

# WHAT IS POLITICAL CORRUPTION? A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRACT

The concept of political corruption is crucial in political discourses. Since the 1990s, there has been a massive resurgence of focus on political corruption. Definitional accounts of the concept have been proposed. This work is a critique of the accounts that have since been provided. I argue that these definitions are inadequate, offering an alternative. The predominant definition of the concept is that it refers to public officials' violations of public office rules due to their respective interests in private gain. I consider this wrong for three reasons. First, politics includes more than the activities of public officials. Second, that is not the only behaviour that is contrary to the moral imperatives of politics. Third, the lack of political integrity is not just about acting wrongly. It also includes the possession of political vices. Observing the inadequacy of the dominant perspective, Seumas Miller offers a more comprehensive definition. He defines political corruption as any act that despoils the moral character of political actors and undermines the processes and purposes of legitimate political institutions. However, his definition is also insufficient. First, he includes some immoral non-political acts as examples of political corruption, although he agrees that political corruption entails immorality in politics. Second, he unjustifiably excludes some immoral political actions as denoting political corruption. In contrast, I define political corruption as possessing political vices or acting contrary to moral, political imperatives. This definition is a comprehensive reflection of what it means to lack political integrity. My thesis begins with a critical account of politics and its moral imperatives. That is the criteria for determining what political corruption is.

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## INTRODUCTION

Political corruption is a political vice. Appropriating public funds for private use is often an instance of political corruption. And the negative impact of such actions in society is enormous. Consider the following example.

In 2013, investigations by the National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria revealed that top public officials had stolen at least 32 billion Naira (\$200 million)<sup>1</sup> from the nation's pension funds (Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala 2018, 96). As of 2015, the Pensions Directorate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria found and eliminated 15,000 fictitious pensioners. The Directorate also discovered that about 1,354 deserving pensioners were left out of the scheme (Okonjo-Iweala 2018, 98). "It has been estimated that close to \$400 billion was stolen from Nigeria's public accounts from 1960 to 1999" (Koni Hoffman and Raj Patel 2017, iv). The ubiquity of this phenomenon in Nigeria makes it unsurprising that the country has the largest population of the world's poorest people – about 90 million Nigerians live in extreme poverty (Muhammad Abdullahi 2019). Funds meant for citizens' welfare, development, and the creation of conditions conducive to prosperity are appropriated for private use. The poverty level in Nigeria, together with unreliable basic public infrastructure,<sup>2</sup> translates into unbearable suffering for many people.

As a result of the decisive impact of political corruption on society, it has been one of man's concerns from time immemorial. People have sought to understand the nature and scope of political corruption, attempted to define it, know its sources, and tackle it. In recent times it has animated public discourse on a large scale. "According to the 2011 'World Speaks' surveys, conducted by GlobeScan for the BBC World Service, corruption was the world's most talked-about problem, ahead of extreme poverty, unemployment, the cost of living and crime, violence and security" (Paul Heywood 2015, 1).

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<sup>1</sup> This was the dollar equivalent based on the exchange rate as at 2013.

<sup>2</sup> For example, contrary to the World Health Organization's desirable ratio of 1 physician per 1000 people, "Physicians (per 1,000 people) in Nigeria was reported at 0.3806 in 2018, according to the World Bank collection of development indicators". See Trading Economics Website for more information [https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/physicians-per-1-000-people-wb-data.html#:~:text=Physicians%20\(per%201%2C000%20people\)%20in,compiled%20from%20officially%20recognized%20sources.](https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/physicians-per-1-000-people-wb-data.html#:~:text=Physicians%20(per%201%2C000%20people)%20in,compiled%20from%20officially%20recognized%20sources.) (accessed July 21, 2020).

Since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century global efforts have been increasingly targeted at defining, understanding the causes of the phenomena, and ultimately mitigating it. In 1997, anti-corruption conventions were adopted by the European Union (Bruce Buchan & Lisa Hill 2014, 1). In 2003, the United Nations, followed by the African Union, did the same. Transparency International also initiated its popular yearly Corruption Perception Index in 1995. More so, "the rise in the number of articles published each year between 1990 and 2010 on the topic of corruption [is] a cumulative total of more than 6,000" (Heywood 2015, 1). This thesis is an appraisal of the definitional accounts of political corruption that has since been postulated. Despite a large number of publications on the subject, there is no satisfactory definition of the concept.

Political corruption needs to be appropriately defined. That is because perceptions influence actions. This means that it affects the quality of the lives of individuals and societies. In other words, perceptions about political corruption animate public actions. Thus, articulating a clear and comprehensive notion of the concept of political corruption is very important.

The predominance of inadequate definitions of political corruption implies that some ethical problems in politics, which we should earnestly seek to tackle, are taken less seriously<sup>3</sup>. Historically, the concept refers to severe moral issues in politics. That is why revolutionary movements and governments appeal to the need to fight and mitigate political corruption to justify their actions. My goal is to present a comprehensive definition and analysis of the concept of political corruption. Before going into that, it suffices that I articulate an overview of the political corruption discourse in political theory.

In the pre-modern/classical discourse, political corruption primarily referred to the degeneration of a society's civic virtues<sup>4</sup> or the lack of civic virtues in a society (Buchan and Hill 2014, 5). The degeneration of a society's civic virtues means the gradual or accelerating decrease of civic virtues in a society (Buchan and Hill 2014, 5). In contrast, in the modern discourse, by political corruption, theorists and scholars predominantly mean morally

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<sup>3</sup> At the same time, their negative consequences are our lot.

<sup>4</sup> Civic virtues are specifically those moral virtues, such as courage that citizens need to possess or that the institutions of a society need to enhance because there are essential to the wellbeing of the community, as a whole.

condemnable actions of public officials, defined by the illicit pursuit of private gain<sup>5</sup>. Political corruption is not conceived as society's moral decay in general or at least of a person's character. In short, political corruption is simply a deviant act of a person, namely, a public official<sup>6</sup>.

However, the classical conception of political corruption as the citizens' loss of civic virtue also involves understanding public officials' immoral acts as instances of political corruption. That is, the public-office definition of political corruption is implicit in the notion of political corruption advanced by classical thinkers. The definition implicit in the pre-modern discourse implies that political corruption involves more than public officials' actions, constituted by the illicit pursuit of private gain. Since the opposite of political corruption is political integrity, pre-modern political theorists rightly thought of political corruption as any form of deviation from politics' moral standards (Robert Sparling 2019, 6). This means that they considered any immoral political action to be an instance of political corruption.

The predominant modern definitions of political corruption as only involving public officials' illicit pursuit of private interest are inaccurately narrow. First, the failure to have and express political integrity is common to public officials and ordinary members of society. That is because politics includes more than the activities of public officials. And moral standards apply to the political actions of people other than public officials.

Second, the exclusive focus on actions implies the supposition that individuals' moral character is irrelevant to political matters. And that is wrong. When two persons are put in the same situations, their respective characters are decisive factors in their choices. An

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Johnston (1996, 322) calls this the “behavioural” understanding of political corruption. Buchan and Hill (2014) calls this the “public office” notions of political corruption. Both classifications are correct and useful. The former signifies the fact that the subject matter of these notions of political corruption is not the character of persons but people’s actions. While the latter signifies the fact that the actions are those of public office holders.

<sup>6</sup>This has two basic implications. First, it means that a resident's, nay citizen's immoral political action, no matter its nature and impact, is not an instance of political corruption, in so far as the action did not take place as the individual's exercise of official capacity. In other words, the predominant contemporary definitions of political corruption are public-office centred. Second, these conceptions of political corruption do not connote the loss of moral virtue. The assumption is that there is no such thing as a politically corrupt or incorrupt character. There are only corrupt, incorrupt or neither corrupt nor incorrupt political actions.

intolerant person responds to the sight of difference with hate or molestation. In comparison, the response of the tolerant is usually respect and acceptance of difference. My point is that political integrity involves certain moral character traits, such as tolerance and courage. This means that the lack of it and the possession of its opposite constitutes political corruption.

An accurate definition of political corruption ought to completely express the idea that it is the opposite of political integrity. The predominant view in the literature that political corruption only involves public officials' illicit pursuit of private gain falls short of the standard. However, Seumas Miller (2018) has recently presented a robust and virtually comprehensive definition of political corruption. For Miller (2018), political corruption is the despoiling of the moral character of the role occupants of political institutions and the undermining of the processes and purposes of political institutions. This implies that politically corrupt acts are despoiling and subversive, which means that not only public officials' illicit pursuit of private gain are instances of politically corrupt actions. The illicit pursuit of private gain is not the only kind of action that despoils moral character or implies a subversion of political processes and purposes. Nevertheless, Miller presented an unjustifiable and inconsistent analysis of his thesis. These shortcomings ground my attempt to offer a comprehensive definition of political corruption.

In the first chapter, I present an account of the ethical imperatives for political activities. The notion of political corruption presupposes the existence of an alternative moral, political condition or manner of political behaviour. That is, it presumes that there is such a thing as political integrity. If there is such a thing as political integrity, what does it look like? That is the question that I answered in the first chapter.

In the second chapter, I present and critique two of the notable definitional accounts of political corruption as involving the illicit promotion of private interest. The first is Mark Philp's (1998, 2015) account. It is the most articulate and philosophical presentation of political corruption as only involving public officials' illicit pursuit of private gain. The second is Dennis Thompson's notion of institutional corruption. For him, political corruption is any action of a public official that promotes private interest in disregard of the legitimate procedures of political actions. My argument is that the definition of political corruption as exclusively involving the illicit promotion of private interest is inadequate. For political immorality goes beyond the illicit advancement of private interest.

In the third chapter, I present and critique Miller's (2018) account of political corruption. The account that Miller gives is of corruption in general. However, his position on political corruption is easily distilled from his general account, especially as most of his examples of corruption involve political actors and institutions. His definitional account of political corruption is the most plausible alternative to the dominant private-interest perspective. One reason is that, unlike others, his understanding of political corruption recognizes the place of virtue in politics. For he thinks of political corruption as implying the state of a person's lack of some political virtues. Despite the improvements, his definition of acts of political corruption is wrong. Implicit in his account is that any action, moral or immoral, which leads to the despoiling of a person's character or undermines political processes and purposes is corrupt. That is wrong because to be guilty of political corruption implies having acted immorally.

In the fourth and final chapter, I present and explain my definition of political corruption. In my opinion, "political corruption is simply the state of being in possession of political vices and/or expressing them".

## CHAPTER ONE: POLITICS AND MORALITY

### 1.1. Defining Politics

I do not judge any of the extant definitions of politics in the literature to be sufficient, at least for my project. Thus, in this heading, I offer a concise and somewhat new definition of politics that is apt for an honest critique of the contemporary definitions of political corruption<sup>7</sup> and the provision of a comprehensive one. To justify my claims, I present the following. First, I give an overview of three authoritative definitions of politics as necessarily involving the affairs of (respective) collectives or societies, broadly construed, starting with the etymological one. I choose to give an overview, not a critique because that is sufficient to prove their unsuitability for my project. These definitions would have warranted critiques if their “forms” suggested that they could be suitable for my project. Their respective forms do not suggest that I ought to critique them to sufficiently prove my point. An overview of a thing – primarily defined as its outline and meaning – reveals or presents its form<sup>8</sup>. Second, I present each of these definitions, respectively, in sub-headings. Third, I offer a critical comparative analysis of these definitions, teasing out a distinctive feature of politics expressively conveyed by them. I affirm this feature as the distinguishing feature of politics. Fourth, I articulate the nature of a definition of politics that could be suitable for my project. Finally, I present a definition of politics, which I argue is accurate for my project, namely, critiquing the

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<sup>7</sup> Note that the political corruption discourse presupposes that politics is a collective or communal affair, irrespective of other details, for example, methods of governance and those who are supposed to benefit. Hence, that is the aspect of the literature on politics that I shall critique and contribute to.

<sup>8</sup> If one knows the kind of definition of a concept that could be suitable for the discourse that they want to participate in, the forms of the available definitions are the cues they need to judge whether a critique of any of them is worth undertaking. Imagine a friendship group of 8 people, who want to go on a road trip. Their preference is to travel together in one vehicle. A car rental agent gives them an overview of the best cars available in their town but none of these cars can accommodate more than 5 people. However, he tells them that they could get an eight-people car in the nearby town with ease and they happily took that opportunity. Do you think that he needed to have provided an in-depth description of each of the best cars in their town to convince them that they should go to the nearby town?

contemporary definitions of political corruption in the anglophone literature. Now, I turn to the tasks:

The standard view is that the term politics is derived from the Greek word *polis* (Macmillan, 3). The polis is construed as a unique form of organizing and regulating communal life. Hannah Arendt (2005) gave an authoritative account of the definition and meaning of the *polis*. According to Arendt (2005, 116), in classical Greece, the *polis* was a form of communal human life regulated by two principles of organization – freedom and equality<sup>9</sup> – within a **spatial construct**<sup>10</sup>. The *polis* was a city<sup>11</sup> within a (broader) society or state, where a group of free people directed their common affairs as equals (Arendt 2005, 117). This consisted of them speaking with each other, seeking to convince themselves to act together to pursue (commonly shared) ends or goals.

