

I first heard about corporations in my environmental science class. For part of a project, I had to trace where a 7-Eleven Go-Go Taquito® came from. This led me to learning about corporations and the way they dominate industries (specifically the food industry in this case). Before, I had never really sought knowledge on corporations or the way they worked. My knowledge was limited; I knew a few classic names, like JP Morgan, due to my United States History class. I think this is indicative of the idea held by not just me, but many people around the US. When I thought about it, corporations seemed to be some sort of almighty power that remained unknown to me. But, as I began my research, I was curious as to why people were complaining or had problems with corporations. So, I listened, and I understood. I too became angry at the great, looming “thing” that was a corporation. I was upset by their decisions, their agenda, and was quick to assume that the notion of a corporation as a whole was evil and shared the same mindset, all tapped into to one brain that controlled everything. After learning about one, and reading similar things about others, I assumed this about all. I became more curious about what went on behind those mysterious doors. The idea of a corporation is hard to imagine as something that isn’t just one big brain, but a system of living, breathing people. My goal was then to deliver, well, to understand, an objective view on corporations. So, based on the feelings I harnessed towards what I had learned from that project, my original question was about the people that make up these corporations. How could they think like this? How could they act so selfishly, with no moral empathy? Therefore, what makes us human?

Exploring the questions of what makes people human, I realized none of my original findings were of total relevance anymore. Fortunately, it brought me to certain points, but the information from the initial research of this question isn’t so vital. Indeed, I quested for what defines us as human beings, and ended up reading about power, animal attributes, survival ideas, our ability to process things symbolically, and other very valid answers. But, the only thing that seemed to best relate was the idea of compassion. Our ability to sympathize and empathize creates a shared sense of compassion amongst our species. This compassion that we see in one another is something we see as profound and distinctly human.

Interestingly enough, this is something that immediately came to my attention when thinking about corporations. I started like this because I thought about the people behind the corporations, the people that are physically making it all happen. Then, a significant topic came to my attention: Corporations are viewed as individual people by the law. Corporations fought for the right to be viewed as individuals under law, therefore granting them some of the same rights as individuals, such as the rights of the first few amendments and the fourteenth amendment (it is recognized that corporations are not physically living people apart from those who work for it, so not all rights are granted to them). Though this wish isn’t wrong, as corporations are not some mysterious large group of power, it is a tactic employed for the purpose of avoiding various problems. First off, the rights of the fourteenth amendment give them some power over the government in the way that they, as a person, cannot be denied “to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws”. Also, treated as an individual, as much money can be put into the company without any limit, just as an individual would have no limit when attempting to gain money for support. Some are wealthier than others, but there still isn’t a limit with the amount of money made. A corporation, though, has no death, so with all the wealth, the corporation can continue on. Corporations, older than most, have a gained power. Because they are older, such as the banking corporation JP Morgan Chase & Co., they have established themselves and harnessed power for longer. A corporation can outlast individuals as employee from employee comes in and out, inevitably leaving it to be an

everlasting and growing superpower. Secondly, the grant of corporate personhood gets a company in less trouble when viewed as an individual, also increasing its power and influence. Although corporations act as an entity, this grant of personhood allows for the CEO's to avoid trouble due to the fact that the corporation, treated as one single person, takes most of the blame for a certain action. This idea of personhood seems to take on separate meanings, allowing for a lot more advancement without bother. From then on, my immediate response was a lot of questioning on their lack of compassion for the common people. Corporations are people, but where was there humanity? How could they be granted the rights of a morally conscience person by law?

As a result of them acting unfairly, corporations, evidently holding a crafty mindset, are finding that opposition and mistrust are a rising reaction of the common people as access to information is easier in the modern age. Many corporations have been found guilty of many different things, immoral things, due to the need to maximize profit, and these mistakes are made public. For example, agricultural corporations like Monsanto create genetically modified organisms, food proved to be harmful to human health, for the sake of convenience. Financial corporations, a.k.a. banks, have been found guilty of swindling for better stock percentages. Hence, when reminded of the fact that corporations are comprised of people with beating hearts and active brains, you'd expect them to have some sort of empathy, nevertheless moral empathy, or at least I did.

