



Responsible Entrepreneurship for Environmental Sustainability and Human Wellbeing: A Missiological Perspective

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Abstract: Entrepreneurship is a lucrative occupation that offers its pursuers promises of wealth. However, as much as entrepreneurship is rewarding, it can bear undesirable consequences if it is not guided by a sense of responsibility to consider seriously sustainability of the earth and flourishing of all humanity. Surely, entrepreneurship which only focuses on profit optimization can contribute to environmental pollution and income and wealth disparity. The earth is experiencing rising temperatures partly due to some entrepreneurial activities as individuals and nations seek to create wealth. Furthermore, the world is experiencing increased human suffering partly due to exploitation by business owners who prioritize personal gain at the expense of their employees. This paper critically reviews relevant literature to highlight the dark side of entrepreneurship and to appeal for responsibility among entrepreneurs based off missiological perspective on the purpose of humans on earth. The paper points to missiology as a potential academic field that can encourage a sense of responsibility in entrepreneurial endeavors to enrich scholarship. The main contribution of this paper is that a missiological understanding of the origins and the purpose for which humans exist on earth could help to foster responsible entrepreneurship that could promote environmental sustainability and flourishing of all humanity. By doing so, this paper also appeals to missiologists to engage entrepreneurship seriously in their scholarly work.

Keywords: Degradation, Entrepreneurship, Homo Economicus, Inequality, Missiology, Pollution, Responsibility

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is one of the unique endowments that distinguish humans from other creatures. Indeed, the ability to innovate has improved lives of humans in various ways including transportation, communication, medication, agriculture, and accommodation. While all these contributions are positive, entrepreneurship without a sense of responsibility can bear undesirable consequences such as environmental pollution, human degradation, and income and wealth inequality. It is for this reason that this paper is written to offer important missiological insights that could encourage responsible entrepreneurship. This paper's main contribution is that a missiological understanding of the origins and the purpose of humans on earth can help to foster responsible entrepreneurship.

To address the agenda of this paper, the presentation sets off with a synoptic background to entrepreneurship to

provide context to the discussion. Then, the paper critically reviews the literature to understand how contemporary scholars define entrepreneurship. Here, the paper interacts with several important voices in the field to highlight their shared perspective which is widespread among policy makers, researchers, and entrepreneurs. Next is a section which discusses the benefits followed by another section that points out some of the challenges associated with entrepreneurship. The succeeding section carefully reflects on missiology as a potential academic field that can enrich entrepreneurship. Finally, the paper closes with a conclusion that stresses its main contribution.

2. Synoptic Background to Entrepreneurship

In terms of etymology, the word entrepreneur is derived

from *entreprendre*, a French word compounded by two Latin words, *entre* and *prendre*, meaning “between” and “to take” respectively [18]. Put together, *entreprendre* means “to undertake” a project [18, 47]. The word first appeared in the French language as early as the twelfth century [14, 5]. While some authors start with Joseph Schumpeter in their introductory remarks to entrepreneurship [16, 3, 29], it is Richard Cantillon who deserves credit for coinage and first use of the term in scholarly work circa 1700s [4, 7, 14, 36]. Cantillon viewed an entrepreneur as a rational decision maker who assumed risks in pursuing opportunities [4, 8]. Later, Say expanded the term to include aspects of management such as organizing, executing, and supervising activities intended for profit gains [14, 36]. That is how entrepreneurship was conceptualized as a profit-oriented endeavor.

In the nineteenth century, Joseph A. Schumpeter added unique innovations to expand the definition of entrepreneurship further. According to Schumpeter (1949), unique innovations replace old and outdated products, services, and ideas with better ones – a process which he described as creative destruction [36]. He was the first to offer a compelling concatenation between entrepreneurship and economics, which earned entrepreneurship currency as an academic field [8]. Karol Śledzik [36] has observed that Schumpeter’s (1949) theory of business cycles and creative destruction highlights innovation as an integral factor in entrepreneurship which lifts the economy to a more advanced level of growth. According to Schumpeter, anyone interested in pursuing profits must innovate [36]. This theory offers a more compelling explanation about innovative entrepreneurship as the impetus for the rise of modern capitalism. Thus, entrepreneurship is originally a French term derived from Latin and was defined by pioneer scholars as a risk undertaking of opportunities in the pursuit of profit gains, a definition that has prevailed to this day as demonstrated in the next section.