For the ancient Greeks, freedom is the opposite of necessity (Arendt 2005, 116-117). Freedom meant living/acting to achieve anything but the minimum material requirements for survival. One is, therefore, free only in so far as his actions are inspired by things other than survival. Neither the slave nor the wage earner, who labour for their daily bread, are free (Arendt 2005, 117). Their lives or actions are limited to the sphere of necessity (for survival), i.e., those activities and ways of being, e.g. family life, without which one cannot breathe (ibid.). The implication is that being a participant in the life of the *polis*, implied being liberated from cares about the indispensable requirements for survival (ibid.). It means that the discussion and actions in the *polis* were targeted at things such as fame, glory, honour and any other thing but the daily necessities of life<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> The equality referred to is not our idea of equality before the law or that the law applies the same way, for everybody (Arendt 2005, 118). It means “that [everyone has] the same claim to political activity... [and ] this activity primarily took the form of speaking with one another” (Arendt 2005, 118).

<sup>10</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>11</sup> This is corroborated by Macmillan, Thomas Curran (1983), Giovanni Sartori (1973, Fred Miller’s (2017) Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy entry on Aristotle’s political philosophy and other authoritative accounts.

<sup>12</sup> If you are wondering how possible it is for people to have lived in such a way, it is because they had secured the necessities of life by subjugating others into slavery, Arendt claims (ibid). “This [subjugation of others] was based on the absolute rule that every head of household exercised over his house. *But this rule was not itself political, although it was an indispensable prerequisite of all things political*<sup>12</sup>” (Arendt 2005, 117)).

Based on the foregoing, Arendt (ibid.) claims that, etymologically, politics involves people "*managing all their affairs by speaking with and persuading one another*"<sup>13</sup> in a city. It is a condition of a community of people living and interacting "with one another without compulsion, force, and rule over one another" (ibid.). In other words, politics is a deliberative organization and regulation of a community of free and equal citizens. This definition of the concept is devoid of the element of rule or compulsion, which is identical to the term politics today<sup>14</sup>.

To support her claim on the meaning of the *polis* and politics in classical Greek thought, she referenced Aristotle. She believes that he merely articulated his fellow citizens' views on this matter (Arendt 2005, 115)<sup>15</sup>. Recall Aristotle's infamously cited quote that man is a "*zoon politikon*", i.e. a political animal. Arendt (2005, 116) opined that

For Aristotle the word *politikon* was an adjective that applied to the organization of the polis and not a designation for just any form of human communal life, and he certainly did not think that all men are political or that there is politics, that is, a polis, no matter where people live. His definition excluded not just slaves, but also barbarians, who were ruled by despots in Asian empires but whose humanity he never doubted. What he meant was merely that it is unique to man that he *can* live in a polis and that the organized polis is the highest form of human communal life and thus

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<sup>13</sup> The emphasis is mine.

<sup>14</sup> Ruling implies coercive control of others and oneself. On the one hand, this means that the obedient subjects would not obey be it not for the threat to their lives, given the force possessed by the ruler. On the other hand, the ruler ought to maintain his coercive power in order to guarantee his protection or at least get his subordinates to work towards the provision of his needs. In so far as they are engaged in either commanding or obeying, they are acting for the sake of necessity, i.e. acting unfreely. One may wonder how the classical "Greek" conception of politics ensured order, direction or guidance between men acting "freely", as equals, without being ruled or commanded. Leadership was the "Greek" answer to the question of order between acting people. To have led means that one had an idea and persuaded his peers to act with him, to ensure its realisation (Arendt 2005, 9).

<sup>15</sup> Sartori (1973, 7) agrees with this reading of Aristotle's famous postulation, as reflective of Greek thought. Fred Miller's (2017) Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy entry on Aristotle's political philosophy also concurs with these reading. These scholars' corroboration of Arendt's claim concerning Aristotle confirm its reliability.

something specifically human, at equal remove from the gods, who can exist in and of themselves in full freedom and independence, and animals, whose communal life, if they have such a thing, is a matter of necessity...Thus, politics in the Aristotelian sense is not self-evident and most certainly is not found everywhere men live in community. It existed, as the Greeks saw it, only in Greece—and even there for only a relatively short period of time.

Interestingly, the etymological understanding of politics persists in our everyday discourse to a limited degree. This is expressed in statements such as “the TRC was a political solution to the problem of Apartheid”, which is to say that Apartheid was not ended through revolutionary violence but negotiations. That notion of politics persists alongside a different one. Most people who make statements such as the above would not hesitate to say that revolutionary acts of violence are instances of politics. This phenomenon also exists more or less in the contemporary literature of politics. Bernard Crick’s (2004) definition of politics is an example.

According to Crick (2004, 67), “politics is a distinctive form of rule whereby people act together through institutionalized procedures to resolve differences, to conciliate diverse interests and values and to make public policies in the pursuit of common purposes”. For Crick, the fundamental distinction between politics and other forms of rule, e.g. totalitarianism, is that politics is governance, decision-making and conflict resolution through public debates for a common purpose (Crick 2004, 73). In other words, Crick (2004, 70) thinks that war and any violent activity is an expression of the absence or failure of politics.

The summary is that, for Crick (2004), politics consists of only three features. First, it involves attempts by people to realize their shared goals by assuaging their diverse interests and values. Second, it involves exclusive use of speech and non-violent actions. Third, it involves rulership. The first two features are pretty self-explanatory. The third feature of politics is that the resolutions of public debates are commands that people are obliged to obey. That is, these resolutions are binding on those who are not persuaded by the arguments. The resolutions are considered to apply to them. So, the failure of politics, which Crick (2004) mentions above, may involve using force to make those who are not persuaded and respectful of the rules or process their outcomes. Now I turn to present the definition offered by Sartori (1973).

According to Sartori (1973, 19-20), politics refers to the activities of state actors and non-state actors, which are legitimated by the state as a mechanism of regulating society. State actors are the institutions of the state, such as the government and the armed forces. State legitimated regulatory acts by non-state actors include voting in elections, running political parties, and lobbying. For Sartori, politics consists of this latter kind of action because the state legalised them as parts of its regulative system. For example, voting is how some state actors, i.e. government officials, are selected.

### *A Comparative Analysis of the Extant Definitions of Politics*

The different definitions of politics presented above are, respectively, coherent. Their descriptions correspond to the aspects and forms of communal life that they think makes up politics. If that is true, then there is no absolute standard for determining the comparative accuracy of those definitions because they describe different kinds of collective human activities. What I am saying is that they are, to an extent, incommensurable. For that reason, I cannot justifiably say – in absolute terms – that any of these definitions of politics is insufficient, simply because they take what I regard as constitutive of politics as non-political. However, as I do below, I can justifiably determine their sufficiency regarding their suitability for my project. But before I go into that, let me present a common distinguishing feature of these definitions below.

It appears that these definitions have a common feature, which if their authors perceived missing in any community, they would unanimously declare it apolitical. That feature is the presence of *purposive attempts to organize and regulate how everyone in a community lives or exists*. It means that politics is generally agreed to involve actions, processes, and institutions purposed to make and execute a community's decisions. In other words, my argument is that if any of the authors presented above were to perceive a community to be lacking this feature, they would, without exception, consider that community apolitical. It does not seem like they even think it possible that there is a human community without this feature. In summary, the extant definitions of politics that I presented above imply that a necessary feature of politics is the presence of *erga omnes*, organizational and regulatory activities within or towards forming a community. That is a

distinctive feature of politics relative to other spheres of human life, presupposed by the definitions of political corruption.

Now, I return to the issue of whether any of the above definitions is suitable for my project. I do not think so, as they are either too exclusionary or incomplete. A definition that could be suitable for my project must accommodate the respective and significantly commensurable definitions of politics implicit in the contemporary political corruption discourse, which I examine. For example, none of the definitions of politics implicit in the accounts that I review considers politics as not consisting of violence, nor do they think it exclusively consists of “free and equal” citizens. Furthermore, Sartori’s (1973) position that politics does not involve the activities of non-state actors, such as revolutionaries and terrorists<sup>16</sup>, is not consistent with the idea presupposed in the political corruption discourse. Below, I tease out a definition of politics, which I am sure is suitable for my project. This will be self-evident to the reader as they go through my presentation of the various definitions of political corruption in the subsequent chapters.

Politics consists of activities aimed at setting up, running and maintaining binding regulatory frameworks for the people who make up a community as they go about their daily lives. It also consists of intentional interactions with the people, processes and institutions purposed to achieve these aims. They are two ways in which social institutions and human activities are purposively concerned with setting up binding organizational and regulatory systems for human communities. The first way involves the activities purposed to establish binding and *erga omnes* administrative and regulatory systems/institutions, such as the state, the executive arm of government and the council of elders of a village. The act of a person who is a functionary of these institutions is an instance of politics, in so far as the person acts in his capacity as a functionary. The person's action, as an institutional role occupant, is a part of what the institution is. And it is part of the binding regulatory condition or activity, which makes up politics. Actions taken to create such institutions or establish a community of people as a unit of rule are also instances of politics.

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<sup>16</sup> Recall that for Sartori (1973, 19-20), the only actions of non-state actors that could be seen as political are those which have been sanctioned by the state.

While the second way involves intentionally influencing the binding systems, institutions or actions that organizes and regulates a collective as a unit of rule. For example, a company that deliberately influences the government's decisions is engaged in politics so long as they continue to act that way. This means that if a company's action is not targeted at influencing government regulations, but it incidentally does that, it is not engaged in politics. In other words, this intentionality distinguishes political activities from other human activities, which may have a similar impact on the binding regulatory system.

In the modern world, the human society per excellence is the state. By this, I mean to say that in virtually everywhere humans live, they do so as citizens or residents of states. Based on this, my definition of politics relative to our age goes as follows: politics refers to any action targeted at or comprised of the exercise of state power/authority. The state can be either an existing state or an ideated state. This is the reason why even actions or processes targeted at their creation are perceived as political. For example, the activities and procedures undertaken by many European Jews to establish a homeland in Palestine and ultimately a state in the Middle East were instances of politics.

Since politics involves exercising state powers, state actors' actions in the international scene constitute politics. The actions of, say corporations, targeted at influencing legislation in foreign countries is also an instance of politics. Likewise, the actions of non-citizens of a state in relation to the governing or regulative institutions of states also constitute politics. This means that any such actions may be instances of political corruption, insofar as there constitute violations of some legitimate action-imperatives.

## **1.2. *Politics as a Necessary Feature of Life***

People are different from one another. Our opinions, interests, values, and perception of the world are often different. This is a constant source of conflict. As Thomas Hobbes (1651) vividly notes in his *Leviathan*, the absence of a binding regulatory system that manages the affairs of humans, i.e. politics, implies the war of all against all. That is the condition of inability to secure and provide our basic needs, such as food, shelter, security, knowledge and social interactions. For that reason, the very fact that a significant portion of humanity has obtained these goods and keep having their basic needs met is proof of the importance of politics for

human survival and flourishing. The implication is that politics will continue to be a feature of life for as long as humans co-exist on earth.

### 1.3. *The Ethics of Politics*

By "the ethics of politics", I mean to discuss what seems to me to be the proper function that political entities, such as states, their institutions and processes of control, are to serve. I think that there is no preferred structural form that they must take. They may be justifiably authoritarian, democratic or mixed, depending on the situation of things. The justified form that political entities ought to take is that which is most capable of serving the function that any political entity ought to serve given the constraints imposed by situations. I also intend to discuss what I think is the right objectives and the virtues that people must possess, either as role occupants of political organizations or just as members of society acting politically. The ethical framework that I work with emanates from my critique of the standard debate between two South African philosophers on what Ubuntu ethic consists or should consist of. My arguments about good and bad politics involve sound premises resulting from my critique of the standard philosophical conversations concerning Ubuntu ethic.

"Ubuntu" is a word in the southern African Nguni languages (Mogobe Ramose 2018<sup>17</sup>, Thaddeus Metz 2007, 323). The concept – which the term denotes – is shared by the Bantu speaking peoples of Africa. For example, in Sesotho, one of the other languages of the Bantu speaking peoples, "Botho" is the word for the concept (Ramose 2018). In other words, Ubuntu is a concept of the Bantu speaking peoples of Africa. What is the meaning of ubuntu? To furnish the reader with a comprehensive understanding of the concept, I begin with presenting the idea asserted by an author<sup>18</sup> of one of the seminal works on ubuntu. His analysis of the essential character of the concept, not his interpretation of its moral imperatives, his commitment to its underlying ontology and his sense of their highest

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<sup>17</sup> This is a talk by Mogobe Ramose, the renowned South African Philosopher, on the content of his seminal work on Ubuntu Philosophy, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*, published in 1999. The talk was given in Brussels, introducing the audience to the 2017 Dutch translation of this book, telling them some of the key points to expect from the book.

