

HUMAN NATURE AND MORALITY IN THE ANTI-CORRUPTION DISCOURSE OF TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL

ANJA C. GEBEL*

Aberystwyth University, Penglais, UK

SUMMARY

Against the background of failing anti-corruption programmes, this article examines the discourse of the anti-corruption international non-governmental organisation Transparency International (TI), thereby focussing on the organisation's use of the concepts of integrity and ethics. Their meaning and significance is explored by looking at policy measures advocated by TI and particularly at the conception of human nature underlying the organisation's discourse. On the basis of TI documents and interviews with TI staff, the article argues that there is dominance within TI discourse of a mechanistic conception of human nature as rational and self-interested. This leads to an over-emphasis on institutional engineering and the strengthening of oversight and control (to set 'disincentives' for corruption), while neglecting the social-moral components of human behaviour as well as the political processes of their generation. This conception of human behaviour makes concepts such as 'ethics' mean not much more than 'rules', 'integrity' mean no more than 'rule-conforming behaviour' and 'prevention' mean no more than 'control'. While discussing some of the difficulties involved in addressing morals, the article argues that without reconsidering its conception of human nature, it will be difficult for TI to re-orient and improve its approach. Copyright © 2012 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

KEY WORDS—corruption; anti-corruption; Transparency International; morality; human nature; self-interested rational actor; integrity; ethics

INTRODUCTION

As its title indicates, this special issue intends to re-assess approaches to combat corruption. In their search for solutions against corruption, they reel somewhere between the implementation of universalist measures and the engagement with specific social contexts, between technical control and retribution mechanisms and the appeal to morality. What they have in common is their lack of significant success in reducing corruption.

In spite of decade-long reform efforts, anti-corruption activities funded by international organisations as well as bilateral donors are not known for being particularly effective (see e.g. Szeftel, 1998; Lindsey and Dick, 2002; Brown and Cloke, 2004; Kpundeh, 2004; Johnston, 2005; Doig *et al.*, 2007; Heeks, 2007; Bracking, 2007; De Sousa, 2010; Persson *et al.*, 2010). Levels of corruption are notoriously difficult to measure, but the overall impression seems to be so clear that even the key international anti-corruption (IAC) organisations themselves admit the disappointing results of their efforts. In its governance and anti-corruption strategy, the World Bank notes that 'while some progress may have been made in strengthening state capacity and accountability worldwide, there is little evidence that this has had a significant aggregate impact on reducing corruption overall' (World Bank, 2007: 40).¹ The *UNDP Practice Note* (2004: 8/9) tells us that '[t]he history of anti-corruption efforts is filled with programmes that succeeded at first only to be undermined by subsequent governments or by economic and political

*Correspondence to: A. C. Gebel, Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University, Penglais, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, Wales, UK SY23 3FE. E-mail: acg08@aber.ac.uk

¹See also World Bank (2007: 48). More such quotes from the World Bank can be found easily: Anwar Shah, Lead Economist at the World Bank Institute, and Mark Schacter, a former consultant to the World Bank, lament that 'so many anticorruption initiatives have met with so little success' and state that it is 'not yet clear that the incidence of corruption has declined perceptibly, especially in highly corrupt countries' (Shah and Schacter, 2004: 40). The World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group comes to the conclusion that although the World Bank has undertaken lots of efforts in the area of anticorruption, 'progress on outcomes has been slow' (WB IEG, 2006: 1).

crises later'.² TI's *Anti-Corruption Source Book* (2000: xx) agrees that '[s]uccessful anti-corruption reform efforts have been all too rare, and the failures numerous'. The non-governmental organisation's (NGO) own research indicates that the world is witnessing a rise in corruption, rather than a decline, which seems to put the success of anti-corruption efforts into doubt.³ Although the anti-corruption efforts that have been undertaken by those many actors should not be dismissed altogether, their low success clearly indicates that there is still much room for improvement.

The search for the right strategies has been ongoing since the inception of anti-corruption efforts in the early 1990s.⁴ While during the 1990s, corruption was almost solely treated as a (technical) matter of insufficient legislation and punishment (starting with TI's pledge against international corporate bribery), the search for better solutions brought about by the obvious failure of anti-corruption programmes as well as manifold scholarly and activist critiques of their approach has resulted in an increased interest of important IAC organisations such as Transparency International (TI), the World Bank or the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in institutions and their impact on the behaviour of individuals (the so-called 'institutional engineering').

At the same time, and with manifest successes in IAC still absent, scholarly critique has expanded from highlighting the overly heavy and technical focus on legislation and sanctions in IAC discourse to include the limited understanding of socio-political processes of much anti-corruption efforts and (anti)corruption research and narrow conception of human nature or behaviour. Warren (2004), for example, criticises the neglect by (anti)corruption literature of the links between the concepts of corruption and democracy and the political processes through which common purposes, norms and rules are created. Polzer (2001) has drawn out the World Bank's limited conception of the political and its neglect of politics (which is regarded as inferior to economics) as well as a disregard for the political implications of its anti-corruption activities. At the same time, she notes that '[t]he corrupt individual is constructed as a rational maximiser responding to incentives, rather than as a moral agent' (2001: 20). Similarly, Brown and Cloke (2004: 285) reprimand IAC activities especially by the World Bank for their neglect of the negative political effects of market liberalisation, a 'very poor understanding of the state' and for its 'highly questionable conceptualisations of human motivation' as purely self-interested. Bratsis (2003: 29) argues that the modern conception of corruption through its narrow belabouring of the public-private divide distracts from and prevents the necessary political discussions about 'what we think the good society is'. And Bukovansky (2006: 182) shows how IAC's 'neo-liberal institutionalist focus on transparency, separation of powers, and government accountability' leads to a 'neglect of the moral core of the corruption concept' and obscures 'core problems of politics and ethics' instead of directly engaging with them. Such much-criticised neglect of the socio-political nature of the concept of corruption in the design of anti-corruption policies cannot go without consequences, and one might wonder whether it is at least in part responsible for the lack of success of many of those policies. Another, related, criticism has been that of the persistent lack of cultural sensitivity and political flexibility within IAC activities.⁵ Hindess (2005) has accused TI of promoting a Western-centric, neoliberal and neoimperialist project via its concept of National Integrity Systems (NIS), while Brown and Cloke (2004) note Western arrogance and hypocrisy towards the Global South with regard to corruption and detect the general tendency in anti-corruption practice and research to take Western norms and standards as universally valid. And Bukovansky (2006) has criticised the Western liberal model of society advanced through apparently technocratic IAC programmes.

One aspect of anti-corruption reform has, however, not yet received much attention. The aforementioned shift during the last decade towards institutional engineering, or 'prevention', as TI calls it, has been accompanied by

²See also UNDP (2004: 6): 'Many anti-corruption efforts have failed for a variety of reasons'.

³See, for example, TI's recent report about one of its indices, *The Global Corruption Barometer 2010*, according to which '[c]orruption has increased over the last three years, say six out of 10 people around the world', and '[m]ore than 20 countries have reported significant increases in petty bribery since 2006' (TI, 2010); the perceived rise could of course also be explained by an increased awareness of corruption, which would in turn highlight the inappropriateness of TI's indices for comparative quantitative measurements of corruption.

⁴See Bukovansky (2006) or Krastev (2004) for a history of the rise of the anti-corruption tide during the late 1980s (starting with an OECD Working Group) and early 1990s, when the United Nations, TI and the World Bank started working on the topic.

