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Social entrepreneurship: critique and the radical enactment of the social

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper seeks to pinpoint the importance of critical research that gets to problematise social entrepreneurship's self-evidences, myths, and political truth-effects, thus creating space for novel and more radical enactments.

Design/methodology/approach – A typology mapping four types of critical research gets developed. Each critique's merits and limitations are illustrated through existing research. Also, the contours of a fifth form of critique get delineated which aims at radicalising social entrepreneurship through interventionist research.

Findings – The typology presented entails myth-busting (problematisation through empirical facts), critique of power-effects (problematisation through denormalising discourses, ideologies, symbols), normative critique (problematisation through moral reflection), and critique of transgression (problematisation through practitioners' counter-conducts).

Research limitations/implications – The paper makes it clear that the critique of social entrepreneurship must not be judged according to what it says but to whether it creates the conditions for novel articulations and enactments of social entrepreneurship.

Practical implications – It is argued that practitioners' perspectives and viewpoints are indispensible for challenging and extending scientific doxa. It is further suggested that prospective critical research must render practitioners' perspective an even stronger focus.

Originality/value – The contribution is the first of its kind which maps critical activities in the field of social entrepreneurship, and which indicates how the more radical possibilities of social entrepreneurship can be fostered through interventionist research.

Keywords Social entrepreneurship, Problematization, Myth-busting, Critique of power-effects, Normative critique, Critique of transgression, Radicalisation, Interventionist critique, Social accounting, Entrepreneurialism

Paper type Conceptual paper

1. Critique of social entrepreneurship: a disappearing act?

Since its inception as a site of scientific inquiry, social entrepreneurship has witnessed quite remarkable developments. Juxtaposing its early days of existence, which were dominated by foundational narratives based on anecdotal evidence, with the present, which is palpably more plurivocal, one might reasonably conclude that social entrepreneurship research has come a long way (Nicholls and Young, 2008). The path

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along which the field came of age, however, is hardly one of uninterrupted maturation or even a linear progression. What speaks against such an appraisal is that social entrepreneurship research is clearly less imaginative and diverse than one would initially assume. Though it would be wrong to believe that social entrepreneurship research already forms a homology[1], we presume that prevailing conceptions of social entrepreneurship are united by a problematic tendency: they harbour a kind of end-orientation[2] and conservatism which neutralises the concept's radically transformative possibilities. That is, since they are more and more often evaluated in terms of their immediate "use value" (as defined from the perspective of ruling power), any radical enactments of the social are sacrificed to the ostensible "real-life" pressures of the day. Rather than being taken to its extreme, as it were, the concept is conceived of solely as an economically viable, yet largely de-politicised, blueprint for dealing with societal problems. In extremis, there is a danger that social entrepreneurship might end up addressing the symptoms of the capitalist system rather than its root causes (Edwards, 2008).

This raises serious concerns over the dominant trajectory of research, not least because it makes it harder to see viable alternatives emerging on the horizon. When most scholars favour established frames of instrumental reasoning (notably mainstream management) at the expense of more heterodox, anachronistic, counterintuitive or critical perspectives, they create a situation in which it is far easier to use social entrepreneurship to envision the most far-reaching utopia than to register even the most marginal point of discontent. Evidently, that critique falls out of the realm of the possible is less an accident than a decisively political effect. Construing social entrepreneurship as necessary, even indispensable, for tackling today's most serious ills, and framing the matter in the language of morality and rationality, forms part of a myth-making process which chiefly suggests that anyone who considers him- or herself reasonable cannot but embrace social entrepreneurship. On the face of it, the conditions of today's scholarship leave little if any space for a substantial critique of social entrepreneurship – simply because others suggest that the solution already exists. Consequently, anyone who raises questions or concerns is immediately looked at suspiciously because social entrepreneurship has, in the dominant perception, already passed the test of critical scrutiny.

In view of this looming pre-emption of critique, in this paper we aim to reclaim the space of critique and to stress the necessity of critique, for, as we will argue, critique is the pivotal quality that must be fostered to overcome the current stasis of social entrepreneurship. Given that most academic treatment of social entrepreneurship adds to the view that the subject matter is beyond all question(ing), our first objective in this paper is to develop a typology of critical approaches that can guide and inspire a critique of social entrepreneurship research and inquiries. Drawing on existing critical research, we make it clear that scholarly mechanisms of censorship and control are not fully effective in averting critical activity and rendering it innocuous. Our second objective in this paper, then, is to go beyond current possibilities and to consider ways to expand the range of critical approaches; in particular we aim to sketch out ways of radicalising social entrepreneurship (critique), both conceptually and pragmatically. In both those instances, critique is viewed as a means for problematising "social entrepreneurship" in order to release some of its suppressed possibilities (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011). By implication, critique is never an end in itself; rather, it serves as a means for creating things (both imaginative and real), which are not possible

within the matrix of the present. Thus, it is our hope that by critically relating to social entrepreneurship we will, in the end, be able to enact social entrepreneurship differently.