3. Contemporary Definition of Entrepreneurship

Building on the perspectives of the pioneer scholars like Cantillon, Say, and Schumpeter whose definitions of entrepreneurship were threaded by interest in profit gains, contemporary scholars have accentuated the same understanding. For instance, Carland et al. [4] define an entrepreneur as an individual who starts a business to make profit to advance personal goals. According to Carland et al. [4], attributes of an entrepreneur include innovativeness and strategic management skill. This view is seamlessly connected to the pioneer scholars as it implies that entrepreneurship refers to innovativeness aimed at making profits for personal interests. This connection is conspicuous where Carland et al. [4] defines an entrepreneurial venture as one that befits the Schumpeterian perspective. Norman M. Scarborough and Jeffrey R. Cornwall [32] and Sorayah Nasip and Rini Suryati Sulong [24] agree with Carland et al. [4].

While admitting the complexity of entrepreneurship, they agree that entrepreneurship is primarily for profit [4, 24]. Thomas R. Eisenmann [49] defines entrepreneurship as the pursuit of opportunity beyond one’s resources. Similarly, Carlsson et al [5] view entrepreneurship as an economic function that is carried out to create new opportunities and to introduce new ideas into the market. Note that by opportunity, these authors imply a chance to make profits. Thus, any chance to make profit is considered as an opportunity.

Perhaps the most widely used frame comes from Sankaran Venkataraman [44] who underscores exploitation of opportunity as the defining feature of entrepreneurship. He suggests that entrepreneurship involves how and by whom opportunities to bring future goods and services into existence are discovered and actualized into marketable products or services [44, 45]. This definition is maintained in Scott Shane and Sankaran Venkataraman [34] where they stress exploitation of opportunities as the defining feature of entrepreneurship. In scholarship, they suggest that entrepreneurship research must explore questions like why, when, and how opportunities are discovered, exploited, and the strategies used to exploit them [34]. Clearly, this emphasis on exploitation of opportunities for profit gains does not offer anything disparate from the perspectives of the pioneer scholars of entrepreneurship. Richard Cantillon, Jean-Baptist Say, and Joseph Schumpeter had wealth creation on the front of their heads as the goal of entrepreneurship. Worth noting about profit-driven entrepreneurship is motivation for innovativeness that has benefited the world in countless ways discussed in the next section.

4. Gains from Profit-driven Entrepreneurship

There is a lot that the world has benefited from innovative entrepreneurship. For instance, entrepreneurs have improved technology in various fields including banking, shopping, communication, transportation, and agriculture. With a laptop or a smart phone and Internet, one can access their bank account, pay bills, and make online purchases without driving around. While printed letters were the only mode of communication in the past, people can communicate through live audio or video calls and texts. Before aircraft technology advanced, it would take months to travel from one continent to another. Also, agriculture production has significantly improved because of technological advancement. All these improvements have been achieved through innovativeness inspired by profit-driven entrepreneurship. Innovative entrepreneurs behind technologies that have contributed to these improvements have created massive wealth for their countries and made themselves billionaires. In addition, entrepreneurship has created myriad employment opportunities that provide people with income. Surely, entrepreneurship is the number one employer in most rich countries [9].

However, there is an undesirable side of entrepreneurship

that seems to be contributing to environmental pollution, human degradation, and income and wealth inequality.

