



## **Corruption, a historical phenomenon that destabilizes society and the state**

## **Corrupção, um fenômeno histórico que desestabiliza a sociedade e o estado**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The objective of this article is to address the phenomenon of corruption to highlight its deleterious and perennial effects on the economy, politics, institutions and society. Therefore, it is essential to evaluate the different philosophical, sociological and legal approaches to the term corruption, demonstrating that, despite its difficult definition, in essence, it presupposes the degeneration of values, distorting nature and human development. In all its aspects, corruption is a pejorative and harmful phenomenon, derogatory of objects and beings, corrosive of the values inherent to the common good. In this context, it is proposed to verify that, being a phenomenon, corruption expands its effects in a perennial way, destabilizing and weakening institutions, at the same time that it foments levels of instability in society that impede human development, generating hostility, polarization and fragility in social, economic, legal and political relations.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Effects, Society, Democracy.

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

The future and present of a society can be projected when its origins, its conformation and its historical phenomena are glimpsed. An accurate prospection of human behavior also leads us to understand the complex social environment experienced today, which reveals alarming levels of corruption and troubled legal and social responses to the issue.

Corruption is an event that has been around since the dawn of humanity, a concern of classical philosophy, anthropology, sociology, the legal field, and other areas of knowledge.

A conceptual approach to the problem of corruption has proven extremely useful in unveiling its effects and the degenerative potential in human relations.

For this reason, already in classical philosophy one can observe concerns with the term corruption, offering elements that propose to glimpse it from the nature of beings, which have their existence progressively degenerated until perishing. The approach is not different



in the religious, moral, legal or political aspects, for under any approach, to corrupt means to degenerate, deteriorate and alter nature, producing depreciative effects that harm the development and well-being of the environment in which it occurs. In this context, corruption can be observed as a complex, multifaceted and pulverized phenomenon in the most varied human relations, extending its tentacles and revealing itself in all human relations, with potential to destabilize the political, legal and economic environment, notably when revealed within the public administration.

From events that occurred in the course of history, several political regimes were annihilated by corruptive promiscuity, with repercussions on economic stability and social relations.

Brazil is prodigal in evidences of corruption rooted in the most varied environments, and can serve as a paradigm to observe, with solar clarity, that once the corruptive system is implanted, several concrete effects make themselves felt immediately and are projected reaching many generations.

From the elements that are intended to be analyzed in the present text, the article proposes to awaken to the historical warning that the phenomenon of corruption has offered, from its concepts and effects, in the sense that the fight against corruptive practices must be unceasing and absolute, to the extent that once installed, the model by which the actors of corruptive practices are organized will be even stronger and more perfected in its techniques and movements, with the potential to protract its consequences into the future, making life in society, political, legal and economic stability increasingly unpredictable, volatile and polarized.

The article uses as methodology the bibliographical exploration proper to the debate evidenced, offering critical and programmatic conclusions for the confrontation of corruption. The deductive method is used, through bibliographical research and factual approach, building solid elements obtained from the conceptual and phenomenological analysis of corruption, to offer perspectives with a view to the problem faced, i.e., the deleterious effects of corruption, which persist over time and make social, public and private relations unstable.



## **2 CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES TO CORRUPTION, A PHENOMENOLOGICAL HAPPENING**

In fact, corruption has demonstrated multisectoral faces, historically revealing itself in the public environment, in the relations between private parties and in the interaction between private parties and the Public Administration, at various levels of incidence.

Nowadays, the incidence of corruptive practices has assumed proportions that, according to Lopes (2011, p. 39), allow us to identify it "[...] as a voracious concept, since the amplified dimension of the 'phenomenon' corruption resizes the understanding of the 'concept' of 'corruption'.

Thus, the immersion in the search for formative concepts presupposes the warning proposed by Warat (1984), in the sense that a purely linguistic or discursive analysis is insufficient, as it is removed from the political effects of the very signification produced from the dominant knowledge, a phenomenon proper to and inseparable from legal science. The formation of a concept or discourse, besides its formal content of meaning, is also conditioned by monopolies of knowledge, which in the legal environment are accentuated, and which pre-constitute the general social production inherent to any concept. In Warat's (1984) view, both, the narrow limit of a symbolic-formal approach of any concept or discourse, as well as the dominion of a professionalized language on the subject are not salutary, given that they immunize the content and sterilize its meanings, plastering them in a rhetorical dogma that deserves to be faced by critical judgments, taking refuge from theoretical common sense. According to Warat (1994, p.57) jurists of theoretical common sense monopolize "a tangle of intellectual customs that are accepted as principled truths to conceal the political component of truth inquiry". In view of this, "they canonize certain images and beliefs to preserve the secrecy that conceals the truths."

Therefore, the heterogeneity of the theme fosters an absolutely intense set of sensibilities for the production of a satisfactory concept. Any option will not be immune to criticism, which, in itself, should not lead the scientist to despair, but rather, reinforce the belief in the need to face the challenge.

Initially, it is observed that already in Greek philosophy, the meaning of the term "corruption" was denotative of alteration of matter, modification of its original state. The first naturalistic view of "corruption" was employed by Plato, when he recorded Socrates' explanation to Glaucus on the possibility of modifying a State. At that moment, already with a political vein, Socrates teaches "[...] that everything that is born is subject to corruption [...]". Therefore, a Republic would also be subject to change into other forms of government,



since it will not last forever. His conviction for the cyclical closure of a State stemmed from the very nature of beings, as would also be later advocated by Aristotle. Socrates started from the idea that the natural cycle of beings is progressive and regressive, until degeneration. Therefore, states and their political systems would not be perennial either. This phenomenon was identified as "corruption" (PLATO, 2001, p. 306).

Aristotle (2007) conceived the phenomenon of "corruption" from a naturalistic point of view, since he was concerned with noting the natural degradation of living beings. In the Aristotelian sense, nature provides for the natural evolution of beings, from birth, through growth and development, culminating in deterioration to suffering and death. The passage through this evolutionary and involutive process is inexorable. The admissible oscillations result from certain events that can alter the chronological routine of these phases, which for Aristotle (2001) could be represented by certain pathologies, or even abnormal demands of the body in atypical activities. There is, therefore, in this Aristotelian conception for the corruptive phenomenon, a naturalistic and degenerative connotation of beings, which deteriorate in their natural time or with greater brevity due to external interferences.

The sense employed for the term "corruption" from the viewpoint of classical Greek philosophy does not differ from the etymological origin listed by modern doctrine. There is literary consensus that the expression comes from Latin. For Seña (2014, p. 22), it derives from *corrumpere*, and its use throughout history has occurred in two senses. "In a *general sense*, representative of destruction, devastation or adulteration of an organic material, for example a piece of wood. In a *particular sense*, designative of a specific human activity, for example, bribery, extortion, of pejorative connotation [...]". The conclusion of Pimentel Filho (2015, p. 6) is not different, when he asserts that, both in Latin and Anglo-Saxon languages, the term corruption is derived from the Latin *corruptio/corruptionis*. He clarifies that the first conception, instead of representing the abuse of someone exercising state power for private gain, had a meaning of "putrefaction, deterioration of matter or physical decay". He points out that even when the philosophers of classical Greece referred to the political systems of the time, they first identified their succumbency as a kind of natural corruption, of wear and tear inherent in matter.

In this sense, effectively, the Greek philosopher, as he had already done to justify the corruption of living beings, when analyzing the forms of government of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, proclaimed that when they suffered from the evil of degeneration, they would give rise to the emergence of tyranny, oligarchy and anarchy, respectively. This degenerative process would be circular, the result of the corruption of their



rulers, who would alter the natural course of the regimes by favoring individual interest over the common good. The circularity of political regimes, for Aristotle (2007), would result from the fact that it is natural the degeneration of monarchies, which would be supplanted by tyrannies. These, the result of popular dissatisfaction, could give way to the aristocracy, and the regimes could follow one another until anarchy. At this moment, again, there would be popular insurgency, giving rise to the new emergence of the monarchy.