<sup>18</sup> Mogobe Ramose is an author of one of the most important works about Ubuntu philosophy, i.e. his 1999 *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* (Metz 2007, 331).

philosophical pedigree, is considered accurate (Metz 2007, 331, C. Maris 2020, 315-321). That being said, according to Ramose (2018), ubuntu is a combination of two words, “ubu” and “ntu”. “Ubu” is a word that can be used as a suffix for any word to indicate the condition of the aspect of reality that the word refers to (Ramose 2018). Since “ubu” expresses the condition of aspects of reality respectively, it implies an abstract idea about the condition of reality as a whole (ibid.). The flexibility of the word, as a possible suffix for any reality describing word, implies that the condition or nature of reality is flux or openness (ibid.). In other words, a philosophical insight that the word conveys about a definitive attribute of reality and being is “motion” (ibid.). This means that “immutability, essentiality, or eternity” is not a condition of life (Ramose 2007, 351). Concerning “ntu”, it is the shortened version of “umuntu”, the Nguni word for “human be-ing” (Ramose 2018). According to Ramose (2018), his hyphenation of the word is meant to indicate humans, as well other aspects or the whole of reality, is dynamic. Besides our dynamic character, another essential element of being human is that we are always in the web of relationships (ibid.). In this vein, Ramose (ibid.) says that “umuntu, just by thrownness into be-ing is already coming with, in and through a relationship. We are all the time related”. “We are related with, through and in nature” (ibid.). In other words, the existence of humans is inconceivable without nature, i.e. every other thing that is, such as the vegetations and the stars, including humans. Proximately, the existence (and flourishing) of a human being, as we know it today, is inconceivable without their being in relationships with other human beings (ibid.). A person’s birth, survival, and growth are based on existing relationships and are supported through relationships with others. Based on the above, the concept of ubuntu roughly means that a person lives and flourishes through persisting, dynamic and affirming relationships with other people.

As an ethical concept, ubuntu means “humanness” (Ramose 2007, 352, Ramose 2018, Metz 2007, 323). This is roughly expressed in the maxim *umuntu ngumuntu nga bantu*: “a person is a person through other persons” (Metz 2007, 323, Ramose 2018). Another translation of the Bantu maxim is “I am because we are” (Metz 2010, 83). To help some people understand the ethical implication of this statement, Metz (2010, 83), in line with other scholars such as Ramose (2018), notes:

To most non-African readers, the above phrases will indicate nothing normative and instead will bring to mind merely some empirical banalities about the causal

dependence of a child on her parents or society. However, such statements express a moral claim (as is made clear in, e.g., Wiredu 1992; Menkiti 2004). Personhood, selfhood, and humanness in characteristic sub-Saharan worldviews are value-laden concepts. That is, an individual can be more or less... a human being, where the more one is, the better. The ultimate goal of a person, self, or human in the biological sense should be to become... a *genuine* human being, i.e., to exhibit virtue in a way that not everyone ends up doing. The phrases say that achieving the state of being a *mensch* is entirely constituted by relating to others in a certain manner. In the way that “an unjust law is no law at all” (as per St. Augustine), or just as we might say that a jalopy is “not a *real* car” (Gaie 2007: 33, emphasis original), so Africans would characterize an individual who does not relate positively to others as lacking *ubuntu*, lacking humanness. Indeed, those who fail to relate properly are sometimes described as animals.

The implication of the foregoing is that the maxim is a categorical imperative for people to enter into communal or humane relationships with others (Metz 2010, 83, Ramose 2018). What does it mean to enter into communal relationships with others or fully become a human being through other human beings? Answers to this question are at the heart of the debate on ubuntu ethic.

In the frontier of the debate are two South African Philosophers, Mogobe Ramose and Thaddeus Metz (Maris 2020, 315 – 319). They present different interpretations of the ubuntu moral imperative and develop different theories of ubuntu ethics, respectively. In other words, Ramose’s idea of ubuntu ethic is different from Metz’s idea. They both take their respective theories to be philosophically superior to each other’s and more consistent with the essential character of the concept. Before proceeding to critique their positions, it is handy to highlight a notable summary of the moral ideal of ubuntu and its implication for actions, which both Ramose and Metz accept. It helps us determine the cogency of their divergent philosophical interpretations of the moral imperative of ubuntu and the theories which they develop from it. This summary is a quotation from Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Nobel Peace Prize winner who chaired the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC). According to Tutu (1999, 31–35 cited in Metz 2010, 83):

When we want to give high praise to someone we say, “*Yu, u nobuntu*”; “Hey, so-and-so has *ubuntu*.” Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring

and compassionate. You share what you have. . . Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum*—the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this sought after good is to be avoided like the plague. Anger, resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive of this good.

Now I proceed to the philosophical discourse, starting with Ramose’s account.

According to Ramose (1999, 52 cited in Metz 2007, 331), ubuntu ethic involves a command to “affirm one’s humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them”. Recall Ramose’s (2018) claim that a human being comes into existence, continues to exist and flourishes through persisting – life-enabling and supportive –, relationships with others. Indeed, there is no doubt of the veracity of this claim about the nature of human beings. That been said, it appears that Ramose’s (1999) point is that, first, one supports one’s existence and wellbeing by recognizing the necessity of others in and for achieving these ends. Second, by noting that other people’s existence and wellbeing are likewise dependent on others, including oneself. Third, based on one’s recognition of the inter-dependence, one should establish humane relations with them. For Ramose (1999), being humanely connected with others implies acting in ways that support the interests, aspirations and welfare of one’s community<sup>19</sup>, i.e. both the immediate one and the community of humans, as a whole. Using Kwame Gyekye’s<sup>20</sup> words, Ramose (1999, 143 cited in Maris 2020, 315) opined that “the group constitutes the main focus of the lives of the individual members of that group, and...the extent of the individual’s involvement in the interests, aspirations, and welfare of the group is the measure of that individual’s worth”. In other words, individual interest and welfare come second.

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<sup>19</sup> For the traditional Bantu speaking Peoples, including Ramose, a community consist of the living, the “living-dead”, i.e. those whom one may call ancestors, and those who are yet to be born (Ramose 1999, 2003, 2017 cited in Maris 2020, 316). For example, in order to maintain peace and justice, the living must relate humanely with the living-dead (Ramose 2017, 64 cited in Maris 2020, 316). In this case, deference to them is key.

<sup>20</sup> (1987, 208)

In his paper, *Towards an African Moral Theory*, Metz (2007) points to what he considers to be two critical problems with Ramose's (1999) theory of Ubuntu ethic<sup>21</sup>. Since then, he has not revised his position on Ramose's (1999) theory, even in light of subsequent clarifications and rebuttals from Ramose (2007, 2018). For Metz (2007, 321), Ramose's theory "lacks a well-defended general principle grounding particular duties that... could be compared to dominant Western theories such as Hobbesian egoism or Kantian respect for persons". In other words, the first problem is that Ramose's (1999) theory is mainly a "moral anthropology" of the Bantu speaking peoples of Africa (Metz 2007, 322). What Metz means is that Ramose's claim that the moral beliefs of these peoples ought to guide our actions does not include any proper, supporting argument. That is, it is mainly a systematic story-telling and an argumentatively poor attempt to promote the morality of these peoples as the justifiable way to act. The second problem is that Ramose (1999) did not articulate a precise and distinctive general principle by which one can determine right actions from wrong actions (Metz 2007, 322).

I think that Metz (2007) is right about the philosophical deficit and anthropological nature of Ramose's theory<sup>22</sup>. It is indubitable that people come into existence and thrive through relationships with others. So people's affirmation of their survival and wellbeing would involve recognising the necessity of others for these ends. People lean on others or try to graft them for themselves because of this recognition. However, it is not apparent why recognizing that humans thrive through interdependent relationships gives one the obligation to "establish humane relations" with them. And that is supposing that it actually provides such an obligation, as Ramose (1999) claims. First, the fact that humans thrive through interdependent relationships does not mean that one's thriving and that of every other person is inter-dependent. If it is true that interdependence is limited and is the source of one's

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<sup>21</sup> His criticism was directed to a number of other works, including Ramose (1999), in the literature of African ethics. But as implied in Maris (2020) above, Ramose's is the other extant theory of ubuntu ethics that is at the heart of the debate. That is why I focus on him.

<sup>22</sup> Ramose "endorses many elements of the ancient African traditions...Nowhere does he assume a critical distance from the customs that he describes. His African philosophy through ubuntu explicitly applauds respect for the ancestors and the elderly, initiation into one's community as a requirement for acquiring personhood, and the idea that law and justice are determined by supernatural forces (the living-dead) and declared on their behalf by the living who are in authority" (Maris 2020, 321).

obligation, in what sense is one obligated towards those outside one's web of inter-dependency? Second, other people can be and are often deliberately harmful. What is the justification for one's obligation to establish humane relations with them? Third, one's recognition of being in an inter-dependent relationship with others is not always mutual. Fourth, a people's interdependence does not mean that they all are mutually dedicated to perpetuating it humanely. By the standards of Ramose's supernaturalistic ontology, these questions are probably unwarranted. However, the necessary persistence of these questions to Ramose (1999, 2007, 2018 cited in Maris 2020, 316) confirms the theory's lack of philosophical rigour.

Concerning the absence of a precise and distinctive general principle, Ramose (2007) articulated a noteworthy response to Metz (2007). For Ramose (2007, 351), the concept of ubuntu implies that any ethic or moral theory that emerges from it would only affirm "a multiplicity of ethical principles", in contradistinction to the affirmation of a *Grundnorm*. The reason is that the concept denotes a worldview that is "without any implicit or explicit claim to immutability, essentiality and eternity" about the constitution of the cosmos and the human "be-ing" (Ramose 2007, 351). Recall Ramose's (2018) analysis of the concept above: Being is a dynamic, non-static or continuous process of becoming something new. This suggests that the right way to interact with humans involves recognising unpredictability and uncertainty about both humans and their situations. But is this proof that one cannot assert a *Grundnorm*, consistent with the dynamism that ubuntu suggests? It does not seem so. Suppose there's enough order in the world and in man to grasp an idea, such as flux, as the condition of the cosmos and man's existence. Why is it, then, *prima facie* different regarding his articulation of a *Grundnorm* based on that knowledge? Whatever the case may be, Ramose's response is a repetition of an undefended ontology. It implies that it is not a philosophically serious objection to Metz's critique of his theory.

The moral theory that Metz (2007, 2010, 2014, 2019) develops from the ubuntu moral ideal does not involve claims of its superiority over other ethical theories, such as Kantianism. It also does not include a declaration that the theory indeed corresponds to the moral facts. His project is relatively modest. First, his project consists of analyses of the moral ideal of ubuntu, the command and the values associated with its pursuit, as is present in the extant literature on African ethics (Metz 2007, 322). Second, based on these analyses, he develops a secular, coherent, unique and precise ethical theory of action. One crucial point is that Metz

(2007, 328) separates the supernaturalistic dimension of ubuntu morality from its moral ideal out of a disposition towards naturalism. That is, he analyzes the ubuntu moral ideal simply as a moral principle that may be hypothetically held by either a supernaturalist or a naturalist. In summary, Metz has interpreted and refined ubuntu morality through analysis to show its uniqueness. Now, what is Metz's secular, ubuntu moral theory of right actions?

According to Metz (2010, 84), the following is a rational, basic and comprehensive principle of action of ubuntu morality: *"An act is right just insofar as it is a way of living harmoniously or prizing communal relationships, ones in which people identify with each other and exhibit solidarity with one another; otherwise, an act is wrong"*. In order to determine the viability of his thesis, it is important to understand what "identifying" and exhibiting "solidarity" with others mean for Metz and to assess whether they fit correctly to the moral ideal of ubuntu. That is because they make up Metz's conception of the kind of relations that ubuntu's moral ideal demands. Metz (2019) explains them quite succinctly:

To identify with others is for people to treat themselves as members of the same group: to conceive of themselves as a "we", to take pride or feel shame in others' activities, and to engage in joint projects, coordinating to achieve shared or at least compatible ends.

Solidarity, in part, involves engaging in helpful behaviour, acting in ways that are reasonably expected to benefit others. Solidarity involves attitudes, emotions and motives being positively oriented toward others' good, say, by sympathizing and helping them for their sake.

The foregoing is a coherent and detailed explanation of what it means to prize communal relationships/take "social harmony" to be the *summum bonum*, i.e. the ideal or ultimate goal of ubuntu morality. In the sense that Metz (2019) explains above, the combination of solidarity and identification with others leads to the prizing of social harmony – this is the same as the maxim of ubuntu: "I am because we are". In other words, I agree with Metz's (2010, 84) thesis, as stated above and applaud its succinctness. Interestingly, Metz's (2010) breaks down what it means to prize communal relationships or act in a way that promotes it to a more basic norm, namely, friendship/love. Metz (2010, 84) asks us to

note that the combination of... identifying with and exhibiting solidarity toward others is basically a relationship that English speakers call "friendship" or a broad sense of "love." So, it also follows that the present moral theory can be understood to instruct

an agent to respect friendly relationships, and especially to avoid prizing ones of enmity...

[this principle] does a reasonable job of philosophically explaining what makes an action wrong. Breaking promises, stealing, deceiving, cheating, abusing, and the like are well characterized as being *unfriendly*, or, more carefully, as failing to respect the value of friendship.

