Fighting "Corruption" with What Really Works: Lessons from Today and from History

by

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ABSTRACT

Chronic widespread corruption persists in refractory countries, despite extensive notionally remedial programs and nominal state commitment to the rule of law, because of an actual public dissensus about the purpose of the state. In such situations it is always more beneficial to be corrupt, because community norms define expectations.

Coercive programs founded on a calculating-machine view of man fail because society is a homeostatic intelligent machine which restructures to accommodate perturbations introduced by the naive conventional view of society as a state machine.

Renorming strategies are well understood in the literature and effective in practice every day in all kinds of organizations.

Three historical cases of profound and durable changes in community norms and personal values (Singapore in the 1960s, Arabia circa 600 CE, Sparta circa 700 BCE) illuminate the human, structural and processual requirements to renorm behavior in such refractory societies and provide valuable insights into what genuine anti-corruption policies and programs would actually encompass.

The principal conclusion from these histories is that changes never worked through the "impersonal operation of law": they always resulted from a remarkable person. The normative changes were finally confirmed in their robustness by the exercise of power but began from the inward change of a few volunteers. The crucial change was not institutional and coercive -- the opposite of current programming.

These conclusions, contrary as they are to received wisdom, have important implications for policies of governments and of external national and international funding agencies, for programming and funding, for metrics and methods, and for evaluative criteria by which the public may judge the actual seriousness of policies and programs.

Current misplaced belief in the efficacy of rational/punitive programming wastes time and resources and perpetuates false hopes.
INTRODUCTION

This paper emerged from the mental tension between my admiration for those devoted to anti-corruption as the term is ordinarily understood and my sadness at the paucity of results compared to levels of effort and of enthusiasm.

Yesterday in her opening statement to this conference, Dr. Juree Vichit-Vadakarn told us that "corruption persists and thrives here in Thailand." Did you ever ask yourself why we are just "plowing the ocean" in the memorable words of Simon Bolivar? I have indeed asked myself "Why is this so and what can be done about it?" Our conference title gave me the clue I needed for the answer: "evidence-based." So I then asked myself, "What has worked?"

In my 2009 paper "Restructuring, Renorming, Rethinking: Inferences from Canonical Thai Corruption Cases," which I prepared for this conference's predecessor, I demonstrated why programming has had such a limited effect. In this paper I provide an alternative approach that is proven to work. I conclude with practical implications and routes to move forward.

THE STORY THUS FAR

"Anti-corruption" is a big industry of funded programs, of consultancies, of research and travel grants, of publishing opportunities, and of conferences like this one. Despite the diversity of personnel and of programming details, "anti-corruption" as we know it today relies in practice entirely on a "rational/punitive" understanding of human behavior, reflected for example in the Astana Statement on Good Governance and Fighting Corruption:

* good governance
* public procurement
* business organizations
* deny entry of corrupt individuals
* criminal investigation
* anti-corruption institutions
* joint training projects

This rational/punitive model likewise underlies the serious work of policy research and program budgetting. For example, Benjamin A. Olken’s 2010 NBER paper "Empirical Analysis of Corruption" reports that a natural question is how [corruption] can be ameliorated. . . . One approach, dating back at least to Becker and Stigler suggests that the right combination of monitoring and punishments can control corruption.

On balance, the results [of Olken’s study] demonstrate that the traditional approach to fighting crime -- increasing the expected cost of crime by increasing the probability of being caught -- can play an important role in reducing corruption, even in a highly corrupt environment where those doing the monitoring are themselves potentially corruptible.

Observant readers will note the structural similarity of Olken’s mainstream conclusion to the carefully worded and legally defensible television ads proclaiming "[Our Junk Food] can be part of a healthy diet."

International conference declarations, the Astana Statement, Olken’s study and the like all firmly embody the thinking of Cesare Beccaria, the father of modern criminal jurisprudence. A careful reading of his magisterial 1764 work On Crimes and Punish-
ments reveals his rationalist vision of man as a calculating machine -- the very essence of Enlightenment thinking.

Indeed the entire field of contemporary economics is founded upon the same understanding of man, and this field can claim excellent accomplishments in expanding our well-being. Its practitioners can also claim credit for the advice which has brought to the world personal and official overindebtedness, fiat money, maturity mismatches, and unfunded liabilities, which in combination are about to bring us decades of material under-achievement.

Some economists, noting the failures of their profession and the ridicule its idealizations have brought upon them, have transcended its primitive understanding of its subject as a calculating machine and are now gradually building a new sub-field -- "behavioral economics," garnering awards, public acclaim, royalties from best-sellers and even modest practical results.

Now is the time, I propose, similarly to advance "anti-corruption" studies, policies and programming beyond their present primitiveness. Great benefits could flow from adapting the field to a realistic conception of man.

