turn’ to the study of corruption, a recognition that the past has important things to tell us about what has or has not worked, why they did or did

not succeed, and what conditions needed to prevail for reform to be successful. Different legal, economic, religious and moral as well as political and social cultures all shape government and attitudes to corruption. It matters, for example, if a country has a tradition of fiduciary law: the legal concept and practice of a 'trust' by which a principal entrusts property or powers to an agent to act as a 'trustee'. A trust thus carries legal duties and responsibilities for which the agent can be held accountable but also much more discretion than a contract. Without that notion or framework, the idea of 'entrusted power' is unlikely to take firm root. Britain and Spain, which developed legal histories along different lines, thus had different anti-corruption trajectories.

An effective case study – or even a microhistory - can also explore the role and beliefs of individuals within the macro data often studied by social scientists, adding an important layer of analysis that examines the behaviour of agents within the game being played (Ginzburg 1993; <http://www.microhistory.org/>). By drilling down into detail, a case study's particular spatial or temporal focus can help us better understand the factors driving or preventing reform; and global and transnational case-studies (for example, the study of transnational corporations, such as the European East India Companies) can explore processes of interaction and points of comparison. Cumulatively, case studies provide data from which generalisations are possible even if they are contextually coloured.

If social scientists appreciate the value of the notion of path dependency, they will necessarily have to engage with the history that helped to shape it (Hellmann, 2017). And that requires a recognition of the role of contingency and local circumstance. Britain's history of pre-modern anti-corruption was thus fundamentally shaped by its religious reformation; parliamentary tradition; acquisition of empire; legal and print culture; and its process of socio-economic transformation. But none of these factors was a fixed determinant. Each of them were vigorously contested and hence fluid: history suggests that there were often multiple paths

that might have been taken and that the path pursued reflected a complex of contingent and contested factors. Venality of office, for example, was removed in Britain by a protracted legal and legislative process; but in France it took a relatively swift revolution. Path dependency does not mean historical inevitability, since both the direction and nature of the pathways were often bitterly fought over – the direction of the reformation, the triumph of parliamentary sovereignty, the freedom of the press, an increasingly independent judiciary and economic liberalism were all deeply controversial and disputed. So the particular context matters. And this applies to peoples as well as institutions and structures. People are themselves conditioned by their historical context. And the choices made at one time shaped the mentalities of the next generation(s) because individuals are partly conditioned by their historical environment: ‘different historical circumstances make different kinds of actors.’ (Little 2013, 324). That means that there is no one single, universal, timeless right path but rather a variety of different strategies that have worked (or not) in different contexts. If the problems of government were the same over time and space universal laws and practices would surely have been developed by now to prevent it.

A historical understanding of change thus challenges ‘one-size-fits-all’ solutions. A good deal of research and international policy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries assumed that corruption is universal and that universal remedies are therefore appropriate. A historical view, which involves reconstructing different ways of thinking about and tackling corruption in the past, challenges this and suggests that corruption and anti-corruption evolved according to local contexts, and that these contingent factors should be taken into account by modern policy makers if they want to be successful. The reconstruction of the past requires imagination - and imagining ourselves back into past lives and contexts helps us appreciate that although basic emotional responses of fear, love, hatred and greed have always existed, their expression and form have always been constructs, the result of pressures

from society, culture, religion, law, the economy and the state (for the history of emotions see Plamper 2017; Reddy 2001; Rosenwein 2006). The universal, rationally calculating, self-interested actor beloved by some economists would be hard to find in history: such a view of human nature is itself a construct. Understanding the different mindsets of the past should thus be of interest to policy makers because they challenge current assumptions.

2. Change and Continuity

One obvious area that history can help with is change and continuity over time. A ‘long view’ can correct any assumption that corruption and anti-corruption are, as has sometimes been claimed, very recent phenomena and intrinsically connected either with ‘modernity’ (Engels, 2017; NGO policies developed from the late 1990s onwards). Corruption and anti-corruption have existed throughout history, even if the types and even concept of corruption have themselves changed over time (Geltner, Kroeze and Vitoria 2017; Buchan and Hill 2014).

One way of charting this is through historical discourse analysis (Brett 2002; de Bolla 2013; Pococok 1987; Skinner 2002). Increasing quantities of historical, printed material have been digitised and are now searchable in interesting (though not always unproblematic) ways.

History can thus help chart the evolution of the concepts in which we are all interested and suggest that although the discourse of ‘corruption’ does similar work across time – giving a moral and often political charge to accusations that something has decayed from its original or ideal purity - its specificity is given to it by its context. What was once described or conceptualised as corrupt in the past (charging interest on money, for example, which was known as usury) are now no longer seen as such or hold much less sway, in many countries at least (Fontaine 2014; Hawkes 2010; Nelson 1969).

