An Existing Ecologically Successful Genus of Collectively Intelligent Artificial Creatures

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The Genus of Corporate Entities

• Different species of corporate entities have different goals and values.
  – For-profit corporations
  – Not-for-profit corporations
  – Unions
  – Churches
  – Governments
  – . . . etc.

• *For-profit corporations* have clear and explicit goals: *maximize shareholder value.*
Is a corporate entity an agent?

- Yes. A corporate entity can
  - Own property,
  - Sign contracts,
  - Employ people,
  - Sue and be sued,
  - Be charged, tried, and punished for crimes.

- They participate as members of our society.
Is a corporate entity intelligent?

• Yes.
  – It can obtain *information* about its environment.
  – It has *goals*.
  – It can make *plans* to achieve its goals.
  – It can take *action* to carry out those plans.

• According to Russell & Norvig’s leading AI text, this makes it an *intelligent agent*.
  – It is probably not *conscious*, in any human sense.
Is a corporate entity artificial?

• Yes.
  – A corporate entity is created by the state, through a particular kind of legal agreement.

• A corporate entity is thus
  – an *artificially intelligent agent* -- an AI --
  – participating as a member of our society.
“Corporations are people, my friend!”

- **No.** Corporations are **made of** people.
  - Somewhat as biological agents are made of organs, tissues, and cells.

- **A corporation is not** a person
  - in the common understanding of “person”.
  - Individual human beings are persons.
  - The specialized term “legal person” is a source of confusion.
Is a corporate entity a distinct agent from the people who make it up?

• **Yes.** People are essential, but replaceable, parts of corporate entities.

  – Just ask Steve Jobs!
    • In 1976, Steve Jobs and others founded Apple.
    • In 1985, Apple Computer replaced him.
      – This turned out to be a mistake for Apple, and they brought him back in 1997.
    • In 2011, he died, and has again been replaced.
  
  – Apple Computer continues.
Is the **intelligence** of a corporate entity distinct from the intelligence of the humans in it?

- Only partly.
  - Corporations need human intelligence, as a component (at least for now).
  - Corporate problem-solving is implemented in human cognition (via business processes).
  - Corporate culture constrains the way individual humans participate in corporate decisions.
Do corporate entities have advantages over human beings?

- Yes.
  - Unbounded lifespan
  - Ability to accumulate unbounded wealth
    - With wealth comes political power.
  - Fewer legal limits on activities
    - Unlimited political contributions
    - Lenient punishment for serious crimes
  - Less definite identity and individuality
    - Creating a new corporation is quick and easy.
    - Creating a new adult human is slow, hard work.
Conclusions I

• Corporate entities are intelligent agents.

• Corporate entities participate as members of our society.

• Corporate entities own and control substantial wealth and power.
Corporate Members of our Society

- You can trust me; I'm a corporation.
- And it's not just my honest face.
- When my friends and I secretly invest millions on American elections...
- That's millions with a "b."
- We're doing it for you, too.
- Because, as "persons," we want exactly what you want...
- ...profit above all!
- ...I'd lose a ton of sleep over it.
- Right? And if, by chance, I ever did anything to hurt you...
- If I did sleep.
- Trust me.
The Next Question

• Since corporate AIs are existing, successful members of our society,

• How can we best get along?
How do people get along as members of society?

• Human society has had many thousands of years to evolve better ways to get along.
  – “Might makes right.”
  – “An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth.”
  – “Thou shalt not kill, steal, . . . “
  – “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”
  – “Love thy neighbor as thyself.”

• Each constraint has brought improvements in overall security and prosperity.
How do *people* get along as members of society?

- Some of these principles are implemented as *laws*, with requirements and punishments.
- Others are *moral responsibilities*:
  - Ways that people *should* behave.
  - Enforced by social pressure, not the law.
    - cf. Mr. Scrooge, in Dickens’ *Christmas Carol*.
    - Parents teach children how they should behave.
- When *most* people meet their moral responsibilities, *everyone* is better off.
The Social Contract

• Individuals give up parts of their freedom, in return for security and prosperity.
  – By giving up your freedom to drive on the “wrong” side of the street, transportation becomes far safer and more efficient.
  – By giving up your freedom to take vengeance for wrongs done to you, the *rule of law* improves everyone’s security and prosperity.

• The foundation of the U.S. Constitution
How should *corporate entities* behave as members of society?

• As members of society, both people and corporate entities have responsibilities, as well as rights.
  – Legal responsibilities: Don’t break the law.
  – Moral responsibilities: Contribute to the successful functioning of society.
  • “*Love thy neighbor as thyself.*”
  • “*Ask not what your country can do for you --- ask what you can do for your country.*”
Isn’t the *sole* responsibility of a for-profit corporation to *increase shareholder value*?

- **No**, although that is commonly believed.
  - Court decisions on this topic aim to protect *shareholders* against corporate managers and even founders.

- **Responsibility to other stakeholders**
  - employees, customers, suppliers, community, …

- **is legal**, but must be justified by long-term benefit to shareholders.
The Social Contract for Corporate Entities

• Long-term benefits to shareholders:
  – Ensuring the viability of society
    • Avoiding social collapse
  – Ensuring the viability of the environment
    • Avoiding environmental collapse
  – Avoiding tragedies of the commons
    • rather than exploiting them.
  – Ensuring equitable treatment of stakeholders
    • Avoiding social collapse

• Taking responsibility, rather than freeloding
Won’t Evolution (or the Marketplace) Sort All This Out?

• Yes, but only in the very long run.
  – Evolution has very high cost in time and blood,
  – and significant risk of collapse, or even extinction.

• Our challenge is:
  – to use intelligent design, and long-term interests,
    • rather than short-term interests,
  – to create a social contract for us and our AIs.
Conclusions II

• The AIs we have created – corporate entities – have major impact on our society.
  – They now have vast wealth and power.
  – They are relatively immature.

• The social contract must be updated, so corporate entities share responsibility for maintaining society, rather than freeloding.
  – Do we know how to do this? Not yet.
  – But we had better work on this question.