

Does Power Always Corrupt?

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An anticipated concern about applying the Children's Hospital Public Economy Model (CHPEM)¹ to the general economy² is the fear that at least some (and perhaps many) of the people who would ascend to positions of leadership and power within the CGPEM-inspired public economy will inevitably become corrupt and will exhibit increasingly autocratic, totalitarian behaviors--- "because of human nature" and because "power inevitably corrupts." The fear is that the leadership of the CHPEM-inspired public economy, despite initially being altruistic and well-meaning, could become increasingly corrupt, decreasingly democratic, and could increasingly lead the public in a totalitarian direction--- "because of Human Nature," because "power inevitably corrupts," and because "power transforms people."

Those with the above concerns often cite historical examples of social movements that "may have started out well-meaning, even altruistic, but ended up being totalitarian." Accordingly, in the opinion of these concerned readers, it would be too dangerous to replace capitalism with a public economy model. They would prefer to stick with the known imperfections of capitalism.

This is an important concern. It warrants careful analysis and respectful discussion.

To begin that discussion, bear in mind that the CHPEM is fundamentally based on an understanding of Human Nature that is very different from the understanding of Human Nature promoted by corporate capitalism.³⁻⁵ Corporate capitalism is fundamentally based on a negative and incomplete understanding of Human Nature---an insistence that human beings, by nature, are predominantly selfish, rather hopelessly so, and that any economic model that fails to accept that "reality" is doomed to failure. The CHPEM is based on a positive, more complex and complete understanding of Human Nature that emphasizes the spectrum of human behavioral capacities (with extremely altruistic capacities at one end of the spectrum and extremely selfish capacities at the other end) and how the social milieu can up-regulate or down-regulate the expression of those capacities. As explained below and in companion articles, the CHPEM intentionally populates positions of leadership with people who are inclined to express altruistic capacities, while corporate capitalism populates its leadership positions with people who are inclined and willing to express non-altruistic capacities. (For a detailed discussion of Human Nature, please see the several companion articles on Human Nature.)

A fundamental principle of the CHPEM is that leadership positions should be filled with "altruistic natural leaders."⁶ Altruistic natural leaders are people who have a natural, innate gift of being able to lead in a kind, wise, fair, competent, altruistic, inspiring, and incorruptible way. Altruistic natural leaders are not motivated by a desire for wealth, power, personal gain, fame,

or control over others. They are motivated by moral incentive, rather than monetary incentive.⁷ When one considers the spectrum of Human Nature, altruistic natural leaders exemplify the altruistic end of the behavioral spectrum, regarding both their innate capacities for kind, altruistic behaviors and their ability to generously upregulate the expression of those kind capacities and greatly downregulate expression of their selfish capacities. Such leaders are known (by people in their community) for these innate and practiced traits, and because of these traits they are asked to assume positions of leadership. Such leaders do not seek positions of leadership and power, they accept requests to serve in such positions.

An additional trait that “altruistic natural leaders” possess is an ability to recognize others who do or do not have the characteristics, inclinations, and motives of natural leaders. This ability enables altruistic natural leaders who are in positions of power to make good decisions regarding who they recommend (people with altruistic inclinations) or do not recommend (people with non-altruistic inclinations) for other positions of leadership.

This understanding of Human Nature and this principle of filling positions of leadership with “altruistic natural leaders” minimizes the likelihood that positions of leadership and power in a CHPEM-inspired public economy will become populated with self-serving people who are primarily interested in power, wealth, control over others, personal gain, and/or fame and are easily corrupted and prone to misuse power.

Other fundamental principles of the CHPEM are to encourage critical thinking, expression of different points of view, respectful dissent, free and open dialogue, democratic problem solving, and rigorous peer review, including careful peer review of the altruistic natural leaders. The altruistic natural leaders of the CHPEM are committed to avoiding “group think.” They are committed to preserving democracy and avoiding abuse of power. These commitments minimize the likelihood of autocratic/totalitarian behaviors.

Because of the above principles and because of the above described traits of the altruistic natural leaders of the CHPEM, positions of leadership under the CHPEM are populated by altruistic natural leaders, who are the least likely among us to abuse power and are not likely to be become corrupt or totalitarian.

In contrast, leadership positions under corporate capitalism tend not to be populated by people with the above-described characteristics of altruistic natural leaders. Instead, capitalist corporations tend to assign leadership positions to individuals who are most likely to help the corporation to maximize profits---i.e., people who are highly ambitious, have demonstrated clever business savvy, and are exceptionally enthusiastic and willing to take steps to maximize

corporate profits.⁸ When one considers the spectrum of Human Nature, these corporate leaders tend to exhibit behaviors along the non-altruistic half of the spectrum, regarding their capacities for selfish behaviors, their inclination to upregulate the expression of those selfish capacities, and their inclination to down-regulate expression of their altruistic capacities. [Please see the important qualifying **NOTE** at the end of this article.] Such people (like the capitalist corporations they lead) tend to be driven by a desire for wealth, power, control, personal gain, and/or fame; and they tend not to be motivated primarily by an altruistic desire to serve the community. Compared to altruistic natural leaders, corporate leaders are far more corruptible and far more autocratic. Furthermore, the corporate culture and its reward system tend to transform its leaders to become increasingly less altruistic.⁹ In contrast, the culture of the CHPEM tends to transform its leaders and participants in a more altruistic, less selfish direction.