Metz's analyses and development of an ubuntu-based moral theory of right action are interesting, unique<sup>23</sup> and appealing. However, as he admits, he does not argue on why it should be the choice theory of right action, compared to others, such as utilitarianism. Nonetheless, I find the ubuntu moral theory developed by Metz attractive and more compelling than its competitors for the following reason. Due to the inter-dependent nature of our co-existence and the increasing interconnection of the world, an impeccably articulate moral theory of friendly relations is precisely what we need. Naturally, our lives would flourish, the more it is conditioned by mutual identification and solidarity with one another. As observed by Maris (2020, 322), some scholars do not appreciate the relevance of the metaphor of friendship in politics. But a cursory contemplation of a world defined by agonistic relations between people and nations should displace any doubt about the relevance of friendliness. Below, I articulate my understanding of the legitimate goals of politics based on Metz's ubuntu moral theory of right action.

In the spirit of ubuntu, the goal which political actions ought to be oriented by is humanity's good as a whole. More specifically, it seems that the legitimate goals of politics include only those good things that can best be actualized or pursued politically. It means that if, for example, the government of a society is not in the best position to facilitate the best

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<sup>23</sup>"Consider, now, that friendliness (or love) has not grounded any influential contemporary ethical theory, conceived as a principle that purports to capture what all wrong (or, conversely, right) actions have in common. The dominant players have been utilitarianism, Kantianism, contractualism, egoism, divine command theory and virtue theory. The idea that an act is impermissible (roughly) because it is unfriendly is a novel idea when construed as a theoretical account of what in general makes actions wrong...Such an ethic is what I, as an analytic moral philosopher, have found so promising in the African tradition and what I have sought to articulate, refine, apply and export to a local and international audience. That project has only just begun, and I hope the reader agrees that it is worth continuing...because it is so philosophically interesting and compelling (Metz 2014, 71)".

possible education, then the facilitation of education should not be its goal. In that case, education ought to be a non-political activity.

Whatsoever relative peace or stability that any subset of humanity enjoys is due to the existence of politics. As noted above, politics is an organization of people into a collective, the absence of which is chaos. Of everything good that politics can achieve for humanity, ensuring peace and stability are the only things that politics should always be oriented by. That is because, without some measure of peace and stability, humans can neither survive nor prosper. Stability, for instance, allows for a measure of reliability on the external world and its inhabitants, as conditions that are suitable for people to take the risks of engaging in projects whose positive consequences are deferred to any time but the here and now. The inventions and discoveries – always products of un-immediate commitments – that nourishes humanity are the consequences of the relative stability that humanity has enjoyed. Without it, we can neither protect what we have nor get better. This means that instability, which implies that today's conditions will cease to be available tomorrow and so on, is the state of powerlessness and extreme anxiety. It is only when people are organized, with peace and stability, that they are most capable of pursuing and attaining the other desirable ends, such as education and recreational activities. This makes ensuring or protecting peace and stability a necessary imperative for every instance or element of politics<sup>24</sup>.

The other goals/ends that ought to or can justifiably orient human actions can be aimed at individually, in factions or by people, together as a society. Some of these goals/ends are often best pursued individually, for example, communing with a romantic partner. Some are best pursued in factions, and others both collectively and/or privately, depending on the context. For instance, it was better to have decentralized and non-public education in most tiny societies in the past. Humans did not know so much. As a result, different perspectives and pedagogical techniques needed to be allowed in the most conformity-averse manner, as experiments. Also, those societies were not so big, to the extent that central, uniform and public-owned educational institutions were required to establish social cohesion among very

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<sup>24</sup> Since peace and stability are good conditions of life because they support the survival and prosperity of humans then, peace and stability as a goal of politics has to be qualified. Regarding peace and stability, the legitimate goal of politics is to achieve them in ways that are most conducive to the survival of and prosperity of humans.

geographically distant people. Since the scale of our collective existence is very much different today, it appears that the government, i.e. collective agency, should be involved in people's education.

The implication is that political activities and institutions ought not to be necessarily or directly committed to achieving other ends, such as education and healthcare, which virtually all governments take to be their responsibility today. Some private institutions provide better services in that regard. It will be better to outsource the services typically delivered by the government or some other political institutions to private bodies in some context. My point is that ensuring any other human good but peace and stability is a hypothetical moral imperative for political activities. This is the basis for my claim that politics should only be permanently committed to ensuring peace and stability.

The foregoing implies that it is only morally justified for politics to pursue other human goods, in so far as they serve as enablers of peace and stability, or when politics is the most reliable way to secure them for humanity or any of its subsection, given the circumstances. When it is not in people's best interest for political activities and institutions to be directly committed to ensuring, for example, healthcare, it should be pursued through other channels. If it is true that the ultimate morally justified goal for any human activity is to make good things happen to humans, then the above holds. For it is the best way to utilize politics and every other human capabilities and endeavour.

Every point made above also means that politics' primary and universal legitimate goal is to ensure peace and stability, i.e. the basic condition for life and prosperity. It also means that political institutions and actions should pursue any other human good, which can be best achieved politically. These two imperatives can be summarised as the following: ***politics ought to be oriented towards ensuring human survival and prosperity in the best possible way that it can.*** This simply means that it must always be committed to providing peace and stability since this is a universal and necessary imperative. And it must also only be committed to ensuring the provision of other human goods when it is in the best place to do so. In short, the goal of politics ought to be the collective good of humankind.

In order to understand my position that the goal of politics ought to be the collective good of humankind, necessarily involving peace and stability for all, it is pertinent that I make a distinction between "goals" and "ends". Goals are overarching ideals (Arendt 2005, 193). They inform our decisions of what sorts of actions to take and the specific results that we ought to pursue at any given time. However, since they are ideals, neither actions nor results can fully express what they mean. Imagine that your goal is to help some needy children in your community. You would have to treat them differently according to sound judgement. For instance, while letting most of the kids consume dairy products, you ought to deny access to these products to the lactose-intolerant kids. It is the same goal, but the realization of the goal does not have a definite form. The concrete realization of the goal is multiple. And beyond that, the goal continues to exist even after an instance of its realization. That is, goals/ideals can only be more or less realized. They are not cast in stone – their realization is multiple and changing (Arendt 2005, 193). In contrast, "ends" have defined qualities, and there can be fully realized. In the example above, feeding most of the children dairy products was the end, and it was actualized. What is the explanatory import of this analysis for my position that the goal of politics is humankind's collective good?

One aspect of what it means for politics to be oriented by humanity's collective good is that it ought to be inclined towards ensuring peace and stability for all of humankind. This is a goal, which is to say that its realizations are multiple, changing, and imperfect. Having this goal implies being attentive to situational constraints and doing the best to approximate the ideal. Peace and stability are good for everyone. Suppose that one can only achieve them for a subsection of humanity, at the expense of others, given the situation. In that case, being oriented by the ideal implies ensuring peace and stability for those that one can, albeit at the expense of others. It is congruent with the ideal because it is better than doing nothing, i.e. allowing the state of total war to persist. This situation is manifest today in the following manner.

Today, the most authoritative organization of human life is the state. States are differentiating political entities, defined by discriminations of citizens from aliens. States go into wars, destroying lives; for the sake of the protection of their respective citizenry. They reserve good things for their citizens and deny aliens access to these things. The selfishness inherent in states' activities appears to be necessarily antithetical to the primary goal they

ought to be oriented toward. However, due to human nature and humanity's current level of enlightenment, discriminatory formations and acts, such as the above, seem to be the best possible ways to aim at and actualize politics' primary legitimate goal. It is, at least today, impossible to firmly organize and regulate human life on a completely global scale. As such, the best that humans can have is the governmental organization and regulation of people at a national level. And this implies differentiation and preference. Therefore, being oriented by the ultimate legitimate goal of politics often implies pursuing national ends. Nevertheless, being truly oriented by the collective good of humankind means that nations have obligations to weigh the impact of the policies they make on other peoples of other nations and only act in ways that hurt others when there is no alternative. In other words, whenever possible, a country's policies should also be other countries enabling.

To better understand my position about the goal that should orient politics, it is pertinent to discuss it in regards to my categorization of the different elements of politics, namely, the non-personal and personal.

#### *(a) Non-personal Political Agents*

Political systems, institutions and processes have to be designed to serve the goal mentioned above. Any one of such political phenomena whose structure and purpose are antithetical to that goal is illegitimate. Whether a political system, institution or process is conducive or antithetical to humankind's collective good is relative to the situational constraints. When there is a civil war, using dictatorial power and political proceedings to achieve order is justifiable if there is no better alternative. However, it is meant to serve a temporary or transitory function, after which it becomes illegitimate. This means that dictatorship can either be a justified political system or an unjustified one, depending on the situation.

#### *(b) Personal Political Agents*

I have formulated the political obligations of people into two injunctions below.

First, people ought to be oriented towards participating in politics. This means that they should desire and work towards directly influencing the regulatory conditions of human life. It amounts to influencing political institutions and processes or creating or contributing

to their creation when needed. Ubuntuism is that each individual should work towards the improvement of humanity. Since politics is the regulatory aspect of human life, one necessary way to express one's obligation is to participate in politics.

Second, people should implicitly have humanity's collective good as their goal while engaging in politics. This means that their political actions ought not to spring forth from their belief in the moral superiority of their needs over that of others. It means that they should not like to attain gain at others' expense when acting politically. It means that they must possess openness and willingness to work for the good of the collective.

You may be wondering why the second formulation is not that people should explicitly be committed to the collective good as their goal when acting politically. The reason is that people cannot be reasonably expected to always have the collective good as the explicit motive of their actions. People often face immediate/personal problems, which they need to solve and can only hope to solve by acting politically. For example, a local government worker who is illegitimately owed salaries by the authorities and whose only way to get paid is to stage a public protest to attract the public's sympathy<sup>25</sup>. People's attempt to solve their problems politically, which is to say that their motive is personal gain, is not necessarily unjustified. A bunch of personal improvements amount to the collective good. Moreover, if people's attempts to solve their personal problems politically is objected to when doing so is their best option, peace and stability would not be achieved. People sooner than later will find undesirable means of expressing their grievances and meeting their needs, such as stealing.

With an implicit commitment to the collective good as their goals, persons would be willing and capable of acting for the good of humankind. While only defaulting when they need to choose between themselves and others in life and death situations. In many circumstances, the interest of humanity is not mutually exclusive from the individual or personal gain.

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<sup>25</sup> In this instance, protest is a political action or an instance of politics, because it involves intentional influence of the action of a political institution.

Today, most political activities take place in the form of people acting as role occupants of political institutions. Most of these institutions have legitimate goals or purposes that they have been created to solve. In such cases, the role occupants of these institutions have moral obligations to perform their functions to the extent of their capacities.

#### 1.4. Political Virtues

In their Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy entry, *Virtue Ethics*, Rosalind Hursthouse and Glen Pettigrove (2016) gives a concise explanation of the meaning of virtue in the following words:

A virtue is an excellent trait of character. It is a disposition, well entrenched in its possessor... to notice, expect, value, feel, desire, choose, act, and react in certain characteristic ways. To possess a virtue is to be a certain sort of person with a certain complex mindset. A significant aspect of this mindset is the wholehearted acceptance of a distinctive range of considerations as reasons for action.

More so, in *Nichomenean Ethics*, Aristotle (1103a1–10 cited in Richard Kraut 2018) asserts the standard position that they are fundamentally two kinds of virtues: intellectual and moral virtues, respectively. It is the latter kind that I present here. That is because my focus is on the virtues, whose presence or absence defines the moral character of political agents. Thus, by political virtues, I refer to the moral<sup>26</sup> character traits necessary for political agents to act in ways that most reliably lead to ends, consistent with the moral ideal of politics. Possessing them implies being in the best possible shape to actualize the moral ideal of politics, depending on your capacity and the situation you find yourself.

Having noted the above, to the extent that actions reflect the characters of agents, political agents ought to possess the following moral virtues. Concerning institutions, I am saying that their structures ought to express or support the expression of these virtues. Based

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<sup>26</sup> Moral character traits are those traits that are most conducive for humans to sustainably achieve good ends, and which do not require special talent for humans to be able to cultivate them. Which is to say that virtually all humans can possess them. There are unlike such talent-dependent traits such as football genius, which can only be attained by those minority of the human population who have inner distinctive football senses.

on ubuntuism and my analysis of its political character above, the following are the moral virtues that I think people should possess in politics.

*(a) Tolerance*

This virtue is the willing acceptance or ability to allow the occurrence of behaviour or beliefs other than one's preferences or reasoned positions. According to Anthony Grayling (2001, 18), "what underlies tolerance is the recognition that there is plenty of room in the world for alternatives to coexist, and that if one is offended by what others do, it is because one has let it get under one's skin".

Tolerant people are devoid of views that include the necessity of everybody's compulsory adherence, except the belief that diversity or differences ought to be tolerated by everyone. That is, the virtue implies non-tolerance of intolerance (Grayling 2001, 17–18).

One reason why tolerance is a virtue is that we are never quite sure about the quality of our beliefs and actions. We are fallible beings. Thus, "the human community benefits by permitting a variety of lifestyles to flourish, because they represent experiments from which much might be learned about how to deal with the human condition" (Grayling 2001, 17).