For Martins (2008, p. 12-13), the term corruption derives from the Latin *corruptio/onis*, from where its first meaning comes from. The Latins of the first and second centuries adopted the term *corruptionis* linking its meaning from the combination of other terms, that is, *cum* and *rumpo*, derived from the verb to break. Hence, it is identified with the meaning "[...] to break totally, to break the whole, to break completely [...]." Thus, *cum rumpo* or *corruptionis* meant the breaking of structures, the destruction of the foundations of something, that is, to destroy something. This rupture, however, was not an instantaneous, sudden event, but rather a gradual one.

The resumption of the semantic meaning of the term in unison leads us to the notion of depravity, deterioration, degenerative destruction of what was healthy. This understanding also brings us to the meaning found in Dictionnaire Alfabétique & Analogique de La Langue Française Le Petit Robert (ROBERT, 1976), where the term *corruption* is defined as *décomposition, pourriture, putrefaction*, or also *altération du jugement, du goût, du langage*. In The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus (ABATE, 1996), the term corruption also means *moral deterioration, esp. widespread. Use of corrupt practices, esp. bribery or fraud. A an irregular alteration (of a text, language, etc.) from its original state. B an irregularly altered form of a word. Decomposition.*

A more generalist and comprehensive view, not only semantic for the concept of corruption is offered by Borrego *et al.* (2016, p. 565), who define it as a social phenomenon, through which someone acts rationally against ethics and almost always against the law, with the desideratum to favor particular interests, whether these are "selfish or partially solidary". They emphasize that it is a "multifaceted problem", with various causes and effects, with strong harmful socioeconomic consequences. Even so, they do not depart from its natural meaning, when they state that corruption refers to the alteration, decomposition, or putrefaction of something, and is associated mainly with the political processes of government, business, and society, when these are transformed for personal pleasure, leaving aside the concern for service in the community's interest. In the aspect of human character, they maintain that it can be understood as man's lack of virtue. In this regard, they associate



themselves with the Aristotelian idea that man is a rational being and that his virtue resides in the search for truth and reason, which should become guiding principles of his conduct in the world, in such a way that when man acts against such principles he is said to be corrupt.

Two ways to interpret corruption are proposed by Martins (2008 p. 23-24). The first, from a moralist reading, leads us to conceive it as the decadence of the virtues of the individual, a practice that provides harmful effects for society. The second, observing corruption as a phenomenon resulting from the rules of the political world, having no relationship with the morality of the individual. He maintains that, from the existence of rules proper to the political world, different from the moral values and virtues of the individual, the reasons for the political corruption of a city are located, since they are linked to the weaknesses of its laws and its political institutions, as well as to the lack of concern and action of the citizen in relation to public things. Therefore, the author understands that this political view of corruption has proven to be more adequate to explain the phenomena of corruption, to the detriment of the moralistic approach, since it allows for better revealing its causes.

For Biason (2012, p. 9-10), corruption cannot be defined from an isolated science, but from a multidisciplinary context, such as economics, public administration, philosophy, political science, law, anthropology and sociology. Ignoring the naturalistic/Aristotelian aspect, it starts from the assumption that, at first, corruption was linked to moral problems. The violation of moral norms was denoted as a corruptive act, which consequently entailed a personalized understanding and judgment. Social and political responsibility for acts of corruption was linked to the action of the bad person, with a vulnerable character. All this raised a problem, that is, the commission of corruptive acts by public officials would remain associated with morality, and not with a deviation in behavior or a breach of the function that was conferred on them. In a second moment, in a functionalist perspective, corruption came to be associated with the social system, referring to the social phenomenon. This is because, renouncing the moral-individualistic conception, the phenomenon of corruptive practices came to be understood as a product of social and cultural pressures. On the cultural aspect, he assumes that in developing countries "there is a gap between informal social norms and laws, that is, there is divergence between the attitudes, goals, and methods of government". He emphasizes that the problem with functionalists is that they sometimes consider the results of corruption as a positive aspect because it can serve as a "stimulus to the political and economic evolution of developing countries or countries in transition to democracy." He also questions this conception because it is linked to the customs and





traditions of a country, disregarding, for example, "the institutional and administrative organization of the state." A third stage locates corruption through the legalistic vein, that is, establishing what corruption is is relegated to legislation and normativity. He sees, however, problems in this conception. A first problem is that the legal system varies from country to country, which could be overcome through international conventions and treaties. A second problem is the attachment of corruption to the legal concept, relegating social, political and economic values. The third negative aspect of this legalistic approach is that the concept of corruption is fixed to the law, which may not be in harmony with the social conception, of the political agents and of the media itself, remaining dependent on the will of the legislator. What has been observed, beginning in the 1960s, is the primacy of the legalistic conception, centered on the concern to conceptualize corruption by means of the private use of public resources by public officials, violating their legal-functional duties. In this period, attention was focused on the exercise of public offices and functions, reinforcing the difference between private and public activities (BIASON, 2012).

In this sense, Nye (1967, p.419) points out that

[...] corruption is behavior that deviates from the formal duties of a public office because of pecuniary advantages or gains or the status offered to its holder, family members or friends. It also conceives as corruption those behaviors that may violate rules that prevent the exercise of certain forms of influence in the interests of private individuals, such as: bribery, nepotism, and embezzlement.

Although the author does not condone corruptive practices coming from the public sector, he sees positive aspects in them. In the economic sphere, he advocates their advantages in increasing capital formation when governments are incapable of fomenting the economy. He also discusses the possibility of reducing state bureaucracy, the stimulus to entrepreneurship, which would be encouraged by the greed aroused by corruptive veins, and the formulation of incentives from the public sector to the private sector, motivated by the possibility of distributing the proceeds of corruption. He identifies positive aspects of corruption in the political meanderings of a society, since corruptive practices make it possible to maintain political legitimacy by means of the integration provided between the elites and the layers that do not participate in it. This is the functionalist view of corruption (NYE, 1967).

A publicist view of the corruption phenomenon, according to Williams (1999, p. 411-412) is positive for locating it explicitly in the public environment, distinguishing it from any private practices. It also gives the problem a formal meaning, which brings conceptual security and stability in the analysis of its effects and consequences. However, the search



for a comprehensive definition to contemplate all areas and the different levels at which corruption is revealed is relentless by analysts and scholars, but hampered by one aspect, namely, "corruption is not a hermetic phenomenon. The definition of this concept needs to situate it in the environment in which it is revealed, as well as the objectives of the prospection, under penalty of falling into a catch-all concept, which is affectionate to various hypotheses of political and even administrative maladies, but may not reflect other environments.

Note that the entire perspective presented refrains from the exclusively penalistic environment, which could also contribute to a more objective definition of the concept of corruption. It occurs that the subsumption of the meaning of the corruptive practices to the penal environment is also reductionist, in spite of offering pragmatic and usual criteria for the attainment of the desired concept. Countries in general routinely contemplate, in their penal normative diplomas, penal types that equate corruptive practices under precise nominal labels. In Brazil, the term corruption is found in the Penal Code in diverse criminal types, not always related to practices that attempt against the public treasury. See that article 218 mentions the crime of corruption of minors; article 271 the crime of corruption or pollution of drinking water; article 272 the criminal offense of falsification, corruption, adulteration or alteration of substances or food products; in article 273 the type of "falsification, corruption, adulteration or alteration of a product intended for therapeutic or medicinal purposes; Article 317 of the substantive law already contains the "crime of passive corruption, which can be committed by public officials in the performance of their duties, to the detriment of the public administration," while Article 333 provides for the "crime of active corruption, establishing conduct perpetrated by private individuals against the public administration. It happens, however, that the legal-penal perspective of finding the definition of corruptive practices, in last analysis, relegates to the Courts such task, because it is in them that one will find, in the end, the solidification of any understanding on the theme.

