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Light, P. C. (2008). *The Search for Social Entrepreneurship*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press. 295 pp. \$26.95 (paper).

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Social entrepreneurship has received a considerable amount of attention in recent years by researchers and professionals alike. The paradigm-shifting, often inspiring, and hopefully sustainable activities regarded as socially entrepreneurial have elicited many questions, though none more important than the question, “What exactly is social entrepreneurship?” Paul Light’s new book *The Search for Social Entrepreneurship* gives clarity to the evolution of this field (if it can be called one) and provides useful insights based on Light’s own research and perhaps the most thorough multidisciplinary literature review to date on this subject. Light issues a caution in the Preface that the book is designed to advance the conversation on social entrepreneurship, not to provide the definitive model of success (p. xi). Light’s approach is prudent as varying theories and beliefs on the definition of social entrepreneurship abound in the field, though some social entrepreneurs such as Trabian Shorters (2008) voiced rather strong opinions as to what social entrepreneurship is: “It is just a term. It doesn’t ultimately matter what you call the people who would rather do it than define it.” Light does not necessarily negate this view, but he does provide a major advance in understanding why social entrepreneurship is distinguishable from other forms of social action.

Aptly titled “Declaring Assumptions,” the first chapter delineates the existing debate on the definitions of social entrepreneurship and the theories that inform them. Light sets forth four components of social entrepreneurship that remain critical throughout the book: entrepreneurs, ideas, opportunities, and organizations (pp. 6-10). He also establishes “inclusive” and “exclusive” definitions of social entrepreneurship. Light’s inclusive definition of “efforts to solve intractable social problems through pattern breaking change”—perhaps far too broad for some—sparked additional debate about the components of entrepreneurship and inferred that Light’s definition “diluted” its true meaning (p. 15). The exclusive definition seems to be much more

reliant on Martin and Osberg's (2007, p. 30) definition of social entrepreneurs who are compelled to solve problems creatively in "an unfortunate but stable equilibrium that causes the exclusion, marginalization, or suffering of a segment of humanity" and ultimately results in the "establishment of a new, stable equilibrium that secures permanent benefit for . . . society at large" (p. 15). Though the definitions differ slightly, both are valid as Light's definition does not undermine others along similar lines, including that of Martin and Osberg, and is equally forceful. Light is open to accepting this definition as it stands, even if it requires "the work of a rare breed that must struggle mightily to succeed"—employing the exclusive definition—though the inclusive definition of a "more natural act by a much larger number of individuals and entities, [is] all the better" (p. 21).

The second chapter examines entrepreneurial activity in both existing organizations and new ventures. Much of the literature on entrepreneurship leans in favor of newer and smaller organizations as opposed to larger, older units. Nevertheless, research indicates that larger and older organizations are also making significant strides in socially beneficial activities. Light posits that the focus on an overall entrepreneurial orientation will diminish the debate on old versus new. "Assuming that socially entrepreneurial organizations must maintain a stream of new ideas and insulate themselves from aging," he writes, "the question is not *what* they should imitate but *how* to maintain the entrepreneurial orientation over time and through growth" (p. 47, emphasis in original).

Chapter 3 focuses on strategies and their applicability to the four components of social entrepreneurship previously outlined (entrepreneurs, ideas, opportunities, organizations). Chapter 4 delves further into the literature on business entrepreneurship and its comparison to social entrepreneurship. Here, Light explores the demography of entrepreneurship and the elements of culture and entrepreneurship (pp. 107-109) and emphasizes the importance of the comparative study of entrepreneurship.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on Light's survey of socially entrepreneurial organizations. The survey was based on a three-step, "snowball" method in which the first survey rolled into the second (both were conducted in 2001) and ultimately concluded with a third survey in 2006. The results were intended to underscore any similarities or differences of 131 "highly, moderately, and not-too entrepreneurial organizations" and shed additional light on the way entrepreneurs work. The initial sample started with 250 randomly selected members of the Alliance for Nonprofit Management, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO), and the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) and concluded in 2006 with Internet interviews of senior executives at 131 of the 250 high performers in the second snowball survey. Light acknowledges that the study

carries biases that limit its relevance to social entrepreneurship in general . . . therefore, readers should approach [it] as part of an exploratory study, not as any kind of final or near final word on how socially entrepreneurial activity does or does not flourish. (p. 149)