Furthermore, our differences, limitations, and mutual dependence imply that we must live together through tolerance. For example, tolerance will stop a state actor from employing state powers to distort the multiple ongoing experiments from which we may learn and be ushered into new profound paradigms of human living.

*(b) Courage*

In their Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry, Ancient Moral Theory, Richard Parry and Harald Thorsrud (2021) states that "courage is a settled disposition that allows one to act reliably to pursue right ends in fearful situations, because one values so acting intrinsically". This seems to be the generally accepted definition of courage (See Grayling 2001, 27, Arendt 2005, 122). Political actions often involve acting in concert with people we do not know, or whose apparently genuine intentions cannot be verified until the acting moment. It also involves unpredictable and potentially adverse consequences. Participating in protests is an example. It is a risky venture. Sometimes the risk of being a part of such – legitimate, just and valuable – political events involves one's life. It shows that courage is a condition for consistent, meaningful participation in politics. In this vein, Arendt (2005, 122) wrote:

Courage is the earliest of all political virtues, and even today is still one of the few cardinal virtues of politics, because only by stepping out of our private existence and the familial relationships to which our lives are tied can we make our way into the common public world that is our truly political space.

*(c) Thoughtfulness*

Thoughtfulness is the virtue of being disposed towards persistent thinking about the implications of one's actions, ideas or beliefs, and/or sampling one's options to determine the best thing to do. By thinking, I mean the silent dialogue that respective individuals have with themselves (Arendt 2003, 45). That is, it is a self-reflexive act<sup>27</sup>. This activity is highly required for the sustenance and continuance of moral, political actions.

Thinking focuses our attention on phenomena to the point of revealing their apparently non-existent aspects. This means that thoughtfulness has the unique capacity of bringing the underlying attributes of our ideas and (intended) actions to consciousness. Although we cannot afford to constantly pause and think very widely about the implications of our actions and beliefs, at least thinking retrospectively or in bits ought to be a consistent feature of our lives. It helps us learn about our actions and break their course if they happen to be in the wrong direction. When we take on things thoughtlessly, we have two significant risks: (i) being easily blown by the wind of change in the wrong direction, (ii) perpetration of acts that our better selves would not be proud of or that we would live to regret. Both possibilities are based on the lack of understanding of the justifiable idea that one thoughtlessly gets committed to. Consider the following case.

There are two presidential candidates. One is the incumbent. He has made significant social and economic progress in his time, compared to his predecessors. However, they were some high-profile cases of embezzlement among his cabinet members. But this is a country where such has been the norm. The other candidate was a former military head of state

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<sup>27</sup> People – some more than others – ask themselves the following questions. “Is it okay for me to vacate my position? What would be the implication for the organization? What would it mean for me, and my family? How can I mitigate the hurt that may very likely result from the act?” There are always more than one idea/answer that emerges when people ask themselves such questions. That dialogic act of critiquing, underscoring the implication of the ideas arrived at, and or ultimately selecting ideas (which one must act on is thinking).

during the pre-democratic era of the country. He oversaw one of the worst socio-economic episodes in the nation's history due to his ignorance and incompetence. Over the past years, he has supported extremism and intolerance – he supported post-election violence after losing in the previous poll. This time, the former head of state came with a message of radical end to embezzlement and the image of righteousness. Unlike the incumbent, he neither had policy statements nor a track record to prove that he was the best fit for the post of president. A thoughtless people, that is, those who would not have considered the implication of this position will vote the incompetent moralist over the descent and more promising incumbent. Thoughtless people do not carefully assess the implications of their actions.

Furthermore, the habit of thoughtfully approaching beliefs and acts is the basis for a working conscience<sup>28</sup>. Arendt (2003, 160) wrote: "The inability to think and a disastrous failure of what we commonly call conscience coincide... (The very word con-science, at any rate points in this direction insofar as it means "to know with and by myself<sup>29</sup>," a kind of knowledge that is actualized in every thinking process). It is by careful self-dialogue that the implication of things is brought to light. And when a belief or action is illegitimate, in so far as it is not apparently so, its wrongness and the attendant psychological discomfort can only persistently present itself to the one who thinks about them.

Thinking helps an individual to build self-trust<sup>30</sup>. Being a self-reflexive act, it is at least an expression of the absence of crippling self-doubt or the inability to avoid confiding in oneself. People who take time to think – self-communion – agree that they must confide in themselves, meaning they trust themselves as holders of opinions worth paying attention to. Their continuous decision to be in self-communion reinforces and deepens the trust that they have.

#### *(d) Compassion*

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<sup>28</sup> I don't mean to say that conscience is necessarily an accurate judge of right and wrong. However, it works really well when one's beliefs and values are accurate.

<sup>29</sup> "to know with and by myself [that an act or belief is wrong]"

<sup>30</sup> Self-trust plays a critical role in giving people enough strength to accept the right dictates of their conscience and resist conformity to widely supported evil.

Without being concerned and regretful of others' suffering, one cannot (consistently) aim at, let alone actualize, the goal of politics. To be oriented by the primary ethical goal of politics is to be concerned with others' suffering. The absence or weakness of the faculty of compassion grounds some of the greatest political evils in history. Cruel people are often well aware of the role of compassion to inhibit evil deeds. That is why cruel and egotistic leaders dedicate special efforts to numb their subordinates' compassion as they strive to achieve their illicit ends.

(e) Forgiveness

Action has the quality of uncertainty in the sense that we are “never quite sure” what we are doing concerning ourselves and others when we act (Arendt 2005, 56–58). For that reason, acting has the unique trait of producing consequences, other than what one intended, for one and those which one shares the world with (Arendt 2005, 57). Consider the following example. Midway into his six months gym program, Thabo’s good intention to become fit caused Mensah an injury – a weight fell off Thabo’s back due to his inability to hold it firm. The injury was, in some sense, an accident because Thabo did not want that to happen to Mensah. Still, in another sense, it was non-accidental because Thabo is guilty of immoderation – he allowed himself to be driven by pride and vain interest to impress a lady at the gym. Humans usually err in this way, despite their good intentions.

From antiquity, it was noted that human actions could never be free of errors and guilt (Arendt 2005, 57). It means that offending and being offended is inevitable so long as we live or work together. One ought to be reminded that there is no reasonable alternative. And the more we need to live and work together, the more opportunities and risks for mutual offences. Being offended makes one hostile to the offender. In hostility, acting or living together is either impossible or precarious. When nothing is done to end or manage precarious relations, which are constituted by hostility, the inevitable consequence is the impossibility of communion, i.e. total war. Against this reality “stands the immediate political interest in finding a *remedy*<sup>31</sup>, in the nature of human action itself, to guard the living-together of men against its basic uncertainty and unavoidable errors and guilt”, Arendt (ibid.) correctly

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<sup>31</sup> The emphasis is mine.

notes. According to Arendt (ibid.) and plausibly so, in the western tradition of political thought, “*Jesus found this remedy in the human capacity to forgive...*”<sup>32</sup><sup>33</sup>.

After much thought, it seems that the virtue of forgiveness is the disposition of willingness to let go of one’s negative emotions, such as resentment, towards others for their wrongful actions against one, based on the profound recognition of shared humanity. It is the disposition to contemplate the possibility of eradicating ill-will towards those who have mistreated us, based on solidary identification with them as humans. To forgive, i.e. the (virtuous) act, is to let go of one’s ill-will due to one’s possession of this disposition, based on the sound judgement of its aptness.

An important implication is that forgiveness, and forgiving are emotional, internal/covert states and acts, respectively. Paul Hughes and Brandon Warmke (2017) affirms this position in their Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry, Forgiveness. They note that this is the traditional and most widely held position on forgiveness (Hughes and Warmke). Hughes and Warmke (2017) assert that “it is widely thought that forgiveness is fundamentally a matter of how one feels about another”. This is obvious in that people, presumably, obey the religious command to forgive offenders who are not physically within reach and may never be, say, due to relocation. In such situations, there are no external acts towards offenders, such as pardon. However, there are acts of forgiveness. This point on forgiveness and forgiving does not negate, say, punishment and revenge forbearances as rational/natural outcomes of the virtue and the virtuous act. It only means that such outcomes or actions are contingent aspects of forgiveness and forgiving. Indeed, they could occur without the mediation of a forgiver, say, due to estimation of expediency – they are distinct from the virtue. As I show below, this distinction is essential. Perhaps, ignorance of the importance of separating the overt behaviours associated with but distinct from the virtue is why the place of forgiveness in politics has scarcely been recognised or given adequate credence. Many are sceptical about its political potency (Hughes and Warmke 2017). It includes some misplaced fears about its risks. Grayling (2001, 19–20) expresses this scepticism thus:

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<sup>32</sup> The emphasis is mine.

<sup>33</sup> See Arendt (2005) for more analysis on this.

Shakespeare... has Timon tell a truth when he says, 'Nothing emboldens sin so much as mercy.'

There seems to be a consensus on that point... Seneca himself, when not praising Nero for his reluctance to sign death warrants...repined the tyrant...[Seneca also said that]'he who forbids not sin commands it.'

The chief reason for being merciful is that we all need mercy ourselves...'To understand all is to forgive all,' the French say....But there is a limit. Those who showed no pity – those who tortured, murdered, beat, gassed, shot, raped, and repressed – and those who ordered them to do it, stepped beyond that limit. The long roll-call of such people in recent world history is too well known to need repeating here. Mercy is not merely wasted on them, it is a licence to others who think they might get away with it too. For them, mercy is misplaced: what is required is justice, for the world's sake.

I don't think that there is a limit to forgiveness and forgiving, at least in the sense that Grayling suggests. Misunderstanding, i.e. ignorance of the distinction I have made above, is the source of this perception of its limits. The justification for people's intuition that forgiveness is a virtue can truly be revealed in its fullness by dissociating it from its consequent but contingent overt behaviours. The virtue of forgiveness means being disposed not to find the contemplation of letting go of one's negative emotions towards those who have been unfair to one, bizarre, irrespective of the nature of those people's crime. That is, there is always an openness to sincerely contemplate the plausibility of the idea of letting go. This openness as a character trait, based on no other thing than a sense of shared humanity with the offender, is what I take to be the virtue of forgiveness. It is only an openness to let go as constitutive of one's character. It means that having this virtue does not necessarily imply that one should eradicate one's negative feelings towards an offender. It might seem that forgiveness – as I describe it – is virtually an inconsequential character trait. But that is not the correct judgement. Some critical situations show that mere openness to contemplate the plausibility of forgiving someone is a virtue.

Possessing this virtue – this openness –, can bring forth "letting go" as an option to be considered. Its importance can be inferred by considering the hypothetical situation when forgiving or letting go was the most rational or just thing to do but did emerge as an option

to the thoughtful person who had been offended. Forgiving her offenders did not appear – to her – to be a plausible option because she lacked the disposition to contemplate forgiving people as a plausible response to offence. This is a probable situation because reason typically offers sound practical suggestions in the decisive moments based on a person's disposition. The fact that some of the most sophisticated thinkers in history were very racist, while some less sophisticated minds in their societies could not accept racism and its cognate institution of modern slavery, is a testament to the preceding. This counterfactual reveals the insufficiency of practical reason in reliably moving people to forgive others when it is either in their best interest or the just thing to do. Such a situation is undesirable. It follows that the disposition to sincerely consider the plausibility of forgiving based on a sense of shared humanity is valuable!

Furthermore, the account of forgiveness that I advance does not suggest that forgiving people means giving up the idea of employing corrective measures towards them. Corrective action may involve causing some discomfort to the offender. Forgiving someone for mistreating you implies substituting the negative emotions they caused you to have with goodwill as the basis for future relations. It means that you no longer see them as offenders but as people who may have some traits that you need to protect yourself or others from by some mechanism, such as corrective ones. It also means that goodwill, which is not the opposite of self-affirmation, is now the basis of your relations with them. The foregoing should quell the worries that forgiveness threatens what one may call “righteous indignations” and the instincts of self-preservation<sup>34</sup>.

In politics<sup>35</sup>, there will be instances when people are both offenders and offended in relation to each other. In some such situations, one of the parties or both parties may be able to retaliate. Still, it would be undesirable for them in the long run. In that case, it would be better for those involved to give up their bitterness and forge new paths, such as a community based on shared warmth, solidarity and interest. There, forgiveness powerfully reveals itself as a political virtue. I conclude with Arendt's (2005, 57–58) insightful and vivid words:

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<sup>34</sup> These worries were noted by Hughes and Warmke(2017).

<sup>35</sup> This is even beyond politics. For politics is not the entirety of human intercourse. Thus, Arendt (2005, 57) correctly wrote: “since we cannot stop acting as long as we live, we must never stop forgiving either”.

The great boldness and unique pride of this concept of forgiveness as a basic relationship between humans does not lie in the seeming reversal of the calamity of guilt and error into the possible virtues of magnanimity or solidarity. It is rather that forgiving attempts the seemingly impossible, to undo what has been done, and that it succeeds in making a new beginning where beginnings seemed to have become no longer possible.