Another important aspect of the historical study of change and continuity has to do with causality and processes of reform and innovation – essential features of any anti-corruption

strategy or policy for the improvement of government. Given that there is now a general awareness that corruption policies may not have been as swiftly effective as their designers hoped, understanding the speed and nature of change is clearly central to current policy formation. By looking at the past we can suggest how, and in what conditions, reform processes came about and flourished; and, more generally, how transformations of government have worked. Historians, together with social scientists and political thinkers such as Weber and Marx, have developed a large range of theories to help explain different types of change and reform processes (for overviews see Kramer and Maza 2002; Little 2000, 2007). Indeed, the word ‘reform’ is one with a deep history, a contraction of the word ‘reformation’, the term applied to the major changes brought about by the birth and development of the protestant church when it broke away in the sixteenth century (Innes 2007). It is therefore instructive to reflect briefly on how historians have explained and characterised the fundamental shift of views, practices and institutions during the Reformation – not least since ‘corruption’ was a term most frequently applied in the British context to religious belief to denote original sin or sins of the body and mind and because corruption has always had a moral connotation. Historians have had, of course, more than one interpretation of the Reformation: it used to be seen as a rapid process, dictated from above, but the growing consensus is now that although there were some early adopters it was generally a slow process, burning from below and taking several centuries to complete – not least because belief was embedded in social and cultural practices that shaped mindsets and often proved stubbornly resistant to reform (Clark 2000; Haigh, 1990; Ryrie 2013; Tyacke 1998, 2007). So a study of the Reformation will caution against thinking that a major set of reforms can ever be won simply by dictat or legislative frameworks, necessary though those may be: changing cultural values takes time. There was a ‘big bang’ of legislative change in the 1530s both in terms of religion and administration, but this took far longer to be

implemented at the local, parish level and historians increasingly talk of a ‘long reformation’ that, for some, lasted from the early sixteenth until the eighteenth century.

Thinking about how big shifts in institutional and individual culture come about is thus an essential part of the historian’s remit but is also the task of those seeking to escape the collective action problem of a prevalent culture of corruption. So another interesting model to ‘think with’ is historical sociologist/philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn’s ideas about the paradigmatic shift that we call the ‘Scientific Revolution’ (Kuhn 2012). He argued that a fundamental change in basic concepts and practices of scientific discipline could constitute a paradigmatic shift. This occurred when practitioners encountered anomalies that could no longer be explained by the universally accepted paradigm, which was not just a way of understanding science but a complete worldview in which that understanding operated: ‘science’ was not a single strand of activity but one embedded in much larger worldviews. When enough anomalies have been accumulated, the study of science was thrown into a crisis in which new ideas were tried out – though this process involved a series of protracted attacks before a new paradigm prevailed. The term ‘revolution’ may imply quick and sudden change but in reality the process was more protracted, involved social and intellectual change, and was messy. Kuhn’s ideas are now contested – the history of science has generally seen apparently conflicting ideas as far more able to co-exist than Kuhn allowed (Toulmin 1972; Iliffe 2017) – but the question of what leads to paradigmatic change is still a relevant one. In the context of quality of government, we might talk of a paradigmatic shift – in the notion of office-holding, for example, during the period 1600-1850 in Britain. This involved a series of scandals and contests that cumulatively chipped away at the old paradigm of office as either a piece of personal property or as something responsible only to the monarch, making that paradigm ultimately untenable (Johnston 1991; Knights forthcoming). During this process there were rival and contested versions of what should be the right

paradigm. Rather than a single factor or set of policies explaining all change, a complex of factors were at play. And even once a paradigmatic shift has been achieved, remnants of the old paradigm still prevailed: in Britain, administrative reform did not remove some of the social attributes of corruption – the pursuit of office for the benefit of a class as much as individuals - such as securing jobs for friends and cronies or for members of a similar class and background. Even Charles Trevelyan, the man most associated with civil service reform in mid-nineteenth century Britain and who hated patronage as a fundamentally corrupting phenomenon, argued that his plans for a more professional and efficient civil service were designed to bolster the strength of the educated social elite. In a private memorandum he asked ‘Who are so successful in carrying off the prizes at competing scholar ships, fellowships, &c. as the most expensively educated young men ? Almost invariably, the sons of gentlemen, or those who by force of cultivation, good-training and good society have acquired the feelings and habits of gentlemen. The tendency of the measure will, I am confident, be decidedly aristocratic’ (Hughes 1949, 72). History can thus highlight how and why some things remain stubbornly resistant to change (even whilst other elements are reformed), and governmental powers embedded in social hierarchies would be one of them. Another might be imperial exploitation and some (though not all) historians argue that anti-corruption may actually have served to legitimise colonial rule (Dirks 2006; Epstein 2012).

My own view is that change has often been cyclical or wave-like – a *process* - rather than a single event or a linear progression from one state to another. Whilst some social science has suggested that societies become ‘modern’ after tipping irrevocably over a threshold to become societies where the quality of government enables economic prosperity (North, Wallis and Weingast 2009), historians might want to stress a series of recurring crises and reform processes, perhaps even occurring in different fields (administrative, economic, political, social, legal) at different times, that cumulatively brought about change (and which

therefore also left some aspects unchanged). Such waves of reform were also necessary because new forms of corruption emerged as the state, society and economy developed in new ways. And anti-corruption often coincided with repeated campaigns for moral reform – waves of anxiety that the moral fabric of society needed repair through a return to moral codes (Dabhoiwala 2012; Ingram 1996; Lemmings and Walker 2009; Roberts 2004). Such moral reform campaigns punctuated the pre-modern period, and arguably continue to shape the modern, and they provided a macro framework within which the moralising spirit of anti-corruption could prevail. Moral reform, we might say, was a macro factor – a context adding weight to micro factors such as personal agency and meso factors such as governmental or institutional initiatives. The combination of macro, meso and micro factors helps to explain change – and hence also to underline that each context is *sui generis* even if there may be general principles at work (Knights 2017a). It is not that we should think of personal integrity, institutional reform and societal reform as *alternative* or *rival* strategies – a mixture of all three were necessary. History thus urges analysts of the quality of government to avoid single-factor explanations and to think, as Michael Johnston does, of how different complexes of factors require different solutions (Johnston 2006).

