

## **Supererogation Theory: Towards a Macromarketing Understanding**

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### **Extended Abstract**

The turn of the twenty-first century marks the significant shift in the temporal horizon of societies, and the businesses that operate within them, regarding their impact upon global ecology. The need to reduce the deleterious effects of business activities has become enshrined in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) frameworks and legislation but there is a growing recognition that the study and performance of this alone is insufficient to achieve triple-bottom-line (TBL) sustainability (Barnett, Henriques and Husted 2020; Fukuda and Ouchida 2020; White, Wang and Li 2015; Mazutis 2014; White, Samuel and Thomas 2022; Humphreys 2014).

Looking beyond the mandatory legislation, philanthropic and otherwise meritorious ecological endeavours are to be found throughout human history, but in reality “*few people address human obligations regarding the nonhuman world*” (Gladwin, Kennelly and Krause, 1995, p.879), and even seemingly commendable initiatives can be found to be disturbingly lacking when examined in detail (Prasad and Elmes, 2005). See for example recent reporting’s on Verra, the World’s leading carbon offsetting organisation that argues 90% of their rainforest offset credits (used by companies such as Disney, Shell and Gucci) fail to deliver genuine carbon reductions (Greenfeild 2023). The difficulties of reconciling the pressing material needs of today with the prospective consequences of those actions tomorrow is reflected in the dichotomous business

literature including special issues in the Journal of Macromarketing regarding Sustainability as a Megatrend (Prothero and McDonagh 2014). Hancock (2008) expresses concern that the 'ethical organization' discourse is dominated by two quests. First, the deontic, to understand and prescribe the codes of conduct and legislative practices that organizations must follow. Second, the aretaic, to determine the ethical principles that organizations should uphold in order to be truly sustainable. Ezzamel and Willmott (2014) also question the validity of the theoretical and practical divide that adopts either an anthropocentric or an ecocentric perspective, neither of which they argue is sufficient to achieve sustainability. They venture that organization and management theory as a whole is dominated by anthropocentric views of the world that "*impede the emergence of alternative (e.g. ecocentric) organization theory*" (p.1031). Their emphasis of the 'ethical register' is contingent to the development of knowledge that is cognizant of the biosphere within which organizations not merely operate but are dependent upon since "*virtually all production and welfare are totally dependent upon ecological health*" (Gladwin et al, 1995, p.887). This is in stark contrast with the realization that the biosphere is not reciprocally dependent upon organizations and is likely better served without such edifices.

Gladwin et al (1995) highlight the "*pathological dangers*" (p.875) of myopically progressing either the dominant technocentrism or emerging ecocentrism paradigms, and afford a means of reconciling the rift by proposing the notion of 'sustaincentrism'. This paradigm is "*grounded in the good of both human and nonhuman nature*" (p.891) but they admit is lamentably lacking in implementation. Sustaincentrism is a worldview that attempts to reconcile technocentrism and ecocentrism that are "self-defeating" (Gladwin et al, 1995, p.889). It recognises the infinite interconnectivity

between humanity and the environment, and that human needs may not supervene those of nature.

The contribution of this study is to expand the notion of supererogatory acts by recognising that they go beyond the superficiality of CSR (White, Samuel and Thomas 2022) and may be considered and conducted, in a non-reciprocal arrangement, for the benefit of non-human and future recipients. Thus, making the theory relevant to both advancing the idea of sustaincentrism and macromarketing scholarship that includes sustainability (Mittelstaedt et al., 2014; Prothero and McDonagh 2014), climate change (Helm and Little 2022), CSR (Humphreys 2014), quality of life (Layton 2009; Lee and Sirgy 2004) and marketing systems (Layton 2009; 2019).

The notion of supererogation, which to date has attracted no attention in macromarketing literature refers to those actions that ‘go above and beyond’ what may be expected of individuals or organizations and are carried out for the benefit of others without concern for the self. Heyd (1982) argues supererogatory acts are identified by the presence of four necessary conditions (Heyd, 1982): (i) The acts are neither mandatory nor illicit, (ii) whose omissions are not wrong, and do not deserve sanction or disapproval, (iii) are morally good, both by virtue of their intended consequences and (iv) are done voluntarily for the sake of someone else. In summery supererogation activities are suggested to be good to do but not bad not to do (Chisholm 1963; Urmson 1958) and are completed by an agent who possess altruistic intentions (Heyd 1982).

Heyd (1982) presents an established taxonomy of supererogatory acts consisting of six acts:

1. **Moral Heroism:** Heyd (1982. 144) posits moral heroism as “*overcoming natural fears, desires, and considerations of self-interest, and also great self-*

*sacrifice either in terms of risk, or moral virtues and, in most cases, deserves praise and admiration.”*

2. **Beneficence:** This is concerned with the act of giving and “*the contribution of one’s material goods*” towards causes that one may have a limited responsibility for (Hyde 1982.146).
3. **Volunteering:** Hyde (1982.150) argues that volunteering is a special kind of supererogatory act outlined as “*the offering of one’s services (help etc) to do something*” for which there is no reason why they should do it or there is good reason they should not do it.
4. **Favour:** Heyd (1982) argues favours consisting of small acts of kindness that require limited if any personal sacrifice.
5. **Forgiveness:** Heyd (1982) posits that forgiveness becomes supererogatory when it is enacted in situations where appropriate punishment is justified.
6. **Forbearance:** Acts of forbearance “*involve doing less of the due amount of something which is undesirable to another person*” (Heyd 1982 p.153)

In addition to this White, Samuel and Thomas (2022) added a seventh act to the taxonomy indicating that sharing should also be considered as a supererogatory act. Each of these acts are suggested to be praiseworthy and favourable, however they are not required moral obligations for any organisation or individual to follow.

We posit that each of Hyde’s (1982) and White, Samuel and Thomas (2022) seven supererogatory acts can evolve from a micro anthropocentric taxonomy to become a macromarketing, sustaincentric framework capable of measuring and informing pro-environmental macromarketing scholarship and practice.

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