5. Challenges of Entrepreneurship

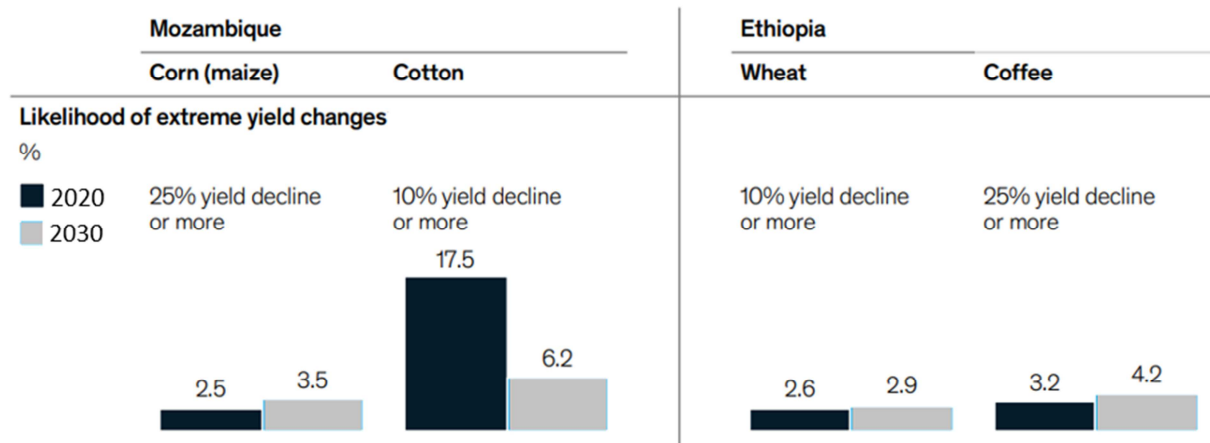
Some of the challenges facing the world today are partly due to profit driven entrepreneurship. These include environmental pollution, human degradation, and income and wealth inequality. This section describes these challenges with evidence from reliable sources.

5.1. Environmental Pollution

Entrepreneurs in the manufacturing industry seem to be part of environmental pollution. In pursuit of profits, some entrepreneurs opt for cheap and unclean energy sources that accelerate emissions of greenhouse gases, leading to global warming. This acceleration of greenhouse gas emissions has caused the surface temperature of the earth to rise at the rate of 1.7°C/century in the last 45 years [25], while 100 years before, the rate was 0.7°C/century [51]. According to Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill [38], most of the warming has occurred most recently in less than a decade ago due to relentless greenhouse gas emissions caused by human

activity. There is overwhelming evidence of rising global temperatures in the shrinking ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica, glacial retreat, and sea level rise. Data from NASA shows tons of ice lost in Greenland averaging 279 billion/year and Antarctica averaging 148 billion/year in the period 1993 – 2019 [19]. Observations from space show that the snowcap of Mount Kilimanjaro is rapidly melting and glaciers in the Alps, Himalayas, Andes, Rockies, and Alaska are retreating [43]. Space observations show further that global sea level has risen about 20 centimeters between 2000 and 2020 [31].

While greenhouse gas comes from many sources, big corporations in the manufacturing industry in high income countries like those in the West and Asia emit more. Sadly, it is low-income countries such as those in Africa and Latin America that are most affected, yet they contribute the least to climate change [41]. For instance, Sub-Saharan Africa is facing frequent droughts and floods that have led to the worst food crisis in the Twenty-First Century due to reduction in agricultural productivity and is projected to experience further decline of crop and livestock yields by 2030 [48]. This is evident in the case studies of Mozambique and Ethiopia shown in Figure 1 below.



Source: Woetzel et al. (2020, 14)

Figure 1. Projected decline of crop yields in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2030.

As shown in Figure 1, corn and cotton production in Mozambique is expected to decline by at least 25% and 10% respectively between 2020 and 2030. In the same period, wheat and coffee yields in Ethiopia will drop respectively by 10% and 25% or more. These projected declines in crop production are due to less favorable weather patterns caused by global warming [48].

Besides climate change, greenhouse gases cause water pollution. Twenty percent of carbon dioxide on earth is absorbed by the oceans and forms a layer of acid which threatens survival of aquatic life. Water pollution is further accelerated by factory wastes disposed in the oceans, lakes, and rivers. A study in India shows that waste dyes that manufacturing companies in the textile industry dump into water bodies obscures sunlight, thereby impeding

photosynthesis which is key for survival of aquatic plants and animals that feed on them [12]. The effects of environmental pollution are worse than what this paper has described here. To get a better picture, read “The Anthropocene equation” by Owen Gaffney and Will Steffen [11], “The effects of global climate change on seagrasses” by Frederick T. Short and Hilary A. Neckles [35], and “The Economic Effects of Climate Change” by Richard S. J. Tol [41]. But is it ethical to compromise sustainability of the earth just for profits?

