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Citation for published version

Ceva, Emanuela and Radoilska, Lubomira V. (2018) Responsibility for Reason-Giving:The Case of Individual Tainted Reasoning in Systemic Corruption. Ethical Theory and Moral Practice . ISSN 1386-2820.

DOI

10.1007%2Fs10677-018-9950-2

Link to record in KAR

https://kar.kent.ac.uk/71375/

Document Version

Author's Accepted Manuscript

Responsibility for Reason-Giving:

The Case of Individual Tainted Reasoning in Systemic Corruption＊

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1. *Introduction*

The paper articulates a new understanding of individual responsibility focused on the exercise of agency in reason-giving rather than intentional actions or attitudes towards others. Looking at how agents make sense of their actions also allows us to identify a distinctive space for assessing individual responsibility within the context of collective actions, which so far has remained underexplored. We concentrate as a case in point on reason-giving that occurs when individuals engage in necessarily less-than-successful rationalisations of their involvement in a shared practice, like systemic corruption.

In §2, we argue that systemic corruption is best understood in terms of its public 'unavowability'. In particular, we focus on the redescriptions to which officeholders who partake in systemic corruption typically resort to vindicate their actions when they present, say, familism as a matter of trust or when they coat bribes in the terminology of tokens of appreciation for services rendered. To show that these redescriptions are indicative of the individual officeholders'

rationalisations constitutive of systemic corruption, we develop in §3 a multidimensional approach to reason-giving. On this approach, reason-giving is less-than-successful when different categories of reasons involved in making sense of one's own conduct are misaligned. We show, on this ground, the necessarily less-than-successful character of individual rationalisations in circumstances of systemic corruption and qualify the kind of tainted reasoning (at the interface between epistemic vice and epistemic disadvantage) thus produced with reference to such test cases as self-deception, wilful ignorance, and actions on 'autopilot'.

In §4, we expound the new view of responsibility emerging from our analysis of individual rationalisations in cases of systemic corruption. Notably, we argue that reason-giving is the epistemic core which responsibility assessments track. To demonstrate the interest of this emerging view, we compare its nature and scope with that of existing alternatives: responsibility as accountability and responsibility as attributability. We conclude in §5, by showing how our reason-giving-based understanding of responsibility can shed new light on the analysis and normative assessment of an agent's responsible ignorance.

2. *Systemic Corruption*

Corruption is a term with a strong, yet elusive pre-theoretical appeal. When an officeholder is accused of corruption, this accusation often involves the claim that he used his power of office for his personal gain (Philp 1997). Or, else, he might be called out for revealing a negative character trait, a kind of personal vice that insidiously degrades the institution in whose name he acts (Miller 2017). Finally, the attribute 'corrupt' might be used loosely, to indicate the lack of trust, whether warranted or not, in an officeholder's professional integrity (Ceva and Ferretti 2018). In a similar vein, when an institution is described as 'corrupt', this description might indicate a sense that self-serving behaviours are widespread among institutional role-occupants (Miller 2017), or that the

institution as a whole has lost sight of its original purpose (Lessig 2013; Thompson 2005). When used in this latter sense, corruption might also be meant to ascribe extensive dysfunctionality to the workings of an institution (Ferretti 2018; Thompson 2018). Finally, by calling an institution 'corrupt', one might be referring to a heterogeneous range of negative institutional features including inefficiency, illegitimacy, or simply the condition of being harmful to society.[1]

The following discussion is not intended to provide a comprehensive theory of corruption to make sense of the variety of cases just outlined. The ambition instead is to demarcate a distinctive phenomenon of corruption as a case in point to observe the role of reason-giving as the ultimate ground for responsibility assessments. One of the main advantages of this focus is that it allows discussing responsibility assessments that bring into sharp relief the interconnectedness between individual conduct and institutional features. This is an important characteristic of our approach because it allows us offsetting the intuitive, though misleading, appeal of conceiving responsibility as fractional or diminished in virtue of being shared by multiple agents.[2]

The specific phenomenon of corruption in which we are interested for the general purpose of our paper can go under the heading of 'systemic corruption'. 'Systemic' here refers to several constitutive features. The relevant kind of corruption (1) is sustained and continued over time, (2) involves the participation, whether conscious or not, of multiple agents, and (3) takes the form of an identifiable institutional practice, (4) thus implying some degree of coordination among the participants. It becomes apparent that the systemic practice we are interested in amounts to corruption proper rather than, say, institutional change or decay once we consider a further constitutive feature of 'corruption': while identifiable on reflection, corruption is still (5)

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[1] For a critical overview of the many sense of 'corruption', see Ceva and Ferretti 2017.

[2] This is what Dennis Thompson (2017), among others, has called 'the many hands problem'.

fundamentally publicly unavowable as a practice. This feature indicates that the rationale of the agenda an officeholder pursues in her institutional capacity through the use of the power entrusted to her office may not be publicly vindicated by reference to the terms—the letter or the spirit—of that power mandate.

Putting these features together we can say that systemic corruption occurs when the mechanisms according to which some powers of office are predictably exercised within a legitimate rule-based organisation regularly operate on a rationale incoherent with the terms of the mandate with which those powers are entrusted to some organisational roles (Ceva 2018). This incoherence makes such uses of power unfit for withstanding public scrutiny. On this understanding, not all instances of widespread corruption would qualify as 'systemic'. Nor would individual officials be necessarily implicated in systemic corruption in virtue of their being personally and repeatedly untrustworthy in the performance of their institutional roles. Similarly, some institutions that are correctly described as failing or dysfunctional overall would nevertheless fall outside the scope of systemic corruption.

Systemic corruption includes such straightforward cases as routine bribery in the selection of contractors for public works and clientelism in the provision of public services, as well as patronage and state capture. To see what these practices share, consider that an institution is standardly understood as a system of interdependent embodied roles (the offices).[3] In public institutions, like in any other legitimate rule-based organization, public rules govern the exercise of the powers entrusted to the various institutional roles. However, a measure of discretion is generally allowed concerning how precisely those who hold a particular office may decide to perform the functions

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[3] See Emmet 1966. This characterisation encompasses both teleological (purpose-driven) and deontological (reason-driven) approaches to institutional theory – for an overview, see Miller 2014.

mandated to them. Moreover, we should expect some significant margins for (reasonable) disagreement among officeholders on the interpretations of their respective mandates and how they think is best to realize them. These predicaments suggest that the terms of a power mandate are likely to be contested. Nonetheless, we can also see that—in a legitimate (e.g., not criminal, like the Mafia) institutional system—there is a certain degree of social confidence that public officials exercise their entrusted powers in ways that are coherent with the letter as well as the spirit of their power mandate.[4] What it more, officeholders are generally expected to be capable of vindicating the rationale of their actions 'publicly' in terms that show such coherence.

