
CALL FOR PAPERS

A Virtual Workshop on Vulnerability Theory, the Employment Relationship, and the State March 12-13, 2021

Vulnerability theory identifies the human condition as one of universal and constant vulnerability. That vulnerability is managed and mediated through the creation of social institutions and relationships. As part of the state mechanism for distributing social goods and ensuring society's welfare, those institutions ultimately can and should be judged by how responsive they are to human vulnerability.

This workshop seeks to look at the status of workers in a corporate system, considering how corporations have changed from grudgingly addressing human vulnerability within a capitalist scheme of wage labor, to increasing rejection of the very idea that human vulnerability should be a matter of corporate concern.

In the middle of the twentieth century, corporate America oversaw a "family wage system" that promised secure employment with benefits to a large swath of white men. Within this patriarchal system, the "organization man" saw his future as tied to the success of his company, while corporate leaders saw the health of their organizations linked to the fate of the country. Provisions for old age, family dependents, illness, and injury were part of a comprehensive system that united corporate and workers' interests, while also recognizing the significance of societal institutions, such as the family. By contrast, today, the characterization of the corporation as solely an instrument to advance private ends permits corporate leaders to ignore workers' increased insecurity, often at the expense of other stakeholders and even the corporation itself. The result creates artificially competitive cultures that increase societal inequality and instability, reduce diversity, and undermine efforts to make employment more responsive to individual worker's, as well as societal needs.

We intend this workshop to cover an array of topics that center on the legal and ideological or conceptual "evolution" of the corporation in relation to its legitimizing societal role in responding to human vulnerability. We welcome the participation of scholars working in law and related disciplines, including economics, community development, history, political science, sociology, and social psychology.

Issues for Discussion May Include:

- Should social goods like health insurance and old age provisions be supplied through corporate or employment structures in the United States? If so, what is then the responsibility of the state for delivery of those goods?
- How should the state balance the vulnerability of the corporation given its social role and the vulnerability of the individuals relying on the corporation for essential goods and services?
- Can the interests and concerns of care workers – the educators, childcare workers, and health care workers – upon whom corporations (and society) ultimately depend be incorporated within the formal legal corporate structure? How or why not?
- How might the state re-envision and enhance the corporate role in addressing critical needs such as health insurance and our collective need for care more broadly?

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Issues for Discussion (continued):

- How should the transformation of employment affect our understanding of the manner in which the state addresses vulnerability through market institutions and relationships?
- How does the increasing emphasis on competition within the corporation change the societal environment for addressing vulnerability? What is the appropriate state response to these changes?
- How is the individualism that underlies both human rights and neoliberalism part of the problem with this new system? What role should other theories of human motivation play?
- Is it possible for the state to address workers' vulnerability within existing corporate governance structures?
- Are there corporate governance systems in other nations that could be modified and adopted in the United States that address the vulnerability of corporate workers?
- What are the problems and potential promises of corporate legal personhood and the anthropomorphism of corporations?
- How should public and private law mediate the relationship between corporations and the communities in which they are located?
- Have social enterprise structures (such as benefit corporations) appropriately responded to workers' needs, or have these new legal forms only further entrenched the conventional business corporation by giving it full license to pursue profit at any human cost?

Vulnerability and Resilience Background

Reading at:

<http://web.gs.emory.edu/vulnerability/>

Submissions Procedure:

Email a proposal of several paragraphs as a Word or PDF document by **Friday, January 15, 2021** to Mangala Kanayson (mkanays@emory.edu).

Decisions will be made by **Wednesday, January 20, 2021** and working paper drafts will be due **Friday, February 19, 2021** so they can be duplicated and distributed prior to the Workshop.

Workshop Details:

The Workshop begins via Zoom on **Friday, March 12, 2021** from 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. EST.
Panels continue **Saturday, March 13, 2021** from 10:50 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. EST.

This workshop will be convened by:

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