5.2. Human Degradation

Another flaw of profit driven entrepreneurship is reduction of humans to creatures that are here just to make money. Some entrepreneurs always think about ways of making money day in and day out. It is not uncommon for

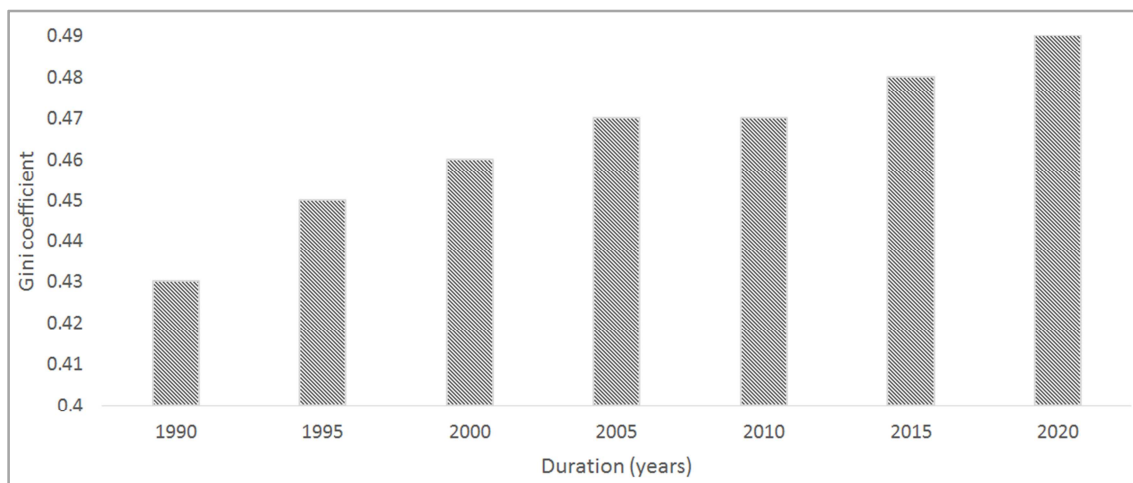
entrepreneurs to work long hours and sometimes deny themselves vacation for fear of losing money [2, 22, 32]. Even when they accumulate billions of dollars, the entrepreneurs' desire to make more money never relents. They want more and there is never enough. Today, there is a group of speculators who use money to make money without offering any product. All they do every day is to identify businesses in which they can invest to make more money. This is common in the contemporary world where wealth is akin to success. But one question must be asked: Is wealth creation the only reason for human existence?

As much as wealth is important in many ways, life that is exclusively focused on wealth creation seems to be too narrow and human degrading. Also, the emphasis on wealth as a yardstick for gauging success is inappropriate as it reduces humans to market products. There is more to life than just wealth creation, and what makes humans successful is beyond wealth [23]. Mother Theresa is a conspicuous example of a successful person who devoted her life to helping poor women rather than creating wealth. In fact, she won the Nobel Prize but refused to pocket the money for personal use and instead donated it to the poor [20]. Indeed, there are many who are remembered as heroes for promoting human rights and social justice not because of their net worth. Cases in point include Sojourner Truth, Malcom X, and Martin Luther King Jr. of the United States, John Chilembwe of Malawi, Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Mahatma Ghandi of India, Dietrich Bonhoeffer of Germany, and Leo N. Tolstoy of Russia. These heroes found fulfilment in fighting for freedom of others rather than accumulating personal wealth. Tolstoy set a more outstanding example when he renounced his aristocratic

privilege and devoted himself to a life of helping the peasants [6]. One of the quotes for which he is remembered is that "the only certain happiness in life is to live for others" [42]. A life of service seems to be more meaningful and fulfilling than solely focusing on personal wealth accumulation.

