

Philosophy in Review



Gillian Brock, "Corruption and Global Justice"

Isabella Luisa Mariani 

Volume 44, Number 2, May 2024

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1112009ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1112009ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

University of Victoria

ISSN

1206-5269 (print)

1920-8936 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Mariani, I. (2024). Review of [Gillian Brock, "Corruption and Global Justice"]. *Philosophy in Review*, 44(2), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1112009ar>

© Isabella Luisa Mariani, 2024



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Gillian Brock. *Corruption and Global Justice*. Oxford University Press 2023. 224 pp. \$80.00 USD (Hardcover 9780198875642).

Gillian Brock's *Corruption and Global Justice* is an impressively encompassing yet concise work that puts forth a compelling argument as to why addressing corruption is a necessary condition for realizing human rights and achieving the goals of global justice, despite being a problem largely overlooked by academics and actors working towards such goals. Brock systematically outlines how corruption is an impediment to poverty eradication, economic development, civic engagement, and effective and legitimate states, highlighting its disproportionate effects on the most impoverished and vulnerable communities worldwide. To that end, Brock covers corruption in a wide variety of sectors including water, extractive industries, infrastructure and construction, and finance and abusive tax avoidance throughout the book, as well as cases of institutional corruption in campaign funding and the pharmaceutical industry's production of medical knowledge in the introduction. Uniquely persuasive in her empirically informed normative methodology are the solutions offered for addressing corruption that work within existing frameworks and human rights practices, and the multi-level approach to assigning such responsibilities, including both remedial and forward-looking responsibilities.

The book is divided into eight chapters and an appendix. Many of the chapters build on her previous works on global poverty, institutional corruption, and remedial responsibility, while leaving much of the conversation conceptualizing the difference between individual and institutional corruption prevalent in the relevant literature for the appendix. The first three chapters establish the normative framework of the book. In the introductory chapter, Brock outlines the variety of forms corruption can take, making clear that the kinds of corruption that are the central focus of the book are 'those in which agents use public office or professional roles, typically for some personal or political gain, in ways contrary to the purpose of that office or role, thereby abusing their entrusted power' (27). Brock highlights examples of petty corruption like authorities demanding bribes or extorting citizens for access to services, as well as grand corruption like state capture or forms of institutional corruption like the US Congress's improper dependence on campaign contributions, and the pharmaceutical industry's improper influence over healthcare practice, policy, and the production of medical knowledge.

The second chapter provides the connective tissue between corruption and global justice, using access to clean water and safe sanitation as the central example to illustrate the potentially life-threatening effects of corruption on the lives of millions worldwide. Brock demonstrates the undermining effect corruption has on efforts to address global poverty and the role of institutions within that framework. On Brock's account, institutions ought to be arranged such that we are enabled to meet



our basic needs, have adequate protection for our basic liberties, have fair terms of cooperation that govern collective endeavors, and background conditions (like social and political arrangements) that support these justice requirements. To that end, Brock argues that taking global justice seriously means fostering an active citizenry and effective and legitimate states, both of which corruption threatens.

The third chapter defends the use of a human rights framework for attaching responsibilities to states to work towards the requirements of justice. Brock argues that we have duties to support institutional schemes already in existence that deliver on core components of justice, or at least have credible prospects for doing so in our world as it is now. The human rights framework is appropriate, the argument goes, as it can effectively mobilize domestic and international publics, provide institutional support for accountability measures like UN reporting and auditing processes, and help assign clear responsibilities to states through international compliance measures. Brock notably states that they serve as a ‘shared moral language’ (56) that can offer ideals that guide efforts at political change at the individual, institutional, state, and international levels. She finishes the chapter with the strong argument that there is no plausible justification for the state right to self-determination unless we accept a range of human rights related requirements.

The fourth and fifth chapters address concrete efforts to reduce corruption and the multiple dimensions in play. Brock’s account highlights the importance of robust institutions that are responsive, effective, accountable, and transparent in combatting corruption. Mechanisms of accountability include electoral accountability, office accountability, performance reporting, independent regulation, watchdog journalism, and auditing. In this chapter Brock introduces a main component of her argument, that of social action coalitions and the power of resistance, publicity, and resources of social organizations that they harness to address several varieties of corruption by challenging worrisome social norms. Chapter five continues the discussion of social action coalitions, exploring Multi-stakeholder Initiatives (MSIs) in the extractive sector (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative) and infrastructure development sector (Construction Sector Transparency Initiative). Brock further outlines the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and its aims to prevent and combat corruption, facilitate and support international cooperation, and promote integrity, accountability, and proper management of public affairs and property.