⁵The relation between these two criticisms will become clearer in the course of the article.

the proliferation in IAC discourse of seemingly moral concepts such as integrity, ethics and honesty as well as by an increased emphasis on the need for more context-specific anti-corruption measures. The article takes a closer look at the first aspect. Considering the critique that has so far been made of the amoral, technocratic and economic-instrumentalist characters of most IAC activities, such insertions of explicitly moral terms into IAC discourse deserve closer investigation and prompt questions about the moral character of IAC efforts. May it be the case that IAC efforts are indeed undergoing changes from purely economic towards explicitly moral arguments against corruption? Drawing on the specific example of TI, this article aims to investigate the nature of this 'moral approach' and asks what this moral language means for TI's anti-corruption policies. Does it mean that TI is indeed on its way to be a global 'moral entrepreneur'⁶ against corruption, as suggested by Bukovansky (2006: 193)? What is the nature of this anti-corruption morality? To what extent does it contribute to overcoming the technical, economic focus IAC activities have been criticised for during the past decade and enable the NGO to lead the way for a reform of IAC policies? And how does this moral approach sit in relation to claims for more context sensitivity? In order to answer these questions, the article undertakes an analysis of TI's anti-corruption discourse and focuses particularly on the concepts of 'integrity' and 'ethics' and their discursive contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

The article is based on an analysis of a range of TI documents as well as seven interviews with TI officials. The documents analysed are all available online and include contents from TI's website (mainly on its five *Global Priorities* and from its *Frequently Asked Questions*), Policy Positions and press releases as well as the *TI Source Book*, a handbook detailing TI's concept of a NIS. The semi-structured interviews, which are used in this article and which exist in recorded and transcribed form, were conducted by the author with TI-Secretariat officials in Berlin during October 2010. The interviewees were selected in such a way as to cover as many aspects of TI's work as possible—quantitative and qualitative research, development, country-specific work, public and private sectors' work. Against the background of the analysis of TI documents, the aim of the interviews was not only to verify conceptual findings that emerged from the documents, to reveal conceptual contestations and to clarify contradictions but also to find out more about the practical work of TI. The questions, which varied from interview to interview and according to the interviewees' expertise, covered a broad range of topics including operational/organisational aspects, co-operations with and differences from other organisations, conceptions of corruption, conceptions of human nature, political and economic ideals, the meanings of different important concepts (e.g. integrity, accountability, development) and their relation to corruption, cultural diversity and universality regarding corruption, consensus and difference among TI chapters and Secretariat, research methods and sources of knowledge.⁷ The evidence from the seven interviews used in this article cannot be taken as representative for the whole NGO, especially because it comes from the Secretariat only. However, the interviews have in interesting ways confirmed many findings from the documents regarding the conception of integrity and ethics and point to a rather strong consensus on the meaning of these concepts at least in the Secretariat.

Regarding the use of quotes in this interview, it should be pointed out that it is not always possible to demonstrate findings in one short quote or footnote, because at times discursive connections were only recognisable from the ways in which an interview evolved, from repetitions or reiterations of certain explanations or from particular contradictions that accumulated over the course of the interview.⁸

This article proceeds by starting off with a portrait of TI in its institutional context, followed by an analysis of TI's conceptions of ethics and integrity in the public and private sectors. The second part of the article deals with the consequences of these conceptions for TI's work.

⁶The original concept was by Nadelmann (1990).

⁷The primary aim of these interviews was to help answer the author's doctoral research question about politico-economic ideals and consensus in international anti-corruption discourse.

⁸A much more detailed analysis of TI's as well as the World Bank's and UNDP's anti-corruption efforts is currently undertaken in the author's doctoral project.

TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL—A POTENTIAL LEADER OF A MORAL INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION AGENDA?

Transparency International in its institutional context

Transparency International itself is proud to be ‘the global civil society organisation leading the fight against corruption’. It is determined to keep this role through ‘maturing, intensifying and diversifying its fight against corruption’ (TI q) and indeed seems to be in a good position for it. Not only was TI one of the first actors on the international scene to talk about corruption as a problem for the development of societies, it has also played an important role in putting the topic on the agenda of bilateral and international donors as well as other NGOs. It is unchallenged as the largest and most important international non-governmental organisation in the area of anti-corruption,⁹ and its documents and best practice suggestions are read, used and distributed by both civil society organisations and government institutions worldwide. Particularly, through its annual publication of the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), it manages to secure worldwide media attention and its more than 90 national chapters are often asked for statements regarding national corruption cases and maintain a huge network with business people, governments, development institutions and other NGOs.

Yet, TI is not only interesting because of the influence it exerts on other actors but also because, compared with them, it is rather well positioned to assume the role of an IAC reformer. Unlike UNDP or the World Bank, it is not by mandate required to have all its projects sanctioned by donor and receiving governments and therefore not forced to evade ‘sensitive topics’. Neither is it bound by anything such as the World Bank’s (1989) *Articles of Agreement*, which prevent the bank from interfering in the ‘political affairs’ of its member states and from acting according to any ‘political or other non-economic influences or considerations’¹⁰ (Art. IV, Sect. 10; Art III, Sect. 5b). Also, it is organised quite differently from the huge bureaucratic apparatus of the World Bank, which requires all of its projects to be moulded into strict templates, thus restricting their potential for innovation, adaptation to local contexts and modification during the process of implementation.¹¹ As an NGO, TI is free to act openly politically and to change its priorities and approaches according to what is deemed appropriate and successful by its members, rather than having to push its policies through a bulk of restrictive regulations and governments’ foreign-political considerations.¹² Claiming to be a decentralised grassroots organisation,¹³ TI could be expected to let its chapters create innovative projects that fit the local contexts under consideration and to try out manifold approaches. It has the potential to be more culturally sensitive, more critical, more innovative and less prone to participate in the liberal economic crusade of the international financial institutions or some bilateral donors who follow foreign-political economic motives.

On the other hand, one must know that TI is originally the product of a former World Bank country director and some like-minded people (see also Murphy, 2011). In 1993, Peter Eigen left his post as East Africa country director at the World Bank because he felt that development efforts could not succeed if corruption was not openly addressed and tackled. Together with nine other people, he founded the NGO TI and provided not only the organisational but also the intellectual capital for the organisation. In Eigen’s case, this capital was shaped in 24 working years at the World Bank; his co-founders came all from either legal or economic background, and some of them had worked at the World Bank or other development institutions. In their work at TI, they drew on their knowledge and networks acquired in development and business institutions. Also, as one can see from the staff profiles on the TI website, numerous people have worked at the World Bank or UNDP before joining TI, thus contributing to the exchange of ideas and assimilation of approaches between these organisations. It is thus quite plausible that the technical-economistic ways of thinking characteristic of the World Bank

⁹Other international NGOs exist in the realm of IAC, such as Global Witness, TIRI and the Open Society Institute, but their influence is disproportionately lower (De Sousa, 2005: 30).

¹⁰As unrealistic as this agreement may be, it does have an influence on the way in which the World Bank deals with topics such as corruption (see e.g. Weaver, 2008).

¹¹For a detailed description of the World Bank’s structures and the consequences for its governance and anti-corruption work, see Weaver (2008).

¹²Tänzler (2010a: 7), for example, reports that the civil society actors who formed TI’s national chapters came together on the basis of their moral and political convictions.

¹³For a critical inquiry into its alleged grassroots organisation, see De Sousa (2005).

are and remain deeply embedded into TI, dominating over potential anti-corruption approaches on more moral grounds.

Compared with the World Bank, which has already received much criticism for its good governance and anti-corruption activities (see e.g. Abrahamsen, 2000; Polzer, 2001; Marquette, 2003; Brown and Cloke 2004; Harrison, 2004; Weaver, 2008; Williams, 2008; Bracking, 2009), the NGO TI has been treated somewhat more gently by the critics. There are certainly a number of critical works,¹⁴ but overall, TI's prominent engagement in the fight against corruption has often been positively acknowledged (Marschall, 2002; Doig and McIvor, 2003; Galtung, 2006), and the CPI, the 'best known "measure" for "corruption" in the world' (De Maria, 2008: 778), is used in countless positivist corruption studies (see e.g. Lipset and Lenz, 2000; Treisman, 2000; Montinola and Jackman, 2002; Gundlach and Paldam, 2009; Sahaa *et al.*, 2009; Das and Di Rienzo, 2010; Melgar *et al.*, 2010; De Jong and Bogmans, 2011; Judge *et al.*, 2011, just to mention a few). TI also seems to be regarded as an ethically committed fighter against corruption. Tänzler (2010b: 331) calls it a well-established 'moral and political authority',¹⁵ and Wrage and Wrage (2005: 322) think that TI 'clearly fit[s] the description of "transnational moral entrepreneurs"'. Hopes seem to rest on TI to take on the role of a more culturally and politically sensitive global actor against corruption. Bukovansky (2006) suggests that

TI's grass-roots approach may well be in tension with the efforts put forth through international institutions, insofar as those institutions draw primarily on the economic discourse on corruption, take the ends of modernity for granted, and neglect issues of political agency and the substantive, normative dimensions of the concept of public good (2006: 194).

