

This is a translation of an op-ed article published in the Swedish daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter October 11, 2015.

Recent research has shown that corruption is a more severe social problem than has previously been considered. Comparative studies find negative effects of corruption on almost every measure of human well-being such as infant mortality, economic prosperity, life expectancy, the number of children living in poverty, access to clean water, the number of women who die in childbirth, willingness to handle environmental problems, and so on. Corruption has also recently been shown to be an important explanation for both the outbreak of civil wars and wars between states. Moreover, corruption has strong causal links with more subjective measures such as the extent to which people state that they are satisfied with their lives and to what extent they believe that people in general in their society can be trusted. Although measuring the degree of corruption is complicated, it is estimated that more than seventy percent of the world's population live in countries with dysfunctional public institutions. This implies that it is not the lack of economic resources, knowledge, medicines, or equipment that is the main barrier for increasing human well-being and erasing poverty in today's world, but instead the high level of corruption in the public institutions in many countries.

There are certainly no societies that are free of corruption since this is as utopian as a crime-free society. However, it is important to point out that widespread corruption is by no means something that only exists in developing countries. Several analyses of, for example, the economic problems in Greece and Italy point at corruption as a root cause. There are also analyses indicating that the collapse of the financial markets in 2008 can be explained in terms of corruption.

As with the level of crime, the degree of corruption varies starkly between societies. Countries that have comparatively low corruption are the countries in Northwestern Europe as well as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Compared with neighboring countries, Botswana, Chile, and Estonia are doing well. The causes of corruption are manifold, but a surprising research result is that people in countries that are plagued by severe corruption do not internalize this behavior as part of their culture. On the contrary, in general they strongly reject such behavior and they also realize that

corruption seriously damages their communities. The reason why they often participate in corruption is that they do not perceive that they have a real choice. It makes little sense to be the only one in the village who do not pay the doctor under the table to get medical care. It is probably not only pointless, but also dangerous to be the only honest policeman in a Mexican police force. In other words, corruption is a so-called "frequency problem", in the sense that if one believes that "most others" are involved in this type of shady business, it makes little sense to be the only honest one in such a "rotten game".

This implies that a very important question to ask from where these ideas about "what everyone else is doing" come from. The evidence suggests that these ideas are for the most part generated by perceptions of how the political and economic elite behave. If the "common knowledge" is that the elites are engaged in various forms of corruption, this quickly spreads downwards. Thus, the German proverb "the fish rots from the head down" seems to be correct. The ethics of those in charge of large companies and public institutions play a big role. For this reason, the ethical dimension in the education of these groups is of great importance.

One problem in this regard is that when comparing the moral and ethical dimensions of different university programs there are interesting differences. A number of independent studies have shown that those who study economics are more prone to corruption and other forms of unethical behavior than students of other subjects. These results first appeared in a number of so-called experimental studies that are based on exposing students to various hypothetical situations. These experimental results have recently been supplemented by a study done on real data by René Ruske (published in the journal *Kyklos* 2015). This study compares members of the United States Congress and shows that those who have a degree in economics had twice the risk of having been involved in corruption compared to those with other types of education. One explanation behind these results seems to be that there is an ideological element in business studies that emphasize the importance of selfish behavior - the notion of the so-called "homo economicus". In addition, the experimental studies show that this dysfunctional behavior is not just something that the students bring to the program, but instead it is most often an effect of what they learn when studying economics.

These results are troubling because degrees in economics often lead to high positions in society. In a Swedish context, these research results are also problematic since Sweden is giving out one of the world's most prestigious scientific awards in the social sciences, namely the Bank of Sweden's Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences (in everyday speech the "Nobel Prize in Economics"). This prize was not established in Alfred Nobel's original testament from 1895 but was added by a donation from Bank of Sweden in 1968. Responsible party for selecting the Prize winner(s) is the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

The prize has been controversial within the Academy, partly because some has felt that economics is not a science of the same magnitude as for example physics and chemistry, and partly because some has considered the prize politicized since it has often been given to economists preaching the ideology of market liberalism. While I do not support the first type of criticism, there is clearly some justification for the latter. However, the problem I raise here is of a considerably heavier magnitude. If it is correct that a university education in economics, as it often seems to occur, is leading to increased tolerance for corruption, then in the light of the research results about the effects of corruption mentioned above, this is a very serious problem. If this is the case, the Prize in Economics stands in direct contradiction to Alfred Nobel's will, which stipulated that prizes should be awarded to "those who, during the preceding year, have done mankind the greatest benefit". A prize that contributes to increased corruption is of course in direct conflict with what is stipulated by Alfred Nobel.

As a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, I will therefore now take the initiative for having this matter urgently investigated by the Academy. If it turns out that these research results are valid, the Academy must decide to abandon its role as being responsible for the selection of the prize winners. My overall impression is that these research results are convincing to a point that now motivates a Moratorium for giving out the Prize until such an investigation is completed. The Nobel Foundation, which is responsible for the award ceremony, should also consider whether it shall be involved in awarding a Prize that in effect stands in a direct conflict with what Alfred Nobel decreed in his will.

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