

Ten Ethical Criteria to Judge Corruption

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The following *ethical criteria* can serve to judge corruption:

1. **Justice:** Justice means to diminish the gap between poor and rich. Whatever benefits most the weakest of our societies is just (J. Rawls). “Heavy“ corruption favours the lead of the power brokers and widens the gap between poor and rich.
2. **Equality, equal rights for all,** also for the poor: Bribes often pervert the rights of the weaker who do not have the means to bribe or cannot get justice in front of corrupt courts. The Old Testament puts it already in words: "Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe makes people blind to what is right and ruins the cause of those who are innocent." (Ex 23,8)
3. **Truth:** One of the motivators that lead to corruption is time and again the fear of truth – which very often leads to perverting the laws of the constitutional state and to violent actions. This form of corruption is equally found in the bible, as seen above.
4. **Freedom:** Corruption creates an obscure tangle of interdependences and blackmailing opportunities and thus compromises political freedom in the sense of perceiving civil rights and duties and forestalls the respect of human rights.
5. **Productivity and Work:** "Corruption replaces economic performances and achievements by theft " (as stated by the Peruvian Bishop's Conference in 1989). It distorts the market because it does not reward achievements, but existing power structures.
6. **Rationality/Efficiency:** Corruption increases the "efficiency" for individuals at the expense of the overall system – which is inefficient in economic terms.
7. **Participation:** Corruption is based upon intransparency contradicting democratic control and participation of the public. To be able to participate in decision making processes presupposes transparent information.
8. **Human Rights:** Corruption prevents the individual of getting his or her lawfully entitled rights, as they have to be bought

separately. The propertied get one's dues more than the unpropertied. The General Assembly of the WCC in 1998 defined the protection of the individual from corruption as elementary human rights.

9. ***Self-interest against Common Good:*** Corruption as abuse of public or private power for private use (as to definition in chapter 2) puts the self-interests in front of the common good. Corruption is "the undermining of the common wellbeing through particular interests of individuals", as is rightly stated by economic ethic-philosophers Peter Ulrich and Thomas Maak from St.Gall (Maak/Ulrich, 1999, 103).
10. ***Responsible use of power:*** A reason for corruption is often the short-term economic survival (the necessity to obtain orders), but in the case of those that bribe the reason is often greed and hunger for power; this makes it impossible to carry out power in a responsible way.

These criteria are related in particular to large-scale corruption. The petty, small-scale everyday corruption is more likely to be justified from the moral point of view: Why is it objectionable when a small official raises his pittance of salary to sustain his family? This "small-scale" corruption of poverty is understandable, but nevertheless ethically to be rejected. It's part of the ethic dilemma that we face as human beings and which brings about the fact that we cannot live without guilt. This is the essence of Christian forgiveness. This remission of guilt liberates us to be able to call injustice after what it really is – even if it is not always possible to escape from it – instead of legitimizing it ethically. Forgiveness liberates from the moral obligation to be innocent.