**Approaches to Corruption: A Synthesis of the Scholarship**

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**Abstract**: The scholarly literature on corruption has developed in separate silos, each of which has produced important insights, but each of which also has some crucial limitations. We bring these existing approaches together, and then we confront them against an ethnographic literature on corruption that over the last two decades has become extensive, but has never before been synthesized into an overarching framework. We argue that any corruption reform must meet three challenges. First, corruption persists because people need to engage in corruption to meet their needs. This is the resource challenge. Second, corruption persists because there is uncertainty over what constitutes a gift and what constitutes a bribe, as well as confusion over what is private and what is public. This is the definitional challenge. And third, corruption persists because of pressure to behave in ways that are considered moral according to alternative criteria, such as taking care of one's kin, or standing up to legacies of racism and oppression. This is the alternative moralities challenge. We examine the strengths and weaknesses of existing approaches to corruption in meeting these three challenges.