Another macro factor, much studied by historians, is the role that war has played in state formation and hence also in the development of corruption and anti-corruption. War has often opened up huge challenges for good government as states struggled to meet the logistical demands of conflict and to regulate the provisioning and supply of troops (Baker 1971; Brewer 1990; Brewer and Hellmuth 1999; Graham 2015; Graham and Walsh 2016). Defeat – or even mismanaged victory - in war has historically led to major reform processes, forcing states to confront the reasons for their inadequacies and their spiralling costs (Christie 1962). A historical approach will thus pay attention to exogenous factors as well as internal or institutional ones. Such factors are, of course, difficult for policy makers – recommending

losing a war is clearly not such a great anti-corruption solution – but they might help us define what elements of post-war reform can be replicated in more peaceful contexts.

History never repeats itself in the same ways; but challenges can recur in ways that are constructive to think about. The developing world, in Africa and Eastern Europe is of course a collection of many different local and national stories and we should be very cautious about uncritically applying the lessons of the European experience to other contexts; but in some ways many of the processes at work in developing countries bear marked similarities with the pre-modern European world in terms of the importance accorded to social institutions such as friendship, patronage, kinship and gift-giving which shaped how office-holding was/is regarded. The analysis of a historian will thus chime closely with the anthropological approaches to corruption developed by Oliver de Sardan and others (Blundo, Sardan and Arifari 2006; de Sardan 1999). The European history of the ways in which corruption was socially embedded and constructed may help us better understand the complexities of such processes in our own day – and make us pause for thought before simplistic condemnation of practices that have been ubiquitous in the past in Western societies. Indeed, pre-modern Britain was a developing country, offering a well-documented case study of a prolonged struggle against corruption. The history of the pre-modern is also instructive for insights into the notion of office and the interplay between the ‘state’ and private or semi-private enterprises. Many modern definitions of corruption tend to focus on ‘public office’ but in the pre-modern world office was something far larger (Braddick 2000; Condren 2006; Goldie 2001; Withington 2005). It extended to the unpaid officers in the parishes and towns, the trustees of road and rail improvement schemes, the unpaid magistrates whose responsibility it was to enforce the law at the local level. Indeed, the pre-modern state was very rudimentary: it had few paid officials, no police force until the mid-nineteenth century, and was hugely reliant on the integrity of local power brokers. And these local officers owed their authority in

part to royal or government appointment, but also, and as much, to their social and cultural standing in their communities. This meant that for much of the pre-modern period, Britain had a weak, dispersed 'central' state and was reliant on officials whose authority stemmed as much from their social and cultural capital as it did that of the office itself. This will be a familiar scenario to those investigating development and corruption.

There are other ways in which a dialogue between past and present can be helpful. The 'dispersed' and voluntary pre-modern state was also reliant on private entrepreneurs to fill what we might now see as state functions, another issue that faces many current policy concerns about procurement. The early state had to make use of a tribe of contractors, especially in order to meet the demands of war, which were frequent and unprecedentedly expansive, particularly after the late seventeenth century, when war between continental rivals tended to spill out across an imperial and hence increasingly global theatre. Contractors supplied the troops with food, drink, clothing and transport – in an era when army commissions were for sale and when commanders sought profit from the contracts they could award. The army and navy contracts were private, profit-seeking individuals fulfilling a public role in which the national interest was paramount. The resulting tensions played out in scandal after scandal of contractors abusing their positions to make excessive profits. The pre-modern state was thus composed of hybrid private-public partnerships that should be of interest to anyone concerned about how these operate today.

Two other examples of public-private hybrid institutions may be instructive. The Bank of England was for most of its life a semi-private, semi-public institution: it raised money from private investors but made loans to the state and became the custodian of public money. It was able to float the national debt because private investors received a profit from the interest on the money they loaned and the interest payments were secured on the receipts of public taxation. There were plenty of critics of the Bank which saw it as a corrupting force,

advancing the ‘monied men’ at the expense of the ‘true interest’ of the nation, the landed classes. Another excellent example of a hybrid public-private body is the international trading companies on which the British empire was in part founded: the East India Company, the Royal Africa Company, the Massachusetts Bay Company and so on. These were given state monopolies over certain types or regions of trade and in return they often gave or loaned money to the state; but they were also private companies (Bowen 2006; Brenner 1993; Lawson 1993; Pettigrew 2013; Stern 2011). Those in authority in these companies were officers who had a duty to the public as well as to the company. The East India Company called their members ‘servants’, and those in the non-military arm of the company ‘civil servants’, from which the term moved in the nineteenth century to become a descriptor for public state servants.

