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Setting the bar of social enterprise research high learning from medical science

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ABSTRACT

Both dysfunctional blood cells and physical exercise, despite the former being pathological and the latter completely normal, make one's blood more acidic, carrying less oxygen, which presents as fatigue. It is up to scientists to develop proper accounts of such mechanisms in the form of theories that are able to distinguish false from true positives. This piece's purpose is to make a case for preventing false positives in social enterprise research. This is achieved by showing how recent research portrays social enterprises as shallow nested systems defined by epiphenomenal enterprise activities as perceived by stakeholders, instead of the internal causal mechanisms that gear such activities. In achieving this piece's purpose, the analysis turns to an analogy with psychiatry, whose status as a medical profession was forged by telling disorders as harmful dysfunctions apart from the false positives of problems of living in general. Similarly, it is concluded that the relevance of social enterprises does not result from stakeholder rationales to use social enterprise-led activities *per se*, but from the designed functions of social enterprise mechanisms in conjunction with a value judgment that such mechanisms have specific benefits compared to alternatives.

Keywords: social enterprise; false positives; mechanistic explanation; psychiatry; harmful dysfunction analysis; scientific realism.

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