

POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

THE NATURE OF POLITICAL CORRUPTION

IN the whole vocabulary of politics it would be difficult to point out any single term that is more frequently employed than the word "corruption." Party orators and writers, journalists, "muck rakers" and reformers all use it with the utmost freedom, and it occurs not uncommonly in the less ephemeral pages of political philosophers and historians. Transactions and conditions of very different kinds are stigmatized in this way, in many cases doubtless with entire justice; but apparently there is little disposition to inquire into the essential nature of corruption itself and to discriminate in the use of the word.

Detailed definitions of corrupt practices and bribery are of course to be found in every highly developed legal code, but these are scarcely broad enough to cover the whole concept as seen from the viewpoint of political science or ethics. The sanctions of positive law are applied only to those more flagrant practices which past experience has shown to be so pernicious that sentiment has crystallized into statutory prohibitions and adverse judicial decisions. Even within this comparatively limited circle clearness and precision are but imperfectly attained. Popular disgust is frequently expressed at the ineptitude of the law's definitions and the deviousness of the law's procedure, as a result of which prosecutions of notoriously delinquent officials, politicians and contractors so often and so ignominiously fail in the courts. If once we step outside the circle of legality, however, we find extremely confused, conflicting and even unfair states of moral opinion regarding corrup-

tion. Public anger at some exposed villainy of this sort is apt to be both blind and exacting. Reform movements directed against corrupt abuses are no more free than are regular political organizations from partisan misrepresentation and partisan passion. With all their faults, however, it is largely from such forces and movements that we must expect not only higher standards of public morality, but also a clearer and more comprehensive legislative and judicial treatment of corrupt practices in the future. For this reason it would seem to be desirable, if possible, to formulate some fairly definite concept of corruption, broader than the purely legal view of the subject and applicable in a general way to the protean forms which evil of this sort assumes in practice.

Certain verbal difficulties must first be cleared away. Chief among these, perhaps, is the extreme levity with which the word is bandied about. One word, indeed, is not sufficient, and a number of slang equivalents and other variants must needs be pressed into service: graft, boodle, rake-off, booty, loot, spoils and so on. With all due recognition of recent achievements in the way of gathering and presenting evidence, it is lamentably apparent that charges of corruption are still very frequently brought forward, by party men and reformers alike, on slight grounds or no grounds at all, and also that in many of these cases, no intention exists of pushing either accusation or defense to a point where a thorough threshing-out of the matter at issue is possible. In "practical politics" insinuations of the blackest character are made jestingly, and they are ignored or passed off with a shrug or a smile, provided only that they be not of too pointed or too personal a character. Very serious evils may follow reckless mudslinging of this sort. Even if the charges are looked upon as the natural and harmless exuberances of our current political warfare, their constant repetition tends to blur the whole popular conception of corruption. Insensibly the conviction gains ground that practices which are asserted to be so common can scarcely be wholly bad, since public life goes on without apparent change and private prosperity seems unaffected. If, on the other hand, the current accusations of corruption are to be taken at anything like their face value, it

becomes difficult to avoid the pessimism that sees nothing but rottenness in our social arrangements and despairs of all constructive reform with present materials.

A second verbal point that demands attention is the metaphorical character of the word corruption. Even when it is distinctly qualified as political or business or social corruption, the suggestion is subtly conveyed of organic corruption and of everything vile and repugnant to the physical senses which the latter implies. It need not be charged that such implications are purposely cultivated: indeed they are so obvious and common that their use by this time has become a matter of habit. Witness in current writing the frequent juxtaposition of the word corruption, used with reference to social phenomena, with such words as slime, filth, sewage, stench, tainted, rottenness, gangrene, pollution, and the frequent comparison of those who are supposed to profit by such corruption to vultures, hyenas, jackals and so on. Side by side with the levity already criticized we accordingly find a usage which, however exaggerated and rhetorical it may be, appears to indicate a strong popular feeling against what are deemed to be corrupt practices.

Escape from such confusion can hardly come from the accepted formulas of the dictionaries. Their descriptions or periphrases of corruption are in general much too broad for use in exact discussion. Bribery, indeed, is defined with sufficient sharpness by the *Century Dictionary* as

a gift or gratuity bestowed for the purpose of influencing the action or conduct of the receiver; especially money or any valuable consideration given or promised for the betrayal of a trust or the corrupt performance of an allotted duty, as to a fiduciary agent, a judge, legislator or other public officer, a witness, a voter, *etc.*