My 2009 NACC paper examined why two Thai scandals arose despite the Thai state’s nominal commitment to legality. The cases revealed that two governmental bodies had been converted into criminal enterprises. Their corrupt activities were not the opportunistic work of one or a few individuals meeting late at night in gas station toilets to sell their offices. Instead they were the coordinated and enduring efforts of hundreds of people following carefully planned procedures to extract resources for themselves in violation of the formal rules of their organizations.

Formal rules failed to direct behavior for a simple reason: the form and extent of corruption in Thailand and similar countries result from a vast public dissensus over the state’s very purpose. Most among their publics view people like us as silly and naive. Without changes in normative beliefs, all coercive efforts will fail, as they have repeatedly in Thailand and elsewhere, leading to observations like Dr. Juree’s yesterday.

An important finding of my 2009 paper was that the very use of the word "corruption" in itself impairs the understanding of its subject, because it prevents us from cognizing the motivating factors.

That’s a strong statement and readers who don’t believe it (probably most of you) should read that paper now. For convention’s sake I’m going to use the term "corruption" from time to time, but I warn that it is scientifically inadmissible.

I concluded my 2009 paper with the observation that "renorming strategies are well understood in the literature, effective in practice every day in all kinds of organizations, and readily available to anyone interested in mitigating official corruption." Readers have occasionally queried me, some with astonishment, about this teaser sentence.

Today’s paper likewise employs case studies to draw out the actual process of behavioral change and norm change, such as would be necessary to terminate definitively what we term in everyday language as corruption. I employ three historical and contemporary cases of successful efforts to change public norms. These will provide us valuable insights into what genuinely effective anti-corruption policies and programs would actually encompass, as well as standards by which to evaluate the seriousness of...
contemporary or proposed anti-corruption efforts.

We know what doesn’t work. This paper focuses on what does.

Further case studies of failed change attempts and of degeneration of effective systems might enrich the insights provided by this paper.

THE APPROACH OF THIS PAPER

This paper reports how came about three remarkable cases of public behavioral change, one contemporary and two historical: Singapore a few decades ago, Arabia circa 600 CE, and Sparta circa 700 BCE. Of interest here is simply behavioral change per se and how it came about. Only one case, Singapore, relates to community behavioral change in the area of corruption, but it turns out that the principles and practices of behavioral change follow a common pattern. I focus on the value transformation process independent of its content.

Some acute observers have proposed to mitigate corruption by a process of personal or individual change diminishing corrupt desires. An example in the Thai context is the work of Machima Kunjara Na Ayudhaya who suggests mindfulness training using such terms in his papers as "Spiritual Anti-Corruption," "The Process of Mind Development and Purification," and "Insight Meditation (Vipassana)." The present paper locates this "individual change" movement as one pole within the larger phenomenon of community behavioral change.

It is a commonplace that community norms are among the most powerful determinants of individual behavior, not just in mundane matters but even to the point of risking injury or death. A recent letter to the Financial Times for example noted the relationship between the differing cultures of northern and southern Europe and the financial inconveniences engulfing the European Community. Our Call for Papers begins from the rational/punitive approach in its mention of ‘regime corruption’ and "institutional checks and balances" but also licenses a broader scheme of enquiry and action with the words "mobilizing every sector in society." Under the authority of this license, this paper brings into focus what has really worked in recent and distant history, because it built upon the actual man who exists in the sordid world of our daily life, rather than upon the rational man who exists only in the library-carrel fantasies of economics professors.

CASE STUDY #1: SINGAPORE IN THE 1960s

Let us begin with the most recent and accessible case.

When I first visited in the 1960s Singapore was a charming if rather run-down place, but quite enjoyable to walk around. It shared with other Chinese cities like Penang and Hong Kong the architectural remnants of past days of trading glory, disorderly traffic and dirty streets, and equally dirty levels of political and commercial ethics.

Singapore has changed dramatically. Charming architectural remnants are gone. The disorderly traffic and the dirty streets are gone. In one generation the dirty ethics are gone, irreversibly so in the near and medium terms, unlike the Thai Ministry of Public Health, which after a dramatic court case reported in my 2009 study reverted to dirty behavior in a figurative eyeblink.
The Singapore story is usually told as one of the government cleaning up the dirt. This formulation misses the important lessons. What were they? They become clear from reading the standard history of the period, *Kee Kwan Yew’s Singapore*, by the distinguished Indian journalist and editor T.J.S. George.14

Born in 1923 of a British-oriented Chinese family, Lee was early recognized as extraordinarily clever and a remarkable person. Returning from Cambridge University with a law degree, he was determined to rise to the top in the clearly forthcoming transition from colonial rule to independence. He became prominent among the politically interested public as attorney for left-wing labor unions but founded his own party, the PAP, after concluding that he could not take over the popular Labour Front from the grand David Marshall.