Depending on the kind of power and the nature of the institution at stake (e.g., whether it is democratic), the community towards whom officeholders are expected to vindicate the rationale of their conduct may vary, to include—at the very least—their fellow members of an organization or even the citizenry (in the case of democratic institutions). But, regardless of how we specify this feature, we want to emphasize that institutional role-occupants must act in ways that enable them to show the coherence of the rationale of their agenda with the commonly known terms of their power mandate. This is an expectation that applies to all officeholders within a legitimate rule-based system, even if the case of their having to withstand actual public scrutiny is an eventuality that might never occur.

When officeholders fail to use their power of office in a way that may withstand public scrutiny in keeping with the terms of that power mandate, we say that their action is fundamentally publicly unavowable in the sense that it is corrupt (Ceva 2018; Ceva and Ferretti 2018; Miller 2017). Publicly

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[4] This is a standard claim in institutional theory. For example, in the field of professional ethics, see Emmett 1966 and, in legal theory, Winston 1999. For a broader discussion, see Applbaum 1999. For the Kantian interpretation of officeholders' action on mandate, see Ripstein 2009.

unavowable uses of entrusted powers of office may well be sporadic and circumstantial. This could be the case of a newly elected politician who uses her power of office to hire her husband as her chief of staff. But they can also be run-of-the-mill and widely predictable. Systemic corruption refers to such publicly unavowable uses of power within the context of a regular and sustained institutional practice.

By pointing to the unavowable character of systemic corruption as a practice we can make sense of the structural role played by the typical operations of redescription through which the officeholders involved in a systemically corrupt institutional practice try to vindicate the rationale of their actions. While the rationale of some officeholders' professional conduct is incoherent with the terms of their power mandate, those officeholders are characteristically ready to pay lip service to their institutional role. So, typically, they would describe bribes as tokens of professional gratitude, clientelism as services rendered, and familism as a matter of trust with beneficial efficiency-enhancing effects on the performance of their functions (see Ceva 2018). This feature has persuaded some commentators to present corruption as characteristically covert. Mark Warren (2004: 333; 2006: 804), for example, argues that corrupt officeholders are symptomatically hypocritical in their formally upholding the norms of democracy, while distorting them in action. In this sense, for Warren, corruption has to be concealed; were corruption to occur in the open, its inherent 'hypocrisy' would be revealed in a way that is not sustainable for the parties involved.

While the covertness of systemic corruption is empirically accurate in many instances, we do not take it to be (either logically or empirically) definitive of the practice as its unavowable character is. For example, many commentators refer to the practice of private electoral campaign financing as a textbook example of systemic corruption. In such countries as the United States this practice is legal and, thus, carried out in the open. However, we could consider it corrupt only to the extent that it makes the mandate of elected politicians dependent on partisan financial powers (Lessig

2013). Another example comes from those instances of systemic political corruption of which everyone is aware, such as systems of patronage in developing democracies. The overt occurrence of such practices does not make them any less representative cases of systemic corruption insofar as they detract institutional action from the pursuit of shared interests to the exclusive benefit of some parties. The definitive point in all such cases is the presence of an agenda with an unavowable rationale, a rationale that *cannot* be publicly vindicated in keeping with the officeholder's power mandate. This is why systemic corruption, irrespective of its being covert or overt, is fundamentally publicly unavowable as a practice.

A popular strand in the current philosophical discussion of corruption has focused on systemic corruption by emphasizing the institutional dimension of this phenomenon as separate from its individual manifestations. Individual corruption occurs when an officeholder deliberately abuses her role to obtain a personal benefit (Philp 1997). This benefit might be material, e.g. money in cases of embezzlement, or immaterial, e.g. influence in cases of nepotism. But corruption may not only be a property of an official's individual behaviour. For the 'institutionalists', an altogether different kind of corruption may be conceptualised if we look at the properties of institutional practices. From this perspective, an institution is corrupt when its constitutive mechanisms respond to a logic extraneous to the nature and purpose of that institution so that the very functioning of the institution is undermined (Lessig 2013; Miller 2017; Thompson 2005 and 2018).

The typical illustration that institutionalists give of systemic corruption refers to the practice of private electoral campaign financing (Thompson 1995). Because in many countries, like the USA, this practice is legal, an elected politician whose campaign was financed through the generous donations of, say, a gas company is not per se corrupt. However, for the institutionalists, the structural relationships of dependence that thus come into being between the elected politician

and the private contributor to her campaign corrupt the institution of democratic elections because they distort its functioning (Lessig 2013: 2).

In virtue of its focus on the functioning of structural institutional mechanisms, the institutionalist approach seems an obvious candidate for making sense of systemic corruption, whereby multiple officeholders make a sustained and continual use of some power entrusted to their office on a rationale incoherent with that power mandate. This use of power ends up constituting a parallel unavowable practice that hijacks the functioning of an institution. On this interpretation, systemic corruption is fundamentally institutional and irreducible to any one officeholder's individual action, it is the 'corruption of a system' whose mechanisms exhibit the properties of regularity and predictability (Lessig 2013: 553; see also Thompson 2005 and 2018).

While the institutionalist analysis sheds important lights on instances of systemic corruption, we also think that the phenomenon cannot be fully explained and satisfactorily analysed without reference to the conduct of individual institutional role-occupants considered in their interrelatedness. In this sense, unlike the institutionalists, we adopt a continuist interpretation of the institutional and the individual level analysis of systemic corruption (Ferretti 2018).

On the continuist interpretation that we embrace, the features that make an institutional practice corrupt can always be traced back to some individual corrupt action. To illustrate this point, Maria Paola Ferretti (2018: 14-15) refers to corrupt systems of public procurement in cases of calls for tenders. By definition, the practice for selecting tenderers should be impartial in order to ensure the equal opportunity of applicants. However, under systemic corruption, it may become common practice that, upon paying a bribe, a tenderer may submit a 'low bid' with the agreement that subsequent price increases will be audited positively. The price increase may then be approved by a different officer; and the potential tenderers, being aware of the practice, may even form a cartel

in order to minimise the costs of participating in the selection procedure and establish a practice of rotation to ensure that everyone's turn of 'winning' the tender comes. The officials responsible for the selection procedure may, in fact, be favourable to this arrangement, which admittedly makes the selection quite straightforward. As Ferretti (2018: 15) notes, all agents follow a practice that has gradually become dominant over that of impartial and fair competition. Single officials may find themselves entangled in such a process without having deliberately initiated it, as perhaps they joined the institution in medias res. Nevertheless, it is their interrelated, more or less advertent individual involvement in the practice that makes public procurement systemically corrupt in this case.

As this scenario shows, the practices constitutive of systemic corruption may not be grasped if we look only (or even just primarily) at the quality of the whole institution in isolation of the structural relations of interdependence that obtain between the individual officeholders' actions. An institution and its constitutive practices are systemically corrupt *because* some officeholders have acted, advertently or inadvertently, to pursue an agenda whose rationale is incoherent with their power mandate. Corruption is therefore not an explanatory basic at the institutional level analysis, since it is always the result of a complex set of repeated interactions of multiple individual agents interrelated via their institutional roles (Ferretti 2018: 19).

