

Seumas Miller, Peter Roberts, Edward Spence *Corruption and Anti-Corruption: An Applied Philosophical Approach*. (New Jersey: Pearson, 2005. Pp. Xviii + 232. Price \$US26.67)

Reviewed by Andrew Alexandra.

Corruption, in its various forms, is a constant threat to the viability of fundamental social institutions, as well as to the moral health of the individuals who constitute and interact with those institutions. Despite its practical importance and conceptual richness, corruption has received surprisingly little philosophical attention. This timely book draws on the resources of philosophical theory, as well as on a broad range of relevant empirical work, to explore the nature and causes of corruption, and means for its prevention and suppression.

In the first chapter of the book the authors provide a conceptual analysis of corruption. The notion of corruption, they claim, presupposes the prior notion of a morally legitimate process, role or institution, or a morally sound person. Corrupt action, then, is action that tends to despoil the moral character of a person, or to undermine a morally legitimate institutional role, purpose or process, and that is intended to so. Such a causal account of corruption implies that kinds of actions are not *per se* either corrupt or non-corrupt. Giving a gift to a friend who has assisted you achieve an important goal will not (usually) count as corrupt, indeed it may be morally appropriate; doing the same thing to a public official may well be corrupt.

What counts as corruption, then, is context-sensitive and may vary from institution to institution, and culture to culture. Indeed, a good deal of the first half of the book explores the specificity of corruption in different settings. However, as the authors point out, there are some kinds of actions that as a matter of fact are almost always corrupt, such as bribery. Furthermore there are certain kinds of conditions that are conducive to corruption. Lack of accountability mechanisms and transparency within institutions obviously make corruption more likely. But so does the nature of some 'moral environments'. The authors point to conditions of high levels of factionalism and conflict, radical social inequality, and the 'moral confusion' that can arise, for example, in times of rapid social and economic change as all fostering corruption.

The second section of the book focuses on combating corruption – on 'anti-corruption'. Again, while the fight against corruption must be tailored to the particularities of the settings within it which may occur (and the book contains very interesting discussions of such topics as dealing with corruption in the corporate world) there are some broad anti-corruption strategies that can be adapted to those settings. The authors distinguish between what they call 'reactive', 'preventive' and 'holistic' anti-corruption strategies, and discuss important component elements of each.

Without glossing over the complexities of the issues with which it deals, the book is highly readable. The interesting – and often entertaining - case studies that enliven it throughout are particularly useful in illuminating and clarifying the theoretical

discussions. In short, this is a book that will be both useful and accessible to a broad audience.