(f) Commitment to Politics

Politics is a necessary condition for peace and stability for all or the majority of humans. People ought to be acutely aware of this or at least disposed to accept politics and participate in politics as a valuable aspect of human life. That recognition is the condition *sine qua non* for people to be engaged in politics, potentially contributing their quota to ensuring (quality) life for themselves and others<sup>36</sup>. Furthermore, that is the condition for the non-pursuit of ends that are antithetical to politics in general.

With the foregoing, I conclude my cursory account of the ethic of politics. To the extent that the above is correct, it should inform our understanding of political behaviours and character traits that are not morally acceptable in politics. That is, we should be able to make better judgements about the character traits and actions that are politically corrupt. In the next chapter, I critique the dominant modern and contemporary paradigmatic definition of political corruption as actions implicated in promoting private interest.

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<sup>36</sup> People often withdraw from politics based on the assumption that it is evil. While they should rather take responsibility and do what they can do, under the inspiration of the legitimate goal of politic.

## CHAPTER TWO: PRIVATE-INTEREST DEFINITIONS OF POLITICAL CORRUPTION

In pre-modern political theory, the concept of political corruption has multiple but interrelated meanings. First, it means the possession of moral, political vices by individual citizens, the society as a whole or any aspect of its political institutions. Second, it signifies moral character failure, expressed as a specific misdemeanour in politics, such as negligence. Third, it means the process by which the loss of moral, political virtue comes to be. In short, political corruption connotes the immoral condition of any element of politics or the process by which an immoral political state is arrived at. These three conceptions of political corruption share the unifying feature of being instances of political immorality. In other words, in pre-modern political theory, political corruption was seen as a deviation from the standards of political morality.

On the contrary, beginning in 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain, the concept was predominantly narrowed down to a specific misdemeanour by public officials. Since then, the concept of political corruption mostly denotes any public official's action involving the illicit pursuit of private interest. Bribery, nepotism, patronage and clientelism in the exercise of public office are the acts considered to be instances of political corruption. This means that since the modern era, individuals' moral character traits or other elements of politics are not typically seen as political corruption, even though they are seen as morally wrong. Two notable exceptions are: (i) the theory of institutional corruption proposed by Dennis Thompson (1995, 2013) and (ii) Seumas Miller's (2018) causal theory of political corruption. Thompson's theory denotes a "private-interest" definition of political corruption that implicates the moral character of institutions. In contrast, Miller's goes beyond the private-interest model. For this reason, my critique of private-interest definitions of political corruption includes Thompson's account. I separate Miller's account from these ones, critiquing it in the next chapter.

Despite Thompson's deviation from the predominant and limited understanding of the concept since the modern era, his account is not so far apart compared to Miller's. Thompson maintains that political corruption necessarily implies the illicit promotion of private interest. For Thompson, any immoral political action that does not promote private interest is not an instance of political corruption. Basically, this is the same as the predominant modern understanding. To what extent does Thompson's understanding of the concept diverge from the predominant one? At this point, let me state only one difference from the

definitional angle. Predominantly, political corruption is defined as necessarily involving the actions of public officials characterized by the unjustifiable promotion of private interest. Thompson also defines political corruption as necessarily involving public officials' unjustifiable promotion of private interest. But while others think that the public official's interest in private gain is necessarily involved, Thompson thinks that an official's act may be politically corrupt even when they are not motivated by an interest in (their own) private gain. For Thompson, insofar as an official's action promotes the private interest of, say, a citizen while violating a justifiable code of conduct, such as due process, it is politically corrupt.

This chapter shows the insufficiency of private-interest definitions of political corruption by critiquing two of these definitions. The first is Mark Philp's (1997, 2015) definition of political corruption. The second is Thompson's.

Philp's theory of political corruption is the most articulate and plausible definitional account of political corruption, as exclusively involving public officials' actions characterized by an illicit interest in private gain. Other such accounts of political corruption assume that political corruption necessarily implies a public official's action, which involves their interest in private benefit. But they do not say why such actions, and not any other misdemeanour of public officials, amounts to political corruption. Of the definitional accounts of political corruption as a public office misdemeanour, which involves motive for private gain, only Philp's includes a justification.

Furthermore, these definitions are similar in a way that proving the insufficiency of Philp's definition implies demonstrating the insufficiency of all of them. These definitions only disagree about when the pursuit of private gain by public officials is unjustifiable. Consider the following examples. For Joseph Nye (2002), a public official's pursuit of private gain is unjustified or an instance of political corruption only when they deviate from the formal rules and/or norms of public office. That is, if a public official does not violate the formal rules and/or norms of the office that they occupy, their pursuit of private interest is not an instance of political corruption. For Carl Friedrich (2002), political corruption is when public officials' actions involve pursuing a private interest, leading to a private gain at public expense. For Friedrich, it does not matter whether it violates the public office's formal or informal rules and norms.

Friedrich's definition is different from Nye's in the sense that he does not think of political corruption as necessarily implying public officials' actions that violate the norms of public offices. Such are the variations in the modern paradigmatic definitions of political corruption. However, they all think of political corruption as exclusively about public officials' actions constituted by the pursuit of private interest. Also, because the bone of my contention is that political corruption involves more than private-interest promoting acts, it is only necessary for me to critique one of such definitional accounts of political corruption. Philp's account is the best fit because it includes a justification.

Lastly, I also present and critique Thompson because his private-interest definitional account of political corruption deviates from the paradigm of political corruption as necessarily involving a public official's pursuit of private gain (for himself). In other words, the pursuit of private gain by the public official need not be reflexive for corruption to be said to have occurred. It could be the pursuit of private gain for other people without any self-regarding interest by the official. The best word to accommodate both senses of the pursuit of private gain is to say that, for Thompson, political corruption involves public officials' "promotion" of private gain.

### 2.1. Mark Philp

According to Philp (2015, 22),

Corruption in politics occurs where a public official (A), violates the [morally justified] rules and/or norms of office, to the detriment of the interests of the public (B) (or some subsection thereof) who is the designated beneficiary of that office, to benefit themselves and a third party (C) who rewards or otherwise incentivizes A to gain access to goods or services they would not otherwise obtain

This means that political corruption is any deviant action of a public official geared towards private gain, i.e. gain for the public official and a third party. Consider the following: A police officer contaminated a crime scene involving an armed robbery. He received fifty per cent of the money by the thief to contaminate the crime scene. The police officer violated the rule of safeguarding leads to the perpetrator of a crime. He did so because of his interests in enriching his pocket and protecting the armed robber. In this instance, the third party is the armed robber. However, a third party could be anyone or a group of persons who are not

morally entitled to benefit in such a manner from the public official's exercise of entrusted power.

Philp's (2015, 22) definition also implies that a public official who violates the rules of public office for any reason but interest in private gain is not an instance of political corruption. For example, negligence, failing to perform one's duties because of carelessness, does not amount to political corruption. What is the justification for taking one kind of political dereliction as political corruption while thinking other kinds to be different?

For Philp, public officials' deviant actions, motivated by an interest in private gain, are directly antithetical to the purpose that should orient political activities, namely, the public interest (Philp 1997, 458). It is direct, in the sense of the motive being the opposite of the motive that should be the basis of public officials' actions. In contrast, other political derelictions are not directly antithetical to the primary goal of politics (Philp 1997, 459). For Philp (1997, 459), a direct violation of political actions' primary imperative is a more serious moral failure. This is why only the illicit pursuit of private gain amounts to political corruption (*ibid.*). I reject the claim that deviant actions constituted by an interest in private gain are more severe moral failures. I consider that claim wrong. If that is true, then the conclusion arrived from it is without justification.

Deviating from a public office's moral imperatives due to interest in private gain is not necessarily a more severe wrong in exercising entrusted power than negligence or unaccountability. Negligence, a failure to care enough for the interest of the public or one's duty, is as bad as prioritizing one's interest over that of the public. As a public official, prioritizing private interest is unethical because it, without justification, undermines the public good. The same applies to negligence. Therefore, there is no important distinction between the weightiness of deviant behaviour constituting an interest in private gain and other political, moral failures, such as negligence.

Philp's (1997) categorization of moral, political shortcomings is based on his judgements of the severity of the moral failure which they imply. I have proven, by argument, that they all have the same moral import in the sense that they undermine the public's interest. It means that by Philp's (1997) standard of severity, any moral, political fault by a public official is an instance of political corruption. This latter conception is closer to the

position that I defend subsequently. But it is still insufficient. I note one of the reasons for this claim below.

Philp's (1997, 2015) definition of political corruption presupposes that politics comprises only situations involving public officials' actions. However, through his examples of other moral shortcomings in politics – which he claims do not constitute corruption – Philp affirms the notion that politics involves activities other than those involving the actions of public officeholders. Terrorism is an example, which is to say that terrorism is a political activity<sup>37</sup> (Philp 1997, 459). Given this understanding of politics, Philp's conception of political corruption is incomplete because it does not factor in the entire spectrum of politics. That is, if the term “politics” implies activities other than those involving the actions of public officials, “corruption in politics” ought to involve more than the deviant actions of public officeholders.

## 2.2. Dennis Thompson

According to Thompson (2013), there are two kinds of political corruption: individual and institutional corruption. Both kinds of political corruption involve public officials promoting private interests in disregard of legitimate democratic procedures. Thompson defines legitimate democratic procedures as those necessary for democratic institutions to function as they ought to. Suppose that the legislature ought to make laws that benefit the public. A legitimate procedure is that which legislators must adhere to for them to make laws that are beneficial to the public.

Individual corruption refers to any public official's violation of legitimate democratic procedures to obtain private gain (Thompson 2013, 6). This means that a public official has acted corruptly even if he is unable to secure the private gain that he intended to obtain through a violation of legitimate procedures or principles of actions. Private gain refers to any benefit that is accruable to the public official, his friends, relatives or any faction in the society that he belongs to. The nature of the benefit is that its purpose is not to help the public official or the institution they are a part of to perform their duties. It is primarily intended to serve their private interest, which is anything but their obligation as public officeholders. The common occurrence of individual corruption involves public officials providing services to

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<sup>37</sup> This is obviously consistent with my definition of politics in the previous chapter.

citizens in return for private gain. For example, a doctor in a government hospital violated the legitimate principle of first-come-first-serve<sup>38</sup> by attending a late-comer in exchange for 50,000 rands. The exchange between the public official and the benefactor is *quid pro quo*.

Institutional corruption occurs when an institution or its agents receive *political gain* and systematically provides a service to the benefactor under conditions that tend to undermine the institution's legitimate procedures or democracy (Thompson 2013, 6). Political gains are the benefits received by public officials, which are primarily and directly useful for the institutions that they are a part of to serve their legitimate functions. They are also the benefits that public officials seek because of their usefulness to the institutions that they belong to<sup>39</sup>.

Aside from the difference in the gains obtained in individual and institutional corruption cases, respectively, another point of difference is in the nature of the services provided by public officials to their benefactors. Regarding institutional corruption, the services provided are part of public officials' job descriptions, i.e., public officials ought to offer such services to their citizens (Thompson 2013, 16). For example, a member of Congress is justified in taking the grievance of a constituent to the attention of an administrative agency. By that, "the member is not only serving this citizen but also democracy. At least, the member is serving the form of a democracy that assigns legislators the duties of ombudsman" (Thompson 1995, 31). Regarding individual corruption, the service provided by the public official is not part of his job description (Thompson 2013, 7). In the example above, there is nothing in the job description of a public official that suggests that he ought to provide any service to his benefactor to enrich his pockets. In other words, the public official's job

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<sup>38</sup> Suppose that it is legitimate.

<sup>39</sup> Campaign contributions is an example of political gains. Politicians are encouraged to seek financial and other legitimate supports for campaigns, in order to ensure fair competition; thus, better representation. Thompson wrote: "the system depends on politicians' seeking political advantage: we count on their wanting to be elected or re-elected. Among the political advantages they must seek are campaign contributions". What this means is that obtaining political gain is a requirement for the job.

description does not include a charge that he enters into a *quid pro quo* relationship with a citizen.

Although a member of Congress is justified in taking the grievance of a constituent to the attention of an administrative agency, there is a manner in which he ought not to go about such activities. Institutional corruption involves a public official improperly performing their job. The impropriety lies in the provision of a legitimate service in disregard of the rules for the provision of that service. When such improprieties occur under institutional conditions that tend to undermine legitimate institutional procedures, there are instances of political corruption. The design or culture of how political gains are obtained tend to lead politicians to undermine legitimate institutional procedures<sup>40</sup>. Hence, the definition of institutional corruption as "when an institution or its agent receives a benefit that is directly useful to performing an institutional function, and systematically provides a service to the benefactor under conditions that tend to undermine legitimate procedures of the institution" (Thompson 2013, 9). Below is an example of institutional corruption.

A senator took the grievance of a constituent – Morris – to an investigating agency. Morris' company was facing some allegations that he maintained was unwarranted and, thus, illegitimately inhibiting their customer base's growth. His company – Lift – is one of the big local employers of labour in the transport sector of the biggest city in the Senator's district. Upon the order of the agency's head, the Senator was briefed on the evidence warranting the investigation. However, the evidence was unconvincing.