Also warns Leal (2013, p. 28), the theme of corruption cannot be seen in the strict sense, linked only to the formal aspect of its normativity, whether criminalistic or even of other branches of legal science. The need for multidisciplinary understanding, disconnected from the exclusively criminalistic aspect is advocated by Lopes (2011, p. 12). 12), who asserts that it is relevant to observe the transposition of corruptive practices to a more comprehensive legal-political perspective, which evidences "a common denominator characterized by the lack of transparency, the manipulation of rules, the omission of procedures, the lack of impartiality of those involved in the decision processes".





The difficulty in conceptualizing the phenomenon of corruption using narrow contours can also be seen when *Transparency International*, a non-governmental organization dedicated exclusively to the topic, limits itself to treating it as *the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It can be classified as grand, petty and political, depending on the amounts of money lost and the sector where it occurs.*<sup>1</sup> This definition is based on the concern with the abuse of entrusted power, which is aimed at private gain. In this perspective, it is not only concerned with the exercise of activities in the public sector, because the exercise of power can also occur in the private sector. In both environments, there may be deviations toward the merely private interest of the one who exercises the activity, whether public or private. In this concept, there is embedded a dosage defined as the "great or petty" abuse of power, which makes us infer that corruption can assume proportions of any magnitude, and still not overflow from the concept. As for the environment, the definition also encompasses the political sphere, but not exclusively, since it depends on the sector in which it occurs. In essence, then, it is observed that *Transparency International* employs a meaning for corruption that does not exclude minor deviations, and points its perception to the public and private sectors, political or non-political. In any of the environments, and whatever the amount, the concept will have at its core the misuse of power for private benefit. In other words, the abuse of power can be represented by the violation of a certain commitment, moral, ethical, or even normative, because deviation means altering the natural course, distorting the order organically established, whether by the nature of the activity or by the validity of norms on the exercise of the power conferred. And this rupture of the pre-established cycle is destined to benefit the one who practiced it, to the detriment of those for whom the human activity or practice was intended.

All the theoretical structure presented, without the pretension of being exhaustive, conditions us to recognize as an essential element in the formation of the concept of corruption its historical etymological origin, either under the focus of a natural degeneration or from the Latin expressions *corruptio/onis*, from where it is extracted to be something pejorative, undesirable, pathological or degenerative, because it breaks or deteriorates structures that, by nature or convention, should be preserved. It also necessarily comprises the understanding that corruption is the result of abusive, distorted and deviant human practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Translation ours "Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It can be classified as large, petty, and political, depending on the amounts of money lost and the sector where it occurs."



### **3 THE SHAPING OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS THROUGH THE PHENOMENON OF CORRUPTION**

The theme of corruption has always permeated the most diverse environments in the political and social history of humanity.

Currently, including after the historical period of the pandemic resulting from the Covid-19, it is verified that the theme of corruptive practices has been deserving attention on a global scale, and can be pointed out as one of the factors of greatest relevance among peoples and governments. Greco Filho and Rassi (2015, p 11), on the subject, assert that corruption is "a perennial problem of humanity."

Canotilho (2011, p. 9), in turn, demonstrates his concern with the theme by stating that it is of "particular relevance the way corruption is intertwined with the erosion of the legality and democratic nature of the State," asserting that it is always "associated with the abuse of the public function for private benefit, being an obstacle to the establishment of the democratic rule of law. Its extension is unpredictable and unlimited because it involves complicity, "covering itself with the intransparency of public and private activities. It has the power to conceal relevant information, "[...] plays with the void of responsibilities, lives from the collusion between the economic and the political. It has long surpassed borders and takes advantage of the electronic world

The difficulty of controlling corruption in democratic countries, as Pani (2009, p.5) points out, remains a major challenge. He points out that public control and accountability should induce public officials in a democracy to be honest, but historical experience shows that democracy alone does not guarantee that corruption will not become entrenched. He points to well-known examples of democracies that have suffered long periods of high corruption, such as Italy, Japan, India, and the United States between the Civil War and the Great Depression. He warns that the importance of the problem cannot be underestimated, for corruption is socially wasteful, harmful to growth, provides for the detour of resources to unproductive rent-seeking efforts, distorts incentives, increases inequality and poverty, and prevents the effective management of public expenditures. A country that cannot control corruption suffers substantial losses in social welfare, with reflections on the undermining of human dignity. Aware of these problems, "Multilateral organizations such as the IMF or the World Bank are stepping up their efforts to promote governance and combat corruption.

Indeed, the specter of corruption is not localized, it cannot be reduced to certain territories or peoples, and its tentacles infiltrate the meanders of all environments of humanity. In the Brazilian scenario, the analyses that have been seen are diverse. However,



the awakening to the content and scope of the phenomenon of corruptive practices proved to be very pronounced at the beginning of the 21st century, after two scandals of national and international proportions, colloquially called the Mensalão Scandal and Operation Lava Jato. From these episodes on, a new reality has been installed in legal, academic, social, political and economic terms, notably, becoming reasons for social effervescence. Its reflexes, of course, are not yet felt to the exhaustion, but allow us to say that a new historical phase has opened around the approach to the phenomenon of corruption in Brazil. It is also possible to ascertain that the consequences in the social, political and institutional fields are unpredictable, requiring that the lights be kept on to focus on the past, present and future of the country.

Furtado (2015, p. 19), in analyzing the aspects that contribute to the maintenance of corruption levels, makes an inference about the legislative structure and the role of the Judiciary. For the author, two are the factors that foster Brazilian corruption. Initially, deficiencies in the administrative legal system. In this sense, he maintains that in order to overcome them, all that is needed is the political will to identify the current vulnerabilities in Brazilian legislation, especially in the field of Administrative Law, and to correct the flaws in the structures of the various organs and entities of the Brazilian public administration. The second aspect resides in the certainty of impunity, since the cases of punishment of those who profit from public funds are rare. Referring to the need to correct the blemishes in the structures of state agencies and entities, he states that it is essential to address the issue of controls used by the main control bodies of the Public Administration, notably the Audit Court and the Judiciary. Regarding the Judiciary, he asserts that there is a generalized feeling that it is unable to adequately combat corruption. Such feeling stems, among other aspects, from the lack of transparency of the actions of the Judiciary in combating corruption, which discourages the other operators of the system.

As already said, a retrospective historical prospection of the phenomenon of corruption in societies and politics takes us back to Greek philosophy, which we can center on the naturalistic thought of corruption from Aristotle (2001). For the Greek philosopher, regarding the generation and corruption of entities that generate and destroy themselves by nature, we must distinguish, in all of them in the same way, their causes and definitions. This naturalistic view of corruption had already been employed by Plato (2001), when he reported the dialogue between Socrates and Glauco about the possibility of alteration or change occurring in a state. Socrates would have stated:



More or less, like this. It is, of course, difficult to change the constitution of a republic like yours. But since everything that is born is subject to corruption, this system of government, however excellent it may be, will not last forever, but will fade away, and this in the way you are about to see. Not only for the plants that spring from the bosom of the earth, but also for the animals that live on its surface, there is a time of fertility and a time of sterility, both for the souls and for the bodies, and this time is indicated by the intersections of the orbits of different circles: short some, long others, according to how long or short the life of these species is. (PLATO, 2001, p. 306).

With a view to the constitution of government systems, the ethical training of citizens was one of the concerns of classical philosophy, since the good man and those destined to exercise a position of command should be healthy in spirit and body, not degenerated (PLATO, 2001).

Also regarding the health of governments and rulers, it is possible to verify a concern that goes back centuries, allowing us to observe that the current events have always been glimpsed and were at the root of the peoples. Aristotle (2001), also in this aspect, already demonstrated this necessary attention to the degenerative process of the bodies, which by analogy could also affect the States. He recommended the need for careful observance in well-constituted states so that nothing was done contrary to the laws and customs, and especially to pay attention, from the beginning, to abuses, however small they may be. He mentioned that "corruption is introduced imperceptibly". As small repeated expenditures consume the wealth of a family, the evil is only felt when it is already consumed. He affirms that the "[...] capital point, therefore, is to stop the evil from the beginning [...].