Nevertheless, it is apparent that Light utilizes the survey to make his best attempt at using a sample of organizations to draw comparisons and highlight any differences between organizations, as well as to assess the impact these organizations make—which for the most part had not previously been carried out in social entrepreneurship research. One of the more revealing aspects of the 2006 survey of the 131 senior executives was the resulting “considerable confusion” among them regarding the definition of *social entrepreneurship*. Light divided these answers into three categories: 36% defined *social entrepreneurship* as a business-like activity, whether used for performing more efficiently or generating revenue; 31% defined *social entrepreneurship* as a form of innovation; and 20% defined it as social change. The remaining 12% said that *social entrepreneurship* either had no meaning to them or did not answer the question. Respondents were also given a “tighter definition” of *social entrepreneurship* and asked how the concept applied to their own organizations. In the sample, 27% of respondents said that social entrepreneurship described their organizations “very well,” 49% responded “somewhat well,” and 22% said either “not too well” or “not well at all.” These findings are important because they illustrate the fact that some of those who have spent years working in socially entrepreneurial activity are among those most divided on its definition. Light’s summary of results demonstrates that there is still much to be discussed and analyzed in terms of defining social entrepreneurship. Additional results summarize levels of performance, founder engagement, risk taking, employee participation, budgeting and growth, and the importance of time and resources for developing new ideas.

The seventh and final chapter of the book provides recommendations for future research and action and underlines the need for the “considerable work” researchers and practitioners need to do to discriminate true from false assumptions concerning social entrepreneurship. Light himself becomes converted to the ideal that the practice of social entrepreneurship requires significant, large-scale changes, an assertion that gravitates toward the aforementioned “exclusive” definition of social entrepreneurship (p. 15). Light finds that the assumption that socially entrepreneurial opportunities are rare and cannot be predicted, which he initially assumed to be false, was contradicted by his data analysis: This finding reaffirms not only what much of the previous research has stated but also the many normative behaviors and practices of active social entrepreneurs.

Light’s undertaking in this book was no easy task, and he acknowledges certain limitations of this work. “The challenge,” he states,

is to avoid assumptions that make social entrepreneurship just another word that gets bandied about in funding proposals and niche building. Other terms such as innovation have gone that route and may never be rescued from overuse. . . . In the end, the research goal should be to uncover the factors that make social entrepreneurship a reality. (p. 21)

Light's volume is critical to understanding and advancing the current state of social entrepreneurship. *The Search for Social Entrepreneurship* should be required reading for the social entrepreneur as much as it should be for the social entrepreneurship researcher. It should also be attractive to the numerous change agents in waiting who seek to engage in the work Light describes throughout the book. What it is not is a "how to" book. What it is, rather, is a consciously encompassing work—based on research and theory alike—which presents the ideas of what social entrepreneurship is, what it is not, and what it can potentially accomplish for the greater good of our global society. If social entrepreneurship was somewhat nebulous and disputable before Light's work, it should be considerably less so afterward. If the ultimate goal of the book was to advance the understanding of social entrepreneurship, it may be judged a success.

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Barber, B. R. (2008). *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole*. New York: Norton.

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Consumed is a vigorous critique of how markets and (especially) marketing function, written in a literate and widely sourced style. Benjamin Barber offers a grand sweep through social science disciplines and social practices. As this review discusses (and as Barber acknowledges), both the scope and intensity of his critique exceed his ability to provide appropriate solutions. This acknowledgement weakens his work, especially as it relates to the book's utility in voluntary and nonprofit sector studies.

The core of Barber's argument, presented in the first two chapters ("Capitalism Triumphant and the Infantilist Ethos" and "From Protestantism to Puerility"), is that the marketing function in businesses drives them to infantilize consumers, that is, to reduce their powers of independent choice. From moviemaking to consumer goods