Having originally focussed on the legal prohibition of business corruption of Western firms in Africa on economic and legal grounds, TI now indeed seems to make more explicitly moral arguments for its work. It claims, for example, to have 'created a coalition of organisations and individuals who are now working together and co-operating as never before in the task of building just and honest government around the world and in developing sound and socially responsible business practices' (TI k); and it declares that nowadays, there is 'a wider recognition that corruption cannot be legislated away simply by passing new anti-corruption laws but rather demands a holistic approach which emphasises prevention (rather than rely on prosecution) and is ethics based, not just punitive in character' (TI k). The most obvious sign for TI's advocacy of moral values to curb corruption is, however, the increasing importance conveyed to the concepts of 'integrity' and 'ethics' in its discourse since about the mid 1990s.¹⁶ Yet, at the same time, the technical language of the days of the NGO's inception seems to remain clearly present in the discourse.

In what follows, I will examine the meaning of the concepts of 'integrity' and 'ethics' in TI's discourse and try to assess their significance for the organisation's work.

Economistic–mechanistic conceptions of morality

To start with, the concept of morality, which I have already been using in a particular way so far, merits some closer attention. The relevant literature has not been particularly explicit about the relation between moral and economic arguments against corruption. Sampson (2004: 3, 2), for example, seems to conceive the whole anti-corruption campaign as a moral enterprise; he sees anti-corruption activities as a 'moral force' and as 'part of a general trend toward global ethics and moral justification in human affairs'. Conomos, who investigates the 'rise of a market of virtue' (2005: 457), argues that concepts like transparency which are used in such discourses operate 'on two levels' and are 'bound up with a vision that is at once economic and moral' (2005: 460). Roden, in turn, thinks that corruption has 'evolved from an economic issues to a moral one' (2010: 15). And Bukovansky (2006: 181/182)

¹⁴Hindess' (2005) critique of the NIS has already been mentioned, and there exist several critiques of the CPI (e.g. Wilhelm, 2002; Serra, 2006; Knack, 2007; De Maria, 2008; Andersson and Heywood, 2009).

¹⁵Translation AG.

¹⁶The proliferation of terms such as 'integrity' and 'ethics' is a general trend in IAC discourse (see also Bukovansky, 2006: 182/183), but they seem to be particularly frequent in and important for TI's discourse.

sees IAC discourse explicitly evoking ‘the moral underpinnings of a successful market economy’, which are, however, in tension with the simultaneously deployed ‘language and methodologies of economics and rational choice’. The authors’ conception of morality remains, however, unclear. Only Polzer (2001: 20–21), who discusses the dichotomies of individual/institutional and moral/rational within the World Bank’s anti-corruption discourse, mentions that apart from the individual morality, there is also a ‘conception of morality of the political system’, which is equally neglected by the World Bank. It is impossible within the scope of the present article to provide a thorough discussion of the concept of morality, and it will have to content itself with two points. As with many socially constructed concepts, there is hardly a universal agreement on the meaning of morality. While I dare to say that most people would probably conceive of morality as an attribute of people rather than things or structures¹⁷—which is the sense in which I have used the term ‘moral’ so far, when mentioning the proliferation of ‘moral concepts like integrity and ethics’ in TI discourse—the aim of this article is, however, not to assess the way in which TI uses those concepts against an eventual objective standard meaning of morality, integrity or ethics; rather, I intend to draw out the meaning that those concepts acquire in TI’s very discourse, to find out about the significance of their insertion into this discourse.

My analysis shows that TI does not conceive integrity as an attribute of people, or as linked to their consciences. This conception, as I demonstrate, is directly related to a particular conception of human nature that is deeply instituted in TI’s organisational thinking.

DEFINITIONS

The *TI Anti-Corruption Plain Language Guide* defines ‘ethics’ as follows: ‘Based on core values, a set of standards for conduct in government, companies and society that guides decisions, choices and actions’ (2009c: 18). There is no mention of the kind of values or moral principles to constitute this barrier, nor of the way in which they are to be determined or decided upon, and by whom. Integrity is defined as behaviour and actions consistent with such ethical standards, thus creating a ‘barrier to corruption’ (2009c: 24). The ‘examples in practice’, which the *Plain Language Guide* gives for ‘integrity’, reveal that a public official with integrity is one who complies with ‘relevant national laws’, and that ‘islands of integrity’ can be achieved through ‘community-based oversight mechanisms’ (2009c: 24). Legislation and oversight, however, is nothing new, and one might ask how people’s moral values come into play here. It is noticeable that the definition of integrity makes reference to people’s ‘behaviour’, rather than, for example, to their ‘conviction’. A deeper look into how TI conceives of integrity of people in politics and companies shall be enlightening in this regard.

PEOPLE IN POLITICS

Transparency International demands ‘manifest integrity’ (TI 2000: xxi) and a ‘high moral standard’ (TI e) from parliamentarians, anti-corruption agencies, investigators, prosecutors, adjudicators and a ‘firm ethical basis for public administration’ (TI 2000: xxiii), to build ‘just and honest government around the world’ (TI k).

If we look at the discursive context of integrity in TI documents, we find that integrity is most frequently mentioned in the context of the three principles of transparency, accountability and integrity, which for TI form the tenets of good governance in both the private and public sectors. Together with ‘ethics’, it is mentioned in direct reference to parliamentarians, businessmen, companies and public institutions.

The *Source Book*¹⁸ takes up the case for a moral approach to corruption and argues that ‘[i]mportant though enforcement undoubtedly is, a strategy that focuses only on enforcement is almost certain to fail and is unlikely to yield a sustained ethical environment that is alien to corruption’. However, already the next sentence—‘Carrots

¹⁷This view seems to be confirmed—although not made explicit—for example, by the discussions of morality by Frankena (1966) and Honneth (1992). This can of course not be regarded as an exhaustive overview over the literature on the concept of morality in any way.

¹⁸Although it dates from the year 2000, the ‘renowned TI Source Book’ (as TI calls it on its website, TI n) still counts as one of TI’s publications of major importance. It is not only linked to the organisation’s FAQs (TI i) but also figures prominently on TI’s Policy and Research page and exists in eight languages (see TI 2000).

are needed as well as sticks'—is paradigmatic for the great extent to which TI remains stuck in its economic perspective, which is mainly about the setting of incentives for self-interested actors (TI 2000: xxii). The stipulated 'firm ethical basis for public administration' can be achieved through the review and enforcement of 'ethics programmes' (TI 2000: xxii–xxiv) as well as through 'integrity testing' (TI 2000: v). Public ethics for TI do not seem to be the outcome of public deliberation, or something that public officials as well as other citizens are supposed to reflect upon, internalise, and try to apply; they do not seem to have to do with social conscience. Rather, TI believes that '[m]echanisms are needed that tell parliamentarians in clear terms what is expected of them and what constitutes a violation of public ethics'. But this is not enough: 'Such mechanisms, for instance codes of conduct, need to be enforced and well publicised' if they are to 'improve the accountability of Members of Parliament (MPs) to parliament and to the general public' (TI e)—which brings the well-known sanction focus in. The conflict-of-interest regulations are another good example for TI's approach to control egoistic private interests through regulatory or legal incentive setting.¹⁹ Conflict of interest is defined as a '[s]ituation where an individual or the entity for which they work, whether a government, business, media outlet or civil society organisation, is confronted with choosing between the duties and demands of their position and their own private interests' (TI 2009c: 11) and thus presupposes that in certain situations, such conflicts will necessarily arise for the individual. TI also seems to assume that the individual will not be able to solve this conflict for the good of the public on its own, which is why the most important thing to do (obviously more important than working on people's values) is to prevent it from getting into this conflict in the first place—for example, through laws on conflict of interest that '[restrict] elected officials, executives and advisors in government institutions from certain activities if they result in private or material gain' (TI 2009c: 11). In line with the usual efficiency logic, TI warns that when a NIS is being instituted to 'minimise the possibilities for corruption occurring in the first place', there is the danger that this 'quest for integrity' might 'impose unwarranted costs or needless restrictions that might obstruct people from doing their jobs effectively' or even 'render government dysfunctional' (TI 2000: vii). If such 'prevention' efforts are driven too far, they might even 'have a negative impact on personal freedoms and fundamental human rights', which is why the aim should be 'not to achieve complete rectitude, but to realise a fundamental increase in honesty—and so the efficiency and fairness—of government' (TI 2000: xviii–xix); this can be interpreted as referring to the successful control of people's behaviour through the setting of incentives such as transparency regulations, oversight and enforcement mechanisms—the excess of which could infringe upon efficiency, liberal freedoms and rights and therefore upon the system logic. It is clear that in such cases the priority is on the latter, rather than on the achievement of integrity. That integrity or honesty has to do with incentives becomes even clearer when TI argues that civil servants and politicians need to be paid living wages not out of social considerations but 'so that an honest career in government is a reasonable choice for qualified people' (TI 2000: xxii–xxiii). It becomes pretty clear that integrity is not so much to do with virtue, good character, social responsibility, altruism or truthfulness to one's convictions, but rather an outcome of successful efforts to 'make corruption a "high risk" and "low return" undertaking' (TI 2000: vii). Accordingly, when asked whether integrity meant something like 'rule-conforming behaviour', two TI interviewees thought that this was an appropriate definition:

TI (6) 'We use the term integrity not in a moral. . .—so far—not very much in a moral, but really as an institutional feature, as transparency, as technocratic.' AG: 'Like rule-conforming behaviour?'—TI (6): 'Aaahh. . . yes, but of course the rules have to have not a moral but. . . but ahhh.... and I could not come up with a good definition of integrity, we have the plain language guide where we did it, you can pick it up' (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 6, 2010).

AG 'I read that TI emphasises incentives a lot, incentives and institutions in order to regulate people's behaviour. But then sometimes there are these things like integrity and honesty. And I wonder what is integrity apart from rule-conforming behaviour.'—TI (2): '...Rule-conforming behaviour is a good definition' (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 2, 2010).

¹⁹See, for example, TI d, TI e and TI m.

This second interviewee added that the rules are defined via the context of the NIS. Another interviewee had a different opinion and saw integrity as a ‘combination of elements that ensure the public good’, including transparency, accountability, responsibility, honesty and a commitment to the public good; when explaining the way in which it should be achieved, however, it all came back to the incentives logic. Interestingly, while taking culture into account, this interviewee maintained the incentives logic by talking about ‘cultural incentives’:

TI (5) ‘So the idea is that the more you work on positive incentives from the institutions, from the, like, attitude side of, ah, behaviour and the.... social control let’s say, yeah, the cultural incentives, you can try to make a difference’ (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 5, 2010).

Another interviewee confirmed the priority of incentives in the following way:

TI (1) ‘I do think that systems could create incentives for people to be corrupt, or could create dis-incentives for them to be corrupt [. . .] if you don’t have the systems in place, it can be just going wild, so yes, I do think that systems are important in that sense, and systems can create very powerful incentives’ (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 1, 2010).

The putting in place of the right ‘control mechanisms’ and ‘systemic hurdles’ (TI i) is what TI calls ‘prevention’, as was shown by one TI interviewee who described preventive measures as lowering the risk of future corruption by reducing opportunities for it (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 3, 2010). The *TI Source Book* stresses this approach by demanding that the ‘primary emphasis’ should be on ‘prevention of future corruption and on changing systems (rather than indulging in witch-hunts)’ (TI 2000: xx–xxi).

Transparency International also links integrity directly to transparency, one of its most important concepts. Persons with integrity open themselves up for the scrutiny of others and are transparent with regard to their actions in office and their financial status. National Integrity Workshops can, for example, lead presidents to ‘voluntarily making public disclosures of their assets’ (TI k). TI stresses the necessity for elected members of government to ‘act, and [be] seen to act, in an ethical manner’ (TI e). The visibility of ‘ethics’ is important, and it is almost as if holding the ‘right’ values did not matter if they are not being publicly displayed to be monitored by others. One reason for this is the mentioned prioritisation of behaviour over conviction. The other reason is that everything else would undermine citizens’ trust in politicians, the state and its institutions, as well as political stability, and lead to cynicism and apathy (TI e, see also TI i, TI 2000, TI d). The ‘ethical’ rationale therefore also relates to the stability of the politico-economic system, which is based upon the support of the citizenry. Reasons for why stability is important, however, are not given; and it remains unclear whether the main rationale for it is the stability of investors’ expectations, the state’s capacity to provide for its citizens or whether there is a concern with political inclusion and the quality of democracy.

Another aspect of TI’s conception of integrity relates to individuals who ‘demonstrate considerable courage in exposing and denouncing corruption’ and are therefore awarded a TI Integrity Award (TI h). Although such individuals may act out of moral considerations, such are not explicitly mentioned (TI h). At the same time, it is to be noted that TI’s focus with regard to those individuals is on their public denunciation of corruption:

‘ . . . many journalists, civil servants or civil society groups demonstrate considerable courage in exposing and denouncing corruption. TI stands behind these individuals. Their firmness deserves recognition. This is why TI has created the TI Integrity Awards, and this is also the reason why on many occasions TI and its National Chapters have drawn public attention to the case of whistleblowers that have become the target of persecution’ (TI h).

This reflects the concepts of ‘fire alarm’ or ‘naming and shaming’ through which public ‘agents’ are ‘checked’ by their ‘principals’ in civil society and which are compatible with the liberal logic of checks and balances. As an explanation for why TI might not be doing as much to improve the value side as it is doing on the institutions and incentives side, a TI official said that these awards have caused problems for TI, because many of its chosen

'champions of integrity' later turned out to have misused the system as well (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 2, 2010). I, however, argue further on for TI's conception of human nature as an at least equally important reason for this lack of emphasis on values.

In some documents, we can read that politicians are supposed to work according to the 'public interest' (TI p; TI i) (which could be expected to inform ethics), but TI documents do not elaborate at all on the nature of the public interest or the processes in which it is being defined. Only with regard to the private sector, the *Source Book* notes a growing 'public interest in containing private sector corruption', which is due to the privatisation of public assets. The rationale for this 'interest' is again an economic one: to achieve development and benefit the wider community through an 'arms-length pricing of goods and services' (TI 2000: xxvi). My interviews with TI-Secretariat staff in October 2011 revealed that the public interest is not a topic that plays a role in discussions or policy making at TI. The respective interviewees were puzzled by questions about the nature of the public interest and the ways in which and by whom it should be defined and implemented:

- AG 'I wonder which conception of public interest TI works with.'—TI (2): 'What does it mean by public interest.... these are very fundamental questions, you realise. You would also realise that once they're established in the movement, nobody really questions them' (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 2, 2010)
- TI (5) 'It's very funny because when we do these things you find out that we discuss so little [laughs a lot]'—AG: 'Yeah, probably because you don't have time.'—TI (5): 'Yeah, and we all take for granted that we all understand the same thing' (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 5, 2010).

They partly resorted to leaving this to be determined by the society in question, without, however, problematising this suggestion in the context of the allegedly corruption-ridden and 'badly governed' political environments and democratic processes in such societies, or preferred to sidestep the issue by assuming some kind of universal consensus:

- TI (2) 'Okay. What is meant by public interest. . . ahm. . . I think people from different backgrounds, different countries, would define this differently. [. . .] Our public interest would be the larger public interest which everybody can subscribe to, which is safe water, access to law and justice, let's say, that there would be little debate about' (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 2, 2010).
- AG 'Okay, but the people working for TI, how do they know what people want, what the public interest is?'—TI (1): 'I think everybody knows: If I give you something, and I give you something in exchange for something else, I should demand that something else. I mean even poor people know this' (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 1, 2010).

One TI interviewee conceived it as 'the opposite of the greedy individual interest [. . .] which every single person has' (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 5, 2010), thus reiterating the economic conception of the selfish individual, which can only be externally channelled to work for the public interest. Another interviewee differentiated between local and global public interest:

- TI (4) ' . . .well, at the local level one of the things we're doing is doing increased work with communities, to give them the space, and the tools to express what they need and what their demands are vis-a-vis the elected officials, the heads of local agencies, or the principals in schools. . . holding to account the people they've elected, or the representatives of the elected officials. On the global level, the idea of public interest, I think we talk about it more within the framework of a world free of corruption, and of promoting those values of transparency, integrity and accountability, and with the aim of development, and addressing poverty'.