Afterwards, the Senator offered the head of the agency a deal: he would approve the money that the agency desperately needed for a necessary project if she ended the investigation<sup>41</sup>. Before and when these actions were taken, the Senator received a series of campaign funds contributions from Morris. However, the Senator did not make that move because of the campaign contributions but to avoid a possible retrenchment of some of his

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<sup>40</sup> In the U.S, there is a pattern of getting the decisive share of campaign contributions from a very few wealthy individuals. Financial support is often based on expectations of servicing interest. Since the process is very competitive, this makes politicians much more responsive to the needs of only a small percentage of the citizens.

<sup>41</sup> He was going to advocated for the approval, irrespective of the response of the agency head because he believed in the agency's cause.

constituents. This means that he acted with a motive to perform his job of looking out for his constituents, being their representative.

Nevertheless, offering a deal to have an agency stop an investigation, not stopping at asking them to do so on merit, is improper. It is a violation of due process. Since the Senator violated due process while receiving contributions from Morris, if news of the act got to the public, it would be justifiably seen by the public as involving an illicit motive<sup>42</sup>. And such actions tend to undermine legitimate democratic procedures. The need for political gain often makes public officials more responsive to the needs of the wealthy minority. This condition is why the public would perceive the Senator's act to involve a motive for his own private gain<sup>43</sup> or a preference for the wealthy minority. Such perceptions by citizens fuels their mistrust of political institutions, such as the legislature. They begin to think that the priority of those institutions is the wealthy minority. Such beliefs inhibit democratic participation, a procedure that is necessary for the optimal functioning of democratic institutions.

Since institutional corruption involves officials attempting to do their jobs, it is an integral part of how institutions are designed to function. The fact that soliciting and receiving political gains is suspect and thus make the well-intentioned acts of public officials cause damage to the democratic procedure is not entirely the officials' fault. If politicians did not have to seek political gains, the Senator's action would not have the kind of effect it had on the democratic process. It would not have sparked mistrust and undermined democratic participation. The Senator is responsible for his improper action. Still, the gravity of his impropriety's impact is significantly an effect of the institution's nature<sup>44</sup>. This means that the

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<sup>42</sup> Even though that is not the case.

<sup>43</sup> That is notwithstanding the fact that he acted for a different purpose.

<sup>44</sup> In democracies soliciting and receiving political support in the form of campaign contributions is necessary for a fair competition and the best possible representation. The problem with the current system is that it is not regulated to have the best outcome. For people would naturally prioritize going to the wealthiest for financial support, if there is no upper bound of how much each person can give, which is convenient for the vast majority of the citizens. In the absence of such a regulation, politicians are incentivized to be more responsive to the needs of the rich minority, which is a collateral damage involved in performing a task that is required of them, i.e. seeking and amassing political gain. This

action is not the type that would have such a result, be it not for the institutional condition, which he is not responsible for. In other words, institutional corruption is partly a structural problem: it involves negative effects that defaulters cannot bear total responsibility for.

According to Thompson, individual corruption implies public officials' possessing interest in private gain, while institutional corruption does not. In what sense are both kinds of behaviour politically corrupt, while the other sorts of public officials' violations of moral standards of actions are not? According to Thompson (2013, 4), it is because in both situations, "private interests distorts public purposes by influencing the government in disregard of the democratic process"<sup>45</sup>. This means that the distinctive difference between individual corruption and institutional corruption is the motive in the public official's mind. The former involves a public official's possession of a "corrupt" motive, i.e. interest in a private gain in disregard of legitimate procedures. In contrast, the latter does not involve a "corrupt" motive.

Based on the foregoing, Thompson's definition of institutional corruption as an act that occurs "under conditions that tend to undermine legitimate procedures" is inconsistent with his claim about what makes an act corrupt. The "tendency" criterion implies that actions, which involve private interest distortion of public purposes, are not politically corrupt if they occur under conditions that do not tend to undermine legitimate procedures. But this contradicts the statement above about what it means for an act to be politically corrupt. Above, Thompson (2013, 4) opined that what makes both the Senator's action and that of the doctor corrupt is that they promoted private interest. Suppose that the Senator did not and could not make any political gain from Morris. It would mean that his impropriety did not occur under conditions tending to undermine legitimate democratic procedure. Still, that would have been an instance of private interest distortion of "public purposes by influencing the government in disregard of the democratic process". That is, it would still be an instance

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creates a condition of mistrust in the minds of the public. And this inflates the impact of an action, such as that of the senator, which would otherwise not be so destructive.

<sup>45</sup> With regards to individual corruption, the influence is direct – the public official had interest in personal gain. With regards to institutional corruption, the influence of private interest was indirect – the public official did not disregard procedural norms because of his interest in personal gain. But, his entire actions were initiated because Morris had a private concern.

of non-individual corruption, which is to say that it belongs to the category of institutional corruption. The public purpose that was distorted is the appropriate relationship between public officials, i.e. the Senator and the head of the agency, and due process is the procedure that was disregarded. This means that Thompson's account implies that any public official's act that is devoid of a "corrupt" motive but involves the promotion of the private interest of a citizen in disregard of democratic processes is politically corrupt irrespective of the condition in which it occurs.

Although Thompson's explanation of political corruption is relative to democratic societies, the underlying meaning is generalizable to other political systems (Thompson 2013, 5). According to Thompson (2013, 4), his account of political corruption is a development of the core idea of the concept in the western tradition of political theory. For him, the core of the traditional idea of political corruption is "the pollution of the public by the private". This means that all instances of political corruption involve the possession of private interests<sup>46</sup>. It implies that the general definition of political corruption implicit in Thompson's account is the following. Political corruption is when private interest distorts the justified public purposes of any political system by influencing a public official to disregard the legitimate procedures of actions in such a system.

Thompson's appeal to tradition as a justification for his definition of political corruption is wrong. Find below some of the acts thought to be politically corrupt by some pre-modern thinkers, as Buchan and Hill (2014, 20) noted:

The view that prosperity, and the luxury it brought with it, dissipated moral character and destroyed social solidarity was prevalent as early as the fifth century BCE, and with this view came the concomitant belief that virtue could be recovered via a return to primitive conditions. Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE), for example, inveighed against the pursuit of gratification beyond our natural needs, suggesting that 'avarice and luxury split human beings up and got them to abandon partnership for plunder'. Epictetus also admonished his readers that needs should be constrained by the modest demands of the body. Underlining that despotism is the end point of the corrupt

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<sup>46</sup> Of course, this is wrong. Cowardice, effeminacy, foolishness, wastefulness and pride which are forms of political corruption, for most ancient and medieval thinkers and they do not necessarily involve private interest (Robert Sparling 2020, 3)).

polity, Tacitus (56–117 CE) wrote of the 'craving for luxury and idleness' and 'loathing [for] discipline and toil' that spoiled Roman troops and allowed tyranny to flourish. The Roman historian Livy (59 BCE– 17 CE) attributed Rome's former greatness to the simple living standards of his forebears, declaring that, in the past, 'poverty with us went hand in hand with contentment'.

The above points out that traditionally, political corruption involved more than acts characterized by the illicit pursuit of private interest. As is clear, the pursuit of luxury, even for society as a whole, was thought to be politically corrupt. It is politically corrupt in the sense that it leads to the erosion of civic virtues (Buchan and Hill 2014, 20). This makes it clear that Thompson's appeal to tradition is wrong. In other words, Thompson cannot justify his limited definition of political corruption. Nevertheless, even if Thompson's position that political corruption only involved the illicit promotion of private interest was correct, his definition is still flawed.

Political corruption implies an immoral political action, which is to say that an instance of political corruption is also an immoral or unjustified political action. Thompson defines individual corruption as any action of a public official that involves pursuing a private interest in disregard of legitimate institutional procedures. However, there are instances when it is not immoral for a public official to disregard legitimate institutional procedures to pursue private gain<sup>47</sup>. Those are conditions when public officials have no moral obligation to adhere to legitimate institutional procedures. In other words, a public official's pursuit of private gain in disregard of a legitimate institutional process may not be an instance of political corruption, contrary to Thompson's claim. Consider the following example:

Imagine a medical doctor who normally treats patients based on the legitimate rule of "first come, first serve". The government has failed to pay doctors their salaries for about six months. Now, his 6-year-old is terribly ill; she needs urgent medical attention and can only be helped in a private hospital. In the absence of an alternative, he took a bribe that was enough for his daughter's medical bill. In return, he skipped the queue and provided medical help for his benefactor.

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<sup>47</sup> Legitimate procedures are those that are necessary for political institutions to serve their justifiable purposes.

The doctor's obligation to perform his medical duties, guided by some formal rules, is not superior to his obligation to care for his daughter. Thus, his decision to serve his interest and save his daughter's life is not condemnable. For he did not act from aloofness to others' wellbeing and lack of regard for his formal duties, but out of duty.

Under normal circumstances, he would have no right to violate the legitimate rules of public office to be happy or provide his family with good things. For example, if his involvement in bribery is simply out of greed, unwillingness to try legitimate money-making alternatives, and lack of concern for his patient's welfare. However, he had not acted corruptly in the initial scenario since his action was not morally unjustified.

With the foregoing, I hope that I have discredited the private-interest definitions of political corruption. Now, I turn to present and critique the definitional accounts that go beyond private interest.

## CHAPTER THREE: BEYOND PRIVATE INTEREST

In this chapter, I present and critique Miller's (2018) definitional account and theory of political corruption. It is not the only definitional account that is a deviation from the position that political corruption involves more than public officials' actions, consisting of the promotion of private interest. However, it is the only one that is useful to my inquiry<sup>48</sup>.

### 3.1. Seumas Miller's Causal Theory of Institutional Corruption

Generally, corruption is the despoiling of the character of a thing or the state of the lack of its good characteristics, says Miller (2018). The entity may be a person or non-person, such as laws, processes and institutions. In this vein, Miller opines that there are basically three kinds of corruption: (i) Personal corruption, (ii) Non-personal corruption and (iii) Institutional corruption. Personal corruption is the despoiling of the moral characters of persons. Non-personal corruption is the despoiling of the character of non-persons, such as artefacts or processes. While institutional corruption implies despoiling the character of institutional entities<sup>49</sup>.

In theorizing about corruption, Miller focuses on institutional corruption. However, the discussion of personal and non-personal corruption is implicit in institutional corruption. Miller (2018) writes that

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<sup>48</sup> Unlike the modern-paradigmatic theorists, Emmanuella Ceva defines corruption as relational injustice, which involves a public official's violation of the publicly-sanctioned rationale of the mandate for his/her office. This definition of political corruption is relative to right-based systems, such as democracy. That is, it is a statement of the nature of political corruption in right-based system. It is not a statement of what political corruption is in general, irrespective of the political system that people work within. Ceva is also of this opinion. Since my inquiry is a search for a comprehensive definition and understanding of the meaning of political corruption in general, Ceva's account has proven not to be useful to me.

<sup>49</sup>Institutions are comprised of entities such as persons, conventions, laws and process, which is to say that institutions are combinations of persons and non-persons. The implication is that institutional corruption involves personal corruption and non-personal corruption. However, the senses in which personal corruption and non-personal corruption are variants of institutional corruption is slightly different from the original senses above.

In order to provide an adequate account of institutional corruption we need a serviceable notion of an institution: the thing corrupted. For our purposes here, it is assumed that an institution is an organization or structure of organizations that reproduces itself (e.g., by training and recruitment processes) and is comprised of a structure of institutional roles defined in terms of tasks...Accordingly, the class of institutions is quite diverse and includes political institutions, (e.g., legislatures), market-based institutions, (e.g., corporations) ...and so on.

Since only those things with good natures can be corrupted, the theory of institutional corruption that Miller (*ibid.*) advocates only applies to legitimate institutions. These are organizations or systems of organizations the purpose of which is a human good. The goods in question are either intrinsic or instrumental goods. For instance, universities are held to have as their purpose the discovery and transmission of knowledge, where knowledge is at the very least an instrumental good.

The above implies that institutions, such as terrorist organizations, whose purposes are contrary to human goods, are not the kinds of institutions involved in Miller's theory of institutional corruption. This is indeed an accurate judgement. For corruption, i.e. the act of despoiling a thing, presupposes that it was previously in good shape.

Having accounted for Miller's definition of institutions, and the nature of the institutions which are or can be corrupted, I now proceed to present and critique his position on institutional corruption.

Institutional corruption implies despoiling the moral character of the role occupants of institutions and undermining the legitimate processes and purposes of institutions<sup>50</sup>. This

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<sup>50</sup> The idea of a role occupant extends beyond offices, it refers to anybody who plays a role in an organization, simply as a member. For the roles of institutions are not necessarily encoded as offices. For instance, voters are role occupants of the electoral institution even though they are not office holders, i.e. officials of the Electoral Commission. As ordinary members of the electoral institution, the roles of citizens include voting, among other things. So, a role occupant is anybody who is a member of an institution; who has a role to play by virtue of his/her membership. This idea of membership also involves people who are not members of institutions in any durable sense. That is, those who momentarily interact with the typical members, say public officials, of institutions in their capacity as officials of such institutions.

means that there are two different forms of institutional corruption, namely, institutional, *personal* corruption and institutional *non-personal* corruption. I explain them below.

