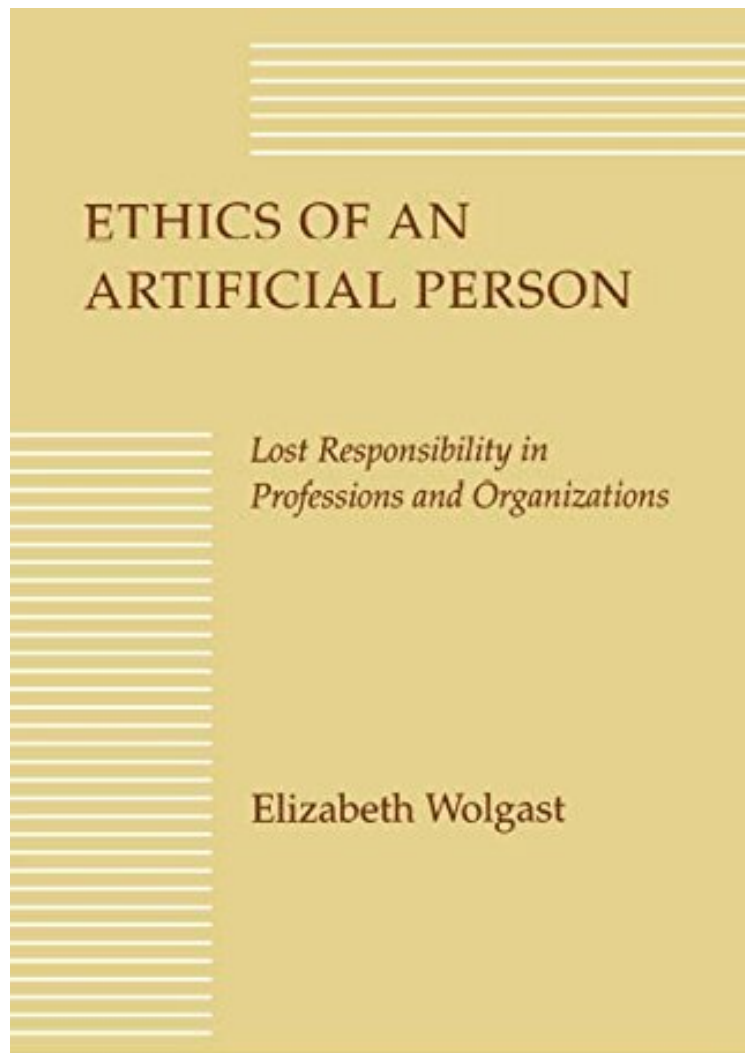


(Download pdf) Ethics of an Artificial Person: Lost Responsibility in Professions and Organizations  
(Stanford Series in Philosophy)

## **Ethics of an Artificial Person: Lost Responsibility in Professions and Organizations (Stanford Series in Philosophy)**

*Elizabeth H. Wolgast*

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**Elizabeth H. Wolgast : Ethics of an Artificial Person: Lost Responsibility in Professions and Organizations (Stanford Series in Philosophy)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ethics of an Artificial Person: Lost Responsibility in Professions and Organizations (Stanford Series in

Philosophy):

