Corporate Selves: Personhood, Agency, and Ethics in Controversial Technoscientific Work

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Abstract

When we experience the harms engendered by technoscientific corporations, it is common practice to attribute blame to both the corporation as a whole as well as to the particular individuals in its employ. The same can be said for our praise of acts of responsibility. For example, we may commend "Facebook" for using renewable energy to power its data centers or criticize "Facebook" for destabilizing democratic processes, but we also celebrate Frances Haugen blowing the whistle on the company's blatant disregard for the wellbeing of its most vulnerable users. In this webinar, Professor Jessica Smith explains how these practices cast both complex corporate entities and employees in the mold of Western individualism, obscuring the fundamentally relational nature of the personhood experienced by corporate actors: they are not always authors of their own actions and frequently have to act through others. A key, but overlooked, dimension of engineers' practices of accountability is their everyday efforts to create collectivities that they can live with – and through. Dr. Smith is joined by Dr. Gwen Ottinger, Associate Professor at Drexel University, in the Department of Politics and the Center for Science, Technology, and Society. The webinar is hosted by Dr. Caitlin Wylie, Assistant

Professor of Science, Technology, and Society at UVA's School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. Funded by the Program in Science, Technology, and Society at UVA.

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