Corruption, however, is by no means synonymous with bribery. The latter is narrower, more direct, less subtle. There can be no bribe-taker without a bribe-giver, but corruption can and frequently does exist even when there are no personal tempters or guilty confederates. A legislator may be approached by a person interested in a certain corporation and may be promised a definite reward for his favorable vote on a measure clearly

harmful to the public interest but calculated to benefit the corporation concerned. If the bargain be consummated it is unquestionably a case of bribery, and the action involved is also corrupt. But, if current reports are to be believed, it sometimes happens that legislators, acting wholly on their own initiative and regardless of their duty to the state, vote favorably or unfavorably on pending bills, endeavoring at the same time to profit financially by their action, or by their knowledge of the resultant action of the body to which they belong, by speculation in the open market. In the latter instance they have not been approached by a personal tempter, and the brokers whom they employ to buy or sell may be ignorant of the motives or even of the identity of their patrons. Clearly this is not bribery, but equally clearly it is corrupt. The distinction is perhaps sufficiently important to justify the coinage of the term "auto-corruption" to cover cases of the latter sort.¹ Corruption in the widest sense of the term would then include both bribery and auto-corruption, and may be defined as *the intentional misperformance or neglect of a recognized duty, or the unwarranted exercise of power, with the motive of gaining² some advantage more or less directly personal.*

It will be observed that none of the terms of the foregoing definition necessarily confines corruption to the field of politics. This is intentional. Corruption is quite as possible elsewhere as in the state. That it has so frequently been discussed as peculiarly political is by no means proof that government is subject to it in greater degree than other social organizations. One might rather conclude that the earlier discovery and more vigorous denunciation of corruption as a political evil showed greater purgative virtue in the state than in other spheres of human activity. For surely the day is gone by when the clamor of reformers was all for a "business administration" of public affairs. Since that era business has had to look sharply to its

¹ Other illustrations of auto-corruption may be found in speculation by inside officials on the basis of crop reports not yet made public, and in real-estate deals based on a knowledge of projected public improvements.

² Misperformance and neglect of duty do not clearly include cases of usurpation with corrupt motives; hence the addition of this clause to the definition. Some usurpations may of course be defended as involving high and unselfish motives, and hence free from corruption.

own morals—in insurance, in public utilities, in railroads, in corporate finance and elsewhere. Revelations in these fields have made it plain that much of the impetus to wrong-doing in the political sphere comes originally from business interests. This is not to be taken as in any sense exculpating the public officials concerned; it simply indicates the guilt of the business man as *particeps criminis* with the politician. Moreover business can and does suffer from forms of corruption which are peculiar to itself and which in no way involve political turpitude. Such offences range all the way from the sale by a clerk of business secrets to a rival concern and the receipt of presents or gratuitous entertainment from wholesalers by the buyers for retail firms up to the juggling of financial reports by directors, the mismanagement of physical property by insiders who wish to buy out small stockholders, and the investment of insurance or other trust funds to the private advantage of managerial officers.

Besides business and politics, other spheres of social activity are subject to corrupt influences. Indeed wherever and whenever there is duty to be shirked or improperly performed for motives of more or less immediate advantage evil of this sort may enter in. This is the case with the church, the family, with educational associations, clubs, and so on throughout the whole list of social organizations. To ingratiate himself with wealthy or influential parishioners, for example, a minister may suppress convictions which his duty to God and religion require him to express. A large proportion of the cases of divorce, marital infidelity and childless unions reflect the operation of corrupt influences upon our family life. Endowments or bequests to universities or colleges may be coupled with express conditions or, worse still, with tacit understandings that will hardly bear scrutiny, while many features of intercollegiate athletics are notoriously bad. If corrupt motives play a smaller part in the social organizations just mentioned than in politics or business it is perhaps not so much due to the finer fiber of churchmen, professors and the like, as to the subjection of the more grossly gainful to other motives in clerical, educational and similar circles.

While the possibility of corruption is thus seen to be ex-

tremely broad, our present concern is chiefly with political corruption. To adjust the definition hazarded above to cover the latter case alone it is necessary only to qualify the word "duty" by the phrase "to the state." Further discussion of the various terms of the definition, thus amended, would seem advisable.

I. To begin with, corruption is *intentional*. The political duty involved is perceived, but it is neglected or misperformed for reasons narrower than those which the state intends. Failure to meet a recognized duty is not necessarily corrupt; it may be due to simple inefficiency. The corrupt official must know the better and choose the worse; the inefficient official does not know any better. In either case the external circumstances may appear to be closely similar, and the immediate results may be equally harmful. No doubt what is often denounced in the United States as corruption is mere official stupidity, particularly in those spheres of administration still filled by amateurs and dominated by the "rotation of office" theory. Thus a purchasing official unfamiliar with his duties may prove the source of large profits to unscrupulous dealers. So far as the official himself is concerned no private advantage may be sought or gained, but the public interest suffers just the same. In another case the official understands the situation thoroughly and takes advantage of it by compelling the dealers to divide with him the amount by which the government is being defrauded, or he may go into business with the aid of office boys or relatives and sell to himself as purchasing agent. The latter are clear cases of bribery and auto-corruption respectively, but so far as immediate results are concerned the state is no worse off than with the official who was merely ignorant or careless. To one not in full possession of the underlying facts all three cases may appear very similar.