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A Deconstruction of Corporate Responsibility By Bob Swain This book takes on the problems of taking on corporations. The writer has a background in feminist theory, and writes with some depth about the problems of suing a company for such crimes as putting forth an exploding Pinto, or a Dalcron Shield. In the hydra-headed monster of the contemporary corporate entity, there is nobody who claims responsibility, finally. A company can knowingly commit murder, and there is no one to be put in prison, or to fry in a chair. A company pays a monetary penalty, for which it can budget. Wolgast carefully explains that we need a new language to understand corporate responsibility, and in her brief last chapter outlines what she thinks this language should be. In short, we have always used a single-subject model to discuss responsibility. What happens, however, when an army general commands troops over a radio to take a bridge within fifteen minutes, and then signs out, and the general didn't know that there were children playing on the bridge? Wolgast argues for a return of the role of personal responsibility for everyone -- within corporations, within every institution. If an institution commits a crime, or if one's department within it commits a crime, each member of the unit is equally responsible. Similarly, she argues that lawyers, and agents, are responsible for any crimes that they commit, or knowingly pass over, even if the result is to free their client. By this standard, Alan Dershowitz, in using his clever abilities to free people who he knows are criminals, is morally culpable. It's an arresting argument, idealistic and yet powerfully and simply put together. My only problem was that she didn't take on board many of the new theories of agency, and identity, which have been developed under the name of postmodernism. She resorts to a single subject theory which works, but leaves me wondering what she would do with a schizophrenic, or with the argument that almost everybody is schizophrenic. Wolgast claimed to be working out a new language for responsibility, but ultimately she argues for a return to the old model of a single subject left alone with her conscience. The book raises the big question of responsibility -- to whom, or what, are we responsible? Wolgast claims to the community -- but a community has many constituents -- family, friends, colleagues, rivals, etc. and this is divided by race, gender, class, school ties, etc. Can we simultaneously and always be responsible to all of these? The argument strains my belief in the philanthropy of humanity. How much good can one do or should one do in a dog eat dog world, if one does not want to be eaten? If everyone acts as Wolgast suggests, the answer would be plenty. I think the book does provide language and thinking for Greenpeace activists and others who want to take on corporations, but have a hard time with the hydra-headed structure. This book offers an understanding of corporate responsibility, and allows us to return to a single-subject model of it. Used in courts to argue that each member of a committee, or a department, or an organization, is responsible for the output of any crime by the organization, I think we would see some companies cleaning up their acts very quickly, and a lot less likelihood that young people would be willing to go to work for known corporate offenders.-- Kirby Olson 9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Ethical lapses? Addresses the biggest, least understood ones By A Customer Elizabeth Wolgast has written a short book on ethics that reads like a novel. It is a real eye-opener. It also helps the reader better understand mechanisms allowing "artificial persons" (organizations) to have rights without attendant responsibilities. It sheds much light on how the organization can ignore the rights of the individual person in disastrous ways and not bat an eye. This book is guaranteed to help you better understand many of the things that have gone awry in a world that is increasingly organizational. It is obviously important to consider Wolgast's critique as it applies to business, but as someone in a clinical profession dedicated to helping others, I now better understand both how and why "artificial persons" like managed care organizations function in the ways that they do. This book should be required reading for ethics courses in professions such as health care, the helping professions, and education.

Artificial persons, as conceived by Hobbes, speak and act in the name of others, so that their actions become the actions of someone else, such as the lawyer who represents and acts for his or her client. In modern institutions we can find many other examples: among them politicians, brokers, real estate agents, bureaucrats, corporate executives, and military personnel. This book focuses on the moral issue of how we can and should locate responsibility for the actions of artificial persons. The author argues that conceiving this question in terms of roles, which may have their own moralities, blocks the kind of moral criticism we want to make, for there is a deep and intractable dissonance between role moralities and moral theory. This dissonance shows that we cannot deal with the moral issues piecemeal, profession by profession, as a role interpretation encourages us to do. Reverting to Hobbes's abstract idea of artificial persons vitiates the compartmentalization of problems. We can freely cross disciplinary boundaries, as well as the line between theory and practice, and allow practices to cast their light back on the theory and show us its deficiencies. In short, this approach reorients some much-discussed issues of professional, business, and military ethics and reveals them as variations on one deeply rooted theme. The author does not treat current institutions as final and unalterable. If these arrangements frustrate moral evaluation, she finds that an argument for change. To make intelligent changes, however, we need a clear view of the reasoning that makes them seem natural and inevitable. That is what this book attempts to do. In the process, the author also re-examines the concept of 'person'. Not all cultures put so much stress on the idea as Western - and particularly American - cultures do. If we wish to keep this emphasis, then here is another

argument for change. If we want to keep our institutions as they are, then this is the price; it is a fairly clear choice.