

Ethical Analysis of Corruption

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Abstract

Corruption has always been one of the main concerns of all walks of life in modern society. Mostly, corruption has been analyzed in the aspect of law, politics, psychology and sociology and so forth. In fact, corruption is also an ethical problem. It should also be discussed and studied from the point of ethics. Observed from the perspective of professional ethics, corruption has violated the moral imperative conferred by the privileged status, and violated the individual morality as well; Observed from the perspective of institutional ethics, institutional deficiency has been a leading cause of corruption. This paper will discuss and analyze the phenomenon of corruption from the perspective of public ethics.

Key words: Corruption; Ethics; Morality

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INTRODUCTION

Corruption has received widespread attention from all walks of life for long. China's anti-corruption campaign has made much progress in both perceptions and actions. In order to root out corruption, many experts and scholars have put forward a variety of solutions which are generally from the perspective of political and psychological layers and so on. It is undeniable that such measures have provided great ideas and thoughts for us

to lay down effective measures, and also offered a large quantity of important theoretical resources for our further study. However, their studies are mostly based on politics, law, economics, sociology, culture, psychology and other fields. Actually, corruption is an ethical issue as well, we should also discuss and analyze it from the perspective of ethics.

In *CiHai*, corruption, which refers to a nasty smell, the state of decay and all the rest of it, is commonly used to describe the stinky and rotten condition of food that is inedible. There is an old saying, "people do not suffer from cold and hunger, food do not spoil and decompose", quoting from an ancient book *Han Shi Wai Zhuan*. In *CiYuan*, corruption was defined as a natural phenomenon of giving off a bad and fetid smell and producing toxic substances because of food spoilage; an old and stereotypical survival philosophy; and what is more, a kind of degenerate corruption behavior. Obviously, in Chinese, the term of corruption is dedicated to depict the state of decay, decomposition and deterioration. There are three meanings of corruption in Chinese ancient codes and records, one refers to the bad and smelly condition of matters that have undergone qualitative changes and lost its original form, quality and value; besides, it is also used to describe an individual's depravity and demoralization, and thirdly, it indicates the illegal and unreasonable action that civil servants abuse public powers and seek private interests by encroaching on public interests. Here I will focus on the third meaning with ethical analysis. From the perspective of morality and ethics, corrupt behavior means that an individual or authority departments begin to lose themselves and degrade in their thoughts and personalities in the process of performing their duties. Analyzing corruption from the perspective of ethics is to try to explore the deep causes of corruption and search for anti-corruption measures from the aspect of social morality, cultural foundation, individual moral practice and the reconstruction of moral system, etc..

1. ANALYZING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHINESE TRADITIONAL IDEOLOGY AND CULTURE

Having long been influenced by Confucian culture, Chinese traditional culture emphasizes the idea of benevolence and human relationships. Then during the reign of Hanwu Emperor, an outstanding thinker, Dong Zhongshu, put forward the moral values of “Jing” and “Quan”. “Jing”, refers to the invariable philosophy of life and means adhering to the principal all the time. “Quan” refers to the strategy to the practical situation, a case-by-case survival philosophy. He paid equal attention to “Jing” and “Quan”, thinking that the two factors existed dialectically, in other words, “Quan” runs counter to “Jing” and meanwhile, complies with “Jing”. In practice, Dong advocated that ruling politicians should dare to adhere to the principle and bravely shoulder the responsibility, and makes appropriate adaptations in accordance with specific conditions at the same time. He systematically analyzed the feudal ethic codes, putting forward “the three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues”. This kind of ethics has engraved on the structure of Chinese morality, psychology and culture, which affects the moral practices and activities of Chinese for thousands of years. Chinese really value human relationships. For example, a man with some kind of social power, will tend to make every effort to do whatever he can to benefit his family members, relatives, and then his friends and classmates who are engaged in related business. Maybe he is unwillingly to do so, but bothered by traditional ethical ideology, he may feel obliged to be partial to and side with their kinsfolk. When at the moment of choice, individuals often find it difficult to shake off nepotism. This is why so many family members and relatives of some corrupt officials have gotten sucked into the corruption cases. Although the traditional thought of “the three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues” is not advocated nowadays, the monarch-subject standpoint still affects us. Thus, it is natural for us to follow the superiors, even if we may violate our principled bottom line. This is a kind of distorted moral behavior choice.

In contemporary society, an individual’s social role and professional role are hard to be independent from the human network. The traditional Chinese ethics seriously impact people’s moral behavior choice, especially for the people who has certain administrative position, or the people who can exercise certain professional rights and power. Such kind of persons or authority departments are easy to corrupt.

2. ANALYZING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INDIVIDUAL MORALITY

The emergence and development of corruption relates to individuals, or we can say, corruption develops and forms

in the process of the interaction between individual and social moral activities. With the rapid development and progress of the market-oriented society, moral values shows a trend of diversification. The education of social morality weakens and the atmosphere of hedonism pervaded. People require more opportunities to fulfill themselves, and then corruption erupts widely. With selfish desire over the consciences, some authorities are seduced by individualism, egoism and hedonism. Degenerating and depraving in minimum moral sentiments, they pay no attention to collectivism, but seek to grab personal gain by hook or by crook. Almost all kinds of corruption start out with “just for once”. The weakness of human nature and the desire for personal gain suppress the clear conscience. Once the expansion of selfish desire is out of control, individuals’ moral activities will be affected severely, directly leading to persistent corruption.