Successful corruption, however, tends to become insatiable, and in the long run the state may suffer far more from it and from the spread of the bad moral example which it involves than it can easily suffer from simple inefficiency. On the other hand inefficiency also may spread by imitation, although perhaps more slowly, since it is not immediately profitable, until the

whole service of government is weakened. Moreover inefficiency may develop by a very natural process into thoroughgoing corruption. If not too stupid, the incapable official may come to see the advantages which others are deriving from his incapacity and may endeavor to participate in them. Because of his failure to obtain promotion so rapidly as his more efficient fellow servants, he may be peculiarly liable to the temptation to get on by crooked courses. Practically, therefore, inefficiency and corruption are apt to be very closely connected—a fact which civil service reformers have long recognized. It would also seem that the two are very closely connected in their essential nature, and only a very qualified assent can be given to the doctrine that inefficiency, as commonly understood, is morally blameless. To be so considered the incapable person must be entirely unaware of his inability to measure up to the full requirement of duty. In any other event he is consciously and intentionally ministering to a personal interest, be it love of ease or desire to retain an income which he does not earn, to the neglect of the public duties with which he is entrusted. Now, according to the definition presented above, this attitude is unquestionably corrupt. It is, however, so common on the part of both officeholders and citizens that its corruptness is seldom recognized.

II. Political *duty* must exist or there is no possibility of being corruptly unfaithful to it. This statement may seem a truism, but the logical consequences to be drawn from it are of major importance. Among other things it follows that the more widely political duties are diffused the more widespread are the possibilities of corruption. A government which does not rest upon popular suffrage may be a very bad sort of government in many ways, but it will not suffer from vote-buying. To carry this thought out fully, let us assume an absolute despotism in which the arbitrary will of the ruler is the sole source of power.¹ In such a case it is manifestly impossible to

¹ Mr. Seeley has shown, of course, that no actual despotism, so-called, really conforms to this conception, but for purposes of argument, at least, the assumption may be permitted to stand.

speak of corruption. By hypothesis the despot owes no duty to the state or to his subjects. Philosophers who defend absolute government naturally lay great stress on the monarch's duty to God, but this argument may be read out of court on the basis of Mencius's dictum that Heaven is merely a silent partner in the state. The case is not materially altered when responsibility under natural law is insisted upon instead of to the Deity. Now since an absolute despot is bound to no tangible duty, he cannot be corrupt in any way. If in the conduct of his government he takes account of nothing but the grossest of his physical lusts he is nevertheless not unfaithful to the principles on which that government rests. Viewed from a higher conception of the state his rule may be unspeakably bad, but the accusation of corruption does not and cannot hold against it.

Conversely corruption necessarily finds its richest field in highly organized political communities which have developed most fully the idea of duty and which have entrusted its performance to the largest number of officials and citizens. The modern movement toward democracy and responsible government, beneficent as its results in general have been, has unquestionably opened up greater opportunities for evil of this sort than were ever dreamed of in the ancient and mediæval world. Economic evolution has coöperated with political evolution in the process. There is a direct and well-recognized relationship between popular institutions and the growth of wealth. It is no mere coincidence that those countries which have the most liberal governments are also today the richest countries of the world. With their growth in wealth, particularly where wealth is distributed very unequally, materialistic views of life have gained ground rapidly. Thus while the liberal development in politics has opened up wide new areas to the possibility of corruption, the corresponding development in the economic world has strengthened the forces of temptation.

Viewed in this light it must be admitted that our representative democracy with its great international obligations, its increasing range of governmental functions, its enormous and unequally distributed wealth and its intense materialism, is

peculiarly subject to corrupt influence. This does not necessarily mean that the republic is destined to be overwhelmed by selfishness. It does mean, however, that we cannot rest secure upon the moral achievements of our ancestors and the institutions which they have transmitted to us. We must develop a more robust virtue, capable of resisting the greater pressure that is brought to bear upon it.