So, although the statements that “because of Human Nature” “power corrupts” and “power transforms people” certainly apply to the corporate capitalist economic model, these statements are far less applicable to the CHPEM. History has abundantly shown that the corporate capitalist model has, predictably, led to upregulated expression of the least altruistic of our human capacities, particularly by corporate leaders, and has led to ruthless autocratic behaviors, extreme levels of corruption, and many Mean Arrangements of Man¹⁰. In the corporate world there are many examples of leaders who, once they ascend to positions of power, are transformed in a negative direction by that power.

In contrast, the CHPEM’s positive understanding of Human Nature, its emphasis on “altruistic natural leadership,” and the fact that the culture created by the CHPEM tends to transform people in the direction of altruism, results in corruption and autocratic behaviors being far less likely under the CHPEM than under the corporate capitalist model. Stated another way, corruption and totalitarianism are far more likely to occur under the corporate capitalist model than under the CHPEM.

SUMMARY:

It is not surprising that corruption is a huge problem in societies that are governed by the corporate capitalist economic model (CCEM). The CCEM’s beliefs about Human Nature, goals, incentives, and competition, and the CCEM’s criteria for selection of leaders create fertile ground for growing corruption. Corruption, in fact, is a tactic that can serve corporate interests well (until/unless held accountable), while it utterly fails to serve Humanity. As already stated, the CCEM tends to promote people to leadership positions, in part, because they have proven to be corruptible and willing to violate principles to an extent that benefits the corporation.

An often quoted phrase is: ***“power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”*** The intention of this phrase is to warn that the more power a person has, the more likely they are to become corrupt. However, it is important to realize that power does not always corrupt. The extent to which “power corrupts” depends on the extent to which the people in power are unprincipled and easily corruptible in the first place, which, in turn, depends on the prevailing economic model. The CHPEM deliberately and wisely selects natural leaders whose characteristics include “incorruptible” and “highly principled.” Accordingly, power is far less likely to corrupt leaders of the CHPEM. In contrast, the CCEM, unfortunately, selects leaders who are relatively more corruptible and less principled in the first place. It is no surprise, therefore, that “power tends to corrupt” leaders of the CCEM, while power is far less likely to corrupt leaders of the CHPEM.

NOTE:

Although leadership positions within corporate capitalism tend not to be populated by people who exhibit the characteristics of altruistic natural leaders, that does not mean that none of the leaders of corporate capitalism is capable of exhibiting the characteristics of altruistic natural leaders. I say this because some leaders of corporate capitalist enterprises, including CEOs, are upregulating the expression of their capacities for non-altruistic behaviors simply because participation in a capitalist enterprise is their best option (often their only option) to provide well for their families. In other words, they are upregulating these behaviors by default.¹¹ They may, in fact, have great capacity for altruistic behaviors and altruistic natural leadership, and would be perfectly capable of up-regulating those capacities, if they had the option to play a leadership role in an altruistic enterprise, such as a children’s hospital (during the altruistic era). But in the absence of such an opportunity to exercise and demonstrate their considerable altruistic natural leadership potential, they do what they need to do to successfully provide for their families. That is, by default, they make themselves attractive for leadership positions within corporate institutions. For the above reasons, I am confident that many leaders within corporate institutions could be excellent natural leaders within the CHPEM, if that opportunity were provided and they were to seize it.

RELATED ARTICLES:

The footnotes refer to the following companion articles, which are posted (or will soon be posted) on the **Notes From The Social Clinic** website: www.notesfromthesocialclinic.org These articles are listed, by title, in the Table of contents (TOC) of the website.

1. The Children's Hospital Public Economy Model (CHPEM)
2. Application of the CHPEM to the General Economy
3. On Human Nature
4. Upregulation and Downregulation of the Expression of Human Behavioral Capacities.
5. Human Nature---A Graphic Depiction---Sowing the Seeds for Public Economy and Social Beauty
6. Altruistic Natural Leaders (soon to be posted)
7. Moral Incentive vs Monetary Incentive
8. Key Problem: Under Corporate Capitalism, Leadership Positions are Populated With People Who Are Inclined to Express Non-Altruistic Capacities of Our Human Nature
9. Capitalism Transforms Human Behavior
10. Mean Arrangements of Man
11. Capitalist Leaders-By-Default