Although stressing the logic of accountability (interests keeping other interests in check) in both of them, the interviewee was ultimately unclear about what TI has in mind with the concept of the public interest:

TI (4) ‘But is there a definition of what the public interest is actually defined as, no, we haven’t got.. I haven’t seen anything that really defines it clearly from our side, what is the public interest’ (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 4, 2010).

In sum, regarding the realm of the public sector, we can conclude that TI’s employment of the concepts of ethics and integrity does not seem to have brought any change in the priorities or perspectives. The only kinds of values that are to inform ethics regulations, the rule-conforming integrity of public officials and the actions of people who denounce corruption in public institutions, or the design of an effective political system in general, are the typically liberal economic motives and concerns with stability, which are well-known from the World Bank’s work and inform TI’s activities since its inception. Nor has it fostered a more thorough engagement with the concept of the public interest; yet, sidestepping this important issue is problematic because the concept of public interest is inherent in all currently popular definitions of corruption, including the one TI uses (for an interesting, convincing and still very topical elaboration on this, see Philp, 1997: 440/441). As Philp (1997: 440) puts it, these definitions implicitly introduce or recognise the public interest dimension by insisting that the deviation from the formal duties of a public office, or, as in TI’s case, the abuse of entrusted power, must be for private regarding gains. The private and public spheres are, however, mutually constitutive. To speak with Philp (1997: 441), TI would thus be well advised to consider that ‘[b]oth public office and public interest definitions of corruption must show which view of the character and scope of public office or public interest should be accepted’. One TI-interviewee realised this during the interview:

TI (6) ‘Well, what’s the public good? If you ask the Ku-Klux-Klan, they say the public good is actually that there is racial division, so.. ahh.. but I don’t think the public interest or public good is part of our definition. And we say it’s a misuse, abuse of power for private gain. And of course there may be an argument that this has negative impact for the public interest.’—AG: ‘But what is. . . why is something abuse? Why are [particular actions] an abuse?’—TI (6): ‘Hm. . . Because they are against.... [resigned] yeah, and then, I mean, that’s a good.. yeah, that’s where you would have to basically define public interest’ (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 6, 2010).

COMPANIES

With regard to companies, integrity has become a particularly important term since 2008. It is linked to TI’s efforts in the area of ‘good corporate governance’. TI explains that poor corporate governance—meaning the compromising of transparency, accountability and integrity—results in abuses such as corporate mismanagement and employee misconduct going unchecked and is one of the forces to blame for the collapse of the global financial markets in 2008 (TI 2009b). Good corporate governance measures, in turn, are expected to ‘manage and reduce financial and operational risks by building the integrity, transparency and accountability of a company’s management toward different actors at varying levels within a company: board members, managers, employees and shareholders’ (TI 2009b). Integrity standards as part of corporate governance systems are in fact regarded as a ‘vital component of company efforts to reinforce the right incentives and practices’ (TI 2009b: 2), linking integrity to the prevention-through-incentives logic.

The measures to prevent abuses include auditing standards, legal compliance systems and ethical policies (TI 2009b). The degree to which companies comply with corporate integrity and anti-corruption standards—their ‘level of business integrity’ (TI 2009b)—should be regularly assessed and reported. TI tries to persuade companies by suggesting that ‘[e]xemplary reporting and a credible track record of compliance can be linked to more lenient treatment by regulators if corruption incidences occur’ (TI 2009a), thus itself trying to operate with positive economic incentives. But it also refers to negative ones: Corruption, to the contrary, poses ‘serious and costly risks to their [the businesses’] reputation and sustainability’, because there is a ‘growing public expectation of accountability and probity in the corporate sector’ (TI g). Under the heading of ‘innovation and incentives: leveraging legislation and enforcement’, TI suggests, for example, ‘ethical blacklisting’ as an option ‘when companies do

not “play by the rules” (TI 2009a), to ‘name and shame’ the respective company and negatively influence its business prospects. All this indicates that corporate integrity means compliance with a set of rules or standards (called ‘ethics’), which is defined by the company’s board or an audit and remuneration committee (TI 2009a) and to be controlled and enforced by the company itself and the market force of the public. Integrity is here not so much a moral conviction or attachment to certain values by people working in the respective companies; it is rather an adherence to particular pre-set rules by the business entity, which are being reinforced through economic incentives and which can be seen as a perpetuation of the legalistic focus TI started off with. The ultimate ends of those regulations—which TI calls a ‘prerequisite for a transparent, honest and just society’—however, remain unclear. In any way, it does not seem to be about the building of particular values or the capacity for moral judgement of staff. Only when TI calls for a ‘supportive corporate culture’ for whistle-blowing in corruption cases (TI 2009a), something such as ethical conscience-building shines through, but TI does not elaborate on this any further. Overall, the way in which TI tries to convince companies to adopt corporate governance mechanisms is therefore by appealing to their economic interests. Those economic arguments demonstrate that the dominance of self-interest is taken for granted. Although this is also the case in the public sector, as we have seen, self-interest is apparently considered to be even more legitimate in the private sector, because the methods to ‘enforce integrity’ are rather soft. This contributes to an acceptance and reinforcement of economic self-interest as the guiding and highest principle in the private sector.²⁰

Another potential ‘value’ that TI refers to from time to time concerning companies, and in particular their corporate social responsibility but also regarding financial regulation institutions, is the participation of civil society in decision making (e.g. TI d), which brings us back to the question of the public interest in TI’s anti-corruption work. However, when it comes to the ways in which this participation is to happen, TI does not argue for anything else besides informal and voluntary discussion meetings (the so-called ‘coalition building’), for civil society’s ability to name and shame (the so-called ‘capacity building’) or just for a fire-alarm function (which presupposes constant ‘monitoring’ of companies). The only rationale that TI explicitly states for such civil society efforts to make companies responsible is not so much a democratic²¹ or justice-related but an economic one, namely the reinforcement of ‘market integrity’—for ‘without good corporate governance systems in place, the overall impact of anti-corruption initiatives is reduced and the growth of companies—and the countries where they operate—is undermined’ (TI 2009b). This underdeveloped conception of the relation between political and economic values is repeated in TI’s postulation that governments should ‘ensure the effective regulation of markets, protection of citizens and enforcement of laws’ and thus prevent ‘the marginalisation of stakeholder rights, distortion of markets and negligent or corrupt practices’ (TI 2009a)—without saying anything about which ways of market regulation are considered effective and/or just, what is meant by market distortion and protection of citizens, what kinds of stakeholder rights TI thinks of and on which moral grounds TI’s respective interpretations of these things are based. At the same time, there is no mention of how societal agreements on such things are to be achieved to be legitimate and morally sound, in case TI would not want to decide on them itself.

From these insights into TI’s position regarding integrity in both the public and private sectors, it becomes clear that the organisation’s emphasis on ‘corruption prevention’ through the promotion of integrity and ethics is not much more than a reformulation of the well-established method of institutional engineering to influence the behaviour of rational, self-interested actors, maintaining the primacy of the economy over politics and individual morality. In politics, the incentive setting is such that the stability, efficiency and smooth running of the politico-economic system are safeguarded; in the private sector, the emphasis lies on voluntary concessions by businesses to stick to some vaguely defined standards of transparency and social responsibility, without infringing upon their economic interests, and with the main aim of preventing major economic collapses. Bukovansky (2006)

²⁰In this context, it is, however, interesting to read TI’s statement that to provide work for its employees is not a legitimate reason for a company to bribe foreign officials—the fight against corruption is apparently a more important value than workplaces. The only explanation for this stance is that ‘bribing foreign officials to abuse their positions is damaging to the ethics of the companies who do it’ (TI k)—which again leaves us with the elusive concept of ethics.