This continuist approach to systemic corruption is capable of offering an effective analytical tool for exploring the interdependence between structural mechanisms and individual actions within those structures. Because the corruption of a system can always be traced back to the corrupt conduct of at least some of its participants, our approach opens up a clear pathway for establishing the grounds for individual responsibility in instances of systemic corruption. In the following section, we identify and explore the role of reason-giving within such fundamentally unavowable yet sustained practices as systemic corruption. The ambition is to isolate a distinctive epistemic

core which anchors the responsibility of individual agents even in the absence of a deliberate contribution to systemic corruption on their part.

3. *Reason-giving for systemic corruption*

On the continuist interpretation we articulated, systemic corruption is a fundamentally publicly unavowable institutional practice, which depends on the repeated involvement of multiple agents who use the power entrusted to their institutional roles on a rationale incoherent with that power mandate. The sustained character of this practice presupposes that individual participants have some shared understanding of what they are up to (Rouse 2007). In the absence of such understanding, systemic corruption would collapse into sheer dysfunctionality whereby institutional workings do not fit into the regular and predictable patterns of any identifiable practice. At the same time, however, the participants' understanding cannot be shared either in a way that satisfies the publicity condition we outlined earlier, or in a way that turns systemic corruption into a clear-cut case of conspiracy. The former would equate systemic corruption with anodyne institutional change. The latter would preclude the possibility of a differential analysis of how and why the responsibility of individual officeholders might be engaged. If officeholders are all in it together in terms of clear-eyed conspiracy, there would be no conceptual room for half-hearted objectors, innocent bystanders, or even burgeoning whistle-blowers, only hardened offenders.

To move beyond these unsatisfactory options, we would like to explore the following hypothesis: the shared understanding of participants in systemic corruption as a fundamentally publicly unavowable institutional practice comes from the distinctive kind of individual rationalisations in which the participants in that practice engage with resources made available to them institutionally, such as 'off-the-peg' redescriptions of dubious conduct as expedient and professional. We will

show two things. First, these rationalisations are necessarily less-than-successful. Second, the tainted reasoning they result in is a core exercise of agency for which responsibility is due. To do so, we shall first identify the criteria of success for reason-giving and then explain why individual rationalisations of systemic corruption cannot but fail to meet them.

Broadly conceived, to rationalise one's conduct is to make sense of it by appeal to reasons (Davidson 2001). Reasons can fall within one or more of the following three categories: normative, motivating, and explanatory (Alvarez 2013; Dancy 2000). For instance, when we cite a *normative* reason for an action, we present this action as worth performing in some respect. We offer a rationale for it as, say, a nice or a sensible thing to do. Normative reasons are prima facie justifications. A *motivating* reason, by contrast, is a consideration in the light of which an action is performed. It rationalises the action by spelling out its agent's rationale. Yet, a motivating reason may not be a good reason, in favour of the action performed, e.g. by being irrelevant or unduly partial. Finally, actions can be *explained* by appeal to 'reasons why' (Dancy 2010: 4-5). Examples include: putdowns uttered out of defensiveness, invitations refused out of shyness, and failures to repay people out of forgetfulness. In these cases, agents do not typically recognise the reasons which rationalise their actions as their own. When they do, this happens mainly as a result of reflection or feedback from others. Unlike motivating reasons, which are first-personal, explanatory reasons derive from a third-person perspective, which may not be immediately accessible to the agents themselves.

This wide-scope view of reasons does not exhaust all possible accounts of rationalisation in the debate. We should at least mention a competing narrow-scope view premised on the idea that motivating reasons are the only reasons properly speaking, with some normative and explanatory

reasons admitted as limit cases to the extent that they are also motivating (Williams 1981).[5] While this narrow-scope understanding may seem intuitive, we adopt the view that the space of reasons is in fact wider and should be understood as including all three categories of reasons as non-derivative, bona fide reasons. Providing a full justification for this view of reason-giving falls beyond the scope of the present discussion. We will only highlight two main advantages of adopting the wide-scope view, which bear directly on the case we wish to make for the kind of rationalisation involved in systemic corruption.

First, the wide-scope view allows us to make more nuanced an assessment of individual reason-giving precisely because it distinguishes between different categories of reasons. Adopting this view gives us the conceptual tools for understanding how and why reason-giving may be less than successful. While there are no sharp edges between these categories, failing to recognise them as different in kind would leave us only able to register obvious cases of success or the lack of it. Keeping normative, motivating, and explanatory reasons separate in spite of their frequent overlaps allows a fine-grained analysis from different points of view, as required in systemic corruption given the many perspectives on the same actions – personal and public – and addressees of their rationalisations.

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[5] Possible further constraints include: (1) rationalisations are post hoc justifications that cannot explain their target actions because (2) they are epistemically illicit, (3) happen outside the reasoner's awareness and (4) enjoy high degrees of credence and resistance to critique and detection (Schwitzgebel and Ellis 2017; Summers 2017). As the later discussion will show, rationalising one's involvement in systemic corruption often exhibits most of these features. Yet, bringing them together as a matter of definition is potentially misleading. It can solidify a picture of rationalisation as too remote from ordinary reason-giving, with extreme cases, such as committing a murder while sleepwalking in the spotlight. Conversely, it can lead to excessive doubts about ordinary reason-giving, overestimating the frequency and incorrigibility of faulty rationalisations.

Second, the wide-scope view helps to clarify why apparent misalignments across categories of reasons are an issue for the agents. This is because, when agents give reasons for their actions, they cannot fully rely on first-personal motivating reasons that are immediately accessible to them. When the first-person perspective is either unclear or insufficient, agents must also draw on eligible normative and explanatory resources. As seen, resort to explanatory reasons brings in a third-personal perspective on the agent's action. Normative reasons, on their part, may be seen as calling in a second-personal perspective, at least on some relational account of morality (see Darwall 2006; Korsgaard 1996). From this perspective, the normative authority of reasons is not entirely internal to the agents, but depends on its being built, shared, and recognised by the members of a given community (who join in regarding an action as worth performing). Evidently, this multidimensional perspective is relevant in cases of complex patterns of interdependent individual actions where certain practices have had an intricate genealogy, are subject to different interpretations, and may acquire different significance from different perspectives. This complexity can certainly be seen in systemic corruption whose fundamentally publicly unavowable character jeopardises the alignment of the first-personal perspective with the second- and third-personal ones.