From this naturalistic view, Martins (2008, p.14) claims that "[...] a city or a political regime, a ruler or an institution" is also "born, grows, develops [...]", is subject to a process of degeneration and decay, and may ultimately die or disappear. Thus, in the political context, the initial signs of corruption are felt when political entities begin to "[...] lose their initial strength and vigor, showing symptoms of fragility, degeneration, deviations from first principles [...]". He highlights the existence of an explanation based on the decadence of the Roman Empire, due to the existence of "orgies, bacchanals, mass abortions, pederasty, homosexuality, bigamy, adultery, promiscuity, fratricides, parricides and infanticides," among other social ills, which would have led to the incorporation of a moral content to corruption in the philosophical conception of history. The author advocates that the incorporation of moral elements to the philosophical-historical conception at its core lies in the vision that the Christians had of the pagan Roman society, which had not yet adhered to Christianity. The representatives of the church interpreted the behavior of non-Christian citizens as heretical, contrary to Christian doctrine, identifying them as sinners and denoting



human decadence, the "corruption of the human condition. The Christian conception judged "[...] as corrupted a world that does not behave according to its precepts [...]" (MARTINS, 2008, p. 17-18).

With the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 4th century and the division of its enormous territory into small kingdoms, almost all of them Christian, political criteria became dependent on Christian morality. The moral values of the rulers were marked by the ideals of a good Christian life, "the ideals of holiness". The people's chances of happiness were considered proportional to the holiness of their ruler.

Inherent corollary to this worldview, Martins (2008, p. 20) claims to be evident that the birth of a moralistic perception of corruption is umbilically linked to the inversion of relations between the spheres of morality and politics. He claims that the moral corruption of an individual, his particular vices, is of great importance for the social whole, especially if this individual is a ruler or a public office holder. Thus, it was based on the lack of moral uprightness of its members, especially its rulers, an eminently moral corruption, that the fall of the Roman, Persian, Babylonian, and Egyptian empires was judged.

As a consequence of this theoretical demand of religious and ideological character, the criteria of qualification of the political world are inverted. The moral and ethical predicates of an individual citizen take on the main value to evaluate the corruption of a place. Even when a public agent is in vogue, as a result of this moralistic turn, corruption is judged in relation to individuality. In the limit, there is no political corruption. What is verified is the corruption of individuals who are politicians. Pimentel Filho (2015, p. 8-9) reinforces the idea in the sense that Christianity has moved away from this thought. He points out that the great rupture occurred in the Middle Ages, with Christianity, which caused citizens to value spiritual life over civism. More attention was paid to matters of the soul than to civic virtues. The individual's virtue became associated with his devotion to the religious cause, in the same proportion as his detachment from earthly and material causes. Man could only get away from sin through the church, by invoking the Christian faith. That is why it would be more useful and interesting for him to engage in the religious cause, to the detriment of the public, civic cause. The solution to this evil would be simplistic, because it would be enough to center investments on individual morality, valuing it, since it is assumed to be unfeasible that morally correct people would allow the occurrence of deviations of conduct.

It so happens that in Europe, from the Renaissance on, in the 11th and 12th centuries, a different reality from the one experienced in the medieval period was verified. More



significantly in northern Italy, there was no predominance of fiefdoms, castles, and medieval social and political structures. In that historical period, several cities were established with total political, economic, and cultural autonomy in relation to the two great poles of power: the Holy Roman-Germanic Empire and the Church of Rome. The cities that emerged in this region enjoyed autonomy for a long time, constituting free and independent republics, which occurred in Pisa, Milan, Siena, Venice, Florence, Lucca and other cities, all in the form of republics with absolute freedom to establish their own directions. It was in this period and in these cities that the so-called Italian Renaissance was established, which became in the 15th and 16th centuries the cultural center of Europe. In fact, it was in this period that Nicolaus Machiavelli lived, who worked as secretary of the Florentine Chancellery and allowed him to travel and visit several countries, as well as to be a negotiator with kings, princes, military men, and even popes. Such functions also allowed him to know the political world. In the words of Martins (2008, p. 23), Machiavelli built his theory advocating the separation between the things proper to politics and the spheres of ethics and individual morality. Machiavelli conceived that the political world has its own rules and criteria, and should be evaluated according to them, and not under criteria of private morality. With this, there is a conception of political corruption different from moral corruption.

The pragmatic, mundane and concretist thought of the exercise of political life is very well portrayed, in this same historical context, by Machiavelli, who demonstrates that politics is a phenomenon that does not necessarily mix with ethical or religious values. In detriment of ethical and religious values, the pragmatic results, of conquering and maintaining political power, take on relevance. This Machiavellian feeling symbolizes human nature, which is prone to the search for power, its conservation and eternalization. Machiavelli admits that, in this lust for power, the individual is legitimated to use means that are distant from ethics, since his nature is directed to conquer, to overcome regardless of the means used. For this reflection, Machiavelli is contrary to the political practice shaped by private life, proclaiming that the ruler, to be successful in his pragmatic goals, can and should act employing the means necessary for such, which authorizes him to abandon the orientation of his private life. The Florentine political philosopher translates this thought well when he asserts that "[...] a man who wishes to make a profession of goodness in all things must ruin himself among many who are not good. Therefore, he proclaims that a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, must learn to be able not to be good and to avail himself or not of this according to necessity [...]" (MAQUIAVEL, 2004, p. 73-74). The extreme of the utilitarian-pragmatic thought is revealed when he states that the prince, who may represent today the





figure of the ruler, "must not mind incurring the infamy of vices without which it would be difficult for him to retain power. This is because the practice of all the good predicates of a man, which he identified by *virtù*, would lead him to ruin. On the other hand, the practice of what he identified by vices (pejorative predicates of man), could lead him to "attain security and well-being".

A sensible turn around in the perception of corruption occurred through the thought of Montesquieu. The French philosopher started to use as source not the republican virtue appreciated in Aristotelian thought, as he turned his batteries to the valorization of three models of government, the monarchic, the tyrannical and the democratic, always having as background the primacy of laws. When referring to virtue, Montesquieu (1997, p. 31) emphasizes that "[...] the good man to whom he refers is not the Christian good man, but the political good man, who possesses political virtue [...]". He further emphasizes his concern with respect for legality, asserting that the man he refers to is the one who "[...] loves the laws of his country and who acts for the love of the laws of his country [...]". Unlike the Aristotelian thought that saw corruption as a degenerative phenomenon of the human being as matter, conforming a natural process of succumbency of all beings, Montesquieu saw in the existence of laws a necessary relationship that derives from the nature of things. He maintained that all beings have their laws. His conclusion derives from the denial that a "blind fatality" would have produced all the effects we see in the world. He states that "[...] there is no greater absurdity than a blind fatality having produced intelligent beings [...]". He recognizes, however, that there are laws created by men and laws preexisting to them, or even permeating nature. With respect to human beings, considered by Montesquieu to be intelligent, he states that there is a long way to go before they are well governed like the physical world. Although there are formal laws to regulate human life, man does not constantly follow them as the physical world follows its own. He notes that human beings have limited intelligence by their nature, and are therefore susceptible to error. Moreover, it is also part of the natural instinct of subjects to act for themselves. "They do not, therefore, constantly follow their primitive laws, and even those which they themselves create, they do not always follow them"(MONTESQUIEU, 1997, p. 8).

From the recognition that men feel the natural desire to live in society, Montesquieu also notes that the feeling of equality that existed among them disappears as soon as they start living in society, starting the state of war, because the citizens, in each society, begin to feel their strength arising from equality, which leads to conflict. Hence, also, the need for the emergence of laws that regulate men. These are called the Law of the Gentiles. In turn,



the laws that govern the relations between those who govern and those who are governed are identified as Political Law (MONTESQUIEU, 1997, p. 8).

