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Corporate Responsibility: Purpose, Institutions, and Global Justice

The demands of global justice are normally understood to fall upon states and their citizens. Increasingly, there is growing interest in exploring what, if anything, justice demands of another class of actors in the global arena: multinational enterprises (MNEs). These accounts range from those that focus on human rights, specifically those that ground duties of forbearance on the part of MNEs and their managers, to those that assign MNEs positive duties to remedy global injustices. For the most part, these accounts proceed without specifying any fundamental purpose to MNEs or for-profit corporations, more generally. This is striking given that debate about corporate responsibility in other areas of the business ethics literature often proceeds from the question of what is the purpose of the for-profit corporation. In this light, this talk aims to situate the question of corporate purpose within debates about corporate responsibility and global justice. The talk examines the extent to which a focus on global justice can shed light on the purpose of the for-profit corporation and what is gained for debates about corporations and global justice in developing such an account.