But even if it be conceded that there is a greater measure of successful temptation among us than in the European nations which twit us with corruption as our national vice, it does not follow that we are inferior in political morality to these, our self-appointed moral censors. Reverting to the illustration with regard to vote-buying, it is evident that we could stop this particular form of corruption at once by the simple and obvious, although practically impossible, measure of abolishing popular suffrage. Assuming, for the sake of the argument, that this could be accomplished, we might readily find ourselves burdened with greater political evils than venal voting—for instance, the development of an arrogant oligarchy and the growth either of a sodden indifferentism or of a violent revolutionary spirit among the masses. A large percentage of Prussian citizens of the poorer classes sullenly refrain from voting, nor are they in the habit of selling their votes. Presumably some of them would be venal if they had the opportunity, but the three-class election system makes their political influence so minimal that their ballots are not worth either the casting or the buying. Neither do Prussian municipal officials engage in boodling, but the ascription of superior virtue to them on this account must be tempered by a knowledge of the fact that the local government of the country is kept closely in leading strings by the state. Paradoxical as it may seem, it is none the less true that political corruption implies the existence of political virtue; it implies trust in the performance of duty, widespread obligation to perform it, and confidence that in the great majority of cases it will be performed in spite of the derelictions that such conditions occasionally entail. If monarchies are less corrupt than democracies, it is also true that monarchies do not repose so much faith in the fundamental honesty of their citizens as do

democracies. At least they do not put it to such severe political tests.

III. In attempting to define corruption, emphasis was laid upon the condition that the duty misperformed or neglected for personal reasons must be *recognized*. The latter word needs further elucidation. Political duties are defined at great length, of course, in constitutions, laws and charters. Yet with all our care in providing laws to govern our governors it can not be maintained that political duty is always so clear as to be easily recognizable. It may indeed be the case that we have at times clouded the situation by the very number and complexity of our legislative acts. Able lawyers frequently differ, for instance, in their views regarding the powers and limitations affecting the action of a mayor under a city charter in a given case. Again, the amount of work required of limited bodies of men is sometimes so great that its full performance is physically impossible, even assuming perfect comprehension and perfect efficiency on their part. Thus our municipal police forces, it is often asserted, are quite insufficient to execute all the laws and ordinances which it is their duty to enforce. The discretion which they must therefore exercise is an extremely dangerous one, and the continuance of its exercise, suggesting the possibility of suppressing this or that law for personal reasons, is very apt to be provocative of corrupt manipulation.

Apart from the difficulty of clearly perceiving duty, owing to the number and complexity of our legal requirements, certain degrees of difficulty varying with the nature of the political service required deserve consideration. A public official whose work is purely administrative and ministerial would supposedly have a relatively clear path before him. Deflection from it should be easily recognizable and punishable. Thus the making of inspections or the granting of permits by authorized officials would seem to be too open for corrupt influences to tamper with. Yet even here the complexities and volume of the business presented and the material interests involved lead to many dishonest practices, as shown in the granting of liquor licenses and building permits, the inspection of life-saving devices, and

so on. Judicial authorities have statutes and precedents to guide them, but every new case presents peculiar circumstances which may furnish opportunity or concealment for a sinister deflection. When we come to superior executive officers who are entrusted with large discretionary powers, and to legislators whose main function is the determination of policy, it is evident that the path of duty is frequently indefinite. To officials so situated personal advantages may offer themselves on both sides of a given question. Amid so complicated a play of motives as must assail these authorities, it becomes at times a matter of almost infinite difficulty to distinguish and disentangle those more or less remotely personal and venal and to give proper weight to those only that make for the welfare of the state.

In discussing the question of the clearness with which duty presents itself we have thus far assumed that relatively exact positive norms are available. The question is greatly complicated, however, by the reflection that we must deal not only with the law but also with the prophets. What of those who, like the socialists, dream of a future state to which they owe allegiance rather than to the present state? Or of those whose elevation to power, as not infrequently happens under representative government, is due to a certain class in the community, the ideals of which they feel bound to support, be they leveling or aristocratic? Assuming that officials or voters of this kind seek no personal advantage whatever, the accusation of corruption would not hold against them, although those injured by their action would most certainly make such charges.

On the other hand advanced reformers do not hesitate to charge with corruption many existing social institutions of apparent solidity. Periods of confusion in constitutional arrangements, as Mr. H. J. Ford has pointed out,¹ are apt to be corrupt, or at least filled with charges of corruption. Doubtless the same observation would hold true for periods of class feeling or moral unsettlement, which, after all, are only the precursors of constitutional reform. At times when all kinds of conflicting views of duty are current, it is of course easy for different individuals and classes to form extremely divergent

¹ *POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY*, vol. xix (1904), p. 673.

views of the morality or immorality of given acts or institutions. Thus, among us, property of various sorts and property in general, government in certain forms or in all forms, marriage, the church, medicine and law, and those who represent them, are all denounced by small or large groups as graft and grafters. And indeed one need not be a thoroughgoing radical to observe that in some instances narrow and selfish interests have crept into these institutions, warped their highest ideals and crippled their efficiency. There seems to be little justification, however, for the employment of the word corruption in such sweeping fashion. Those who so employ it can not pretend that any general consensus of moral opinion supports their usage. No doubt many propositions for social change which are now considered extremely radical will gradually gain converts and will ultimately be enacted into law; but not all reforms can appeal unerringly to the future for justification. Institutions hotly assailed in times past have not infrequently outlived their detractors and developed new possibilities of social utility. The formation of modern nationality itself wore the appearance of corruption to many contemporary observers. With all due respect for unfledged reforms, we may fitly remind their advocates that the force of a hard and stinging word like corruption is materially weakened by employing it in senses familiar only to the members of a small circle. Such reckless usage is similar to that of the party politicians criticized above, and it is similarly adapted to produce either a callous levity or a sour distrust of social integrity which in the end must react unfavorably upon every constructive effort for social betterment.