The multi-dimensional aspect of rationalisation that the wide-scope view allows us to appreciate may, in fact, go unnoticed if we stick to a particular class of examples for reason-giving. These examples centre on an agent's ability to answer the Anscombian question 'Why?', viz. 'What are you doing?' with regard to her discrete intentional actions (Anscombe 1963). In such cases, giving a reason for what one is doing is the expression of direct, unmediated knowledge available only to agents as opposed to observers. Here, rationalising by inference from either normative or explanatory considerations is not an option for the agent. The ability to answer the Anscombian question 'Why?' is meant to single out ongoing intentional actions from the wider range of

purposive behaviours and sub-personal bodily movements agents are engaged in. To see the interest of the distinction, consider the simple action of opening a window:

Case 1: As I cross the room and reach to open the window, an acquaintance comes in and asks: 'What are you doing?'. I answer without hesitation: 'Why, I'm opening the window, it's getting stuffy in here.'

Case 2: As I cross the room and reach to open the window, an acquaintance comes in and asks: 'What are you doing?'. I stop in my tracks and give it some thought before replying: 'Well, I must have wanted to open the window, it's stuffy here. To tell you the truth, I've been running on autopilot all day.'

In Case 1, the rationalisation offered is complete. Opening the window makes sense in virtue of being an intentional action. The agent can cite the reason for which she performs the action readily and truthfully. Case 2 exhibits a different kind of rationalisation. Opening the window becomes intelligible to both the agent and the observer as something done absentmindedly, out of habit. The reasons cited do not demonstrate the agent's direct knowledge of her action, but support a credible conjecture.

Looking at the two cases side by side, reason-giving in the first case clearly does a better job than reason-giving in the second. The agent in Case 1 knows what she is doing: she is acting for a reason. She is also confident it is a good reason. This tells us two important things about successful rationalisations. First, they are subject to an *accuracy* requirement. Answering the Anscombian question 'Why?' is unlike creating fiction about one's actions.[6] Some further constraints have to

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[6] Readers familiar with recent work on truth in fiction, e.g. Lewis (1978), Currie (1990), Woodward (2011), might be inclined to think that sheer intelligibility brings in considerable constraints. These constraints should not be so quickly dismissed as insufficient. We do not have the space to pursue further this possible line of inquiry here. Instead, we would like to highlight the intuitive contrast between *giving a report* on a action and *telling a story* about it. As will become

do with the context or circumstances of the action ('it's getting stuffy here'). Others refer to the range of actions that can make good sense in this context (opening a window is one of them). Neither set of constraints can be ascertained by introspection alone, or is inaccessible to other agents and reasoners. So, when rationalisation goes well, it affirms the limited authority agents have as self-knowers (O'Brien 2007) rather than the unbound resourcefulness they might develop as story-tellers (Doris 2015).

The second thing we learn from Case 1 is that successful rationalisations point to a neat *alignment* between categories of reasons. The reason in the light of which the agent opens the window is good (*motivating* and *normative* considerations pull in the same direction). It also *explains* the action fully, there is no need to look for an extra 'reason why' (the explanatory dimension is absorbed by the motivational one).

The two features of successful rationalisations elicited by the Anscombian question 'Why?' – accuracy and alignment across dimensions of reasons – become particularly attractive when the consideration of actions turns to allocating responsibility as opposed to disinterested understanding. A counterfactual conversation with those affected by one's actions or an internal dialogue modelled on it is a core idea for many conceptions of responsibility (e.g. Macnamara 2015, McKenna 2012, Wallace 1994). In this communicative setting, giving reasons for one's actions plays a key role in being and holding responsible (Smith 2007). It involves anticipating challenges, but also showing due concern for others' interests and perspectives. In this way, reason-giving demonstrates an agent's secure belonging to the moral community where the so-called

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clear, on the view we put forward, the more successful a rationalisation is, the closer it gets to the former as opposed to the latter.

reactive attitudes, such as resentment or gratitude, the backbone of being and holding responsible, can be appropriately addressed (Strawson 1962; Shoemaker and Tognazzini 2014).

So understood, the interpersonal significance of allocating responsibility for individual actions might seem to call for adopting Case 1 or an equivalent as a paradigm for responsible reason-giving (see, Hieronymi 2004; 2008; 2014). In a nutshell, in this view, responsibility is about the way in which an agent settles questions, like whether to undertake a particular course of action, maintain an attitude or a relationship, or revisit an existing commitment. In all relevant cases, the agent is answerable to the Anscombian question 'Why?'. This question tracks the reasons in the light of which the agent acted or refrained from acting, maintained or revisited attitudes, commitments or relationships of hers.

However, we wish to show that taking up Case 1 as paradigmatic in this way could be misleading. While we acknowledge the centrality of the two features of successful rationalisations identified though Case 1, cases of interest for the purposes of responsibility assessments are unlikely to exhibit the clarity and simplicity that make Case 1 so appealing. Not all things for which agents might be required or would want to give reasons are structurally similar to the single-minded opening of a window.[7]

Ongoing intentional actions can be rationalised as lucidly as Case 1 only under the specific descriptions under which they are intentional. Anscombe's original example of 'pumping water' sheds ample light on this limitation. A man moves his arm up and down to operate a cistern. The

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[7] Examples include: long-term projects or practices that evolve over time and rely on multiple agents (Lear 2017), but also past intentions of a single agent (Child 2006). In either case, reason-giving takes the form of a more or less laboured 'gap-filling' rather than immediate articulation. We will expand on this point in the subsequent discussion.

water in the cistern is poisonous; the man thus supplies water to a house and ultimately poisons its inhabitants. While the pumping man is aware the water he pumps into the house is poisonous, he may not intend killing its inhabitants. He may only intend to earn a living by doing his job (Anscombe 1963: 37– 44). So, when asked what he is doing and why, the man can produce a reply that does not mention the effect of his activities on the inhabitants of the house. The pumping man may not be deliberately misleading. He could simply be stating the description under which his moving his arm up and down is intentional – pumping water into the house – and the reason in the light of which he is doing the pumping – earning his wages. His answer seemingly matches the lucidity of reason-giving in Case 1. And to the extent that we are only interested in learning what the actual reason motivating the pumping man is, this answer might be okay. If however, the exchange is part of a moral address, the pumping man's answer seems deeply disturbing.

In the case of the pumping man, moral address aims to establish the man's involvement in the inhabitants' fate. It centres on such questions as 'Why are you poisoning the inhabitants?'. To answer by merely indicating the description under which he is acting intentionally – supplying water to the house to earn his wages – would demonstrate an uncommon lack of concern for human life: the pumping man puts his own trivial interests (he could find a similar job elsewhere) ahead of others' survival. Here, reason-giving cannot end with identifying a motive for the action performed. Knowingly or not, this motive is also located within the realm of possible justifications, as a reason that speaks in favour of this action. By failing to mention any misgivings, the pumping man rationalises his actions in a way that disavows the normative significance of reasons that speak against them.

The upshot mimics the integrated rationalisation we saw in Case 1. A deep misalignment between the normative and the motivational dimensions is thus initially concealed. This misalignment also undermines the explanatory force of the pumping man's reason-giving: by omitting silenced

normative reasons that speak against supplying poisoned water to a household, the man is creating the illusion that these reasons are extraneous to understanding what he is doing. Importantly, this kind of rationalisation does not have to be deliberately undertaken. The pumping man might be as much a prey as a perpetrator of his elusive reason-giving.