Studying these hybrid public-private institutions should offer insights into the inherent conflicts of interest that lay in their structure and how these were tackled in the past. The history of the East India Company is of a ‘company state’ with extensive political and civil powers as well as economic ones and its officials had to be reined in over the course of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries because of their widespread corruption and rapacity. Such a history is a reminder that corruption is not just about ‘state’ officials unless we interpret that category in very broad terms; that the state has struggled in the past to regulate private-public relationships; but that some successes were possible. In 1782, for example, MPs in the House of Commons were barred from acting as contractors or having a personal interest in such concerns. As a Commons report – on such a lowly issue as hiring waggons and horses – put it, the private contractor was in effect a public officer: ‘The Officer is a Trustee for the Public; as such, he is bound to husband the Public Money committed to his Charge with as much frugality as if it were his own; what he saves, or what he gains, he save and gains not for himself, but for the Public. He ought not to be permitted, by any

management or contrivance, to carve out for himself an interest in the execution of a public trust' (Commissioners of Public Accounts 1782). Remarkably the pre-modern period was actually stricter than the modern era about forcing MPs to withdraw from voting on issues in which they had a personal financial interest. Across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this was established convention, consolidated in a 1797 ruling by the Speaker (Platt 1961). The reasons why this is no longer in force are something of a mystery, but the revival of this older procedure in the modern Parliament could only be beneficial (Knights 2019a).

3. The Benefits offered by Varieties of Historical Data

What, then, is the type of data that historical analysis yields and how might it be useful? This section will explore two key types of sources that both generate questions about corruption and help us to answer them. The first relates to legal and institutional history; the second to personal and cultural history. Historical sources can offer data that other material about corruption might offer far less readily or not at all. Diaries and correspondence, in particular, but also trial transcripts and memoirs offer insights into the mindsets of perpetrators of corruption and of those observing corruption in others. If corruption is often secretive, 'ego' and legal documents can help to recover something of the private world that can help explain why people acted in the way they did. And this is illuminating, since very few individuals accused of corruption saw themselves as corrupt and offered plenty of justifications and vindications of their behaviour (Knights 2018a). Such comments can be supplemented by the many instances of public professions of innocence – some of them successful defences against prosecution. These underline that corruption is always a contested concept, that can be viewed in very different ways and that can be legitimised, at least in the eyes of the

accused. But it is not just ego documents that can be revealing. Corporations such as the East India Company amassed huge archives (Ogborn 2007) that enable us to examine how corruption worked in a semi-public, semi-private institution, and what measures it took to curb it. Literary and cultural works, including graphic satire, and material culture (house-building, art collection, precious objects) can also tell us much about the emotive display and ridicule of corruption and how these too change over time.

One of the most useful and numerous types of evidence is the legal or quasi-legal: the documents generated by official or semi-official investigations or accounting bodies (undertaken by government departments, by Parliament, and by semi-private corporations such as the East India Company) together with the trials or hearings, and their verdicts or judgements. Such material almost immediately raises a number of questions: about the legal framework, both in terms of legal concepts and of institutions to enforce them; about who brought the prosecutions and why; and about the effectiveness of legal remedies. The cases themselves are also highly revealing, setting out contested notions of what constituted corruption and how behaviour that was condemned by the prosecution could be re-described as benign; about how cases and processes could be frustrated and undermined; and about institutional and personal failings. Each of these dimensions is worth expanding on further and illustrating.

Anti-corruption is in part a history of the law and legal culture and here too a historical approach yields results, since legal history shows that legal cultures took time to evolve. Legislation surrounding corruption in pre-modern Britain was extremely patchy. Bribery was a concept limited in the courts to subornation of judges and magistrates, or to electoral malpractice, and it was not until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century that prosecutions for bribery became possible under common law. Until then, extortion and exaction were far more frequent crimes, placing the blame squarely on the officer rather than

those making the payment. Bribery thus has a history; it was not a universal constant (Noonan 1984). It was, for example, closely linked to electoral as well as judicial malpractice. From the late seventeenth century onwards, legislation sought to limit the amount of money spent to influence voters and from 1729 voters were required to swear that they had not accepted a bribe or other inducement. Outside of the fields of justice and elections, the statute book was virtually empty in relation to bribery. There were some medieval laws against bribes given to procure office, reinforced a little in 1555, but only applicable to the realms of justice and the king's revenue; but there was otherwise something of a legal vacuum until 1809 when 'sale' of office was banned.

The paucity of anti-corruption legislation had two consequences. First, public law had to borrow from private law. A trust was initially a legal instrument to protect private property by vesting land in the hands of another; but the trustee was supposed to act for the beneficiary of the trust and not himself, an altruism that made the concept attractive when applied to public office. That move was made in the mid-seventeenth century, as a result of the disputes that led to civil war: when the King claimed that he was only entrusted by God, Parliament responded that he was intrusted by the people (Knights 2018b; Maitland 2003; Maloy 2008, 2009; Mendle 1995). Very rapidly the application of the notion of trust to public offices of all sorts became quite widespread, at home and in the empire; and in turn this led to the development of a body of law around the 'abuse' or 'breach' of trust. Indeed, it was this fiduciary concept that underpinned a landmark case in 1783 (still invoked today) that set out both who counted as a public official and the common law on misconduct in office (Law Commission 2016). It is interesting that a developing area of public law seeks to apply these older fiduciary concepts to the present day (Criddle et al 2018; Finn, 1995; Fox-Decent 2011).