IV. The motive of a corrupt act must be *some advantage more or less directly personal*. The grosser the nature of the advantage sought and the more directly selfish the purpose, the worse from the moral point of view is the transaction. Thus in the case of venal voters or boodling aldermen we have direct transfers of money or its equivalent, to be employed later, it may be, solely to the advantage of the men who sell themselves. Or still more reprehensible, high police officials or even mayors of cities may be in receipt of sums which they know were paid

originally by criminals or prostitutes for license to disobey the law. Perhaps we are too prone to think of all political corruption as consisting essentially of such gross cases and sordid transactions. In one way it is unfortunate that this is not the case, for, if it were, the task of defining and uprooting the evil by law would be comparatively easy. As a matter of fact we have to deal with every possible *nuance* of corruption, shading off from the most palpably illegal and immoral acts to apparently harmless transactions that are of everyday occurrence even in circles that would hotly deny the least imputation of wrongdoing.

Let us consider first the various gradations of corrupt action as regards the advantages offered and sought. There are crassly venal persons, of course, whose itching palms are held outstretched for cash bribes, but these after all are the small and stupid minority of the army of corruptionists. Many who would scorn a direct bribe are, however, quite willing to receive considerations more tactfully offered but almost as purely material—shares of stock, railroad passes, salaried positions, *etc.* In pointing out the distinction between bribery and corruption, the large possibilities of “auto-corruption” have been touched upon. The absence of a personal tempter seems very often to veil the real nature of a corrupt act, and contemporary usage completes the illusion of innocence. Tax-dodging is a case in point. Here the citizen is seeking, not a bribe, of course, but merely to cut down as far as possible an inevitable deduction from his income. He may depend upon his political influence, his friendship with assessors, his contributions to campaign funds, or upon the misrepresentation of facts in obtaining the reduction, but he would refuse indignantly to offer a cash bribe to secure action which he knew would be disadvantageous to the government. He might refuse with equal heat to accept a cash bribe to secure his continued allegiance to a party or his continued support of particular politicians. It hardly occurs to him that in a sense he is bribing himself with a part of his own income. Of course this case leaves open the question of the justice of the tax and of the failure of the state to provide suitable technical safeguards to prevent evasion. Unjust or ill-

constructed tax laws do not, indeed, justify corrupt action on the part of individuals, but they do transfer part of the moral guilt to the state. Other instances of veiled corruption readily suggest themselves—the intrigues of banks to secure the deposit of public funds, the devices employed to escape tenement-house, sanitary or life-saving inspections, the appropriation by officials of government supplies or services as “perquisites” of office, and so on.¹

Besides material inducements almost every object of human desire may tempt to corrupt action. Social position, personal reputation, office, power, the favor of women, the gratification of revenge—all these have been artfully adapted by corruptionists to bear with the greatest weight upon the tempted individual. Far more often, however, temptations of this kind originate within. They are the more dangerous because they prevail with men of much higher type than venal voters or boodling aldermen. But it will be objected that these are not necessarily objects of corrupt desire; that on the contrary they are currently recognized as part of the necessary driving power of political and other human activities, and praised as such by contemporaries and historians alike. The point is well taken in so far as it is maintained that such rewards are not necessarily sought by corrupt means. So far as that is concerned, the money which a corrupt legislator accepts is not bad in itself, nor need it be put by him to other than very creditable uses. The evil lies in the deflection from duty which the money bought, in the resultant deterioration of character and in the contagion of bad example. Precisely the same thing may be said of the so-called higher objects of desire to gain which men sell their political honor. This distinction goes far toward disposing of the objection that such motives are not corrupt because they are currently recognized as necessary and beneficial in political life. So far as their effect is the reinforcement of the influences which make for the performance of public duty there is no reason why they should not be regarded as good. To regard them in the same way when they have a directly contrary moral effect is a pernicious perversion of a true idea.

¹ Cf. C. Howard, “The Spirit of Graft,” *Outlook*, vol. lxxxi (1905), p. 365.