Even under the cloak of legality, Montesquieu identifies corruption in the forms of government of democracy, aristocracy, monarchy, despotic government, and the people themselves, with the corrosion of the system by the lust for power as the common thread. In democracy, the spirit of democracy is corrupted when the spirit of equality is lost, or when the spirit of equality is taken to the extreme, which happens when citizens pretend to be equal to those they have chosen to command them, that is, the senate and the magistrates. In dealing with the particular cause of the corruption of the people, he points out that the successes achieved by certain societies give them pride. This pride of the people eventually erodes their humility, leading the citizens to envy. This process of excessive pride makes them enemies of those who govern and, consequently, of the constitution. He exemplifies that "[...] the Salamina victory over the Persians corrupted the republic of Athens [...]. The aristocracy, in turn, becomes corrupted when the power of the nobles makes them arbitrary. He points out that the extreme of arbitrariness occurs when the "nobles become hereditary and can have almost no moderation. Monarchy is corrupted when princes believe that their power to transform the order of things is greater than their duty to follow it, when they suppress the natural functions of some to confer them arbitrarily on others. In short, it is corrupted when princes become despotic and have no notion of their limits. As for despotic government, it is corrupt by nature, since it has already originated through the deterioration of power and lack of respect for the principles that conform the other forms of government (MONTESQUIEU, 1997, p. 153-159).

There is, therefore, in Montesquieu a perceptible path in the sense of identifying the corruption of peoples and governments to the lack of correspondence to the principles of aggregation that the laws impose on them. The collapse of systems of government and of peoples is linked to the lack of obedience to the checks and balances that the normatization instituted to preserve well-being advocated.

Without there being a preordained relationship, if Machiavelli already advocated the need to use the ends to justify the means to maintain power, without limiting them to respect for morality, ethics or even the values of goodness that should guide the private lives of men, and Montesquieu already identified the corruption of peoples and governments by the weaknesses that lead them to violate the principles and laws that govern them, the pejorative sense of human nature is portrayed by Simmel (2013, p.9), when he asserts that it is inherent to the human being the nature of conflict, aimed at deceit, instability, polarization of relations



and antagonism between opposites. It is a phenomenon that stems from the very heterogeneity and complexity of human nature and its social relations. He maintains that hostility consists of an autonomous drive that, in a natural way, develops among men. He claims that there is, in man, a formal drive of hostility, symmetrical to the need for sympathy. Therefore, there is a dualism inherent to the human being and to social relations that is translated by association and dissociation, continuity and discontinuity, form and matter (SIMMEL, 2013, p.11-12). There is, both for Machiavelli, who sees in this a need for power, and for Simmel, who sees in the phenomenon a polarized nature in the human being, an anthropological connotation focused on competition, on the expansion of man in his ideals of conquest. We are not giving absolute credit to these perspectives, but they make us reflect before the current picture of systemic corruption revealed in Brazil, and why not in several other geographic spaces?

It can be seen, therefore, that the incidence of corruptive practices is not a specific characteristic of certain peoples, regions or societies. It is a widespread phenomenon that has been ingrained in society and politics since the dawn of civilization, a focus of philosophical, political and legal concern, and which has become more pronounced recently, especially in spite of the prevalence of the democratic regime in almost all Western countries and, above all, in the midst of the rule of law.

Therefore, it seems to us of utmost importance to pay attention to the warning of Bobbio (1997, p.9) in the sense that democracy is "[...] always fragile, always vulnerable, corruptible and often corrupt [...]", since it is inevitable a reflection about the deleterious effects of corruption for democracy, especially in Brazil, because both, corruption and democracy, are phenomena that have been revealed after the collapse of the military regime, a little over thirty years ago, very (in)tense in our country. With the disappearance of the military regime of exception installed from 1964 on, after the first democratically elected president in 1989, our country has been prodigal in corruption scandals that demonstrate the need to (re)think the way of governing, its practices and relations with the private sector, in last analysis, the reflexes provided by corruption in the democratic regime that is said to be installed. And, very subliminally, the reflexes of corruption from its judicial and political ramifications.

Indeed, the existence of democratic regimes, which represented the appanage of the political and constitutional movements of the 20th century as a perspective of good government and development, is still a matter of concern and reflection. In this vein, Lapuente (2016, p. 15-16) proposes to inquire what distinguishes the countries that work



best from those that do not, stating that for many years thinking prevailed to the effect that the key was the type of political regime. If a country guaranteed civil liberties and its leaders were democratically elected, its public institutions would end up being *inclusive and non-extractive*. However, he states that since the end of the 20th century, there has been a growing number of academic investigations and reports from international institutions that have downplayed the virtuous effects of democracy. Sentencia: *tener instituciones democráticas es necesario para el buen gobierno, pero no suficiente*. This is because

What distinguishes countries whose institutions benefit everyone is not the democratic accountability of their leaders, but rather that they are not corrupt. Now we know that corruption acts like a cancer that prevents the good functioning of the institutions. It does not "grind the wheels" of a society - as was said in many areas not so long ago - but quite the opposite: there is more and more evidence that corruption oxidizes public institutions in multiple ways... Keeping the rest of the factors fixed, corruption is linked to lower economic growth, lower per-capita income, greater economic inequality, greater unemployment, poorer state of well-being, poorer subjective health perception, lower Human Development Index (HDI), lower environmental sustainability, lower life satisfaction, lower life expectancy, and lower subjective happiness. Las sociedades con más corrupción tienden, sencillamente, a ser lugares peores em casi cualquier dimensión que se nos ocurra. (LAPUENTE, 2016, p.15).

The correlation between good government and control of corruption in democratic regimes is also expressed by Huntington, when he expresses his concern with the need for modernization of political institutions and the existence of weak governments. He states that weak government corresponds to "the corrupt judge, the cowardly soldier, and the ignorant teacher," while modernization, which is to be confused with full efficiency, can be translated by the combination of various factors such as "urbanization, industrialization, secularization, democratization, education, and participation in the media, which can only be achieved through "social mobilization and economic development. However, he claims that the efforts to achieve modernization generate instability, even pointing out that "modernization is a crisis. And corruption, which occurs in these moments of crisis, "[...] is the measure of the absence of institutionalization [...]. Thus, Huntington (1975, p. 5) recognizes that there is corruption "[...] at all periods of peoples' history [...]". In his analysis of the existence of effective political systems and weak political systems, he asserts that the most important political distinction among countries refers not to their form of government, but to their degree of government, asserting that, just as the economic gap between developed and underdeveloped countries has been accelerating, a similar and equally urgent problem exists in politics. "In politics, as in economics, the gap has widened between developed and underdeveloped political systems, between civic politics and corrupt politics." He sentences



that there is a correlation between the economic and political gaps, but that they are not identical, since it is possible for countries with underdeveloped economies to exist with highly developed political systems. On the other hand, there are countries that have reached a high level of economic well-being that may have a disorganized and chaotic political system. In this diagnosis, he makes a prognosis to the effect that "[...] in the twentieth century the locus of political underdevelopment, as well as economic underdevelopment, tends to be the modernizing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America." (HUNTINGTON, 1975, p. 14).

Regarding the phenomenon of corruption, in spite of his accentuated ideological liberalism, Huntington (1975) offers us an interesting sociological and political observation, when identifying the levels of intensity of corruptive practices with modernization. In this sense, although he recognizes that it is a common problem in all societies, he identifies that it is more common in some, to the extent and proportion of their evolution. He also advocates that corruption may predominate in certain cultures to the detriment of others, "[...] but in the great majority of cultures it seems to be more prevalent during the more intense phases of modernization [...]". His conclusions refer back to the history of the development of the United States and England, when he asserts:

The political life of the 18th century United States and the 20th century United States was, it seems, less corrupt than the political life of the 19th century United States. Likewise, political life in 17th century England and late 19th century England was less corrupt than in 18th century England. Was it mere coincidence that these moments of extreme corruption in American and English public life coincided with the impact of the industrial revolution, the development of new sources of wealth and power, and the emergence of new classes making new demands on government? In both periods, political institutions were strained and experienced a degree of decay. Corruption, of course, is a measure of the absence of efficient political institutionalization. Public authorities lack autonomy and coherence and subordinate their institutional roles to exogenous demands (HUNTINGTON, 1975, p. 72-73).