Second, serious cases of corruption tended to be pursued under the rather flexible charge of ‘high crimes and misdemeanours’ prosecutable via an impeachment in Parliament, that is to say, a trial that took place when the House of Commons brought a prosecution and the House of Lords judged on its merits (Knights 2019b). An alternative route was to bring a statute, called a bill of pains and penalties, against someone that the House of Commons had judged guilty of a crime and who had fled prosecution. Neither route was very satisfactory: impeachment, re-introduced in 1621 after one hundred and fifty year gap in order to try a corruption case, was last used in 1806 after two failed impeachments of high profile figures undermined confidence in the process (Fry 1992; Marshall, 1965; Tite 1974). And in 1782 Sir Thomas Rumbold, who had amassed an enormous fortune in India under highly dubious circumstances, escaped a ‘bill of pains’ because it seemed unjust to prosecute him in Parliament rather than the courts, where a higher standard of proof was required. Such cases remind us that the laws surrounding corruption have to be invented and that it takes a long while for legal cultures to adapt to changing circumstances. It also reminds us that the law is often a blunt instrument for tackling corruption and that prosecutions of individuals can often back-fire. Tackling corrupt individuals alone – as opposed to the system in which they flourish - is both difficult and insufficient to effect reform. And processes such as impeachments very often become politicised to such an extent that the legal process is undermined. In Britain trials were no substitute for systematic regulation at the administrative and corporate level or for a set of internalised and explicit ethical guides for behaviour.

Not that those were easy either. Numerous investigations and reports were conducted by government departments and within corporations such as the trading companies to try to tackle corruption and these provide wonderfully detailed information about malpractice and reform processes. Sometimes investigations into abuses or suggestions for how to change the system were initiated by internal whistle-blowers – who generally came out badly from these

encounters and there was very little attempt at a higher level to create a framework in which this type of internal exposure of misgovernment could become routine, a problem that faces many institutions and governments today (Knights 2007; Neufeld 2014). History also underlines the gradual nature of the evolution of proper accounting procedures, which can be explored through analysis of attempts to establish national auditing bodies. As a result of the unprecedented amount of money raised by Parliament to fight the Crown in the civil wars of the 1640s, a number of committees were established to oversee and audit payments and pressure mounted for an overarching public accounts commission (Peacey 2013). Although the latter was abolished in the 1650s there were new attempts, again in the light of expenditure on war against the Dutch in the 1660s, to institute a parliamentary oversight of accounts. Britain's entry into large-scale continental (and at times global) war after 1689 also re-activated concerns for better national auditing and parliament created a commission of public accounts (Brooks 1984; Downie 1976; Seaward 2002). Yet this too, rapidly became a partisan tool and was allowed to lapse in 1716. It was only under the pressure of the (failing) war with the North American colonists that a new commission of accounts was created in 1780. Nor would such a history merely tell us about accounting, since the numerous and highly detailed reports that the new body generated were instrumental in changing administrative and remunerative practices across a wide number of government departments, even if the recommendations took a long time to implement fully (Harling 1996). Thus higher pay was introduced for public officers to remove the incentive for corrupt practices; best practice was shared across departments; and better auditing techniques were inculcated. The reports – and the minutes of earlier committees and commissions - are a superb resource for anyone interested in the nature of corruption in Britain and the innovations undertaken to curb it.

Turning to the legal cases and investigations themselves, many of which are readily available in published form or on modern databases of archival material, the courtroom or the floor of the Houses of Parliament or the minutes and papers of trading companies offer abundant evidence about attitudes to corruption and to reform. Indeed, some of the cases generated so much material that the problem is too much data rather than too little. The Governor General of India, Warren Hastings, for example, was impeached in a process that lasted from 1786 to 1795 with speeches made by Edmund Burke and Sheridan that went on for days at a time (Marshall 1965). Or, to give another example, when Charles Trevelyan, the future author of the Northcote-Trevelyan report which is generally seen as the blue-print for the modern civil service, prosecuted his boss, Sir Edward Colebrooke, Resident of Delhi, in 1828, the papers generated by the case fill five large volumes in the East India Office archive in the British Library (Prior, Brennan and Haines 2001). Indeed, as both the Hastings and Colebrooke cases illustrate, the data available relates not only to domestic corruption but increasingly to imperial corruption across a wider and wider sphere of influence and control. The Delhi materials allow us to reconstruct two very different views on what constituted corruption and hence also what constituted good government. From Trevelyan's standpoint his superior, Colebrooke – egged on by his wife - had accepted presents from Indian princes that compromised the East India Company's integrity. Trevelyan thus condemned a 'system of corruption' operating in Delhi that was, in his eyes and those of the Governor General, extensive and damaging (British Library, IOR/F/4/1371/54509, p.216, Trevelyan to the Governor General, 1830; *Papers* 1833, 15). Yet Colebrooke had a very different take on his behaviour. He came from a family with extensive Indian connections and he regarded the acceptance of gifts from Indian princes as an essential and customary lubricant for cordial relations between the Company and the Indians. Indeed, Colebrooke thought Trevelyan's attitudes were part of a growing distaste among the British for intimate relations with the

native population, who were increasingly being thought of as a corrupt race. And this, Colebrooke believed, would lead to an inevitable breach between the Company and the Indians. The prosecution, and the documents it generated, thus allow us to reconstruct two contrasting views of how to govern and hence also what were the legitimate boundaries for officials. For Trevelyan, quality of government meant never taking gifts; for Colebrooke, they were an essential part of good government. 'Corruption', then, involved clashing visions of how to conduct affairs – it was not a neutral term but part and parcel of the contest.