5.3. Income and Wealth Inequality

Also, profit-oriented entrepreneurship seems to be contributing towards perpetuation of the gap between the poor and the nonpoor. A case in point is the United States where income inequality at household level rose from 0.43 to 0.49 between 1990 and 2020, making it higher than any time in the history of the country (see Figure 2). Economics data suggests that rising income inequality in the United States is not a recent phenomenon. There is empirical evidence that the income gap between the upper and lower and middle-income households started widening way before 1990 but has escalated in recent decades [15]. One fascinating observation is that in the wake of the widening income disparity, the upper-income households are gaining while the middle- and lower-income households are being pushed to the margins of the economy. For instance, in the period 1981 – 1990, the household income for the bottom 20 percent earners declined by an annual average of 0.1 percent, while the top 20 percent gained 2.1 percent annually [15]. But even among the top 20 percent, income growth inclined towards the households at the very top. Data shows that the top 5 percent of the households experienced an annual income increase of 3.2 percent in the same period 1981- 1990, a trend that has prevailed to this day [15].



Source: Computed from Statista 2021 data

Figure 2. Trends of income inequality in USA (1990 - 2020).

The top 5 percent households that are gaining more wealth in the United States today are entrepreneurs who own big corporations. Emphasis on profits as core to entrepreneurship seems to be contributing to income inequality in the country. In pursuit of profits, entrepreneurs outsource manufacturing to other countries due to cheap labor, thereby taking away

jobs for Americans. Also, the minimum wage is by far below the cost of living in most states. The United States has experienced inflation several times between 1990 and 2020, yet, in response, entrepreneurs who are also the major employers in the country have not revised wages of their employees to keep up with inflation despite raising prices of

their companies' services and products [39]. This situation has seen entrepreneurs gain more at the expense of their employees. Further to that, some innovative entrepreneurs charge exorbitant prices for their services and products, which the society cannot do without. Such entrepreneurs take advantage of intellectual property rights to monopolize the markets. Conspicuous examples of such innovative entrepreneurs that monopolize the market are in the hi-tech industry like those of Silicon Valley in California.

Note that income inequality in the United States cannot be exclusively attributed to profit-oriented entrepreneurship. A wide range of factors contribute to this situation. They include systemic prejudice based on skin color, gender, immigration status, and debts among other factors. Systemic gender and racial stereotypes have negative economic implications and contributes to income disparity [33]. The credit system in the United States discourages saving practices. People can spend beyond their account balances and their wages only help to offset their bank overdrafts. In addition, most people cannot afford to buy things like cars and houses with cash. In most cases, the alternative is a payment plan which hikes prices due to interest rates. For instance, using a payment plan one may end up paying \$30,000 for a car going at \$15,000. In this system, the poor pay more than the rich because they cannot afford to pay cash. As such, the poor get mired in debt and the income inequality gap continues to widen up.

However, as much as income inequality cannot be exclusively attributed to entrepreneurship, its part cannot be ruled out. The undesirable consequences discussed in this section call for responsibility. Perhaps one question entrepreneurs must consider is the purpose of humans on earth. Unfortunately, most academic fields do not pay attention to this question. Missiology seems to be one of the rare academic fields that consider this question seriously. This is where contributions from missiology could help to promote entrepreneurship praxis that is responsible and friendly to humans and all creation. Indeed, there is not much that missiology has contributed to entrepreneurship as evident in the underrepresentation of missiological insights in entrepreneurship literature. But just as the field of entrepreneurship draws on other disciplines [5, 8], this paper's missiological insights deserve attention for the field of entrepreneurship to reflect its interdisciplinary nature. The next section reflects carefully on relevant missiological themes to appeal for a sense of responsibility in entrepreneurship that could help to abate environmental pollution, human degradation, and income and wealth inequality.

6. Reflection on Missiological Themes vis-à-vis Responsible Entrepreneurship

Missiology can encourage an understanding of entrepreneurship that is responsible to the environment,

humans, and all creation. The potential of missiology to contribute meaningfully to entrepreneurship resides in its interest in the question about the origins and the purpose of humans on earth. Grasping these two missiological themes could help to abate the challenges facing the world partly due to the homo economicus perspective that encourages irresponsible entrepreneurship.