His early allies were socialists and communists, whose methods he studied carefully and later employed.15

Lee’s PAP projected itself as a revolutionary party and worked closely with communist supporters but at the same time Lee collaborated with the still sovereign British to put away communist and left-wing leaders.16 Lee thus became Britain’s chosen instrument to effect independence in the early 1960s.

George records that on becoming prime minister in 1959, Lee “call[ed] his parents and brothers around him [to] tell them that from then on they should expect no special consideration from him, that they were entirely on their own as ordinary citizens of the state.”17

Immediately on taking power Lee began a program of restricting what he viewed as unsavory or unhealthy behavior and also restricting channels which would permit political opposition to dethrone him.18 Eventually he achieved unchallenged power within the PAP and then throughout all domains in Singapore -- press, legal, business, political and cultural. He turned completely on his former leftist allies, imprisoning many without trial for lengthy periods. Any possibility of legal challenge to the government was removed from 1963 onward by the combination of election techniques and incarceration of opponents.19 George stresses that “In performance no one could fault the government. Lee’s method of mobilizing popular loyalty was not through conventional party organisation but through providing a palpably achievement-oriented government.”20 George goes on to add a tantalizing question material to our own concerns:

The question remained whether high performance alone could have given him invulnerability. A leader more steadfast to the principles of socialism and democracy learned in the best English tradition might at least have given the possibility of a fair trial. But Lee obviously thought otherwise, hence the free employment of authoritarian methods to eliminate all opposition.21

Singapore eventually achieved independence in 1965 with Lee as its head. It is at this point that the anti-corruption mechanism moves into gear. George goes on:

What eventually made the mini republic go was . . . the dynamism which Lee Kuan Yew began, with independence, to display. He evolved his own philosophy of development, identified his priorities, assembled the expertise required and, with zealous determination, applied himself to achieving visible results . . . . The result was that, unlike in many other Asian countries, the government of Singapore really governed.”22
To perpetuate the character of the society he sought to create, Lee deemed essential a panoply of measures to renorm behavior and to preserve these new norms:

* A “Suitability Certificate” came to be required for university entrance, a form of political clearance warranting the holder’s possession of healthy civic ideas.23

* A “Code of Conduct for Vigilante Corps Members,” another component of Lee’s “great emphasis . . . on directing people’s minds along approved lines, keeping harmful ideas out of Singapore’s air and, above all, moulding the young.”24

* An intensive political re-education program for government employees and students in "Singapore ideology," undertaken initially by a Political Study Centre, one of whose staff stressed to author George that he was an "official brainwasher." (The function later moved to the Ministry of Home Affairs.) Re-education was focused on government officials, police, the armed forces, students, and "a wide assortment of local institutions, from the Rotary Club and the Red Cross to the YWCA and the Sri Narayana Mission."25 Trades unions and the educational system received special attention and emphasis. "Lee never underestimated the significance of catching them young. He acknowledged the power of schools and universities to turn out desired types within the space of a generation."26

* All coverage and opinions contrary to Lee’s re-education plans were expunged from the mass media.27

You will begin to see similarities as I precis the next two cases.

CASE STUDY #2: ARABIA IN THE YEAR 600 CE

For this section we shall rely on the perceptive study titled Muhammad by the late French scholar Maxime Rodinson,28 still banned in many parts of the Arab world.

Sixth Century Central Arabia was lightly populated by nomadic tribes lacking a centralized state of any type or anything resembling religion more than a belief in spirits.29 Among the nomads existed some settled Jewish and Christian communities, respected by many for their universalist monotheistic beliefs and perceived higher cultural level. Rodinson paraphrases the conclusions of the work of the Japanese arabist Toshihiko Izutsu to describe the nomads’ regnant cultural values:

The men the Arabs admired were careless, arrogant, afraid of nothing and ready to sacrifice their lives and goods for nothing -- for the sake of a fine gesture, without a thought for the consequences. What did they care for such incidental matters as reducing their families to poverty and ruin! In their eyes it was a noble thing to give way to one passion after another, to run to meet death merely to avenge the smallest insult, to treat with open contempt those whom nature or society had spurned, to spare oneself the trouble of the hard work needed to scrape a little extra from a life that at best was a transitory thing, yet to sacrifice all one’s worldly goods and those of one’s kindred for the reputation of being a paragon of hospitality.30

The ideal man possessed in the highest degree the quality known as muruwa, which can be literally translated as "virility." This comprised courage, endurance, loyalty to the group and to one’s social obligations, generosity and hospitality. The feeling which drove a man to conform to this ideal was one of honour (’ird). Infringements of the moral code of the desert rendered him liable to insult, and hence to loss of honour.31
By tradition Muhammad was born in 571 CE in Mecca, an orphan in the tribe of Quraysh. While still young he was already recognized as having a remarkable character and strong personal qualities, being a person of strong virtue, fairness, moderation and trustworthiness, acquiring the epithet *al-amin* ("truthful, trustworthy").