Nevertheless the fact must be faced that the public conscience is often deceived on this point; and that as a consequence practices are tolerated which will not bear the most cursory moral inspection. Sometimes these practices become so common that all consciousness of wrong-doing is lost. On this ground it might be maintained with reason that they are not corrupt according to the conventional morality of the time. It is this condition of affairs which makes the subtler aspects of corruption so much more dangerous and so much less easy to cope with than common bribery. Yet even here the outlook is hopeful. Corruption in its more insidious forms is not the vice of low intellects. Hence in many cases education of the public conscience will either suffice to banish these forms of evil or may be depended upon to find the legal means of destroying them. Our own recent experience with the abolition of railroad passes is a case in point, although passes can hardly be considered an extremely subtle means of corruption. Social ostracism, public contempt and loathing of the corruptionist, regardless of his looted wealth, may prove a stronger deterrent in the future. At present, perhaps, too many of us live in glass houses to make stone-throwing general and effective.

V. Just as the advantages sought by corrupt action may shade off from the more to the less material, so also the *personal interest* involved is susceptible of numerous gradations from egoism to altruism. It may be entirely selfish, as in the case of a bribe credited directly to the bank account of the bribe-taker. It may be extended to include the welfare of relatives—a form of corruption so common as to have acquired a name of its own. It may be broader still, appearing as favoritism to friends. Finally, it may be so extended that the individual interest is merged in the interest of certain groups, such as the party, the church, the labor union, the secret society and so on. The state is by no means the only sufferer by this process, any more than it is the only social group afflicted by corrupt practices. An official sentimentally mindful of the needs of Mother Church may cheerfully consent to burden the public treasury with a large part of the cost of maintaining an orphan asylum

mismanaged by ecclesiastical officials. Political influence may be brought to bear upon Rome to secure the creation of a new American cardinal acceptable to certain influential classes in this country. Desire to placate the labor vote has paralyzed the employment of the police power by governors or mayors to put down violence during strikes. And labor leaders, seduced by promises of office, have consented to misrepresent and betray their followers. Complementary illustrations of this sort might be cited indefinitely. It is not maintained that the larger part of the interrelations of social groups is tinged with corruption. Directly the contrary is more nearly true. Thus the interests of the state and of the family are so largely coincident that the latter is frequently spoken of as the unit of the former. Nevertheless family interests may be cultivated very greatly to the detriment of political life. Many flagrant examples of nepotism and the all too prevalent neglect of the duties of citizenship to cultivate those of the family circle are cases in point. It is no mere coincidence that one of the most soddenly corrupt municipalities in the United States is peculiarly distinguished as the "City of Homes." Again, a business man may be vastly more efficient as citizen or public official because of his experience in business, but, on the other hand, he may make use of this experience to plunder the state, or he may allow himself to become so thoroughly engrossed in money-making that others plunder it with impunity. Knowledge gained by social intercourse with parents may enable the teacher to perform his work with far greater discrimination as to the individual peculiarities and needs of the children under his tuition, but it may also tempt him to gross favoritism and toadyism.

In discussing cases of corrupt action procured by inducements not directly material in character it was pointed out that current moral opinion does not clearly recognize the evil involved. Similarly it may be indicated that many of the less somber *nuances* of corruption resulting from the selfish interrelations of social groups hardly deserve condemnation, because they are not commonly recognized as deflections from duty. This may be conceded so far as the present conditions of morals is concerned; but under any sharper analysis than is currently em-

ployed the element of corruption contained in such actions is manifest. The difficulty of the situation is enhanced by the fact that it is extremely hard to separate and define duty and self-interest in many of the relations of social and individual life. Nevertheless the effort must be made. We must distinguish and define economic interest, family interest, public interest. We have for our guidance the great general principle: "Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's." It is no valid plea in avoidance that it is hard to distinguish the things that are Cæsar's and the things that are God's. Rather would it seem to be enjoined upon a robust morality incessantly to search the heart regarding all the details that arise in following the commandment.

The most perplexing questions that arise in this interrogation of duty spring from the conflict between fundamental and general moral ideas and the customs of various social groups. It is considered entirely allowable and laudable, for instance, that a father should encourage his son to succeed him in business, even if the business be not his but that of a corporation in which he is simply an official. Many of the means employed to this end—education, travel, apprenticeship and so on—are beyond reproach. Others involve gross favoritism and disregard of the merits of employees not connected with the family. The most noteworthy point involved in this illustration is that a procedure which passes without question in business and family circles is recognized as reprehensible in politics. From this discrepance in social judgments it follows, however, that the man who has made a success in politics may find it very difficult to see anything but the far-fetched morality of the "unco-guid" in the proposition that he may not provide places in the public service for his relatives and dependents, just as the man who has been successful as a merchant or manufacturer is in the habit of doing in his store or factory.