3. ANALYZING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Professional ethic is the theory which studies the phenomenon, the essence and the rule of emergence and development of professional ethic. Professional activity is a kind of social historical phenomenon. Its development adapts to the social economy, politics, ideology and culture, at the same time, it is also the carrier of the existence and development of the society, and besides, the core element of social life. With the development of human social profession, professional ethic has experienced different stages of development. In political life, professional ethic places more emphasis on the government and the country’s public management functions, advocating collectivism and serving the people, encouraging practitioners gain their own lawful profits through honest labor. Any career is made up of a certain amount of responsibility, rights and benefits. And corruption is the behavior of seeking personal gain by taking advantage of one’s office which is often committed by some specific persons or departments that have certain professional power. Professional power corresponds to certain professional responsibility, it is a kind of privilege entitled the professional personnel some certain rights to complete certain tasks or business. In the operation of the professional ethic, there’s a symmetry between the professional power and professional responsibility. If the practitioners fail to fulfill the professional responsibility or they are not conducive to the completion of the professional tasks and business when wielding their professional power, their behaviors should be considered as improper exercise of professional power. Since professional power has limitation in terms of scope of application, stressing not beyond a certain limit when the exercise of rights, it is often called professional permissions instead.

Take the judge for example, I think the judicial professional ethic should obey the following principles: Faithfully implement the constitution and laws; take facts as the basis and the law as criterion; fulfill their duties diligently; abide by the discipline; stick to the independence of the judiciary, advocates fairness and justice. As a judge, he or she must have a strong independent consciousness and make fair judgments in every case, not be afraid of or favor of any person or institution involved in. Aristotle once said, impartiality is just not a part of the virtue, but the interior of it. Only by being immersed in situations without stakes and being in the status and position of a third party can the judge really weigh between good and evil. However, judges' corruption cases emerge in endlessly. Many judges abandon their professional ethical bottom line and moral bottom line, meets with a party or its agent without authorization or accepts invitation to dinners or gifts therefrom, and act out various immoral behaviors.

The level of professional individual's moral qualities and moral accomplishment vary from person to person. Theoretically speaking, moral realm can be mainly divided into three layers, extreme egoism, rational egoism and altruism. We are supposed to prevent and avoid practitioners from stepping into the moral state of extreme selfishness. We should strengthen the construction of personal professional ethic, cultivate good professional habits and improve the consciousness and the authorhythmicity of professional ethic.

4. ANALYZING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS

The phenomenon of corruption has aroused wide public concern during the current period of social transformation in China. There are a lot of reasons why corruption occurs, among which institutional defects are a crucial one. Since it is hard to overcome the weaknesses of human nature, it is not enough just relying on people's self-discipline and conscience to keep away from egoism due to the limitation of individual's will power and ability and the lack of morality. To play the role of ethics to the fullest, institutional ethics must provide the necessary external support for individual ethic. Strengthening institutional construction and carrying forward institutional ethics contribute to improve and perfect the system itself. It also helps to control corruption and promote social justice. We should, on one hand, enhance the cultural quality education, on the other hand, create an active public opinion supervision atmosphere in the whole society and establish institutional norms which are ethical and conducive to the generation of moral behaviors.

To sum up, corruption is characterized by the following features:

Firstly, the subject of corruption must be in authority. It can be an individual or an authority department, and the premise is that they all take advantage of public power given by the society. Corruption is inevitably connected with power. It is a form of power behavior which goes against social value. No power, no opportunities and conditions for corruption.

Secondly, the purpose and motivation of corruption are to satisfy personal desires and gain wealth or status. For his own purpose, the corrupt person doesn't hesitate to violate morality, waste public resources and harm public interests and interests of others, which seriously break social equity. The corruption of government officials is reflected in dealing with the relationship between personal interests and collective interests. They take their personal desires as behavior standard, regardless of social interests and collective interests.

Thirdly, corruption violates moral norms, profanes the power and transgresses ethics.

5. ANTI-CORRUPTION THINKING

In view of the above ethical analysis on current corruption, I think that the following measures should be taken in the current anti-corruption task.

5.1 Moral Construction: Virtue Ethics Construction

Strengthening ideological and moral education, and cultivating good moral character and noble personality. "moral values establishment first". Only noble person plays a positive role in the society. On contrary, as to those people who are morally corrupt, the more powerful they are, the more harmful to the society. The people in authority are all selected through various methods. To establish enough authority to carry out their job well, he should first of all possess a good image and personality charm, which request him to consciously strengthen moral cultivation, enhance virtue construction, and sublimate moral realm constantly.

5.2 Moral Construction: Institutional Ethics Construction

Moral construction is a way to study moral construction from the perspective of individual, but the institution and institutional construction are from a longitudinal standpoint. To strengthen institutional ethics in construction is an important breakthrough of moral construction in our country. Moral construction cannot just be limited to moral research and education. It should promote the overall development of social morality on the basis of perfecting various social system. Institution is a combination that not only pay attention to internal moral concept but also external heteronomy concept. It has characters of certainty, stability and compulsion. Institutional monitoring is a more effective way to curb

and control corruption. So institutional construction is of great importance to moral construction.

5.3 Moral Construction: Institutional Ethics and Virtue Ethics

Strengthening institutional ethics of construction is the key point of moral construction, but virtue ethics also plays an important function in moral life. So the organic combination of virtue ethics and institution ethics is necessary if we'd like to perfect moral construction. We should compose a new moral culture, adhere to collectivism as well as advocate of moral principles such as social morality, social virtue and professional ethics. Furthermore, mechanism and means of moral regulation should be improved. Also we have to create a good public opinion atmosphere, shape a healthy moral personality and build a good cultural and public opinion environment for anti-corruption task. Under the circumstance of contemporary social morality, a new order needs to be constructed to regulate the new sphere and space. The new order requires highly integration of self-discipline & heteronomy, self-consciousness & compulsion. Once morality is combined with the institution, the anti-corruption problem will be put in ethical construction perspective. Then through the combination of heteronomy and self-discipline, we can

explore a basic way to prevent and control the corruption from its source.

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