²¹It should be acknowledged that in some places, TI talks about democracy as an important value, however without elaborating on its meaning and far from giving it the same weight as economic arguments.

therefore seems to be too optimistic regarding TI's morally outstanding role among IAC organisations. As we have seen, TI too takes 'the ends of modernity for granted' (2006: 194) as consisting of economic progress, neglects people's internal morality and has no real conception of the public good or the processes of its formation and realisation. Thus, its attempts to be a moral entrepreneur are—so far—in vain. A TI-interviewee problematised TI's use of the term integrity accordingly. To my question 'whether, when TI uses the concept, there is a deeper moral value behind it, [...] maybe things like social responsibility, or maybe even love for your fellow citizens', he or she answered:

TI (2) 'I think it's been our weakness not to make the link between integrity and values more strongly. That's what I would say. I think we've missed out. . . we've come to it in the context of the financial crisis²² . . . okay, parts of the movement, like TI Corea, right from the beginning there have been people in the movement who have said moral values and ethics need to be more securely embedded at the foundation, but that's one segment, I don't think the movement as such and to the outside world we've been able to marry the term integrity sufficiently with the kind of values that you are mentioning. Not in our outside communication, I don't think so. It's been more a mechanistic term' (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 2, 2010).

Later on in the interview, the person added that in 'the issues that we should have brought out in the context of the financial crisis, again we should have spoken about the ethical foundation of the system being missing' (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 2, 2010). In what follows, I argue that this problem of the missing ethical foundation springs directly from TI's individualistic and mechanistic conception of human nature: the individual as self-interested rational actor who by default prioritises his or her short-term and mostly material private interest over that of its fellow citizens or the public and who is ready to damage the public interest whenever he or she can gain from it personally. Corruption is a social act or a property of the social system, and how TI thinks about it (and, consequently, of measures against it) inherently depends on how it thinks about people, morality and social relations and processes; when discussing TI's policies, it is therefore important to look at its conception of human nature, which forms the rails on which its projects currently roll. In the following section, I examine this conception more in detail, and we will see how it intertwines with the conceptions of integrity and ethics just reviewed.

THE ECONOMIC MAN

In TI's perspective, people are 'as corrupt as the system allows them to be' (TI i), and 'every society is as corrupt as its institutions and practices allow' (TI k). The organisation does not seem to believe that something like morality can exist in humans. In fact, it makes sure to stress that if some countries are 'less corrupt' than others, it is only because of their 'more developed and stronger institutions and practices to control the menace', rather than their 'moral superiority' (TI k). According to TI, it is 'well-established checks and controls that make the difference in proportion' (TI i). This means that whenever there is an opportunity for abusing public resources or trust for personal gain, with a concomitant low risk of detection, people will take it: 'It is where temptation meets permissiveness that corruption takes root on a wide scale' (TI i). Temptation for corruption exists everywhere (TI i), because an 'inclination' for corruption (TI 2000: xviii) is conceived to be intrinsic to human nature. Thus, the risk of corruption exists from the very 'moment when public budgets are allocated' (TI f). Individuals function according to incentives, and the more the opportunities and the stronger the incentives are for corruption, the more likely is the respective person to succumb to the temptation. Incentives for corruption arise not only from permissiveness and lax or inefficient rules but also from (particularly economic) power, for example, 'whenever a government official has economic power over a private firm or individual' (TI 2000: xx). TI explains that public contracts are 'sources of power to those who give them out, and targets of ambition for those who may receive them, making

²²Contrary to this statement, TI has already been using the term integrity long before the 2008 financial crisis, for example, in the NIS first set out in the *Source Book* in 2000.

public contracts particularly prone to abuse at the expense of public need' (TI f). Thus, when two can break the rules for their personal (particularly material or monetary) profit, they will do so. Then, human egoism and mechanistic response to incentives makes things become worse with time: 'Once a pattern of successful payoffs is institutionalised, corrupt officials have an incentive to raise the size of bribes demanded and to search for alternative ways to extract payments' (TI 2000: xx).

It is due to such egoistic human inclinations that the *Source Book* remarks full of fatalism that '[t]here seems to be no end to human ingenuity when it comes to circumventing systems designed to protect the integrity of institutions and processes' (TI 2000: xviii). There is nothing that could be done against these human inclinations; as TI knows, 'the potentially corrupt will always be with us' (TI 2000: 1). It does not become entirely clear whether TI locates this inclination for corruption in all human beings, as an inherent part of human nature, or whether it is only some people who are particularly easily corruptible and who TI concentrates on. It is certainly convinced that '[i]n every society there are those who will try to "beat the system" and if the system is vulnerable, there will be more of them' (TI k). This statement nevertheless suggests that there are also some who resist the temptation. Interestingly, some interviewees exhibited a couple of different views on human nature, which did not always seem to conform to the purely egoistic actor model. A TI official told me, 'I wouldn't say that everybody would be equally corrupt'. Differences are seen to arise from 'the way how people are socialized, and the way it's actually imbued in the education in the very beginning' (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 1, 2010). Another interviewee was of the opinion that if people are conceived as self-interested individuals who behave according to incentives, this 'misses out the whole ethical foundation—which is a bit strange, and I don't think we've been very consistent' (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 2, 2010). A third TI interviewee presented a 'theory of the human being', which he or she had heard about, and according to which, people can be put into different groups: 25 per cent are 'absolutely honest', 25 per cent are 'totally selfish' and corrupt and nothing can be done to change them. But the 50 per cent of people in the middle are malleable and should be worked on: 'So the theory is, those 50 per cent of people in the middle—if you create the conditions and the environment and the correct incentives for them to behave towards the law and not against it, that can really make a difference' (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 5, 2010). Another TI interviewee explained to me that conceiving corrupt behaviour in terms of incentives rather than individual or social morality, and to 'talk about systems and structures, not about people', is a tactical TI move that does not really mean 'that people cannot be blamed because it's all structural'. Instead, 'human agency is completely acknowledged as a . . . component of anticorruption' (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 6, 2010).

However, the same interviewees would, a couple of sentences later, resort to use rational-choice language and talk about human behaviour in terms of incentives, demonstrating how deeply this logic is embedded in the NGO, its operational culture and staff's thinking. One interviewee, for example, conceived the 'ethical foundation' necessary in the public and private sectors in terms of 'an incentive element which would be "can you motivate your people to be performing better to their constituency, to your customers, to your citizens"' (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 2, 2010). The interviewee who believed that 25 per cent of people are good and 25 per cent are bad seemed to conceive these as unchangeable natural character traits. Although acknowledging that culture shapes the values of the 50 per cent in the middle, these 'cultural incentives' were conceived as something that exists externally to people and that can be manipulated to effect positively or negatively upon their behaviour (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 5, 2010). Although some of its members obviously believe that some people are more corrupt than others, an inquiry into the question of why some people might not feel tempted to try and 'beat the system' does not seem to be regarded as helpful by the organisation; it is almost as if corruptness or non-corruptness was regarded as an inalterable genetic condition. In any case, TI's focus is on the ones that are inclined to be corrupt, and those can only be controlled by improving the incentive structure. It has become clear that the focus on oversight and sanctions, which is typical for IAC and which we have detected in TI's conceptions of integrity and ethics, is very closely linked with its particular conception of human nature. TI's potentially corrupt actor is much more a *homo oeconomicus* than a *homo sociologicus*. If one conceives people to be nothing more than self-interested robots that mechanically react to incentives set to their self-interest from the outside, it does not make much sense to waste one's efforts on trying to change their internal values or morals. In TI's perspective, the self-interested nature completely outstrips social nurture and individual ethical conscience when it comes to

explain and change people's behaviour. What needs to be done to prevent people from acting corruptly is to minimise risks and to set negative incentives.

Following on from these insights into TI's logic of human nature, all other things that are claimed to cause corruption become therefore just conditions that allow corruption to 'thrive'. Although 'inclination' is always already there in humans, it needs 'permissiveness', 'opportunities' and 'incentives' for corruption to actually happen (TI 2000: xviii; TI i). A corrupt public official, for example, needs the power to decide on the allocation of money or services. In addition to this opportunity, he or she needs other people either willing or needing to pay and thus to provide incentives for corruption. Moreover, the whole corrupt transaction is only possible in a permissive environment with low or no risk of detection and punishment. And ready is TI's model of human behaviour, with which it is certainly not alone. Resonating in its approach are countless positivist academic studies on corruption (and not only on corruption), which work with rational choice and principal-agent models of human behaviour.²³ Brown and Cloke (2004: 285) remark that

[s]uch [principal-agent] analyses are, like many recent forays by economists into the realms of the other social sciences, based upon highly questionable conceptualisations of human motivation and a very poor understanding of the state. Their major objective is limited to explaining how the activities of public servants distort the efficient functioning of markets.