It would be possible to point out many similar divergences between the fatherly and motherly indulgence of family life, the charity, long-suffering and forgiveness of Christian faith, the easy tolerance of social life on the one hand, and, on the other, the ideal of justice, cold and impassive, which we associate with

the state. In her admirable discussion of "Friendship and Politics,"¹ Mrs. Simkhovitch has given us what is, on the whole, a very sympathetic picture of the poor man who would scorn to sell his vote outright but who delivers it blindly to the "big hearted" ward leader, whose kindly interest and protection he so constantly needs to secure work and avoid oppression. It is hardly fair to characterize his attitude in slightly ironic phrase as dominated by the principle of the "sacredness of the job." Hard, continuous labor and the support of a family under such conditions are virtues of no small proportions. In large part, as Mrs. Simkhovitch has pointed out, devotion to the ward leader may be much less the expression of selfishness than of the traditional loyalty of a race, class or neighborhood. Such loyalty, within limits, must also be accounted a virtue. Finally, in attempting to judge the case, we must inquire into the opportunities which voters of this sort have had for acquiring high ideals of civic conduct. Are the best attainable results secured by our systems of education, poor relief, correction and taxation? Need nothing further be done to prevent child labor, to furnish better housing conditions and to safeguard the public health?

If we concede the necessity of social reform in these or any other directions, we impliedly recognize either the failure of society to live up to its own ideals or the necessity of new and higher ideals of social conduct. And this recognition involves the assumption of part of the moral guilt of existing corruption by society itself. Mr. G. W. Alger has noted the current dissatisfaction with the ideal of pure cold justice.² He also insists, correctly enough, that justice is the rock upon which alone generosity can safely build. The two ideals should not, however, be dealt with as fundamentally incompatible. Not since the time when Thomas Aquinas first recognized the caritative function of the state has such a view been tenable. More and more the state has endeavored in modern times to live up to this duty of protecting the poor and weak. Its fuller realization will

¹ POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY, vol. xviii, (1902), p. 188.

² *Atlantic*, vol. xcv, (1905), p. 781.

mean the disappearance of many of the existing causes of corruption.

One aspect of corruption for motives not entirely personal must be dealt with separately, both because of the moral casuistry involved and because of its practical importance. This is the acceptance and use for party purposes of money paid to bosses or other leaders for the corrupt use of their political power. While the personal interest of the politician as a member of the party organization is usually involved to some extent in such transactions, the purely selfish element may be extremely attenuated. Thus Floquet, accused of having accepted money for his favorable vote as member of the French Chamber of Deputies on the Panama canal scheme, defended himself on the ground that every *centime* of the sum paid him had been used for the benefit, not of himself, but of the party to which he belonged.¹ Thurlow Weed is alleged to have used his political control of the New York state legislature in 1860 to secure the granting of several franchises for street railways in New York city to a gang of lobbyists, and to have spent the four to six hundred thousand dollars of "campaign contributions" obtained in this manner to back the candidacy of Seward for the presidential nomination at the Chicago convention of the Republican party. In such cases not a cent of the corruption fund may stick to the hand of the party chief receiving it. Indeed it is not inconceivable that his devotion to party ends or to a party leader might induce him to pursue a corrupt course of conduct even though he foresaw his own ruin, politically or otherwise, as the certain result of his action.

Cases of the foregoing sort force us to a recognition of the fact that when political passion has reached its climax, as at the end of a hard fought campaign involving great principles, all considerations besides party success are apt to sink into nothingness. Properly considered, of course, the party organization is a social institution subordinate to the state, but it differs materially in one way from other social groups of the same rank, such as business associations, the church, the family, *etc.* The latter accept their subordination more or less passively, but

¹ J. E. C. Bodley, France, book iii, ch. vi, p. 306.

the party avowedly seeks to gain control of the government. Of course it professes its intention to conduct public business honestly and for the benefit of the whole people, but fine distinctions such as these are apt, in the heat of conflict, to be lost sight of by practical politicians. Not unnaturally they identify the interests of the state with the interests of their party, and the acceptance of dishonest money, with the possible danger which such an act involves, may easily seem to them a patriotic duty rather than a heinous offense. In all their corrupt bargaining they are conscious of a certain devotion to ideal ends. They may sell franchises, but they would refuse to betray a candidate. They may allow a local gang whose support is essential to loot a city government, but they would not abandon a fundamental party principle. On the contrary they would defend their conduct as designed to secure the triumph of a great right by the commission of a small wrong.

This argument is perhaps the most subtle that can be offered, and the form of corruption for which it finds a quasi-justification is assuredly the most dangerous with which we are confronted today. It will be observed, however, that the foregoing illustrations involve a higher range of motives than can be ascribed to our ordinary political bosses. Doubtless there have been exceptional cases of party leaders who, for minor but corrupt governmental favors, have accepted money and turned every cent of it into the party treasury for honest propaganda work. But once admit this conduct to be justifiable and the day of such leaders will soon be over. Inevitably they must be succeeded by less scrupulous politicians who will sell public property and betray public interests right and left, and, after deducting large sums to feather their own nests, still be in a position to contribute to the support of the party more largely than any conscientious leader. Under these conditions the political influence of wealthy corporations or wealthy men will be limited solely by the amount of money they are willing to spend. No matter with what reservations and good intentions such practices are entered upon, they will mean in the end nothing more and nothing less than that government is on hire or on sale to the highest bidders. There is no easier road by

which democracy may pass over into plutocracy; and it is indeed fortunate that the American people in its recent attitude toward the question of campaign contributions has begun to show an adequate realization of the danger confronting it.