The relevant counterpart against which to assess the quality of the pumping man's rationalisation is not Case 1, but Case 2. The features to look out for are as follows. First, in Case 2 there is a disconnection across dimensions of reasons. Second, reason-giving in Case 2 raises the question of how to realign different categories of reasons. The pumping man's rationalisation leaves things as they are: the underlying disconnection between normative and motivating reasons remains unaddressed. The action under consideration is under-explained and misinterpreted. Drawing on recent work on motivated irrationality (Radoilska 2013), we can say that reason-giving of this kind is necessarily less-than-successful. By this we mean to highlight that this reasoning is bound to fail both criteria of successful rationalisations: (i) accuracy and (ii) alignment across the normative, motivating, and explanatory dimensions of reasons for the target action. In contrast, the pumping man's rationalisation could have been successful had it followed the model illustrated in Case 2. True, reason-giving in the Case 1 does a neater job; however, it also has, as we showed, a lighter task than reason-giving in Case 2, which can thus provide a model for reason-giving in such complex scenarios as that of the pumping man.

How would this picture help to elucidate the workings of rationalising an officeholder's own involvement in systemically corrupt institutional practices? Looking at the constitutive features of systemic corruption, there are good grounds to believe that the individual rationalisations it involves are, like that in the 'Pumping Man' scenario, necessarily less-than-successful. To recall, in a legitimate institutional system, institutional role-occupants are expected to provide reasons for their conduct that can withstand public scrutiny in keeping with the terms of the power mandate

entrusted to their office. When officeholders are involved in such a publicly unavowable practice as systemic corruption, this expectation is typically met by the officeholders' redescribing their conduct into terms that show a certain coherence with the rationale that should inform their professional actions, whereby the glaring contradictions between used and mandated power are glossed over.

On some occasions, such redescriptions might be undertaken with a clear purpose in mind, that of fobbing off potential critics. This superficial kind of redescription however would not qualify as rationalisation, successful or otherwise. For an officeholder who engages in this kind of redescriptions does so precisely to *avoid* giving reasons for her professional conduct. By redescribing her criticised actions as intra vires, she means to leave them unaccounted for. This is not because she at a loss for answering the Anscombian question 'Why?'. On the contrary, the corrupt officeholder is acutely aware that there is an accurate explanation to hand 'I am doing it for my personal gain' which however falls short of the normative expectations that come with her institutional role. Therefore, she maliciously redescribes her action.

This kind of redescription might be enough to answer for one's behaviour in cases of individual or occasional corruption. However, it would not suffice to maintain the entrenched ways of operating ultra vires (and getting away with it) constitutive of systemic corruption. To support such a complex practice, within the constraints placed by its fundamentally unavowable character, redescriptions should be able to somehow address the flagrant discrepancies between normative and motivating reasons that corruption creates. Arguably, redescriptions would also need to obliterate competing explanatory reasons from coming to the surface and jeopardising the process of rationalising one's own involvement in systemic corruption, vis-à-vis similarly placed agents. This predicament is an implication of the 'public' nature of the accounts that officeholders are

expected to give for their actions by placing equal weight onto first-, second-, and third-personal perspectives.

To see how and why this kind of thorough redescription takes the distinctive form of a necessarily less-than-successful rationalisation, let us explore it in relation to two possible counterparts: instances of self-deception, on the one hand, and reason-giving for actions performed for no particular reason, or on 'autopilot', on the other.

Self-deception is one type of motivated irrationality. It affects directly reasons for belief and, by extension, reasons for action. While there are competing conceptualisations of this phenomenon (Bach 1981; Davidson 2004; Mele 1987), there is a clear overlap on paradigm cases: a believer is faced with some compelling evidence that something is the case; yet, she strongly desires this not to be so. Viewed through the lens of her partial motivation, the unwelcome evidence is recast as consistent with, if not favourable to, what she wants to be the case. She ends up convinced it is actually the case. Fooling oneself into thinking one's partner is faithful in spite of mounting evidence to the contrary is a standard example (Mitova 2017). As Lynch (2016: 515) helpfully observes: 'What's important here is the existence of a discrepancy: a discrepancy between what the subject's doxastic state is, and what it should be given her evidence.' Lynch then goes on to distinguish between self-deception and wilful ignorance. The two phenomena have a similar function: they help an agent resist an unwelcome revision of plans pressed on her by the emergence of contrary evidence. This function, however, is discharged differently in each case.

Unlike wilful ignorance, self-deception is not a process in which believers typically engage at will; if that were the case, the resulting beliefs would be insufficiently stable. Self-deceiving believers also labour at a greater disadvantage than wilfully ignorant agents. The former have to deal with contrary evidence they have already stumbled upon. The latter only have to avoid direct exposure

to the contrary evidence they correctly surmise is out there. This is why the discrepancy between actual and warranted doxastic states Lynch highlights as defining in cases of self-deception does not occur in cases of wilful ignorance: its point is precisely to pre-empt conflict by keeping the agent away from potential sources of conflicting evidence.

While it is obvious that wilful ignorance may occur in cases of systemic corruption,[8] it cannot be the underlying mechanism that supports the ongoing rationalisation of someone's involvement in such a practice. In these cases, evidence of one's own corruption is readily available to any participant in the system. Recall from the previous section the corrupt practice of 'low bid', as instantiating bribery and relations of clientele, in the scenario of public procurement in cases of calls for tenders. It is true that an official's accepting a bribe or favouring the 'low bid' of a tenderer in spite of the principle of impartial and fair competition is consistent with a generalised behaviour on the part of his co-workers. This consistency might even be deemed to normalise the corrupt practice in a statistical sense. At the same time, however, that officeholder's institutional power mandate is not ipso facto altered, nor does it become suddenly inaccessible to the agent. The terms of the officeholder's power mandate remain as readily available as ever. And their incoherence with the rationale of the unavowable practice in which the officeholder partakes is not a matter of warranted suspicion but of putting, as it were, two and two together. In such cases, we can hardly imagine that the corrupt agent can wilfully ignore the corrupt nature of his ongoing activities in an effectual and sustainable way.

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[8] Luban (1999) discusses a helpful example: a corporate boss who puts pressure on his team to deliver but does not want to know how the expected results have been achieved. This is because he suspects the law is likely to be broken in the process. Not being informed would give him deniability in the case of an investigation.

