

A problem larger than its parts

The previous article discussed why corruption represents a breakdown of integrity and wholeness. This article focuses specifically on the concept of wholeness and the search for a systemic definition of corruption.

Since integrity means “wholeness” it is appropriate to link integrity with “holism”. Jan Smuts, the second Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, introduced the concept of holism in his book *Holism and Evolution* (1926) and contrasted it with the idea of a “geheelgreep” (“part of the whole”) in analytical or reductionist argumentation in scientific thinking.

Holism also relates to “wholeness”, as Hornby (2005) defines “holistic” as follows: “considering a whole thing or being to be more than a collection of parts”, and in relation to medicine: “treating the whole person rather than just the symptoms”. This definition corresponds with the definition in the *Verklarende Handwoordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal* (HAT), which emphasises that holism is a philosophical approach based on the principle that the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

This definition emphasises the inherent characteristic of holism, namely that the whole is of greater significance and importance than the sum total of the individual independent parts. This seems to be a most appropriate insight



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for the purposes of understanding holism and corruption as a holistic or systemic concept.

Impairment of virtue

The most appropriate systemic definition of corruption defines corruption as “an impairment of integrity, virtue or moral principle; depravity, decay, and/or an inducement to wrong by improper or unlawful means, a departure from the original or from what is pure or correct, and/or an agency or influence that corrupts” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). A scholar may argue “what is pure or correct”, but the essence of the definition is clear.

• References

- Hornby, A.S. (2005). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. International Student's Edition.*
 Merriam-Webster Dictionary. (2010). *Corruption.*
 Odendal, F.F. (1985). *HAT. Verklarende Handwoordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal.*
 Smuts, J.G. (1926 [1967]). *Holism and Evolution.*