Such detailed sources allow us to reconstruct cases very fully – indeed more completely perhaps than some modern investigations and trials which are often held in secret, outside of the public domain, or only partially reported. And because many of the key actors left caches of private papers – correspondence, memoirs and vindications - it is possible to see a case in its round and through the eyes of the participants in a way that is seldom possible today. The diary of Samuel Pepys, for example, who faced a number of investigations for corruption, is a highly revealing document – not only does he record the sexual favours he sought in return for the disposal of the patronage he held for the Navy Office, but he also recorded a number of instances when he received 'gifts' that were intended to influence his decisions (Knights 2014). Such a personal and revelatory document gives us insights into how Pepys could both be horrified by the corruption of others – he reacted strongly against one official who told him that that 'his horse was a bribe, and his boots a bribe and told us he was made up of bribes and that he makes every sort of tradesman to bribe him; and invited me home to his house to taste of his bribe-wine' – and yet also justify his own nest-feathering. Pepys, and indeed others accused of corruption, created a personal code of morality that saw some bribes as honourable. Lord Clive, for example, explained to a committee of the House of Commons what presents he thought were honourable (those that were freely given, not extorted, and rewarded good service) and those that were dishonourable (those that were extorted by force

and were simply the result of avarice) (*First Report* 1772, 148). The committee thus forced the articulation of assumptions that might otherwise have remained unsaid.

The historical evidence enables us to reconstruct not only the facts of a case but also to explore the contested and blurred boundary between public and private interests that often lies at the heart of corruption and misgovernment. Alfred Hirschman showed that the language of ‘interest’, on which self-interest depended, was an early modern innovation that took hold over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Hirschman 1977; Force 2003). Historical allegations of corruption produced counter-claims that private interest was not necessarily incompatible with the public interest. To give an example, Samuel Vaughan was alleged in 1769 to have tried bribing the prime minister of the day to buy a legal office on the island of Jamaica, where he had considerable interests. Vaughan was part of a radical group in London that was a thorn in the government’s side; it was very convenient to smear one of their number with corruption, especially when the radicals alleged the government of misgovernment. But Vaughan tried to put a ‘public good’ defence: he claimed he had wanted the post because it had previously been mismanaged and he could bring order and regularity to it by employing a competent deputy. Moreover, his defence team said, if corruption was prevalent it could not be resisted by a single man – swimming against the tide was an unreasonable expectation (Vaughan 1769, 1770). At the heart of the case was therefore a judgement about where the public interest really lay and how far an individual should sacrifice their private interests to pursue it. If we are interested in the process by which the dividing line between public and private interests became more solid and clearer, we will need a historical explanation of a process by which waves of scandals gradually shifted public opinion and state action.

4. How and Why Key Concepts and Discourses Change

This final section will return to how history can help us think about change in order to make two further points: that studying the history of how the concept and language of corruption changed over time can be instructive and that such a history will be one that is not focused solely on the history of institutions and governmental administration but will also include both an ethical debate and a more popular element, charting popular engagement and pressure. Reform cannot be simply a top-down, formalistic process, but must also have an ethical dimension and engage and reflect, as well as lead, popular opinion.

Political scientists have spent a good deal of time trying to define and therefore fix what we mean by corruption (summarised in Philp, 1997). A historical view will show that the meaning and concept of corruption has evolved over time and that it has always been a contested and ambiguous notion. As has already been noted, for much of the pre-modern period, the word corruption was mostly used in a religious context. After the protestant reformation of the sixteenth centuries it meant original or committed sin – man was a corrupt and sinful creature – but was also associated in Britain with a catholic church that was doctrinally corrupt (having moved away from scriptural purity) and institutionally corrupt (selling salvation for money in the form of ‘indulgences’). At the same time, ‘government’ meant regulation of the self as well as of a nation, and government was only partially conceived of along the lines of a principal-agent model: officials were empowered by the Crown, it is true, but they were ideally to be guided by an internalised sense of public duty, an ethos inculcated both by Christian sensibilities but also by classical literature, in which the pre-modern world was steeped. Aristotle and Cicero, in particular, offered influential guides to understanding corruption and quality of government. In the republican tradition of civic humanism, the classics underlined the importance of virtuous governors and of a virtuous population: corruption was the decay of this virtue in both rulers and ruled. These are very different ways of thinking about corruption to today, though echoes of them still survive and

they remind us that our own cultures have thought about corruption in very different ways.

The focus on the abuse of office emerged in fits and starts over the best part of three hundred years.