The routine and predictable nature of systemic corruption as a practice might bring it closer to instances of acting for no particular reason or on 'autopilot', the second counterpart we would like to consider. Picking an item out of a group of near identical items, as in shopping, is a helpful example. As shown by recent psychological work cited by Doris (2015), most people tend to respond to the question of why they have chosen the item they have picked out by pointing to some non-existent superior features it has over the items they left, e.g. being softer or of a nicer colour for pieces of clothing. Such cases illustrate a common tendency to find reasons for one's behaviour when challenged rather than admitting there are none. According to Doris, this tendency could be explained by conversational pressures to show oneself as a reliable, consistent, and competent agent. In other words, we cannot say all too often: 'I have no idea why I did it'. Locutions of this type are meant to remain exceptional, explanations of last resort.

The pressure to engage in excessive reason-giving is likely to be even stronger when an agent is asked to account for stretches of activity which contribute to the performance of an organisational task. When she acts on the basis of the tasks routinely assigned to her role within an organisation, she frequently acts on 'autopilot', precisely in virtue of the predictable nature of her impersonal (qua role-based) actions. Looking at the emerging analytic literature on habitual actions (Pollard 2010; Delacroix 2017), practiced routines exhibit a distinctive trade-off with respect to agents' knowledge: the more competent and fluent agents become in their 'know how', the less aware they are of what they are doing in terms of component actions. Walking, typing, dancing are everyday illustrations of this effect of habituation.

So, when asked to account for a stretch of a routine activity, agents will tend to answer by identifying good or acceptable reasons for their performance rather than acknowledging its unconsidered character. And, as argued in a recent paper (Summers 2017), this tendency might not be bad news altogether. While the rationalisation this tendency supports is, in terms of the

current discussion, less-than-successful with respect to the stretch of activity it is meant to explain (because it fails on account of inaccuracy), it nevertheless helps the agent to get better at acting on good reasons in the long run. For having rationalised a previously unconsidered stretch of activity by claiming the best reasons that speak in its favour as one's own, the agent tacitly begins to internalise them as they grow more and more salient in her future planning and deliberations.

This benign, propaedeutic effect of some less-than-successful rationalisations is unlikely to obtain in systemic corruption. This is because the individual rationalisations it rests on are informed by what we shall term, following Lear (2017), a distinctive 'crisis of intelligibility'. Consider Lear's original example as a point of contrast. The end of nomadic life in the 19th c. when North-American tribes, such as the Crow, were moved on to reservations, marked the disruption of the intelligibility of the Natives' actions as a result of losing the way of life which gave these actions a meaning. As Lear (2017, p. 54) points out: '…if going on a hunt and going into war and going on a nomadic migration all become impossible, then there are no longer any acts that can intelligibly count as preparing to go to war, on a hunt, on a migration. Nor can anything intelligibly count as intending to perform such acts.' Both the collective and individual self-understanding of agents is impeded since they can no longer use the categories and concepts of their past in order to plan, deliberate or give reasons for what they are doing.

The crisis of intelligibility that systemic corruption brings in takes a different form. When patronage comes to govern the access to some public office, for example, the reasons of impartiality and fairness that should guide the procedure continue to apply and make sense and, therefore, it is not the case that they have become unavailable to the participants. Instead, intelligibility is subverted through excess of ready-made rationalisations, so that the agents' individual involvement in some publicly unavowable institutional practices may never come to the fore and be acknowledged as such. The currency of redescriptions that turn patronage into a matter

of mutual trust and institutional efficiency facilitates individual doublethink in the mould of the prevalent institutional doublespeak. This kind of tainted reasoning shelters the unavowable practice (and its sustaining reasons) at the root of the crisis from both external and internal scrutiny. In so doing, this reasoning provides the degree of shared, stable, albeit partial understanding required to sustain systemic corruption as a multiple-agent practice.

It may be tempting to conclude that agents who try to rationalise their actions in circumstances of systemic corruption effectively labour under severe epistemic disadvantage. To break out of the cycle of necessarily less-than-successful rationalisations, the participants in a fundamentally publicly unavowable practice need specific epistemic resources: ways of rethinking their indefensible routines to recover some scope for appropriate agency. Yet, as highlighted, these resources are persistently obscured by the distorting and distracting logic that underpins systemic corruption. In this respect, officeholders who partake in publicly unavowable institutional practices may find it difficult to recognise their own corruption for what it is. Even if their original power mandate is not erased or rendered meaningless, the performance of their institutional tasks in keeping with that mandate is undermined. In addition, many individual officeholders are likely to have been inducted through their colleagues' unavowable conduct from the very beginning; they have not seen the undiluted institutional mandate put into practice but have always acted on its tainted version.

These observations capture an important side of individual rationalisations for systemic corruption. Yet, focusing on the epistemic disadvantage that is revealed can easily lead us to misread the situation. Officeholders who participate in some publicly unavowable practices would then appear as though inadvertent victims of epistemic injustice, a set of wrongs that afflict individuals in their capacity as knowers (Fricker 2007). Such agents, however, are first and foremost tainted reasoners. Their proficiency in doublethink is instrumental for the upkeep of the

unavowable practice they might have joined inadvertently. So, if we wanted to explore their status in terms of epistemic injustice, we should start by recognising them as co-producers of an injustice, rather than bystanders, who end up being harmed.

As seen, officeholders who participate in systemically corrupt institutional practices are faced with ample evidence of what they are up to. By engaging in the sort of necessarily less-than-successful rationalisations typical of systemic corruption, they are able to act without feeling conflicted or endangering their self-image. That they proceed through mechanisms of self-deception rather than well-planned cover-ups does not indicate loss of epistemic agency. On the contrary, these tainted reasoners are appropriate target for the kind of criticism that would be out of place if, through misinformation, they made an honest mistake about what their power mandate demands of them.

In this respect, tainted reasoners are akin to knowers, whose performance is indicative of an epistemic vice. Adopting the motivational account put forward in Tanesini (2018), we take epistemic vices as dispositions, whose core feature is non-instrumental aversion to epistemic goods like finding out what the case is or making up one's mind for the right kind of reasons. That is to say, the self-serving function of rationalising one's own corruption is not self-standing. Neither recasting unwanted evidence as innocuous, nor excessive reason-giving for unconsidered actions can be sustained without the entrenchment of pro-attitudes, such as indifference to the truth, that make tainted reasoning more likely to go unchallenged if not undetected.

4. *Responsibility for tainted reasoning*

On the account we put forward in the previous section, rationalising one's own involvement in systemic corruption is a kind of first-personal reason-giving, whose distinctive feature is to be necessarily less-than-successful. More specifically, these rationalisations can provide answers to the

Anscombian question 'Why?' that do not only happen to be inaccurate. They also make the second key task of reason-giving, aligning different categories of reasons – justificatory, explanatory, and motivational – practically impossible with respect to individual actions that jointly make up the publicly unavowable, yet shared and sustained practice of systemic corruption. We argued that the rationalisation at work in such cases is best understood as a kind of tainted reasoning at the interface between epistemic disadvantage and epistemic vice.