In general, Muhammad gave the impression of a sensible, deliberate and well-balanced man. All his life we find him thinking before taking a decision, conducting his public and private business efficiently, knowing when to bide his time and when to retract, and capable of taking the necessary action to ensure the success of his plans. His physical courage... was adequate to enable him to figure creditably in the various battles of his lifetime. He was a remarkably able diplomat, and capable of reasoning with clarity, logic and lucidity."

Muhammad married the wealthy widow Khadija but continued to live a simple life without recourse to her wealth.

Using psychological and sociological perspectives controversial among and unacceptable to many Moslems, Rodinson proposes interior mental processes which inspired Mohammad to build a system of beliefs and values sharply in conflict with the regnant system described above. He appropriated some of the beliefs and practices of the Jewish and Christian universalizing traditions but altered them in changing ways as time went by, adapting them to the circumstances of central Arabia in that period.

Rodinson describes Muhammad’s innovations as follows:

Against this lofty ethic of the chivalrous kind [described above] which, in similar conditions, has been the ideal of a good many societies and which crops up so often among members of the younger generations, for whom life’s more realistic demands are for the time being rather vague and distant, Muhammad set the presence of God. God was there, as a fact, and that changed everything. God existed and he cared for men, even for the humblest. He did not wish for lawless outbreaks of violence, regardless of the peace and even the very lives of others. Above all else, the believer must take life seriously and show consideration for others, for morality and for the demands of God. Morality was practically identical with religion. Faith must always, should always, be expressed in works. Every ‘social’ act was a way of worshipping God. Carelessness and mockery were especially condemned. Courage and generosity should be kept within bounds. Men who knew no fear had been highly praised; but it was right to be afraid. Yes, however shocking this might seem to people brought up to the chivalrous ideal, men must fear God. Vengeance as far as possible must be left to God who would not fail to accomplish it in the next world with a circumspection which men often disdained...  

Muhammad also condemned idol worship and raised the doctrine of life after death, strongly conflicting with Arab beliefs at the time.

But Muhammad’s initial presentation of ideas was publicly acceptable. Rodinson reports ”his circle of mesmerized listeners grew larger and his words attracted more attention.” He appeared initially as an acceptable henotheist rather than as a monotheist and did not yet denounce significant Arab cultural practices; also there were no "vital innovations of a moral nature either." He was not seen as a threat to cults of local gods centered on the Ka’ba.

Muhammad acquired a few early zealous supporters including his wife Khadija and Abu Bakr from an influential family, and later the important figure of Hamza. These conversions are recorded as all being by the force of Muhammad’s personality.
However, Rodinson notes, "The new movement must have caused many Qurayshites some anxiety. The reassuring character of its doctrine and the fact that it involved apparently few changes in the previously accepted world picture were not enough to make everyone regard it as harmless."44 This led to mockery of him and his followers and to violent conflict and violence upon the person of Muhammad himself and indeed to a two-year social boycott.45 Some of his small but increasing number of followers withdrew to Abyssinia.46 Later they returned to Mecca but then in 622 emigrated to Medina because of conflict with his own Qurayshite tribe. Rodinson goes on to explain:

Force of circumstances, that is, in this case, the force of Meccan conservatism, together with Muhammad’s deep-rooted conviction of the importance of his message and the burning desire for a new deal on the part of his disciples, had made compromise impossible. From then on, the ill-assorted group of individuals, all more or less in sympathy with the message of one inspired spokesman, became welded into a community, its unity only strengthened by the hostility which surrounded it. This transformation involved a profound alteration in the content and even the form of the message, and in the general attitude of the master and the disciples towards everything around them. . . . This group had to distinguish itself clearly from everything outside itself.47

Rodinson explains that many made a hard calculation and found nothing to be gained by conversion; it was strictly a calculation of benefit. 48 In Medina one group came over for material gain and other conversions at Medina come about as a way to avert clan conflict. Some chose to be his followers and to change their behavior because they saw Muhammad as the 'Messenger of God': he had moral authority. He had no personal power (indeed had many enemies even in his own family); his "only distinction was he spoke with the voice of Allah."49 Following this came the conversion of elites ("two chiefs" of the powerful Awsite clan50) and finally many others through calculations of expediency.

Now a series of crucial events.

In the absence of a state there is an Arabian tradition of brigandage, in keeping with which Muhammad arranged a victorious attack on a Quraysh trade caravan at Nakla in 624. Muhammad took one-fifth of the booty and shared the rest with the community.51 This led to his decision to commit to battle at Badr later the same year, leading with victory to a great increase in prestige, and to Muhammed’s becoming a power due to the material benefits of adherence.