One of the reasons why it did was public interest in scandals surrounding corruption and poor government. Whilst there has been a good deal of stress on the importance of civil society in anti-corruption, there has been less of a concern with involving a wider public in the process of reform. A historical approach would nevertheless emphasise the importance of this, both because public pressure acted as an important force for change – there is a considerable history on the importance of popular culture, social action and non-elite actors as well as more elite shapers of public opinion - and because public debate helped to define what was acceptable and unacceptable. One way of exploring such forces is to study print culture. Pre-modern Britain had a particularly free press – the government lost control over pre-publication censorship in 1641, on the eve of the civil war, and although it regained some control on and off over the next half-century, after 1695 the government no longer required material to be published under licence. The press not only exposed corruption but was also a participant in the production of corruption scandals, with writers and publishers having their own agendas. These factors made for robust public discussion, with numerous pamphlets, newspapers and printed images – all highly illuminating data sources for anyone interested in the quality of government or in the public management of corruption scandals, and a testament to the depth of public discussion which itself played a significant part in the anti-corruption process by increasing pressure on politicians (Barker 2000; Clark 2004; Gatrell 2006; Knights 2006; O’Connell 1999; Peacey 2013; Raymond 2003; Sommerville 1996). The press articulated anxieties about corruption, either in the abstract or more generally focused on particular scandals. To be sure, such scandal-mongering was not always productive – a concern with the individual tended to obscure what needed to be structurally reformed – but

corruption was a persistent and widespread popular concern, not least because it was used for political and electioneering purposes – much as we see it deployed today. Partisan rivalries were a key driver of the anti-corruption campaigns as much then as now. But this also meant that politicians and polemicists were interested in using corruption to engage and inflame their audiences. This pressure brought about significant change – in the 1640s, for example, and again in the early 1830s, when popular pressure was instrumental in pushing through electoral reform in 1832 (Aidt 2015). Fear of revolution concentrated the minds of the elite very well.

Graphic satires are another useful resource and can illustrate the point about the changing concept of, and attitudes to, corruption as well as the importance of engaging the public and showing how anti-corruption became part of the creative and imaginative life of a country. Although the protestant reformation was somewhat distrustful of images, graphic satire could be justified where it had an anti-catholic purpose (Morton 2014); and one of the most enduring of biblical metaphors was the corrupt tree bringing forth corrupt fruit (Mathew 7:18-19; Luke 6: 43; Job 14:7). Anti-catholicism and the biblical metaphor of corruption were combined in an image of the later sixteenth century, which showed the roots of a corrupted tree being nourished with money by ‘the worlde’ and being watered by ‘ignorance’ (British Museum 1916,0212.2, Object reference number: PPA93310, analysed by Watt, 1991, 150-4). Lying on the right-hand side is Judas, who had betrayed Jesus for money; and on the other a figure from the Acts of the Apostles, Simon Magus, who gave his name to simony, that is, the buying and selling of clerical office. In this image, the reform(ation) of corruption was being lauded.