To understand individual rationalisations for systemic corruption in terms of tainted reasoning might be taken as a ground for the partial excuse of the agents involved. In the following, we aim to show why this is not the case. Individual responsibility for tainted reasoning is sui generis. It indicates an epistemic core underpinning moral, legal, and political considerations on the matter. By acknowledging and exploring this core, we are in a better position to help to resolve some intractable disagreements on the nature and scope of responsibility which have shaped recent debates.

In essence, these disagreements derive from two competing views on what a person can be ultimately responsible for. On the first view, responsibility assessments are meant to track intentional actions and omissions. This view highlights such notions as choice, understanding, planning, and deliberation. Responsible agents know what they are doing. When they fail to fulfil an obligation or rise up to some reasonable expectation, their wrongdoing is deemed 'akratic' (Rosen 2004). That is to say, they are aware of some overriding normative reasons that speak against their chosen course of action but engage in that action all the same. This awareness is what distinguishes blameworthy transgressions and failures from regrettable accidents and misfortunes brought about by blameless agents. Culpable ignorance is thus reduced to a prior choice to ignore or, as Smith (1983) terms it, a 'deliberate benighting act'. This choice need not have the wrongdoing under consideration for its object. A decision made a long time ago would suffice, providing it

explains this wrongdoing as a direct, credible consequence of something the agent has chosen advertently in the past.

Theories that conceive the scope of responsibility as it concerns the agent's advertent past actions tend to endorse a particular view of its nature too: *responsibility as accountability*. This view interprets different practices of responsibility – be they legal or moral – as grounded in the core notion of a reciprocal bond, holding agents accountable to one another in the light of rules that can, at least in principle, be justified to and agreed upon by all parties concerned. This is because being accountable for something amounts to being open to sanctions, viz. an increased normative burden in response to failures, omissions, or poor performance with respect to that thing. In institutional contexts, this normative burden might take the form of a penalty, a fine, or even a custodial sentence. In everyday contexts, however, this burden need not involve anything further than moral address in terms of blame. To be held accountable, in this way, is to be identified as the fair target of a negative moral assessment in virtue of what one has done. A constant feature across different modalities is the wrongdoer's clear reduction of standing within a community of reference: the citizens of a country, the members of a profession, the moral community as a whole. To restore her standing, an accountable agent would take up the normative burden her guilty wrongdoing created – by paying the fine, serving the sentence, issuing an apology, or seeking other appropriate means to redress her normative shortcomings.

As shown in this brief outline,[9] responsibility as accountability integrates a strong requirement of fairness as reciprocity. Being held accountable can be onerous for the agent. And so, responsible agents have a strong interest in being shielded from arbitrary, confounding, or ever-changing patterns of blame. If they find themselves frequently open to censure through no fault of their

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[9] For an extended discussion, see Radoilska 2013, Ch.1.

own, with no recourse to defence, the practices of responsibility would simply collapse into something akin to witch-hunt. Importantly, these practices will no longer be able to provide responsible agents with reasons that speak authoritatively in favour, or against, any particular course of action. This central idea – it is unfair, hence impermissible to hold people accountable for things that are not up to them – is neatly translated into the notion of 'akratic wrongdoing'. As Mason (2015: 3041) puts it: 'There is a difference between failing to get things right and failing to get them right in a blameworthy way.' By insisting on a definable epistemic error, which is imputable to the agent as a wrongdoing in its own right rather than an honest mistake, responsibility as accountability is kept free from the dangers of vindictiveness.

By contrast, on the second view, responsibility is fundamentally about the attitudes or quality of will a person shows toward the others. Notably, the view of *responsibility as attributability* does not only track intentional actions and omissions, but a broader set of manifestations of an agent's moral character or personality.[10] The exclusive focus on intentional manifestations of character is deemed indicative of the misplaced concern about reciprocity and fairness at the root of the idea of responsibility as accountability. The proponents of this alternative attributivist position see moral commitments as too fundamental to be 'up to us' (Hieronymi 2004; 2008). Responsibility as attributability is incurred directly for being who one is rather than for what one does or does not do *intentionally*. To be responsible, in this view, a person need not be knowledgeable of what she is responsible for. The rejection of an overall knowledge condition on responsibility goes two

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[10] Some authors, whose work fits within this approach, e.g. Smith (2005; 2012), disown the label and opt instead for that of 'answerability'. The ambition is to resist the charge of articulating a lesser, derivative kind of responsibility, such as 'aretaic appraisal' (see Watson 1996) that is sometimes associated with the notion of attributability. In the present discussion, we will continue to employ 'attributability' as it captures better the distinctive features of the responsibility conception under consideration, without assuming it is less fundamental than its competitor, responsibility as accountability.

ways along the spectrum of attributability: at the negative end, it opens up the possibility for non-derivative culpable ignorance; at the positive end, it inaugurates the possibility for 'akratic right-doing'. Let us briefly consider each of these openings in turn.

To be culpable, ignorance does not have to originate from a blameworthy epistemic error. Instead, it can be the very target of negative moral appraisal, e.g., for showing disregard, lack of care, or indifference to others. On such occasions, ill will is rightly attributed to a person in virtue of, not in spite of, her ignorance. Crucially, blameworthiness here does not rely on a claim that the blamed agent could or should have not known better. Nor does it carry the normative expectation that the blamed agent stand corrected or get to know better in the future. The so-called hard cases of moral ignorance, such as ancient slave holders and psychopathic offenders, offer compelling illustrations of how this practice of responsibility might work. The moral address is still condemnation. It involves 'complete alienation' but 'no demand for amends' (Mason 2015: 3055).

While attributable wrongdoings need not be akratic, attributable right-doings or praiseworthy actions can be so. A person who displays good will in her interactions with others can be thus credited for that attitude independently of her professed moral outlook. Such creditable displays also include actions that the good-willed person herself wrongly considers as morally objectionable while performing them, as in the much-discussed case of Huck Finn (Arpaly 2003; 2015; Bennett 1974). Recall that in Mark Twain's eponymous novel, Huck is a white boy from the American South who befriends Jim, a runaway slave. Huck believes it is his duty to turn in his new friend but cannot bring himself to do so and berates himself for being a bad boy.

It is tempting to see this permissiveness regarding the first-personal knowledge of one's attributable actions as motivated by thoughts, such as: 'Poor reasoners can still be good people' and 'Having one's heart in the right place is what really matters'. If so, attributability can be set

aside as applicable to a very limited range of cases to supply a comprehensive view on responsibility. For naïve displays of good will are of little help in most practices of responsibility where competence, discernment and a whole variety of other intellectual attributes are essential (Hills 2015). Professional roles are obvious examples. However, this observation also applies to most everyday interactions where proper care for the interests of others still requires some aptitude for reasoning.

Akratic right-doing is rarely naïve in this way. While good-willed people may not be skilled in articulating the reasons for their creditable actions, they are not only likely to act for a reason, they are also likely to act for the right kind of reason: out of friendship and concern for another's wellbeing, as in Huck's case. In this respect, responsibility as attributability builds on the narrow-scope account of reasons we critically explored in the previous section. On this account, a strict distinction is made between forward-looking reasoning and post-hoc rationalisations. Since agents can be mistaken in reading back introspectively what motivated their actions, the practice of responsibility is focused on reading their motives directly, from the perspective of an ideal moral community.