The practical gains were enormous. The ransoms paid for the prisoners were heavy . . . but the gain in prestige was more important. This was the new sect’s first real success and it was a considerable one. . . . It was no longer possible to ignore the importance of Muhammad and his followers. They were now a power to be reckoned with.52

These events had a marked effect on Muhammad himself, who determined to overcome all opposition, including his pagan opponents and his former strong allies the Jews.53 He began to differentiate his followers’ rituals and personal grooming from those of the Jews, and arranged the slaughter of many of the Medinan Jewish community and the exile of the rest. He secured the assassination of his (female) opponent Asma bint Marwan54 and of the poet Kab ibn al-Ashraf who had verbally joustied with him in public.55 Rodinson marks these events as the emergence of both a movement treasury (from accumulated booty) and of a police force (the figures involved in the assassinations).

That is to say, *a state had now emerged.*
This state power in Medina now triumphed over Mecca, soon built a central Arabian state, later came to dominate other cultures, and finally became the religion of empire. Our point here is that this superstructure of state coercive power arose on the base of initial behavioral transformation among a small group of Muhammad’s followers. The later expansion to empire is for our purposes trivial. What interests us is the beginnings. Again we see a pattern:

* A remarkable individual who attracts an initial small following with his personality alone.

* The small group expands its following among the public, and differentiates itself distinctively, to become a movement.

* At a certain point the movement employs coercion to expand its influence.

* Measures are adopted to universalize the movement’s values and to restrict channels communicating opposing values.

CASE STUDY #3: SPARTA IN 700 BCE

Since antiquity the Spartan city-state has fascinated the world and influenced many. What mysterious power did this small community of some ten thousand souls possess, such that it could cast its shadow down the millennia to our own day? Plutarch in his Lives gives us the answer: the behavioral changes in this small number of DORians on the Eurotas River compared to Athenians, Thebans, Corinthians and other Greeks. How and why did these behavioral changes occur? From the beliefs and actions of Lycurgus, one of history’s greatest law-givers. A very wise and clever man, Lycurgus conceived a plan and executed it. The plan and its execution teach us how to effect behavioral change and how, once effected, to maintain the changes -- for centuries. Perfect for the field of corruption studies!

Plutarch is careful to establish the baseline: "lawlessness and confusion prevailed at Sparta for a long time; and it was owing to this that the father of Lycurgus, a reigning king, lost his life." In contemporary terms: a community accustomed to luxury, corrupt and disordered. Just like the places where many of us live today.

From this incident a remarkable personal characteristic emerges about Lycurgus. His elder brother Polydectes died soon after succeeding their father to the throne. Shortly after succeeding Polydectes in turn, Lycurgus learned that his late brother’s wife was pregnant. She approached Lycurgus offering to abort the child if Lycurgus would marry her, so that they could rule together. Lycurgus agreed but used a strategy to ensure she would bring the child to term, secretly ordering her attendants to spirit the newborn child away if female but to bring immediately to him in public if male. Born male, Lycurgus during a dinner publicly proclaimed the infant king, briefly ruled as guardian, and then went into self-exile.

Plutarch records that at the proclamation "all present were filled with joy, admiring as they did his lofty spirit and his righteousness" and later although no longer king "he was revered by his fellow citizens, and more than those who obeyed him because he was guardian of the king and had royal power in his hands, were those who clave to him for his virtues and were ready and willing to do his bidding."57

However Lycurgus had powerful enemies, particularly the queen mother who
having been tricked into bringing her fetus to term lost the chance to become queen in her own right. So he exiled himself first to Crete and thence to Asia, with the desire "to study forms of government." His fellow citizens "missed Lycurgus sorely, and sent for him many times. They felt that their kings were such in name and station merely, but in everything else were nothing better than their subjects, while in him there was a nature fitted to lead, and a power to make men follow him. . . . Returning, then, to a people thus disposed, he at once undertook to change the existing order of things and revolutionize the civil polity."

Lycurgus first obtained endorsement from the Oracle at Delphi, and then "he tried to bring the chief men of Sparta over to his side, and exhorted them to put their hands to the work with him, explaining his designs secretly to his friends at first, then little by little engaging more and uniting them to attempt the task." After an unspecified period of time "he ordered thirty of the chief men to go armed into the marketplace at break of day, to strike consternation and terror into those of the opposite party." At first the reigning King Charilas fled in fear, but on an oath of safety from the band of innovators returned and "joined them in their enterprise."

Lycurgus now began what we would call "institutional reforms":

* "First and most important was his institution of a senate, or Council of Elders" which tempered the power of the king, so that "the Spartan kings did not experience the fate which the Messenians and Argives inflicted upon their kings, who were unwilling to yield at all or remit their power in favour of the people."