6.1. The Origins of Humans

The point of departure in missiological inquiry is the question about where humans and all things that exist came from. Missiologists share the understanding that the entire universe was created by God [1, 40, 30]. This perspective is supported by the logic that a house cannot exist unless someone builds it. Thus, all things including humans came into existence because God created them. What distinguishes humans from other creatures, however, is their unique abilities as *imago Dei* [30]. Surely, there is no question about advancement of humans over all other creatures. From stone age to modernity, humans have produced generations of innovative thinkers who have continuously improved agricultural technologies, transportation, and health services, information dissemination and access, and many other things, whereas other creatures do not seem to have changed much their ways of living. This evidence of creation implies that humans cannot claim private legitimacy as owners or originators of anything. Every skill, innovative idea, and capability they have is entrusted to them by God who created them.

The knowledge that God created humans should appeal to humans to be responsible in entrepreneurial endeavors to fulfil the purpose for which they were created.

6.2. The Purpose of Humans on Earth

Another question of interest to missiology is the purpose of humans on earth. Understanding why humans are here is key to purposeful living. Unlike the question about the origins of humans which has several competing theories [47, 10, 21], the question about the purpose of humans on earth seems to have been neglected in other academic fields. Missiology is one of the rare academic fields that give attention to this question. But neglecting this question is a serious academic flaw. It is therefore unsurprising that some entrepreneurs are irresponsible as their activities contribute to many challenges including environmental pollution and income and wealth inequality. According to missiology, God created humans for myriad reasons that cannot be exhausted in this paper. But one which is overt is to serve one another and the entire creation [1, 13, 17, 50]. Missiologists affirm that only God has mission (*missio Dei*), and all humans are called to participate in it [1, 26, 40]. God's mission has multiple facets that include living for others and creation care. Living for others and creation care seems to be part of human nature as evident in the efforts of various organizations to alleviate global poverty, save endangered animal species, conserve the environment, and establish peace on earth.

This missiological perspective could help to encourage a sense of responsibility among entrepreneurs and thus reduce environmental pollution, human degradation, and income and wealth inequality.

7. Discussion

To this end, the discussion of this paper has demonstrated that entrepreneurship without a sense of responsibility contributes to many challenges including environmental pollution, human degradation, and income and wealth inequality as entrepreneurs engage in a relentless struggle to create wealth. To abate such challenges, entrepreneurs need to be responsible. This could be achieved by paying attention to the question about the origins and the purpose of humans on earth – a question that seems to have been neglected in many academic fields, especially the latter part. Reflecting on entrepreneurship through missiological perspectives underscores missiology as one of the rare academic fields that pay serious attention to this question, which makes it a potential candidate to appeal for entrepreneurship that is responsible for environmental sustainability and wellbeing of all humanity. Indeed, missiology can enrich the field of entrepreneurship, and its contributions deserve serious attention if the field of entrepreneurship is to truly reflect its interdisciplinary nature.

8. Conclusion

As much as entrepreneurship is a lucrative career because of its contribution to improvement of various aspects of human life and promise of wealth to its pursuers, a sense of responsibility is needed to sustain the environment and promote wellbeing of all humanity. This paper has highlighted environmental pollution, human degradation, and income and wealth inequality as, in part, caused by irresponsible entrepreneurship that solely seeks to optimize profit gains. To encourage responsible entrepreneurship, this paper draws attention to the question of human origins and purpose on earth. Understanding the origins and the purpose for which humans exist on earth could help to reveal a better way to live, and thus foster responsible entrepreneurship.

Unfortunately, the question about the origins and the purpose of humans on earth has been largely ignored in many academic fields including entrepreneurship. Since missiology is one of the rare academic fields that consider this question seriously, this paper draws on missiological perspectives to point to God as the original source of humanity and to call for human participation in *missio Dei* which includes living for others and creation care as the purpose for which God created humans. These missiological insights seem to be providing a compelling point of departure towards responsible entrepreneurship. While missiology seems to have potential to enrich scholarship in the field of entrepreneurship and to promote a sense of responsibility among entrepreneurs, missiological contributions are scanty.

This paper, therefore, serves as an appeal to missiologists to engage entrepreneurship in their scholarly work.

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