As the above discussion indicates, a strong case can be made for each of the two competing conceptions of responsibility, as accountability or attributability, assuming the instances they identify as paradigmatic for the practice of responsibility are correct. Yet, in spite of the growing range of sophisticated variants of these positions in the debate (see Robichaud and Wieland 2017), neither view has succeeded in explaining away the appeal of the other, thus offering a compelling overall picture of responsibility.

In response, some authors (e.g. Mason 2015, Shoemaker 2015) have now opted for a pluralist approach, where different kinds of responsibility are mapped onto different areas of our moral

lives. This approach however offers more of a diagnosis than a solution. We are given rich phenomenological descriptions of self-contained, parallel practices of responsibility. We are also told how to make sense of their respective criteria from within. Yet, these advantages come at the expense of dissolving any critical perspective that would cut across individual practices. Responsibility begins to look like an umbrella concept covering over a fragmented field rather than a guiding principle helping to elucidate, compare and, if needed, correct established ways of being and holding responsible.

We would like to take a different route, which follows from the recognition of an epistemic core shared by different practices of responsibility. Instead of either intentional actions or attitudes toward others, we focus on reason-giving as more fundamental for assessing responsibility. This focus allows us to break the impasse between the two competing approaches while keeping valuable insights from both. As acknowledged within responsibility as accountability, epistemic blameworthiness is at the heart of negative moral appraisal. Yet, as clarified within responsibility as attributability, this blameworthiness does not have to take the form of a specific fault. By shedding light onto dispositions, such as disregard for the facts and other forms of epistemic vice agents actively employ in their reason-giving, it is possible to recover some shared ground theorists of responsibility have missed so far.

At first blush, this claim might seem implausible. Responsiveness to reasons already figures in many existing conceptions of responsibility, across the divide between accountability and attributability (e.g. Wallace 1994, Watson 1996, Smith 2005). What is more, responsiveness to reasons is particularly significant in views (e.g. Hieronymi 2008; 2014) which, as discussed in §2, conceive answerability to the Anscombian question 'Why?' as ground for a new conception of responsibility. These apparent similarities notwithstanding, it is important to note that on these views responsiveness to reasons still indicates a precondition for the establishment of

responsibility rather than its primary object. By contrast, our focus on reason-giving points to a fundamental activity bridging the gap between backward- and forward-looking practical considerations. It also clarifies the interdependency between individual actions, institutional structures, and common practices within those structures that involve multiple individuals. When we give reasons for what we do, we take a stance about the past that commits us to a particular future. In so doing, we buttress, challenge, revise, or disengage with the practices that made what we do intelligible in the first place.

Tainted reasoning is a case in point. It is *constitutive* of systemic corruption, not merely caused by it. Instead of being inflicted on individual officeholders, the rationalisations they engage in are the very nourishment of the perpetration over time of some fundamentally publicly unavowable institutional practices, like clientelism in the provision of such public services as healthcare, nepotism in the allocation of jobs in the public sector, or partisan systems of public procurement for major construction works – to recall some of the examples discussed earlier. When clientelism is redescribed in terms of accessibility, nepotism as a bond of trust and 'low bids' as efficient selection procedures-, the officeholders involved in these redescriptions are tainted reasoners, who are not just struggling with some epistemic burdens their institutions impose on them. Instead, their responsibility for reason-giving is fully engaged.

Being able to assess individual reason-giving as constitutive of systemic corruption is an important contribution of our view as it allows us also to establish individual back- and forward-looking responsibilities with precision. This establishment could help avoid the disturbing extremes of individual scapegoating, on the one hand, and collective witch-hunting, on which some populist

rhetoric frequently trades, on the other.[11] But the view of responsibility we have proposed has also some more general implications for the analysis and normative assessment of individual agents in their capacity as reasoners. We devote the last section of the paper to bring one such an implication to the fore.

5. *Closing remarks: Responsible ignorance*

We wish to bring our argument to a close with a final suggestion concerning tainted reasoning as a helpful model for understanding responsible ignorance more broadly. Ignorance, just like knowledge or skill, can be the outcome of our epistemic endeavours, something we actively pursue. Pointing this out does not commit us to an implicit notion of wilful ignorance as in akratic wrongdoing. There is a great variety of cases, including tainted reasoning and entrenched group-based bias, such as racism (Mills 2007), where someone's own ignorance is neither chosen or engineered in any clear-cut way, nor imposed or endured.

We have already shown how the agency involved in tainted reasoning can be interpreted and assessed. An important feature of this model is its rejection of any sharp distinction between moral ignorance and ignorance of facts (Heal, forthcoming 2019). Looking at the space of reasons, moral and factual considerations are typically intertwined. The patterns of salience picked out by individual reasoners are direct manifestations of their own agency, not something they passively acquiesce to. This is why the model does not come with a rough and ready rule declaring greater, or lesser, ignorance as the more culpable. The shape of ignorance, as it were, is more important.

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[11] For the need to establish both of these dimensions of responsibility in cases of systemic corruption, see Ferretti 2017; see also Thompson 1980.

This acknowledgement does justice to cases, such as tainted reasoning in systemic corruption, where some degree of incorrigibility might be involved. After all, the rationalisation it is based on is, as we argued, *necessarily* less-than-successful. This feature, however, does not turn this kind of rationalisation into an instance of what Mason (2015) has termed 'objective' as opposed to 'ordinary blameworthiness': it is appropriate to ask tainted reasoners for amends and to expect them to stand down from the offices they have degraded. In this sense, we can conclude that individuals retain moral responsibility in cases of systemic corruption and that the establishment of responsibility in this kind of cases can help to track a sui generis kind of epistemically grounded blameworthiness.

Notice, also and finally, that the model we offer is not limited to negative moral address. Tainted reasoning will occasionally apply to actions, for which at least limited credit is due. Importantly, these positive cases might not be appreciated as such by the tainted reasoners themselves. Some of them are likely to interpret their unease with current redescriptions as a regrettable inability to fit in. Unlike attributability accounts, our acknowledgement of potentially creditable ignorance does not rest on a notion of akratic right-doing. Nor does it require a view where practical reasoning is just about motivation to act.

On the contrary, that some positive moral address is consistent with agential ignorance flows directly from our understanding of reason-giving as the primary object of responsibility assessments. Since producing a report rather than spinning a story is what successful reason-giving looks like, there will be plenty of room for registering surprise, confusion or disbelief at one's own actions. And in cases, such as tainted reasoning this might be a salutary thing opening up a breach in an otherwise internally sustained practice to inaugurate possibilities for redemption and redress. This is new territory to explore. In this paper, we offered the conceptual background and the normative equipment for embarking on this exploration.

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