Call for papers for an *ephemera* special issue on:

Critiquing corruption: A turn to theory

Issue Editors: Thomas Taro Lennerfors, Eric Breit and Lena Olaison

For this Special Issue of *ephemera,* we want to explore the possibilities of turning to theory, instead of practice, to critique corruption and anti-corruption. Corruption is often seen as a virus or a cancer that is eating away at the core of contemporary society (Wolfensohn, 1998). Correspondingly, international anti-corruption measures have risen to prominence over the last decade, exemplified by the UN Convention on Corruption and the UN Global Compact. In the 2000s, corporate scandals, such as Enron, Worldcom, and most recently the global banking crisis, have increasingly put corruption into the spotlight.

Despite this, there have been few calls for theoretical investigations into corruption – on the contrary, there seems to be an aversion to such explorations. While there are various types of corrupt practices (e.g. bribery, fraud, embezzlement, etc.) at different levels (e.g. petty, grand, systemic), few are willing to theorize corruption beyond the World Bank's definition – 'the misuse of public office for private gain' (The World Bank Group) – or the one by Transparency International – 'the misuse of entrusted power for private gain' (Transparency International). The argument has even been made that it is unproductive to define and theorize corruption (Johnston, 1996); it seems to be taken for granted that 'we know it when we see it'.

Such neglect of the complexity of both theories and practices of corruption, we suggest, is a mistake. Studies have shown, for example, that when portrayed

in media, the meaning of corruption is far from agreed upon (Breit, 2010; Hansen 1998). Further, the intrinsic nature of corruption as 'evil' and anti-corruption as 'good' have been analysed. Such studies broaden the view of corruption, suggesting that corrupt exchanges can be functional in inefficient contexts and that corruption in some cases can be conceived as a fifth factor of production (Ledeneva, 1998; Kameir and Kursany, 1985). Anti-corruption, on the other hand, has been critiqued not only for its neoliberal spirit but also for its Western perspective positing corruption as an attribute of the Other of Western civilization (Brown and Cloke, 2011; Doig, 2011; Haller and Shore, 2005; Sík, 2002). While recognising the value of these studies, a common tendency in the aforementioned critiques is to turn to practice and to stress the need for understanding the complex context of corruption and anti-corruption.

To point towards a few potential avenues for theoretical engagement, one of the most prevalent understanding of corruption comes from classical agency theory. Here an 'agent', rather than acting in accordance with the will of a 'principal', acts in his/her own interest (see Jain, 1998) or in the interest of his/her organization (Pinto, Leana and Pil, 2008). As a response to such an understanding, structural perspectives put less emphasis on the agency of the individual and instead focus on the 'barrel' rather than the 'rotten apples' (Bakan, 2004). Furthering such development, process-based approaches have tried to break with the agency/structure theorising altogether (Ashforth and Anand, 2003; Fleming and Zyglidopoulos, 2009).

Other, perhaps less pursued, paths that could serve as inspiration for theoretical explorations are, for example, attempts to theorise corruption with insights from psychoanalysis. In such studies, corruption has been theorised as a symptom of the failure of the public/private split (Batsis, 2006; see also Lennerfors, 2008; 2010) or as a psychological disorder such as greed, arrogance or self-aggrandizement (Levine, 2005).

From a politico-philosophical perspective, Hardt and Negri (2000) theorise corruption in terms of the absence of ontology, conceived in terms of the revolutionary political subject. They draw on the largely forgotten ancient notion of corruption, where it always denotes corruption *of and in relation to something*. This stands in contrast to the contemporary view where it almost seems that corruption is not corruption *of* anything, but just exists. We might even see connections to Badiou's critique of present ethics as fighting Evil without any positive conception of the Good (Badiou, 2001).

We invite papers that attempt to rethink corruption theoretically, and to connect the concept of corruption to theory more rigorously. The theoretical investigations highlighted in this call might be used for inspiration, but even more, we invite papers that propose novel and unconventional theoretical takes on corruption. Possible topics include, but are not limited to the following:

- Generation and ontology
- Virology and oncology
- Subject formation and corruption, corrupt and not corrupt subjectivities.
- Freud, Lacan, perversions
- Food and gluttony
- Gender and sexuality
- Mind and body
- Science and technology studies
- Cynicism and kynicism
- Corruption, tradition, and history
- Processual conceptualisation: Transcendence, immanence, rhizome
- World systems theory, globalization and corruption
- Corruption as boundary object; Actor-Network Theory and corruption
- Corruption and the environment; corruption as an epiphenomenon of natural resources.
- Thermodynamics: entropy, dissipative structures, and corruption

Deadline for submissions: 30 October 2013

All contributions should be submitted to one of the issue editors: Thomas Taro Lennerfors (thomas.lennerfors@angstrom.uu.se), Eric Breit (eric.breit@afi.no) or Lena Olaison (lo.lpf@cbs.dk). Please note that three categories of contributions are invited for the special issue: articles, notes, and reviews. All submissions should follow *ephemera*'s submissions guidelines (www.ephemerajournal.org/how-submit). Articles will undergo a double blind review process. This call for papers is associated with the stream 'Unmasking corruption: Critical perspectives on corruption and anti-corruption' at the EGOS 2013 conference in Montreal (July 4-6, 2013). The special issue is open for contributions also outside the conference participants.

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