* "A second, and a very bold political measure of Lycurgus, [was] his redistribution of the land. For there was a dreadful inequality in this regard, the city was heavily burdened with indigent and helpless people, and wealth was wholly concentrated in the hands of a few."

* Third, a clever currency reform: "He withdrew all gold and silver money from currency, and ordained the use of iron money only. Then to a great weight and mass of this he gave a trifling value, so that ten minas' worth required a large store-room in the house, and a yoke of cattle to transport it. When this money obtained currency, many sorts of iniquity went into exile from Lacedaemon. For who would steal, or receive as a bribe, or rob, or plunder that which could neither be concealed, nor possessed with satisfaction, nay, nor even cut to pieces with any profit? . . . Luxury, thus gradually deprived of that which stimulated and supported it, died away of itself, and men of large possessions had no advantage over the poor, because their wealth found no public outlet . . . ."

Plutarch dutifully reports that

the wealthy citizens were incensed against Lycurgus . . . many pelted him with stones, so that he ran from the market-place. He succeeded in reaching sanctuary before the rest laid hands on him. . . . Lycurgus, however, was far from yielding in consequence of this calamity, but confronted his countrymen, and showed them his face besmeared with blood and his eye destroyed . . . .

Lycurgus then began a series of policies of what we would call social change:

* Measures against luxury and extravagance.

* Public messes in which all were obliged to eat, conducing to simplicity, thrift, friendship, teamwork, public discussion and public spirit.
* "In the matter of education, which he regarded as the greatest and noblest task of the law-giver, he began at the very source, by carefully regulating marriages and births. He made the maidens exercise their bodies in running, wrestling, casting the discus, and hurling the javelin, in order that the fruit of their wombs might have vigorous root in vigorous bodies and come to better maturity, and that they themselves might come with vigour to the fulness of their times, and struggle successfully and easily with the pangs of child-birth. He freed them from softness and delicacy and all effeminacy by accustoming the maidens no less than the youths to wear tunics only in processions and at certain festivals to dance and sing when the young men were present as spectators. . . . Nor was this all; Lycurgus also put a kind of public stigma upon confirmed bachelors."

* Healthy children were reared in common, not by their parents, while the weak were exposed to die at the foot of Mount Taygetus.

* To prepare for a successful military life, more mature youth were organized in companies, headed by a boy of twenty, who "commands his subordinates in their mimic battles, and indoors makes them serve him at his meals. He commissions the larger ones to fetch wood, and the smaller ones potherbs. And they steal what they fetch, some of them entering the gardens, and others creeping right slyly and cautiously into the public messes of the men; but if a boy is caught stealing, he is soundly flogged, as a careless and unskilful thief. They steal, too, whatever food they can, and learn to be adept in setting upon people when asleep or off their guard. But the boy who is caught gets a flogging and must go hungry. For the meals allowed them are scanty, in order that they may take into their own hands the fight against hunger, and so be forced into boldness and cunning. . . . The boys make such a serious matter of their stealing, that one of them, as the story goes, who was carrying concealed under his cloak a young fox which he had stolen, suffered the animal to tear out his bowels with its teeth and claws, and died rather than have his theft detected."

Plutarch records a policy of Lycurgus directly relevant to our study:

None of his laws were put into writing by Lycurgus, indeed, one of the so-called rhetras forbids it. For he thought that if the most important and binding principles which conduce to the prosperity and virtue of a city were implanted in the habits and training of its citizens, they would remain unchanged and secure, having a stronger bond than compulsion in the fixed purposes imparted to the young by education, which performs the office of a law-giver for every one of them.

The behavioral result Plutarch thus sums up as follows:

The training of the Spartans lasted into the years of full maturity. No man was allowed to live as he pleased, but in their city, as in a military encampment, they always had a prescribed regimen and employment in public service, considering that they belonged entirely to their country and not to themselves, watching over the boys, if no other duty was laid upon them, and either teaching them some useful thing, or learning it themselves from their elders. For one of the noble and blessed privileges which Lycurgus provided his fellow-citizens, was abundance of leisure, since he forbade their engaging in any mechanical art whatsoever, and as for money-making, with its laborious efforts to amass wealth, there was no need of it at all, since wealth awakened no envy and brought no honour . . . . In a word, he trained his fellow-citizens to have neither the wish nor the ability to live for themselves; but like bees they were to make themselves always integral parts of the whole community, clustering together about their leader, almost beside themselves with enthusiasm and noble ambition, and to belong wholly to their country.
Plutarch emphasizes how different from other Greeks were the Spartans and one of the measures Lycurgus adopted to maintain the purity of Spartan behavior:

This was the reason why he did not permit them to live abroad at their pleasure and wander in strange lands, assuming foreign habits and imitating the lives of peoples who were without training and lived under different forms of government. Nay more, he actually drove away from the city the multitudes which streamed in there for no useful purpose, not because he feared they might become imitators of his form of government and learn useful lessons in virtue, as Thucydides says, in the Funeral Oration of Pericles, but rather that they might not become in any wise teachers of evil. For along with strange people, strange doctrines must come in; and novel doctrines bring novel decisions, from which there must arise many feelings and resolutions which destroy the harmony of the existing political order. Therefore he thought it more necessary to keep bad manners and customs from invading and filling the city than it was to keep out infectious diseases.74

But Lycurgus' cleverest "system maintenance" measure was literally his last:

When his principal institutions were at last firmly fixed in the customs of the people, and his civil polity had sufficient growth and strength to support and preserve itself . . . [h]e . . . ardently desired . . . to make it immortal . . . .75

So Lycurgus addressed the assembled population saying that he must receive confirmation from the Oracle at Delphi as to the appropriateness of his innovations, and

they must therefore abide by the established laws and make no change nor alteration in them until he came back from Delphi in person . . . . When they all agreed to this and bade him set out on his journey, he exacted an oath from the kings and the senators, and afterwards from the rest of the citizens, that they would abide by the established polity and observe it until Lycurgus should come back; then he set out for Delphi . . . On reaching the oracle, he sacrificed to the god, and asked if the laws which he had established were good, and sufficient to promote a city's prosperity and virtue. Apollo answered that the laws which he had established were good . . . . This oracle Lycurgus wrote down, and sent it to Sparta . . . . [Lycurgus then] resolved never to release his fellow-citizens from their oath, but of his own accord to put an end to his life where he was . . . . He therefore abstained from food till he died . . . .76

Plutarch records that Sparta held "the first rank in Hellas for good government and reputation, observing as she did for five hundred years the laws of Lycurgus." She became an object of emulation, frequently being requested to send leaders to other states.77

And so this system lasted for centuries, making Sparta the most feared of the Greek city states and a model for others, ultimately defeating Athens through the effectiveness of its methods of training its citizens. This model has intrigued rulers and aspiring leaders ever since.

However we have no interest in the actual content of Lycurgus' innovations, only in the fact of the effectiveness of his measures for inducing behavioral change and then maintaining it. (For example, for the purpose of developing military skills of stealth and cunning, he placed great stress on exercising youth in successful theft, notably punishing failed theft. Not a desired skill in itself in the search to reduce corruption in contemporary society, but a fount of insight into behavior modification.)

What are the lessons we learn from the history of Lycurgus?
* He was recognized as a remarkable individual who did not seek personal power.
* He held strong ethical principles at risk to himself.
* He was a careful planner.
* He started with a small group of dedicated followers, which at a certain point used compulsion on others. And they used violence on him -- costing him an eye.
* He effected his changes not with political power; in fact he had been king but gave up the throne. We may infer he believed that as ruler he could not effect the changes he had in mind.
* The public did his bidding because of his virtue and righteousness. He was perceived as a leader despite lack of office.

His history is important for us not for any particular innovation -- in fact some were at cross-purposes to ours -- but for the fact of innovation.

CONCLUSIONS FOR COMPREHENSION OF STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

* The supremely important conclusion from the above histories is that changes never worked through the "impersonal operation of law": they were always the results of a remarkable person (never of a bureaucratic plodder) and of this remarkable person's personality.
* The behavioral changes under study were finally confirmed in their robustness by the exercise of power, but they did not begin that way. They began from the inward change of a few volunteers. The crucial change was not institutional and coercive -- the opposite of current programming.
* The genitive forces were never governmental at the start. It was always a power outside, with specific values, that achieved influence to implement these values. It was not "the government" but the transformation of the government (if any) by an outside group. Thus these historical cases support the same conclusion as did my 2009 paper: it was not the government, which was a criminal enterprise; it was outside groups having energy, values, excellent organization, resources and leadership. The historic changes’ progenitors achieve influence and then the benefits of the influence, which reinforce the durability of change. In contrast the Thai Ministry of Public Health cleansing was not durable because the same criminally-prone structure and values remained after the transitory cleansing.
* Changes took effect quickly but required a generation to become durable. (This delay follows on the institutionalization of the "emergent structure" from the initially small but growing group of followers, and the gradual conversion of external norms to become internal values.)

IMPLICATIONS

These fundamental structural and processual conclusions, contrary as they are to the received wisdom of experts in the "anti-corruption" field, are filled with implications in these areas at least:
Policy of governments and of external national and international funding agencies.

Programming and funding, now currently sold on the basis of promised results, but which are structured to fail in the places most in need of change.

Metrics and methods with which to measure changes in inputs and outputs.

Evaluative criteria by which the public may judge the seriousness of policies and programs.