The author's conclusion that there is a link between corruption and modernization stems from three relationships. First, he claims that every modernization implies a change in the basic values of society, which must gradually be accepted by the groups within it. There is the need to assimilate new universalistic and performance-based normative standards, the emergence of loyalties and identifications of individuals and groups with the nation-state, the spread of the assumption that everyone has equal rights and obligations before the state. This provides that certain previously accepted behaviors become "[...] unacceptable and corrupt when viewed from a modern angle [...]". Thus, in a society undergoing modernization,



corruption is, in part, "[...] not so much the result of behavior deviating from accepted norms as it is the result of norms deviating from established standards of behavior [...]." New measures and criteria of what is right or wrong emerge, "[...] leading to the condemnation of at least some traditional patterns of behavior seen as corrupt [...]." In a society undergoing modernization, there are still the remnants that the public authority has the responsibility and even the obligation to provide rewards and jobs to members of his family or of the social strata and dominant groups, with no distinction between private resources and public resources, or even between the obligation to the state and the obligation to the family. However, to avoid corruption, a minimum of recognition of the difference between the public role and the private interest is required. Therefore, "[...] when the culture of a society does not distinguish between the king's role as a private person and the king's role as king, it is impossible to accuse the king of corruption in the employment of public money [...]." Thus, the introduction of new standards coming with modernity may stimulate the feeling of the need to protect the interests of family or dominant groups, which are still governed under traditional standards, against the threat posed by modernizing reforms. "Corruption is thus a product of the distinction between public welfare and private interest that arises with modernization" (HUNTINGTON, 1975, p. 74).

A second factor that proves the link between modernization and corruption is the emergence of new sources of wealth and power, which relate to politics no longer by the dominant traditional patterns of society and whose modern norms are not yet welcomed by the dominant groups in society. Corruption "is a direct product of the rise of new groups, with new resources, and of the efforts of these groups to become an effective presence in the political sphere." Huntington cites the example of Africa, asserting that a link has occurred there between those who wield political power and those who control wealth, providing that both classes, previously separated in the early stages of nationalist governments, have come to assimilate one another. Referee:

The new millionaires bought seats in the Senate or House of Representatives and thus became participants in the political system rather than alienated opponents, as would have occurred if they had been denied this opportunity to corrupt the system. Similarly, newly emancipated masses or newly arrived immigrants use their newfound voting power to gain jobs and favors from the local political machine. There is, therefore, corruption of the poor and corruption of the rich. Some exchange money for political power, the others exchange political power for money. But in both cases, something public (a vote, a position or a decision) is sold for private gain (HUNTINGTON, 1975, p. 74).





Third, without there being a hierarchy among the factors, Huntington justifies why modernization stimulates corruption from the mutations that it produces in the part of the results (*outputs*) of the political system. This phenomenon arises from the expansion of governmental authority and the multiplication of activities subject to governmental scrutiny (HUNTINGTON, 1975, p. 75).

The Brazilian case seems to gather all these three aspects raised by Huntington regarding the correlation between the increase of modernization and corruptive practices. We see that already since the middle of the last century, with the beginning of industrialization, the moving of the capital to Brasília, the nationalist-developmental phase that continued even during the military regime, and, afterwards, with the democratic opening initiated in the 1990s, we see a series of economic conglomerates spring up in Brazil, in diverse branches of activity (financial, industrial, infrastructure, etc.), always linked to political power or to a small bloc of families that has historically been present in the political, social and economic environment. With the outbreak of the recent corruption scandals, from the "Mensalão", to the confessions made in the statements collected by the "Lava Jato" Operation and others, with the return of billions of reais diverted to the treasury, the intertwining between these groups that have remained at the head of the national command and corruptive practices has been revealed. What can clearly be seen is the shading between the phenomena of the country's modernization and the intensity of corruptive processes involving social layers that have always been infiltrated in the country's political, economic and social command. Such actors have been marginalized by the legislation itself, which has gradually been incremented with a view to good governance practices, and has even intensified the processes of sucking public resources through corruption. It can be seen that corruption did not cool down or increase proportionally to the crises and economic advances in the country. On the contrary, it has remained alive in symptomatic indifference to the possible progress that the modernization of the country has brought about, notably in the legal field. Despite the modernization that took place in the country, high levels of confusion persisted between the public and the private, as well as between the public and the interests of groups that were installed precisely after this period.

In effect, many business opportunities and riches arose with the Brazilian democratic and modernizing process, being sliced up by a small portion of people, all taking turns in their relationship with politics. The spaces of economic growth and political domination remained intertwined, wrapped in a cloak of corruption that perpetuated power along the lines of the processes of formation of the State and of Brazilian society. In spite of the



alternation of political ideologies, these political and economic power layers were not dislodged or weakened, given the existence of a kind of surreptitious cronyism in the relationships that enabled the growth and the sucking in, to a greater or lesser extent, of the treasury's resources. Despite the apparent rupture of ideological structures in politics at certain historical moments, the political and economic elites did not succumb, as they knew how to keep themselves immersed in the wealth extracted from corruption. More recently, already in the 21st century, the alternation represented nothing more than the alternation of corruptive practices, forming coalitions that could not be sustained by the original ideological or disinterested path.

Another insight Huntington derives from modernization is that the causes of corruption are similar to those of violence. In this sense, he maintains that both are encouraged by modernization and are symptomatic of the weakness of political institutions. They are means by which individuals and groups relate to and participate in the political system, violating the customs of the system. Therefore, a society that has a high capacity for corruption also has a high potential for violence. Corruption and violence "are illegitimate means of making demands on the system, but corruption is also an illegitimate means of satisfying such demands" (HUNTINGTON, 1975, p. 78).

The Brazilian reality can also be identified in this aspect. As Brazilian society is immersed in a process of systemic corruption, which has affected political and economic sectors that, until then, traditionally controlled and held power over society and the state, violence on a geometric scale has erupted, with corruption and violence constituting two of the greatest national ills. In the statistics of violence Brazil surpassed all historical levels in 2016, registering the highest number of homicides in its history, that is, a total of 61,619 people died as a result of violence. There was a 3.8% increase compared to 2015, consummating seven deaths every hour in the country. Staggering that violence has increased across the country. These alarming rates can be compared to numbers that even countries at war have yet to reach. In the period between the years 2011 to 2015, Brazil recorded a higher number of murders of people compared to Syria's war in the same period. In Brazil, 278,839 people were murdered, while in the Syrian War, in the same period, 256,124 people were murdered.<sup>2</sup> It is worrisome to note that in this universe the death of young people between 19 and 25 years of age is more accentuated. Such is the problem in

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<sup>2</sup> Data from Anuário do Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública. [www.forumseguranca.org.br/](http://www.forumseguranca.org.br/) Consulted on 03.11.2017.



this environment that the Atlas of Violence 2017, published by the Brazilian Forum on Public Security and the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA, 2017), dedicates its chapter 4 to what it identifies as "Lost Youth," as it found that "since 1980 a gradual process of lethal victimization of youth has been underway in the country, and that the dead are younger and younger people. With the outbreak of the global pandemic at the end of 2019, the data in this area are compromised, given the total change in social behavior, notably isolation and restrictions imposed.

In this panorama, the survey by the Latinobarómetro Corporation (2017) very well illustrated the two greatest concerns of the Brazilian population at that moment. In its 22 years of analysis in 18 Latin American countries, it was the first time that corruption appeared at the top of the pyramid of a country's concerns.

The coordinator of the survey, Marta Lagos, stated that "[...] never in the history of our survey had corruption been at the top of a country's list of concerns. And not only that, a third of Brazilians expressed this concern, that's a lot of people." In this same manifestation, he asserted "[...] that the political system cannot move forward until it solves this issue. It is a big mistake to think that the problem refers to specific people, who have committed acts of corruption. This problem has penetrated the political system and paralyzed it" (MILLENIUM INSTITUTE, 2017).