Considering these questions, I could not help but remember other ideas I had heard about on man's true nature and natural attitude. When I thought about the idea of morals and compassion as the reflections of our humanity, what makes us the species we are, I had to consider the many philosophical explorations on the idea of human nature. As explored by many philosophers and authors, there is an idea that man is naturally an uncivil, barbaric species that lacks the care for others without rules set by authority. For example, the novel *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding explores the idea of natural behavior of man when social constructs and rules are taken away from man's environment. Set with these circumstances, as time goes on in the novel, the characters regress, forming a more selfish, animalistic society based on the survival of the fittest. Similarly, Thomas Hobbes, a philosophe, explored the idea of acting selfishly when authority is absent. This brings us to the idea of man without government rule being naturally selfish. This idea is also a part of ethical egoism, in which people pursue their own needs, and that process therefore determines their own personal moral code as they act based on personal interest. When all these thoughts are put into consideration, it is hard to determine whether morals are such an authentic human feature. Corporations may appear to lack a moral compass, but maybe their personhood is more authentic and or natural than expected.

Taking a look at religion, scripture such as the Torah in Judaism sets important values and rules to live by in order to keep order among people. These holy texts that are believed to be greater than ones self instill morals through warning and fear of a divine figure. These texts, especially the Torah (as it is the script I am most familiar with), stress communal values and the importance of acts of compassion/doing the greatest good. It is possible to see how the idea of religion is put in place to suppress human kind's naturally selfish, more barbaric manner. And, as morals were put in place back then, we have evolved to act upon them. Corporations today are powerful groups that regulate and support the populace. At the same time, they are fulfilling their own goal of gained profit and power. In the end, these operations may actually give us a clearer look at the way morals can and cannot be defined, and that morals can and can't be considered a part of humanity. So, then, this questions whether corporations are actually so terrible, even

when being viewed as a person. They may possibly reflect a more true, undeniably indefinite idea of humanity back at us.

The thing I realized, and that I feel all must comprehend before attacking corporations, is that corporations' main motive has always been about maximizing profit. Their whole reason for existing is for fulfilling a certain purpose, more specifically, maintaining revenue. Since the beginning of the formation of corporations in America, they were concerned with performing a particular function. Specifically in older times, it was "to serve the public good" (The Corporation). Yes, corporations are making food, helping people, and creating products for the people, and while that is their activity, the goal now is to create profit. We are a much more established and built up America then we were then. So, now, they advertise, substitute, rearrange, add, quicken, and build for the purpose of making sure their product is consumed, leading to the ultimate goal, again I reiterate, profit.

The people running the whole ordeal may indeed be good people who are concerned for others. And, to get in the position they are in, one must remember that they had to make sacrifices to be able to work and support who ever they may be supporting. Sacrifices and hard decisions come very frequently, but they are working there for a reason: to be a part of fulfilling the goal of this large business. Although, this isn't an attempt to justify all decisions the corporations, but it is just to understand the difference between the corporation and the people behind it. Now, when you think about it, they act unlike individual people as the decisions made are not in their own interests or aligned with their own personal beliefs. It is in their contract to not jeopardize business if that means they change something about production, despite if its better for the people in the end. They must act in the corporation's best interest. As you see, this ruling of these corporations being treated as individuals is therefore one that twists and ties. It doesn't seem to make sense as corporations cannot act as people, but yet they are granted the same rights as one. In court rulings, morals, psychology, and other human characteristics are considered. With a corporation, it is almost impossible to fathom that they could be ruled the same way. Corporations don't have these kinds of characteristics to consider. Even though people are working and making decisions, these decisions are pretty much paved for them as they aren't acting in not their own, but the company's interest. They are simply working as a part of a large entity. But I am not the first one to notice. Cases have been taken to court in which corporations are questioned on their right to corporate personhood, such as the 1886 case Santa Clara County versus Southern Pacific Railroad. "What makes this okay," I thought? What makes corporate America more of individuals rather than superpowers, especially since they were given the right to be viewed as such under law?