CONCLUSIONS FOR THE 'ANTI-CORRUPTION INDUSTRY'

Refractory cases -- the world’s most salient, most interesting, most targeted by international organizations, the Nigerias, the Thailands, the Indonesias -- are characterized by Dr. Juree’s plaint that despite effort "corruption persists and thrives." This is an aggravation to the well-meaning like her, a puzzle to economists ("what approach might be most effective in reducing corruption") and a Sisyphean rebuke for our ignorance. Rational/punitive programs must fail in refractory cases because they fail even to cognize the structure of the etiological process for the behavior they aim to alter.

The current misplaced belief in the efficacy of rational/punitive programming in such cases perpetuates faith in false hopes, wastes time and resources, and is as specious in its comprehension of the structure of reality as was bloodletting as a treatment for hysteria and heart disease.

The rational/punitive approach aims to redefine the matrix of incentives in which one seeks to maximize his benefits. Yet by definition in refractory cases, it is always more beneficial to be corrupt, because it is the community norm which defines expectations. Changing outcomes in such cases is precisely the domain of norms (external guides to behavior) and values (internalized guides to behavior) which direct the actor to behave contrary to salient interests, just as a soldier advances on the battlefield to his death. It is thus no surprise that the rational/punitive approach fails, fails again and again, and will continue to fail. It can be no other way.

We should heed these facts to rebalance our understanding, our metrics, our policies, and our programs. That is a worthy goal.
1 Dr. Juree Vichit-Vadakarn, "Opening Statement" to the Second Conference on Evidence-Based Anti-Corruption Policies organized by the National Anti-Corruption Commission of Thailand in collaboration with the World Bank, Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand, January 11-12, 2012. She is Secretary-General of the Thailand branch of Transparency International.


9 For example application of "framing hypothesis" insights to generate certain pension plan choices by unthoughtful employees.


12 [FT letter citation coming]


14 T.J.S. George, Lee Kwan Yew’s Singapore (London: Andre Deutsch, 1973). At page 105 George refers to the historic Singapore as a "photogenic cesspool."

15 ibid., p. 38 16 ibid., pp. 40-41 17 ibid., p. 51
18 ibid., pp. 52-53 19 ibid., p. 70 20 ibid., p. 71
21 loc. cit. 22 ibid., p. 93 23 ibid., p. 133
24 loc. cit. 25 ibid., p. 135 26 ibid., p. 136

27 ibid., pp. 146-155


29 Rodinson, Muhammad, pp 16-17.

30 ibid., p. 128 31 ibid., p. 17 32 ibid., p. 34
33 ibid., pp. 49-50 34 ibid., p. 53 35 ibid., p. 50
36 ibid., pp. 128-129 37 ibid., p. 108 38 ibid., p. 97
39 loc. cit. 40 ibid., p. 96 41 ibid., p. 97
42 ibid., p. 98-99 43 ibid., p. 113 44 ibid., p. 103
45 ibid., pp. 103-111 46 ibid., p. 113 47 ibid., p. 118
48 ibid., p. 139 49 ibid., p. 154 50 ibid., p. 156
51 ibid., pp. 162-163 52 ibid., p. 168 53 ibid., p. 170
54 ibid., p. 171 55 ibid., p. 176


57 ibid., pp. 211-212 58 ibid., p. 213 59 ibid., p. 219
60 loc. cit. 61 loc. cit. 62 loc cit.
63 ibid., p. 227 64 ibid., p. 229 65 ibid., p. 235
66 ibid., pp. 231-232 67 ibid., p. 233

68 Contrary to the custom of Athenian females who were heavily clothed.

69 ibid., pp. 245-249 70 ibid., p. 255 71 ibid., pp. 261-262
72 ibid., p. 241 73 ibid., p. 279, 283 74 ibid., p. 289
75 ibid., p. 293


77 ibid., p. 297

78 For a basic discussion of the concept of "emergent structure" see Peter M. Blau, Exchange and Power in Social Life (New York: Wiley, 1964). I elaborate on the application of this concept to political change, and provide many additional references, in Chapter Seven, "Revolutionary Dynamics and Starting Mechanisms" in the second edition of my War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

79 For a typical Third World example see Deunden Nikomborirak, Sirikarn Lertampai-non and Weerawan Paibunjitt-aree, "Corporate Fraud in Thailand" TDRI Quarterly Review, December 2011: 3-9, which reports that massive corporate fraud goes unpunished. "This report finds that Thailand already has all the necessary rules and legislation required to handle corporate fraud but its enforcement record has been appalling. . . . [E]xamination of selected cases . . . reveals that those cases that involved well-known politicians did not result in prosecution, indicating that political influence may be an important factor in determining whether the law is enforced or not." To be quite clear about it, this means that (as opposed to the text of the relevant laws) the actually effective norm of the Thai public, businessmen, and law enforcement mechanism is to ignore corporate fraud. The paper is available at <http://www.tdri.or.th/download/quarterly/text/t5d2011001.pdf>.