It happens that violence and corruption are intertwined, especially in countries where the lack of resources is a constant for the implementation of social rights and conditions of human dignity that have historically lagged. Huntington (1975, p. 80) advocates that corruption and violence find fertile ground when the scarcity of "[...] opportunities for mobility outside politics combines with the existence of weak and inflexible political institutions, channeling energies into deviant political behavior."

The diagnosis of this political and social context was made by the Americas Barometer, in its 2016 report, demonstrating the social hopelessness with political institutions, verifying the lowest credibility index ever demonstrated. This Vanderbilt University publication found that Brazilians' level of trust in political institutions was only above Jamaica, and just below Venezuela and Haiti. In addition to appearing penultimate in the 2014/2015 cross-country comparison, it pointed out that the proliferation of corruption scandals involving politicians of various parties and the perception that the political class has done nothing to address the structural factors of these scandals have rendered much of the population dissatisfied with the country's political institutions (RUSSO, 2016, p. 2).



These findings are fundamental, as they seemingly portray a very close historical moment, followed by several political and legal issues that have full connection.

This social perception of the phenomenon of political exercise in Brazil is undoubtedly due to Huntington's emphasis on modernizing countries in which "[...] politics is big business, becoming a way of life for many, being the main road to power, and power the main road to wealth [...]". The accumulation of power and wealth, in such circumstances, is the shortest path to success, and the employment of political office as a means to gain wealth means "[...] the subordination of political and economic values and institutions [...]". He maintains that in all societies "[...] the scale of corruption (i.e., the average value of private goods and public services involved in a corrupt exchange) increases as one moves up the bureaucratic or political ladder [...]" However, the incidence of corruption may vary at certain levels of the political or bureaucratic structure from one society to another (HUNTINGTON, 1975, p.81).

It can be seen, in this perspective, that the keynote in any society, developed or in the process of modernization, with high levels of politicization or precarious indexes of political development, richer or poorer, is the existence of the phenomenon of corruption that permeates social, political, and economic relations and is constantly reflected in them, with harmful effects that linger over time and reveal themselves in the most varied, insidious, and increasingly perfected forms.

So intense are the reflections of corruption in the current stage of humanity that there are even projections from the perspective of their prospects eventually favorable to the development of human relations, from the interrelationship between society and the state, and the performance of public administration. In this vein, Seña (2014, p. 61) warns that the consequences of having a corrupt public administration are varied, and their observation depends on the point of view with which the phenomenon is analyzed as a whole. A supporter of this revisionist thought, Huntington proclaims:

A relatively incorruptible society - a traditional society for example, in which traditional norms are still powerful - may find that a certain amount of corruption is an optimal lubricant to accelerate the path to modernization. A developed traditional society can be improved - or at least modernized - by a little corruption; but a society in which corruption is already widespread is unlikely to be improved by more corruption. Corruption naturally tends to weaken or perpetuate the weakness of government democracy. In this respect, it is incompatible with political development. There are times, however, when some forms of corruption can contribute to political development by helping to strengthen political parties. The corruption of one government is the generation of another. Similarly, the corruption of one governmental body may contribute to the institutionalization of another (HUNTINGTON, 1975, p.83).



In the context of the "revisionist theses," several arguments are suggested to support the indications favoring corruptive practices. The first of these claims that corruption can allow the overcoming of the inconveniences caused by the unclear and extensive legal and institutional entanglements that grant broad discretionary powers to public officials in certain developing countries. In these cases, the obstacles to establishing oneself in the economic-business terrain are such that corruption becomes necessary to overcome the enormous uncertainty, ineffectiveness, and inefficiency of public institutions. From this point of view, corruption has become a mechanism that confers stability, security and certainty with respect to the actions of private agents who interact with the State. Related to this argument, there is what Seña (2014) identifies as *pagos de engrase*, consisting of bribes to speed up certain procedures, not through legislation, but through facts. It is about demanding that the official perform his duty. However, in order for him to do so more quickly, he is given advantages/rewards (corruption). He points out that, in Spain in the 1980s, it was common practice for the parties to pay advantages (*las astillas*) to court clerks so that they would comply with certain warrants that required them to travel outside the judicial office, and the payment of these amounts was institutionalized and added to the clerks' salaries. The same can occur, for example, with the payment of amounts to speed up customs procedures, sectors identified as highly complex for the movement of goods (SEÑA, 2014, p. 63-64).

Corruption could also be salutary for economic and social development. It is argued that members of certain ethnic, religious or political minorities, in order to exert influence and rise in their relations, need to negotiate with the State, since their interests would not be met in their respective contexts due to the numerical insignificance or even lack of political expression of the members. It would be made possible, through corruption, the participation and social cohesion of minority categories at the margins of society (SEÑA, 2014, p. 65).

Under these perspectives presented, corruption as a factor in economic, political and social development would be morally justified. It happens, however, that adherence to the revisionist theses means, in the final analysis, consenting to and inserting oneself in the context of corruption itself, assimilating it and adhering to all its effects and consequences.

By accepting corruption as a phenomenon from which one can extract salutary perspectives for society, the economy and politics of a country, one is, above all, closing one's eyes to the entire negative panorama that such practice fosters. One cannot lose sight of the fact, as pointed out elsewhere, that the very term corruption embodies a negative conceptual charge, since it means deterioration, putrefaction, rupture with the healthy natural structures of any environment, natural or social. The advantages that can be glimpsed are



geometrically inverse to the harm it does. It is the same as saying that the option of promoting corruption to achieve human development presupposes an absolute lack of capacity to find diverse solutions, extracted from lawful and morally justifiable behavior.

Therefore, Seña (2014) points out that a corrupt person is not a social reformer. He is very diverse, because he has strong incentives to perform conservative actions and thus continue obtaining the benefits that his privileged position grants him. This explains why many corrupt people in various countries amass huge sums of money through corruption, diverting them to hidden accounts in tax havens, without any return to the society from which they were diverted. Furthermore, he points out that administrative corruption generates feelings of resentment, rejection, and frustration among honest public servants, and often subjects them to situations that are difficult to solve and even embarrassing, because they need to take a stand. Either they take a stand for corruption and side with their corrupt comrades and superiors, or they must resign their positions, because they cannot hold on to them. Thus, there is frustration for honest and competent public servants, and also a disincentive to provide good services to society, since those who benefit from corruption get everything from the state. Ultimately, the best public servants, because honest, leave the public service or remain discouraged, while those who remain are conniving or practicing corruption (SEÑA, 2014, p. 69-70).

Under this prism, when corruption becomes systemic in a certain political environment, it will be unusual to find public agents willing to confront those layers of power involved in corruption. Reprisals and persecutions, as well as political and economic power and even influence in the media will be vigorously exercised to maintain the *status quo* and belittle those who dare to fight corruptive practices. The levels of courage and daring to confront the layers within the corruptive system are diminished. As a result, the system built on corruption and its beneficiaries becomes more and more dense and powerful. Its structures are rarely broken from the inside, that is, from the conflicts of interest among the corrupted themselves, who feel neglected or harmed by the slices of power and resources grabbed by others. What we see is that, when corruption becomes systemic, its rupture is more likely to occur from within, in an intrinsic way, since the extrinsic forces are more and more fragile and insufficient, because they are subdued and discouraged to act against the corrupting system. Even when the links of the corruptive systemic chain are broken, it is not long before new forces reorganize themselves to retake the spaces previously occupied. And, at the slightest chance of rebirth, they present themselves with even more vigor, since their





members retake spaces aware of the mistakes previously committed, perfecting the model and the ways of practicing corruptive acts.