TI's elaboration on different types of incentives actually reminds very much of Klitgaard's (1988) famous formula: Corruption = Monopoly + Discretion – Accountability. As we can see from the formula, an individual's moral values or the social processes of their formation do not play a role in this kind of thinking; TI has adopted the liberal rational choice model of human nature in its purest form. It might be interesting to note that UNDP (2008: 9) uses Klitgaard's formula in a slightly modified version: Corruption = Monopoly + Discretion (Accountability + Transparency + Integrity) in one of its more recent anti-corruption documents, which indicates that mechanistic conceptions of corrupt human behaviour are not limited to TI as an anti-corruption organisation. It is not surprising that also the World Bank has been charged with promoting 'the neoliberal assumption that most corruption can be explained by the rent-seeking behaviour of individual public servants and that this can be overcome through the dual processes of economic liberalisation and deregulation' (Brown and Cloke, 2004: 287; see Williams, 1999 for a more detailed discussion of the World Bank's conception of *homo oeconomicus*).

These findings can now be viewed either as a lack of morality in IAC discourse or as the discursive transformation of the concept of morality: rather than being a characteristic of people's character or mind, morality is being externalised away from people's conscience, into their behaviour, which is in turn induced by institutional structures in which incentives for morality are installed via anti-corruption programmes. Instead of morally conscious beings, people function as egoistic robots that can only be 'programmed' to act for the sake of their community through the setting of particular institutional impulses. Sampson's (2004: 4) statement that with IAC, the world has arrived at a 'conjuncture' at which moral progress²⁴ and system rationality²⁵ meet would thus have to be specified to mean more precisely that—at least in the case of TI—the way in which they meet is such that system rationality takes the place of the moral rationality, which has remained empty since the technocratic beginnings of IAC. TI's founder and former director Peter Eigen, however, seems to opt for the first interpretation, that of the absence of morality; he explains that TI's work 'tries to abstain from moralising arguments' and concentrates on 'purely practical arguments', like those about economic progress or democracy; the moral side of corruption at best 'supports' those arguments.²⁶ The present analysis should have made clear that such moral support is not nearly as important for TI as institutional engineering.

²³On the spectrum of rational choice approaches, the model chosen by TI seems to range among the more simplistic ones (see also Williams 1999 on similar conceptions within the World Bank), assuming that people function almost solely according to short-term, mainly material rationality and proposing complete transparency/information as an adequate remedy.

²⁴The moral explanation is that anticorruption is just the next step in a project to make the world a better, more just place. This is the rhetoric of "ethical globalization". The fight against corruption is virtuous, and those who form part of the "anticorruption community" are thus "integrity warriors" (Sampson, 2004: 4).

²⁵The second explanation focuses on the need to increase system rationality: fighting corruption, it is argued, will make market economies more efficient, state administration more effective, and development resources more accessible' (Sampson, 2004: 4).

²⁶Tagesschau Chat (2007).

PROBLEMS ARISING FROM THE ECONOMIC MAN AS THE BASIS FOR TRANSPARENCY
INTERNATIONAL'S POLICIES

In TI's discourse, 'ethics' do not mean anymore than the rules and incentives that are formally set for public offices, institutions and businesses, whereas 'integrity' does not mean anymore than behaviour according to those rules. The 'moral elements' in IAC discourse are just words that make it sound better because of their positive connotation. Like the proverbial donkey that runs after the carrots, people are conceived to run after their narrow material self-interest and to be controllable by sanctions like the donkey by sticks. However, not even donkeys function as simple as that, and the prevailing mechanistic-universalist conception of human nature is problematic for TI out of different reasons.

Neglect of the social constitution of morality

The first important reason is not that oversight and sanctions would be completely unnecessary and effect-less; they certainly fulfil an important function in the fight against corruption and should not be done away with altogether. Yet, by solely concentrating on them, TI leaves out very important aspects that are crucial for dealing with social acts such as corruption, namely the socially shaped side of people's views and behaviour, which depends on personal and socio-cultural values (or morals).

It is the crucial insight not only of social constructivism but also of modern natural science that people are not just rational actors whose interests are independent of their environment but that they internalise and most of the time follow norms that are socially constructed and reconstructed in their environment, a process to which they continuously contribute (see e.g. Blaug, 2010, for an interesting elaboration on social and bio-psychological reasons for corruption; Searle, 1995; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Williams, 1999).²⁷ This is not to say that people do not have interests of their own but to emphasise the importance of taking differing social norms into account when trying to find out about and change people's behaviour, because they can be expected to influence people's perspectives and perceptions. As De Sousa and Larmour (2009: 272) emphasise, '[t]he meaning of any particular idea, or tool depends in part on its context. General ideas like "corruption" or "transparency"—its presumed opposite—have different inflections and connotations as they are transferred and translated into local contexts'. Numerous publications have pointed to the differences in conceptions of public office, governance and corruption across different countries, thus demonstrating that people are not just naturally corrupt but that their moral norms are socially determined (see e.g. Gupta, 1995; Olivier de Sardan, 1999; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006; Duncan, 2006; Pierce, 2006; De Maria, 2007; Heald, 2007; Lauer, 2007; Routley, 2010); the purpose of these studies has certainly not been to 'excuse corruption' with cultural specificities. It is therefore hugely important to look at how social contexts shape people's norms when trying to understand corruption—and to look at them not only in the sense of 'objectively' assessing the specific 'local problem constellations' or 'systemic failures in accountability', as often done in IAC, but also in the sense of considering particular norms that make actions of politicians, public officials and businessmen be perceived as legitimate or illegitimate.

So far, TI's advocacy and lobbying have been unable to take local norms into account and be politically and culturally sensitive, because its own framework is mechanistic and static (see also Warren, 2004).²⁸ Morality as the socially constructed interests and values of people has been left out of the picture (see also Williams, 1999: 83). By addressing the norms and moral convictions people hold internally, and the processes of their creation, TI could be much more effective in generating debate about corruption and persuading people of the importance of public mindedness and the need to become active in the fight against corruption. On the other hand, there are obvious pitfalls of such an approach. One reason for why TI sticks to this conception of human nature is that it tries to avoid Western-centric moralisation or anything that could be interpreted as imposing 'Western values' onto nondeveloped societies.²⁹ According to an interviewee, one reason for why TI has got 'a more technocratic and institutional approach' and tries 'not to go into this issue of morals and values' is that this 'goes into the issue of culture, and it goes into issues of

²⁷Much more could of course be said about the nature of humans as socially embedded beings; this article is, however, not able to accommodate it.

²⁸Brown and Cloke (2004: 289) note this lack of context sensitivity for IAC efforts in general.

²⁹See, for example, TI k; Larmour (2005: 2).

cultural relativity. And who are we as an organisation sitting, well, not in Berlin, we're a global movement, but you know the West is very strong, preaching certain values' (Interview with TI-Secretariat Official 6, 2010).³⁰ At the same time, it claims to have been 'critical of the prevailing international relativism that had excused corruption in developing countries as "the way they do things over there"' (cited in Larmour, 2005: 2). TI therefore tries to abstain from universalism as well as relativism at the same time. The solution it resorts to is to preach the intrinsic corruptness and incentive drive of people all over the world, which is assumed to be universally valid and thus to produce 'un-political' policy recommendations for the setting of the 'right' incentives. This is, however, a self-deception, because its policies are anything but un-political, as will be discussed in the following.

Political implications

The original meaning of morality as an internal characteristic of people or societies does not fit the economic man because it derives from a conception of humans as beings with consciences who would be able to consider social or religious values or the well-being of others. The economic man only fits a very particular conception of morality—one that is external to individuals—because instead of a conscience, it is just his self-interest that guides him, and he is not able to act according to the public interest against his own.

Bukovansky (2006: 183) argues that through the articulation of 'moral undertones', IAC discourse extends its focus 'into the realm of ethical mores such as public-mindedness, fairness, and equality before the law' but that it then fails to open those concepts up for political debate. Now, after going one step back and recognising that those moral undertones are conceived in a mechanistic way, it becomes clear why they are not being opened up for debate but instead automatically linked to a particular political agenda.