These corporations are, as discussed, dominating and elite persons that exert control. This immense power, which they seek to maximize through various connections and careful purchases, creates a large influence in American society. When it comes to consumerist America, there are approximately 10 large corporations that own the majority of common brands. They own everything from candy bars to body wash. For example, the powerhouse known as Nestle holds Gerber, Stouffer's, and Ralph Lauren Parfum all under its belt. The same company that owns Duracell batteries also owns CoverGirl cosmetics (Proctor & Gamble). It is apparent that owning so many brands only elevates control and wealth, and this ownership of such common products has a control over us citizens.

It's interesting to imagine that a group of people has such large control over production, ingredients, image, etc. When it comes to food, for instance, many convenient, cheap, and consumer friendly foods are modified for freshness or injected with artificial additives. Though a

good product to market and easy to have transported, a perk for corporations, it may be terrible for human health. Now this doesn't apply to all corporate decisions, but it goes to show how little control we have over many common products. Meanwhile, this great control allows for market manipulation. They are able to manipulate people into buying certain products through various methods. This includes offering great deals, sponsors, and forms of advertising to spread the product. Millions are spent on the aim of a good reputation for a product, but in the end, the revenue amounts to even more.

It is discernible that corporations have become even more pervasive as they attempt to regulate society in more than just the marketplace. They have been able created close ties to members of the inner circle in politics. By backing certain people with certain beliefs, they can influence candidates, elections, and ultimately decisions. For example, if a corporation favors a certain candidate in election, they have the capacity to back that candidate with a great amount of money in order to allow that candidate the capability to buy more resources that could help win the election. An example in today's society: the Bilderberg group. This group of 100+ of the world's most influential individuals is connected to plenty of large companies and charities. The group meets for an annual conference to address global topics, and many of the corporations add to that power or show their support in this way, increasing their influence.

A big environmental impact is created and seemingly under-acknowledged by these corporations as well. On a mild level, the creation of products in factories creates intense waste. Specifically, industrial agricultural corporations have been found guilty of mistreatment of animals, hurting fertile soil, killing other plants, and releasing large amounts of greenhouse gases into the air. While this was one of the initial issues that lead me to this topic in the first place, I now understand that it is all a part of generating profit.

As these corporations house and nurture tremendous influence, there is also much potential for good. Many have worked on spreading this influence through social programs and philanthropic programs. Forbes magazine publishes how much certain large businesses give back to philanthropic causes, such as how General Mills contributed approximately \$88.7 million to charity in 2011. The question is whether these charitable contributions are sincere or not. They could easily be giving up this money, a small percentage of their profits, for the sake of having the ability to truthfully some profit was donated. Good reputations are important when wanting to create trust with customers and with data sources in general. These philanthropic programs are created by individuals, and they may very well be giving back with pure intentions of donating to a good cause who is not as lucrative. That would, in turn, be a display of moral sympathy. But, based on past history and evidence, while these corporations are led by individuals, their aim (aside from these programs) is to generate profit, and personal morals must be set aside. Many argue that the aim is purely for image. No one, in the end, can truly decide what is the correct answer to this question and what is not.

In the grand scheme of things, I do not think corporations should be treated as people. They do not nearly deserve the rights as people. They are composed of people, but since the birth of corporations it is in their instruction to act UNLIKE a regular human being, that of one lacking a moral conscience and only working for profit, then they should not be considered something close to that of a person like you or me. This grant of personhood, in my opinion, needs to be looked over. But, what I will say is that half of the criticism of corporations is legitimate. The other half is not. Many attacks on corporations connect back to the people behind the operation. But it is their job, especially if they want to secure their position, to act in the

company's best interest. Yes, the company's interest may seem immoral, but that's the price they must pay for success. I'm not justifying this, but it's something that needs to be understood.

There is no solution quite yet. Corporations have so much power, and unfortunately, we really cannot combat such a great force. History has shown the effect their power has, such as the way they come out many court cases relatively successful. The most basic example: they were granted personhood. They have already established themselves as the greater power. They have more money, more political reach, and these kinds of footholds are very difficult to compete with. I think then, that corporations need to be restructured to fulfill both their needs and the rest of the world's needs, too. They need to be more socially responsible, and they have the power to do so. We are a different, highly intelligent, more modern world, and I think part of having so much power is to act responsibly.

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