There is no way to consent to the argument that corruption allows overcoming the obstacles arising from bureaucracy. In this sense, the assimilation of corruptive practices for this purpose, while at first apparently allowing the bureaucratic barriers to be overcome, will at the same time foster a vicious circle that will lead the administrative machine to function only through corruptive impulses. One cannot forget that, in this perspective, the "good citizens" will be subject to the evils of the corruptive system, and for those who do not reach it, barriers will be imposed that will make it impossible for them to have access to essential public goods and services. Consequently, there will be an inclusive model for those perverted by the system, and an excluding model for those on the margins. And, as we know, any unequal and unfair political, social or economic model is reckless, naturally susceptible to failure at any moment.

Another untenable argument from a revisionist point of view concerns the possibility of the corruptive ascension of certain minority groups to economic, political and power circles, without which they would be excluded. It happens that, once they are part of the circles of power through corruption, those who were previously excluded will push other minority layers that are still excluded to the end of the line. Not to mention, moreover, that they will swell the ranks of the extracts that launch their tentacles to suck the precious public resources, thus providing more and more the need for the State to raise resources to meet the needs of its machine. The process of suction, by corruptive means, will increase, since a greater number of people will be at its base, draining the fruits of corruption, to the detriment of the needy social strata who, in the last analysis, pay their taxes and sustain the public structure.

Even from an economic perspective, corruption is unfair to the great majority of economic agents who do not make use of it to promote their activities. There is, in this environment, accentuated damage to competition, to the smoothness of the means of production, and even to the safety and quality of the products produced and consumed by the population. When the mechanisms for quality control, the instruments for the administration of free competition, and full access to the resources necessary for the production and development of economic agents are loosened, there are imbalances, unequal treatment, and injustices that, in the mercantile environment, are extremely harmful, leading to situations of unemployment, losses, and frustrations in the economy that can deteriorate, through economic fragility, the political system of a country.



In the institutional environment, the incidence of any level of corruption in the meanderings of public administration fosters discredit and despair in governments, in rulers and, ultimately, in everything related to public power. Institutions deteriorate, the credibility of public entities and their agents is tarnished, and, as a consequence, great disharmony and social instability is established. In this sense, see the occurrence of intense popular demonstrations in Brazil in 2013 and 2014, when millions of people took to the streets to protest against the reality experienced as a result of the revelation of high rates of corruption confessed by several people. Since then, it is possible to state that we no longer have an environment even close to stability, worsening the political, economic and, consequently and inevitably, social panorama in Brazil. In this sense, as already said, corruption is a historical phenomenon, transversal to the development of humanity in many parts of the planet. More recently, however, the existence of technological apparatuses of communication has made it possible for information to circulate instantaneously, fostering the exercise of opinions in social networks and communication vehicles with absolute dynamism. Thus, the feedback of ideological positions and antagonisms are accentuated, increasing the effects of the political, social and economic impacts of corruption.

Therefore, the conviction of Barata (2012) is encouraging when he advocates that corruption is "[...] an idiosyncratic phenomenon that has its explicit origin at the level of criminality or, at least, of public censure [...]". Its practices, however, reveal more of the order of the quality of public institutions and the political culture of communities. In essence, they reveal the content of the everyday practical existence of the political regime. Corruption has been a central theme for much of the history of political thought, not infrequently integrating the dynamics of regime change as far back as Aristotle and Plato, as well as with Machiavelli and Rousseau. "The idiosyncrasy of corruption lies, therefore, in its relevance as a phenomenon and concept in political theory. That being so, as to its pejorative effects, he points out:

If we accept, on the one hand, the premise that the overall practice of corruption is a destructuring of the public space, and if we justify, on the other hand, the assertion that public ethics has an essentially structuring function in the public space, preserving interpersonal trust and commitment to the public good as a value to be pursued, precisely that which corruption deflates, then there follows, as argumentable, the thesis that public ethics is, from the point of view of the effects it produces, the opposite of corruption, thus constituting the instrument par excellence to confront the phenomenon of corruption (BARATA, 2012, p.24).



The theme of corruption has always been in evidence on the world stage, and deserves permanent attention in all spheres.<sup>3</sup> In Brazil, from the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the revelation of corrupt practices took on appalling proportions, with political, legal, economic and social ramifications, surpassing any other national priority focus, with effects that are still being felt today.

#### 4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Indeed, corruption cannot be explained or understood solely on the basis of isolated concepts or specific historical episodes. It is an event that transcends the ties that may be imposed by a certain field of knowledge.

A conjunctural analysis is necessary, such is the complexity of the corruptive phenomenon.

Moreover, as if this were not enough of a highly heterotopic phenomenon, corruption also spreads its effects far beyond the environment in which it occurred.

If it is possible to observe the natural degeneration of beings, of morals and of human values in various social environments, it is in the sphere of public administration that its sensitive effects can be found for the entire community. Therefore, the focus conferred within the limits of this text reached its apex when it was ascertained that the phenomenon of corruption within the public treasury is highly damaging, not only to the public coffers, but to the institutions, to political relations and even to democracy, but also with deleterious effects on the economy and on social peace.

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<sup>3</sup> Just to mention a few emblematic cases: scandals in Italy - starting with Operation *Mane Polite*, initially called the *Tangentopoli* case (*city of bribery*, in Italian, in reference to the city of Milan), was a major judicial investigation in Italy, starting in Milan, aimed at clearing up corruption cases during the 1990s (more exactly in the period from 1992 to 1996); following the scandal of the Ambrosian Bank in 1982, involving the Mafia and the Vatican Bank. This operation, coordinated by Judge Giovanni Falcone (killed in an organized crime attack in 1992), led to the end of the so-called First Italian Republic (1945-94) and the disappearance of many political parties (1993-95). Politicians and industrialists committed suicide when their crimes were discovered, while others became fugitives, inside and outside the country. Also, the recent "Panama Papers" scandal, revealed from secret documents that were kept by the Mossack Fonseca law firm in Panama, and that show how hundreds of personalities, among them 72 heads of state, managed to become fabulously rich from money embezzled through corruption. See also the Fifa Scandal, in which seven Fifa leaders, including the former president of the CBF, José Maria Marín, were arrested in Zurich by the Swiss police at the request of the American justice system on a series of corruption charges. At the same time, the Swiss justice system questioned ten leaders of the entity about suspicions in the choice of the venues for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups. There is also the Bae System case, in which one of the largest security agencies in Europe and the world was accused of corruption involving the United States and Saudi Arabia, not to mention some European countries. The company paid kickbacks to public officials in exchange for contracts. Another worldwide scandal was the KBR Halliburton case, in which the American energy company bribed Nigerian public agents in exchange for contracts worth US\$ 6 billion, generating an amount of R\$ 1.8 billion in corruption. The case of corruption committed by the multinational Siemens, which allegedly generated R\$ 5.1 billion in corruption of political agents in contracts with public agencies, also generated a lot of repercussion worldwide.



Brazil has been living for some time in an environment of great instability, which also coincides with the revelation of intense corruptive practices.

The warning that the conceptual approach and the prospection of the proposed facts and effects must be made is evident. It is the same as saying that the fight against corruption must be unceasing, at all levels and degrees of its occurrence. Moreover, the existence of strong and independent institutions is a prerequisite for its confrontation. And, above all, to conclude that the tentacles of corruption, notably when in the heart of the public administration, are like the hydra of Greek mythology, which, according to legend, once Hercules had its head cut off, others would be born in its place, becoming even stronger. Its destructive power, moreover, was phenomenal. Only with great effort and intelligence was it destroyed. This is how corruption is. Once installed and its agents unveiled, they can regenerate themselves, gathering forces and reacting with even more structure and organization. And if this occurs, the risks are even greater for the environment in which it developed, once its methods are perfected and its anger instigated.

What encourages any perspective necessary to confront the phenomenon of corruption is the certainty that there will always be people and institutions with the preparation, responsibility and fearlessness to combat it. And society, in the last analysis, the instance most harmed, needs to be alert to discern symptoms that demonstrate, even if subtly, the occurrence of corruptive practices.

In the end, it is believed that the existence of a consolidated Democratic State of Law and strengthened institutions, with a society that is enlightened and intolerant of corruption, are the path to social pacification and common welfare, thereby raising the levels of citizenship and human dignity.



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