### 3.2. The Two Forms of Institutional Corruption

#### 1. Institutional *Personal* Corruption

Institutional, personal corruption is the despoiling of the moral character of persons *qua* institutional role occupants. It is the erosion of the virtues that people need to have to perform their duties as role occupants of a certain institution and its replacement with vices. It also means the cultivation of values that are antithetical to the moral virtues that people require to be able to function optimally, in their roles as institutional agents.

For institutional role occupants to carry out their tasks, they need to possess certain moral virtues. For instance, objectivity and open-mindedness are virtues that police detectives ought to have. These virtues can be displaced with bribes, for example, and replaced with dishonesty and bias. When such displacements occur, it is a case of institutional personal corruption.

However, the corruption of a person *qua* institutional agent does not necessarily mean that they are corrupt in other regards. It only means that they no longer have the capacity to perform the morally right actions that they ought to perform as institutional agents. That a police detective no longer values objectivity in his investigative reports does not mean that he is no longer faithful to his wife. Suppose fidelity is a marital virtue, and the detective still values and practices it. In that case, he is not corrupt in at least one non-institutional setting. This means that he was only corrupted, relative to his being an institutional agent. The reverse is also the case: that a person is corrupted, in the sense of being made incapable of performing

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So, one is a member, i.e. institutional role occupant, in so far as one is in interaction with a member of an institution in his/her capacity as a member of the specific institution. That is because there are certain ways in which people ought to interact with members of institutions, in so far as they are being institutional agents, which is to say that people have roles to play. For instance, an individual who is seeking immigration services is typically not supposed to bribe or mislead an immigration officer.

their non-institutional duties, does not mean that they have been institutionally corrupted, i.e. made incapable of performing the duties of an institutional role.

In summary, institutional corruption involves making institutional actors unable to act as they ought to or perform their duties by eroding the necessary virtues.

## 2. Institutional *Non-Personal* Corruption

Institutional corruption sometimes occurs without the despoiling of the moral character of an institutional role occupant or agent. For example, a tender officer was forced to collect a "bribe", while also being forced to subvert a tender process. He obliged as an act of self-defence. But he neither repeated such act nor possessed an interest in doing so. That he acted against his will, and never repeated it, implies that only the process was corrupted. That is because he still has the virtue – impartiality – required of him as an occupant of that institutional role. When only institutional processes and purposes are being undermined, it is might be purely a case of institutional *non-personal* corruption.

There are different ways in which institutional processes and purposes can be undermined. According to Miller (*ibid*), only a certain way amounts to the corruption of institutions. For him, institutional corruption is only when the undermining of institutional processes and purposes occurs intentionally or as a result of an immoral action. Otherwise, the undermining of institutional processes and purposes is simply a case of institutional corrosion. The following is an example of the corrosion of institutions, which is not also the corruption of the institution.

Consider, for example, funding decisions that gradually reduce public monies allocated to the court system in some large jurisdiction. As a consequence, magistrates might be progressively less well trained and there might be fewer and fewer of them to deal with the gradually increasing workload of cases. This may well lead to a diminution over decades in the quality of magistrates, and so the judicial processes are to an extent undermined. However, given the size of the jurisdiction and the incremental nature of these changes, neither the magistrates, nor anyone else, might be aware of this process of judicial corrosion, or even able to become aware of it (given heavy workloads, absence of statistical information, etc.) (*ibid.*).

Suppose that no one is aware of it. Or no one can be held morally responsible for undermining the judicial process, say for not taking steps to fix the problem (ibid). In that case, the situation above is simply a case of institutional corruption (ibid.).

Implicit in Miller's theory of corruption is that a corrupt action is one that has the effect of despoiling the character of a thing. That is to say that an action that does no damage to a thing's character, which may just be a violation of a principle of action or which leads to the annihilation of a thing, is not a corrupt action<sup>51</sup>. An example provided by Miller is Genocide. The reasoning is that genocide leads to people's death, not the destruction of their moral character. In this vein, Miller (ibid.) wrote that "genocide is a profound moral wrong, but it is not corruption". However, corruption is not just the act of despoiling but the state where a thing, namely, a person, does not have the good traits that they should have. This means that a corrupt character is simply a deviation from how a person's character should be. If that is the case, then all immoral actions are also corrupt actions because they are deviations from the moral standards of actions. Moreover, if immoral actions are expressions of corrupt characters, then there are corrupt actions. Immoral actions, including genocides are expressions of corrupt characters. Thus, all immoral actions are corrupt actions.

A further implication of Miller's position is that corrupt acts are not necessarily immoral actions. One need not have acted immorally for one's action to constitute acting corruptly since corruption is simply about damaging a thing's character. Therefore, a corrupt act is merely a negative action, i.e. an action that has the negative effect of despoiling a thing's character, for example, the character of a person<sup>52</sup>. In short, a corrupt action might either be

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<sup>51</sup> Miller's distinction of corrupt actions from other kinds of immoral actions, based on the effects produced is the reason why he calls the account a causal theory of corruption.

<sup>52</sup> One of Miller's example about a case of corruption confirms this. It concerns a mother who pays a one-off bribe to an immigration official in order to be reunited with her child. Miller asks that we assume that the action is morally justifiable. But in spite of the justifiability of the action, its effect is the despoiling of the moral character of the official. That is because that act made the official to appreciate the advantages of collecting bribes. Afterwards, he continued to receive bribes from people, which is to say that he stopped acting on the basis of the merit of the case. This means that his character (previously defined by the prioritization of merit) has been despoiled. For it is now defined by an inordinate care for advantage or irrelevance.

a moral or immoral action. However, this is inconsistent with his correct acknowledgement that corrupt actions are likewise immoral actions. This means that Miller's definition of a corrupt act is wrong.

In spite of these shortcomings, Miller's account is very insightful. His observation that appropriate political behaviour is the expression of some moral virtues that may not coincide with some of the virtues which condition good behaviour in non-political matters is accurate and useful<sup>53</sup>. To perform their public duties, public officials only need some moral virtues. For example, a senator's faculty of loyalty is weak, to the extent that he struggles and sometimes fail to be faithful to his wife. However, he is courageous, thoughtful, and committed to his duties as a representative and legislator. His political actions, relative to his role as a senator, are morally justified. His political character does not include infidelity to his duties – he has political integrity. Hence, he ought not to be less preferred to a competitor with a clean marital record and equal technical competence but who is less thoughtful in so far as the duties of the office is the priority. That is because he has more political integrity, even though the same may not be said concerning his private life.

Now, I turn to present my conception of the concept of political corruption in the final chapter.

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<sup>53</sup> Miller's (2018) theory of institutional corruption is also a theory of corruption, with regards to political institutions. Relative to political institutions it means the erosion of the virtues that people ought to possess as political agents and the undermining of the legitimate processes of political institutions.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION: DEFINING POLITICAL CORRUPTION

My critique of the preceding definitional accounts of political corruption reveals that there is no viable definition of the concept in the literature. Philp's (1997) argument for limiting the concept of political corruption to mean only those actions of public officials characterized by the illicit pursuit of private interest is unsound. He wrongly claimed that such moral wrongs are more severe moral failures than other kinds of moral wrongs. Thompson's (2013) appeal to tradition to justify his claim that political corruption only involves political actions that promote private interest in disregarding legitimate procedures is false. While Miller's (2018) definition is defective because of his incorrect notion of corrupt actions. Political corruption is the opposite of political integrity. In that case, it includes more than those acts that despoil the character of persons or undermines legitimate political processes and purposes.

As I posited in the first chapter, political integrity connotes people's possession of some moral virtues. It implies people acting according to the political imperatives, namely, participating in politics and doing so with the collective good as the action-orienting goal. It also means that the non-personal elements of politics should be expressive or supportive of the political virtues. For example, laws ought to be congruent with moral, political imperatives. Based on the above, the following is my definition of political corruption.

Political corruption is the state of being in possession of political vices and/or expressing them. Possessing political vices means that a thing's character comprises one or more of the opposites of political virtues. A person who lacks and has the opposite of political virtues is corrupt to the degree that their character comprises political vices. While expressing a corrupt character implies acting in a manner that is contrary to one's moral, political imperatives in specific situations<sup>54</sup>. This means that politically corrupt actions are morally wrong political actions, and/or the failure to perform one's obligation to participate in politics. Such actions are corrupt actions by virtue of their being expressions of corrupt natures.

My perspective on political corruption implies that the phenomenon is hardly, if at all it is, totally descriptive of a person's political character. That is, one can hardly be completely

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<sup>54</sup> Like I said before, the primary moral, political imperative has no specific form. Its form is multiple and changing, depending on the situation and the persons involved.

corrupt, as to not have at least one of the virtues of politics or momentarily possess some of the political values. To be politically corrupt is often a partial description of a person's moral character. A person may be politically corrupt to the extent that he/she is intolerant. The intolerant person may be incorrupt, to the extent that he/she is courageous and compassionate. This is the manner in which people often fall short of having political integrity. An accurate representation of people's lack of integrity is one that mirrors the fact.

The notion of political corruption that I advance applies to everybody, including citizens and residents of societies. For politics refers to actions or activities that involve more than the actions of public officials. The actions of ordinary residents of society have or can have significance on society and people's wellbeing. Everyone is subject to moral, political injunctions and judgements. The imperative to care for humanity's wellbeing implies participating in politics under the guidance of ethical principles of action. Thus, political corruption is a moral disease that they also possess and express.

Taking the above point into consideration expands the discourse on the moral issues in politics. It implies the expansion of our knowledge of the problems that we have to surmount in order to have a more just world. Knowing one's problem is often the first step to solving the problem. In this case, this expanded knowledge of the problems of politics is part of the solution. It increases our capacity to make for a better world by reminding us of what we have to resolve to make a more just world emerge.

My position contradicts the prevailing ethic that the fundamental imperative of local politics is national development or the public interest. National development or public interest are moral imperatives of local politics. But there is a primary moral imperative of all politics, local or international, which the imperative to pursue public interest is only a part. What this means is that the absence of other countries enabling policies in public discourse is an indication of the widespread presence of political corruption among people all over the world. Local political activities that express disinterest or disdain for the welfare of the people of other countries are politically corrupt. People ought to be committed to making the institutions of the state, which is the collective agent, conducive as much as is possible to the welfare of humanity in general. There are a few historical examples of people acting per the fundamental imperative of politics, which is admirable and ought to be duplicated in our time.

For instance, in the U.S., the counter-culture and civil rights movements critiqued and protested against its wars, especially the U.S-Vietnam war. are some shining instances.

When Martin Luther King Jr. spoke against the war in Vietnam, he meant that the cause of humanity is an imperative of politics, which should be a part of political discussions and actions at all levels of politics. King (1967) opined that America ought to use “its vast resources of power to end the long night of poverty, racism and man’s inhumanity to man”. Still in this vein, he charged his fellow American citizens with the following words:

We cannot remain silent as our nation engages in one of history’s most cruel and senseless wars. America must continue to have, during these days of human travail, a company of creative dissenters. We need them because the thunder of their fearless voices will be the only sound stronger than the blasts of bombs and the clamor of war hysteria... We must work unceasingly to lift this nation we love to a higher destiny, to a new plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humaneness (King 1997).

Furthermore, my definition of political corruption contradicts the prevailing moral sentiment in international politics: nothing but the interest of nations ought to prevail. My position is that those who have this conviction have politically corrupt characters. Another way to put it is that there are politically corrupt to the extent that the good of humankind does not orient their political values and actions. It implies that actions aimed at national gains at the expense of other countries, for no just cause, are instances of political corruption. Under certain conditions, it may be justified for political actors to only pursue national outcomes. Suppose that competition between and among nations is justified because it allows for the overall best outcome for all people due to the incentives to produce. Suppose that there are legitimate rules or moral principles of actions for international competition. In that case, it is justified to pursue national interests at the expense of other nations, following the moral imperatives. Otherwise, it would be political corruption. Another condition whereby the pursuit of national interest at the expense of other nations is not an instance of political corruption is if nations have no other alternative for achieving a necessary end, such as security than the pursuit of their national gain in such a manner. Otherwise, such are instances of political corruption. State institutions designed for such illicit purposes are politically corrupt. People who act in such manners are also politically corrupt.

Members of international political organizations, such as the United Nations, ought to be primarily oriented by the interest of mankind. All their actions ought to prioritize humankind. Doing the opposite is politically corrupt. Any international organization that is purposed for any reason that is antithetical to the good of humanity is politically corrupt.

I have provided what I think to be a comprehensive definition of political corruption. I believe that future research should now be concerned with critiquing political institutions and activities in respective societies in order to detect which ones are instances of political corruption. Efforts should also be taken to explain why some ways of being or acting are instances of political corruption to the public. Moral, political imperatives are multiple. This means, for example, that the behaviours which are politically corrupt are not the same across the political domains and political institutions. It would take incisive inquiry, which is beyond the scope of this work, to make what behaviour amounts to political corruption clear in the different areas of politics. And this has to be an ongoing activity because new political situations often come with new imperatives.

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