Transparency International's abstinence from thinking about norms and its use of the rational self-interested actor as a universalist template for people skew its policy recommendations in a very particular direction. TI is not aware that this substitution of one universalism ('Western societies are morally superior') with another ('all people are equally inclined to be corrupt') does not solve the problem of Western cultural imperialism; the concept of *homo oeconomicus* is the product of Western history and liberal political thought—and so are the modern ideas about structures to 'tame' this nature and make individual self-interests work for the public interest, which are intrinsically linked to it. These ideas skew TI's policies towards a neoliberal re-organisation of society in which economic progress assumes priority as the highest aim of society, and in which competition and carefully set restraints are being universalised as the most adequate way of structuring the social relations of egoistic actors to attain that aim (see also Williams, 1999: 82/83). The combination of the concept of integrity with the rational choice conception of human nature does not allow for it to be filled with any meaning other than behaviour conforming to those neoliberal aims. Accordingly, TI does not embark on any concrete arguments for social responsibility or protection, public mindedness, freedoms or justice, leaving its policies to be dominated by the economic rationale that fits the self-interest of the 'liberal actor', as well as concerns about the stability of the system that is supposed to produce economic growth. Similarly, and relating directly to the former point about local contexts and cultural sensitivity, it does not deal with political questions of the interpretation of concepts such as corruption, integrity and the aims of society in different contexts: Which values are to be supported, who defines them and how are they to be decided upon?

Given TI's history, the idea that suggests itself is that this economic conception of humans and the market ideology has been instituted into the organisation from its very birth where it remains up to the present day (see also Tänzler, 2010a, 2010b). So far, there does not seem to be much reflection in the organisation about how its history shapes its 'organisational thinking', making its policies much more political than many of its members might want to admit. But TI needs to recognise that an un-political fight against corruption is not possible and that its ongoing self-deception in this regard only advances the universalisation of a Western economic ideology; this might on the one hand not actually be what TI staff wants because it excludes moral values³¹ and amounts to a Western neo-imperialist project, and on the other hand it has according to TI and others not even been very successful as a

³⁰The interviewee, however, added that 'ethics is an important feature which we have not paid enough attention to' (interview with TI-S Interviewee 6).

³¹'But we honour people [...] we believe in change that is possible through people [...] and I would imagine TI to be a place where people come because they feel that they're aligned in terms of their moral values' (interview with TI-S Interviewee 2).

strategy to combat corruption. A first step would be to reconsider its conception of human nature and to take the social and political constitutions of people's morality into account. Also, if corruption was conceived not just as a malfunction of institutions but maybe as a 'subversion of the naturally sound condition of politics' (Philp, 1997)³² or as 'injustice' (Génaux, 2004), TI and other IAC organisations would find it less easy to sidestep the context relativity of the concept and its shaping in political processes. Ideally, the acceptance of the normative and political nature of the concept of corruption and any anti-corruption activity would open up a debate about TI's political agenda, and TI would start to face the unavoidable dilemma between wanting to advance certain (moral?) norms and wanting to avoid the imposition of Western norms onto non-Western people.

If the moral and social aspects of people's behaviour were to be taken into account, TI could either decide on particular values and political processes that it aims to universalise, be clear and 'transparent' about the exact normative content of those (which is not the case right now, with TI claiming to be un-political) and modify its 'technocratic' agenda by trying to work more on people's values and morality to attain them. Equally, it would have to face criticism for universalising a political agenda that might be found culturally insensitive and imperialist.

The other possibility would be to be more open towards other social norms and ideals of societal organisation—with regard to the first-order norms to be instituted in the respective societies as well as to the second-order norms that guide the processes of their creation (Warren, 2004). With regard to the first-order norms, TI would have to recognise that its liberal approach of institutional engineering and incentive setting combined with the overarching aim of achieving economic growth is only one among many possible approaches; that other conceptions of a society without corruption might not necessarily reflect classical liberal or neoliberal thinking but might better fit the local contexts under concern or better reflect the views of people wanting to combat corruption in their countries; that such approaches might, for example, place much more emphasis on public mindedness, social protection, economic justice and restrictions of the autonomy of the private sector or be based on completely different conceptions of justice, equality and welfare and also include social norms that are rather alien to Western political thinking. The political second-order processes that generate political decisions, for example, about anti-corruption measures, can equally be regarded as just or unjust by different socio-political groups; and especially an organisation such as TI, which claims to be concerned with the poor and their development, could be interested in discussing whether there are politico-economic systems or models of democracy that are better able to benefit poor people than those modelled on neoliberal markets. TI would have to engage with questions about the forms of political authority that exist in a particular society and how they derive their legitimacy, and it would have to accept that they might be different from its own preference of a liberal 'governing structure that maximises individual rights' (Bukovansky, 2006: 183) rather than social justice and that values institutional checks over collective deliberation mechanisms; it would have to think very hard about its own or others' willingness to which kinds of reforms (Bukovansky, 2006: 182) and about possible compromises. Its decentralised organisation in national chapters could be very helpful in this regard. Political conflict within the organisation would, however, be inevitable.³³

CONCLUSION

The article has shown that the incorporation of seemingly moral concepts into TI's discourse does not add anything to the organisation's approach in terms of reform or moral entrepreneurship. The only thing it does is to re-define

³²Philp (1997) chose this definition of corruption to highlight how much conceptions of corruption depend on differing conceptions of what good political (and, I would add, economic) organisation of society is like—and what a contested concept corruption therefore is.

³³Here, of course, TI-internal power structures also come into the picture. In the process of franchising national chapters, the Secretariat has picked or encouraged particular organisations that already suited the image of a national chapter envisioned by the Secretariat (De Sousa, 2005; Murphy, 2011). By now, a particular conception of corruption and the right way to fight it is deeply instituted within the NGO chapters (regarding this 'isomorphism', see Larmour, 2005) so that it would certainly be very difficult to allow for organisations with a very different approach to join TI. Also, the appropriateness of national chapters in an age of increased globalisation is questionable (De Sousa, 2005; Larmour, 2005). Not least would a change of focus towards a more culturally sensitive approach with more political flexibility bring with it lots of practical challenges that cannot be discussed here. On the other hand, TI interviewees announced that TI's strategy 2015 would have a stronger focus on ethical issues (Interview with TI-Secretariat Officials 5–7, 2010).

morality from something that is inherent to the individual's consciousness to a quality of the structures. It has been demonstrated that TI's conception of integrity as incentivised rule-conforming behaviour is directly linked to the organisation's conception of humans as self-interested rational beings, which does not allow integrity to mean anything else. The manipulation of structures to incentivise egoistic actors through rules and regulations, control and punishment as well as positive incentives for competition to achieve economic progress, however, is nothing new and has been the main focus of IAC policies including TI for more than a decade. The seemingly moral concepts merely serve to perpetuate and camouflage the partly unconscious promotion of a universal neoliberal project, which opens the NGO up to the charges of Western neo-imperialism it claims to be so eager to avoid and which continues to be unable to achieve the 'just and honest society' desired by TI.

Transparency International cannot escape the question whether it wants to advance a particular set of values, despite taking the risk of being criticised for supporting Western imperialism (e.g. Hindess, 2005); or whether it takes its grassroots approach seriously and leaves it to the national chapters and their socio-political environment to define what corruption is, what the priorities in tackling it should be, and what their particular conception of a society free of corruption looks like; or whether it wants to attempt a compromise between both positions. It would obviously be a challenge for TI to be a global moral entrepreneur while leaving it to the chapters to specify concepts such as integrity, justice and social responsibility in cooperation with other civil society actors, but it would probably be possible if openly addressed as a strategy. The current approach is not a solution out of this dilemma but just a self-deceptive evasion of the respective questions. An open discussion within TI about those questions is currently not taking place but is definitely necessary. A revision of its conception of human nature and its relation to corruption would be a first and important step, as the article has tried to show. When it comes to corruption, Philp (1997: 446) is undoubtedly right when he remarks that '[s]mall questions have a way of leading to big ones and the broader questions almost inevitably raise deeper normative and ethical issues'. It remains to be seen whether under its new strategy 2015, TI will consider such issues.

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