To sum up the argument presented in the foregoing pages, it should be noted that while it is comparatively easy to formulate a definition of corruption, to point out the difference between the legal and ethical conceptions of the matter, to distinguish between bribery and auto-corruption and, in general, to mark out the logical boundaries of the field, the application of these definitions and distinctions is made immensely difficult by the variety of political institutions, the divergence of political practices and the conflict between general opinion and class opinions. A number of conclusions would nevertheless seem to deserve at least tentative expression.

(1) The prevalence of charges of corruption and of actual corruption in American politics is not of itself proof of our inferiority in political morality to the other great nations of the world.

(2) Considering opportunities and temptations, our current political morality is at least not yet proven to be inferior to our business and social morality in general.

(3) Unsupported charges of corruption are too frequently indulged in by practical politicians, reformers and conservatives, the results being a popular moral callousness and a loss of social confidence which render all constructive work more difficult.

(4) Acts involving corrupt motives range in current social estimation all the way from heinous felonies to minor foibles. The view that there are only a few "corruptionists," all of whom richly deserve criminal sentences and might receive them without unduly crowding our penitentiaries, is a grotesque misconception. Instead of this we must recognize frankly that self-interest and social interests are inextricably bound up as motive forces of our social machinery, often working in harmony and reinforcing each other, but sometimes colliding and presenting new questions for moral determination and social protective action.

(5) From among such cases of collision between social and self-interest we must endeavor to single out those most obviously harmful to society and the state, and, not content with branding them as morally bad, we must formulate legal prohibitions supported by penalties severe enough to check the evil. Particularly important in this field of work is a thorough solution of the whole question of party finances.

(6) Certain cases in which political action is determined by corrupt considerations may be more effectively combated with moral than with legal sanctions. These are cases which threaten no very serious consequences, cases in which the corrupt considerations are not directly material in character, cases in which personal advantage is not so much sought as the advantage of some social group, and all other cases of so subtle or undecided a character that definite legal action, at least under existing conditions, is impossible. In the presence of many such difficulties we can only plead for a clearer recognition by the individual of duty to the state and to society as a whole. On the other hand, society and the state as now constituted fall short of a full and humane ideal of justice and hence are partly responsible for existing corruption.

Finally it should be said that all effective work against corruption must be two-fold. On the one hand we must endeavor to raise moral and legal standards to a higher level. On the other hand we must unrelentingly prosecute actual offenses to the full extent of existing law. Work of the first sort must be either impersonal or based upon well authenticated facts. Work of the second sort must above all things be subjected to a wise restraint; sweeping charges resting merely upon suspicion must be scrupulously avoided; direct and well-founded charges must be put into legal form and fought to the last resort. Reformers should learn to bring down all direct and personal accusations to the level of existing law, until they have succeeded in bringing the level of the law up to their ideal standard.

ROBERT C. BROOKS.

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI.

MUNICIPAL SOCIALISM AND ITS ECONOMIC LIMITATIONS

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CONDITIONS IN NEW YORK CITY

THE theoretic socialism which involves the destruction of our existing society and its reconstruction on other bases has made little progress towards accomplishment. But as the increased coöperation necessary to enable modern civilization to perform its complex functions leads us each year further away from the simpler individualism of early life, we are drifting, for the most part unconsciously, toward a practical socialism, the tendencies and results of which it becomes highly important to analyze.

We call this movement municipal socialism, but, as in the case of the other, older and parent socialism, its definition is not easy. Viewed in its broadest aspect, it might mean merely the use which communities make of government in order to engage in coöperative effort. But this would be almost equivalent to making it a synonym for government itself. What is commonly understood by the term municipal socialism is the use by municipalities of the powers of general taxation to obtain special advantages which do not enure to the benefit of those who chiefly defray the cost. It is a phase of the universal struggle of those who have not to take from those who have. It signifies the tendency to depart further and further from those earlier ideas of justice in taxation, which required that the users of public utilities should pay for them, each according to the benefit he derived.

In the earlier stages of urban development, it was comparatively easy to adhere to such principles of justice. For example, in the days of the Dutch occupation of New York, when it was deemed necessary to pave the street known as "Prince's Graft"—inappropriate name!—each resident was required to pave that portion of the street which lay before his own door. While this service is now commuted by money payments, its