The sixth and seventh chapters explore the principal case study of the book, abusive tax avoidance, and introduce Brock’s account of assigning responsibility, both remedial and forward-looking. Chapter six outlines factors that contribute to abusive tax avoidance such as the relationship of supply and demand between well-financed corporations, well-connected high net worth individuals, and willing tax

professionals, transfer mispricing and offshore tax havens protected by secrecy laws, and the complexity of tax law itself in most jurisdictions. Brock argues that tax professionals that facilitate abusive tax avoidance have a special remedial responsibility to address this form of corruption due to what she calls *connective criteria*. These criteria include a causal contribution to the corruption, benefitting from the corruption, and capacity to remedy it effectively and at a relatively low cost. On Brock's account, if all three connective criteria converge, there are very strong grounds for establishing remedial responsibilities. Brock provides the examples of the 'Big Four' accounting firms, tax lawyers, and financial advisors that have special remedial responsibility towards addressing abusive tax avoidance and its devastating effects on public funding for populations worldwide.

The seventh chapter continues the argument of responsibility for addressing corruption, focusing on the shared responsibility between states, international organizations, professional organizations, and citizens themselves. Brock titles her approach for identifying relevant agents and diagnosing responsibilities for addressing corruption the 'list of questions approach' (159). Expanding on existing literature, it entails questions of agent capacity, contribution, benefit, role-related responsibilities, past efforts, conflicts with other responsibilities, and reducing such conflicts while respecting human rights. Brock emphasizes that making effective steps towards curbing corruption in the here and now ought to focus on better implementation of existing tools rather than finding completely new ones. These tools include international organizations like UNCAC, Multi-stakeholder Initiatives, and strengthening existing domestic laws under the framework of human rights as a normative guide.

The eighth chapter addresses two potential challenges to Brock's position, both of which she addresses convincingly. The first holds that defining corruption in universal terms fails to accommodate cultural diversity and entails an imperialistic projection of Western standards globally. The second, building on the first, is a concern that tools on offer to address corruption are inappropriately culturally-infused. Brock presents a thoughtful response to both challenges arguing first that differences in social norms of trust, loyalty, and reciprocity do not vary across cultures as much as such a challenger may believe. Thus, the persistence of corruption in some societies is not due to a profound cultural difference, but rather to a collective action problem such that people feel trapped and forced into complying with the norms of their environment. In response to the second concern, Brock reminds the reader that not only are the guidelines that UNCAC presents well-grounded in a large body of cross-cultural research, but also that much discretion is left to states to decide the criminality and level of severity in dealing with agents that engage in corrupt acts, allowing for a reasonable difference in addressing corruption among societies.

The book's last chapter, and arguably the most interesting for a philosopher, is the appendix. It is here that Brock engages with the conceptual distinction between institutional and individual corruption that encompasses much of the theoretical literature on the subject. While the appendix addresses institutional corruption in the political sphere, including the pioneering work of Dennis Thompson on campaign funding in the U.S. (1995), I find myself wanting a more in-depth discussion of the difference between institutional and individual corruption in sectors beyond the political, as explored in Sergio Sismondo's work on the pharmaceutical industry (2013) and Brock's own work elsewhere on abusive tax avoidance (2014). While her account of shared responsibility includes responsibility for actors whose corrupting actions are technically legal, a feature most often associated with institutional corruption, it seems that fleshing out this distinction is relevant for her account of good institutional design. For instance, several factors may look different depending on the type of corruption. These include what is considered a conflict of interest, how independent monitoring and oversight are structured, and role-related actor responsibility. The differences become apparent when comparing institutional and legal corruption, which may even be considered ethical, to corruption that is illegal and largely considered unethical. In other words, the distinction between institutional, legal corruption and individual, illegal corruption may change what actor responsibility and good institutional design look like within each context, both of which are features of Brock's account for addressing corruption. Ultimately, however, this critique does not weaken Brock's project. The power of the book lies in Brock's call for all of us to be constructive agents of change, joining together to combat what truly is a global scourge often overlooked by those concerned with global justice.

Isabella Luisa Mariani, University of California Berkeley