

Multinational Corporations, Global Justice and Corporate Responsibility: A Question of Purpose

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Abstract: Do multinational corporations (MNCs) have a responsibility to address unjust conditions – not simply by refraining from contributing to injustice, but also by actively working to bring about a just state of affairs? This paper examines whether this question can be meaningfully addressed without having to engage two contentious debates in contemporary scholarship: the debate about the moral agency of corporations and the debate about the purpose of the for-profit corporation. Finding it difficult to avoid the second debate, the paper examines the extent to which prevailing accounts of corporate purpose (e.g., shareholder primacy, stakeholder theory, corporate citizenship) support attributing responsibilities of justice to MNCs. The paper concludes that a more promising account is one that frames the purpose of the for-profit corporation in terms of its function in allowing members of society to meet their wants and needs by coordinating labor and capital in the production of goods and services.

Keywords: Multinational corporations, Global justice, Corporate purpose, Corporate responsibility.