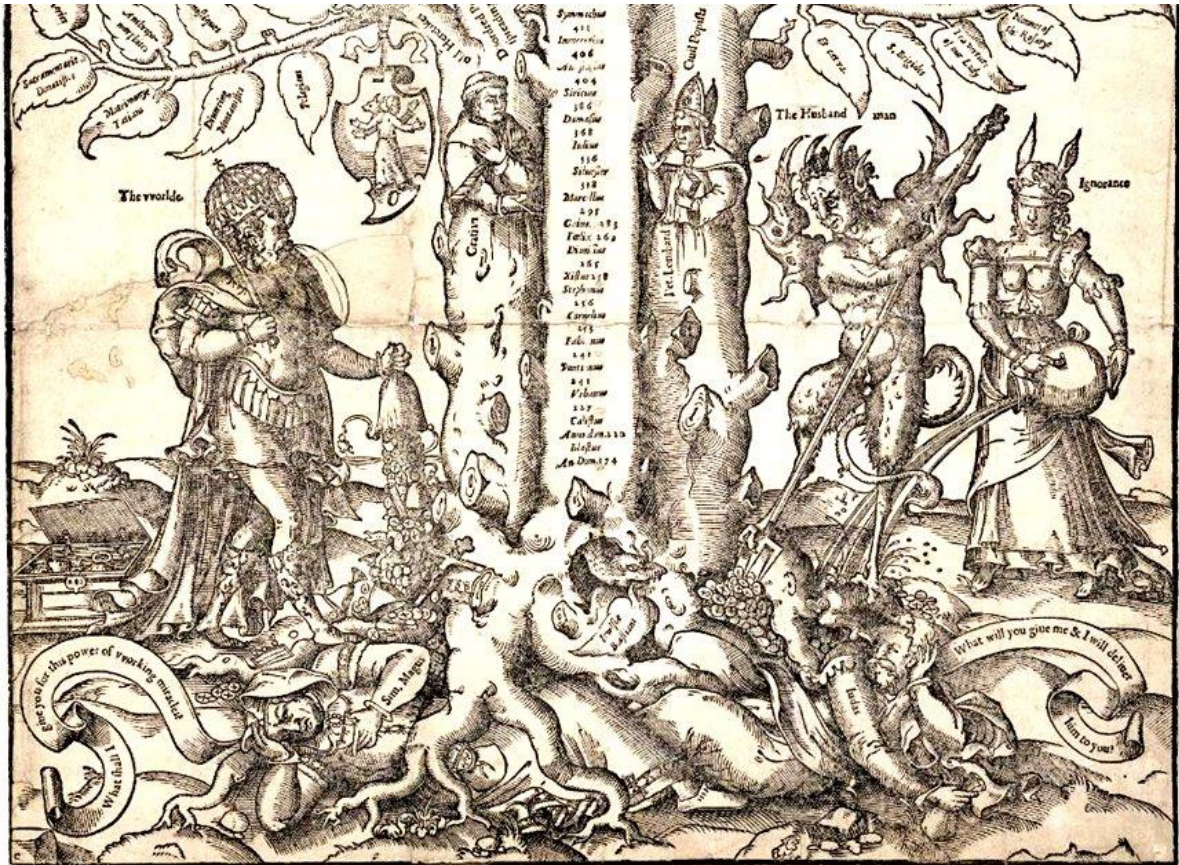


Fig. 1: a detail of an untitled, uncatalogued satire from the later sixteenth century (British Museum 1916,0212.2, Object reference number: PPA93310). © The Trustees of the British Museum

We might contrast this with an image from over two hundred years later:



BM Satires 9214, James Gillray, *The Tree of Liberty* (1798) © The Trustees of the British Museum

In this satire, it is reform that is being attacked: John Bull is being tempted by a populist politician Charles James Fox with an apple labelled 'reform' and the corrupt tree represents an association of negative attributes or reform, since its apples are labelled 'conspiracy',

‘revolution’, ‘Age of Reform’, ‘Slavery’, ‘Blasphemy’ and even ‘Treason’. In the background a flourishing tree has a trunk of ‘Justice’ with roots in the ‘Commons’, ‘King’, ‘Lords’, branches of ‘Laws’ and ‘Religion’ and fruit inscribed ‘Freedom’, ‘Happiness’, ‘Security’. Here then is a very different vision of government, in which reform could be dangerous.

The image is a useful reminder that reform was not universally welcomed or popular, and that it could be a pejorative term, particularly at times of crisis – during the French revolution and consequent revolutionary wars, reform was often seen as dangerous. Such prints may have been primarily intended for a fairly elite audience but we also know that they reflected a much more extensive public debate – one of the factors pushing reform in the early nineteenth century was a flood of cheap print that contained some biting critiques of corruption that deeply worried the governments of the day (Gilmartin 1996; Knights 2017b; Rickwood 1971; Wood 1994, 2009). Moreover, allegorical depictions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ government adorned public spaces, including municipal buildings where governance actually took place. We should not underestimate the power of the visual and the metaphorical to inculcate lessons – and to create visions of both the ideal and the corrupt. Indeed, using prints or historical case studies as a basis for ethical training may have distinct advantages, since they can be tailored to particular local cultures and also defuse the confrontational risks of directly tackling an individual’s moral compass (as an example, a discussion sheet about Pepys is available at <https://www.transparency.org.uk/publications/was-samuel-pepys-corrupt/>). The past can help a dialogue with the present.

5. Conclusion and Future Agenda

History, then, offers a vast dataset of when and why quality of government was compromised or improved; it offers qualitative insights into the mentalities of individuals, groups and societies that quantitative data alone cannot provide; it offers interpretations of and models

for change; and it can show the ways in which corruption was and is part of a larger set of inter-related phenomena. Corruption is a topic in its own right; but it is also a lens through which larger societal problems are visible, that have to do with the process of state formation, the nature of the economy, religious and moral culture, the legal system and the extent of informed public debate. History suggests that corruption cannot be seen in isolation from these other factors and that policy has to take this larger picture into account if it is to be successful.

All this helps to set an agenda for future research on national but also comparative histories. Although there are some interesting studies of corruption in different European and non-European countries in the pre-modern period, so that we know something about Denmark, Sweden, Italy, the Netherlands, France, Germany, colonial Spanish America, colonial British North America and China (Doyle 1996; Frisk Jensen 2014; Geltner, Kroeze and Vitoria 2017; Kerkhoff 2013; Little and Posada-Carbó 1996; Moutoukias 1988; Paquette 2008; Park 1997; Teachout 2014; Uslander and Rothstein 2016; Waquet 1991), there has been relatively little attempt to compare such experiences in order to analyse when and why anti-corruption strategies worked and failed, and how different countries navigated their way through reform (though see Brewer and Hellmuth 1999; Crook and Crook 2011; Elliott 2006, chapter 11; Innes and Philp 2013, 2018; Kroeze and Martinez 2018; Swart 1949; Wagenaar, Kerkhoff and Kroeze 2013). Such a project would in turn throw up important conclusions about the evolution of the quality of government more generally, indicating which political, economic, religious, legal and print cultures created the best environments (there may well have been more than one type) in which good government could emerge and flourish. Moreover, such a comparative European framework would also embrace an imperial dimension, since many continental nations, and the corporations they spawned, developed overseas colonies and empires that posed very considerable challenges in terms of government and corruption. And

that history matters because imperial legacies have been important in shaping contemporary cultures. So understanding our European and imperial histories is not just an academic exercise but should tell us useful things about the processes and frameworks underpinning good government. If history has so far been slightly marginal to cross-disciplinary discussions about corruption and good government, this chapter has sought to make the case that in future it might usefully and routinely have a seat at the table.

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