To develop the above contributions, we take several broad steps. After a short exposition of the emergence of critical approaches in (social) entrepreneurship, we draw on a review of the extant academic literature to identify four types of critique, which we call "myth-busting", "critique of power effects", "normative critique", and "critique of transgression". We present and discuss them in terms of how they call into question some of social entrepreneurship's most powerful taken-for-granted assumptions, and add a different, if not fresh, view to them. We illustrate each type of critique through a particularly demonstrative study. We then discuss new possibilities of critique by zooming in on the kinds of critical practices that can bring out the more radical cause of social entrepreneurship. Particular emphasis is put on fostering the view of critique as intervention (Steyaert, 2011), for interventions are needed to make it clear that social entrepreneurship, as we know it, does not exhaust what social entrepreneurship might become. The paper closes with a short conclusion.

2. Problematising social entrepreneurship: towards a typology of critical endeavours

The practice of including critique in research is slowly gaining legitimacy in entrepreneurship studies. While the field of entrepreneurship is no longer the paradigmatic monolith it used to be, calls for more "critical" applications to study entrepreneurship have been more recent (Ogbor, 2000; Armstrong, 2005; Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2009; Jones and Spicer, 2010). In themselves, these critical approaches are not homogenous, as they draw from quite different understandings of critique. What they do have in common is that they question the representation of entrepreneurship as always stimulating and worthwhile to pursue, as something that does not require any reflection on and change of established ways of research and method (Steyaert, 2011). Critical approaches thus emphasise practices of problematisation, which impact the kind of (research) questions we dare to ask. Problematisation consists of looking at and challenging assumptions that guide a certain way of doing research (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011) in order to confront the particular logics a field uses to formulate research questions, to legitimise certain methods, and to claim theoretical or practical implications. Critical research on entrepreneurship thus focuses on "what the scholar is doing, for whom, and for what as he or she does entrepreneurship theory and research" (Calás *et al.*, 2009, p. 554).

As pleas for a more critical engagement with social entrepreneurship are mounting (e.g. Cho, 2006; Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006; Steyaert and Dey, 2010), we want to start from the middle of things so as to address and endorse some critical issues which scholars have already said are urgent. Taking to heart some crucial conundrums and voids in social entrepreneurship research, we want to work with the critical research already being practiced and create different concepts to capture their critical potential[3]. In so doing we develop a typology that creates a variety of possible anchor points for engaging with critique. Though our selections are by no means the only ones possible, and we do not create a neat plan using strict categorisations, we provide some direction for applying critical research to advance our understanding of social entrepreneurship.

The first issue we address is the paucity of empirical knowledge and, associated with it, the problem of truth. We use the concept of "myth-busting" to describe how empirical reality tests can place our understanding of social entrepreneurship on a more solid knowledge basis. The second issue stems from the realisation that social entrepreneurship research has mainly turned a blind eye to the political effects it creates and of which it is itself a part. Thus, we suggest that this critique of power effects as practiced in "critical sociology" is a way to raise awareness that social entrepreneurship is invested with particular political worldviews that shape reality according to a certain image of "goodness". The third issue is that very few studies have reflected social entrepreneurship in terms of its normative foundations. We present "normative critique" as a way to emphasise the moral limitations of those interpretations which envision social entrepreneurship merely from the perspective of market dogmatism and economic self-sufficiency. The fourth issue is concerned with the observation that the views of practicing social entrepreneurs have not received enough attention from the research community. Here we offer a "critique of transgression", inquiring how practitioners' narratives differ from both academic and political discourse, and how these instances of micro-resistance and emancipation open up new paths of understanding. In each case we use illustrations to demonstrate how critical inquiry cuts through the self-evidences of social entrepreneurship and, in doing so, prepares the ground for novel articulations.

3. Myth-busting: testing popular ideas and their assumptions

> So long as an illusion is not recognized as an error, it has a value precisely equivalent to reality – Jean Baudrillard, (2008, p. 53; quoted in Gilman-Opalsky, 2011, p. 52).

A first form of critique looks into how the field is based on unchallenged assumptions, which might take on a mythological form as they become naturalised as established truths. Many ideas in the field of social entrepreneurship, which have been developed in other disciplines (notably in management and business entrepreneurship studies) seem to be applied to social entrepreneurship in a rather flippant way. The use of such casual, unelaborated associations raises the risk that social entrepreneurship will be based on false premises (e.g. Cook *et al.*, 2003); this is problematic to the extent that these truisms pass through a process of normalisation, and then tend to take on an existence of their own. The mechanisms by which ideas about social entrepreneurship come to be viewed as knowledge or truth may have little to do with their actual truth value. That is, much of what is said and known about social entrepreneurship is mythological in the sense that it is perceived as true rather than effectively being true. Because myths tend to be self-reinforcing and self-reifying, social entrepreneurship scholarship has in many areas come to rely on untested assumptions, such as those pertaining to the nature of the social entrepreneur, the reasons why the field emerged, or why it is so popular. Where the theorising on social entrepreneurship seems to rely on impression and instinct rather than on empirical evidence, it raises the need for inquiries that probe whether what is said about social entrepreneurship actually corresponds with reality. Hence, a first task of critique would entail demystifying social entrepreneurship by subjecting its unchallenged, unconsidered assumptions to empirical scrutiny. What we henceforth refer to as "myth-busting"[4] encompasses empirical endeavours that ask whether popular ideas (read doxa) about social entrepreneurship are merely tall tales or actually true.

To illustrate the critique of myth-busting, we invoke an academic article by Janelle Kerlin and Tom Pollak (2010). It is worth considering in detail as it tackles one of the most popular and powerful myths of the third sector: resource dependency theory (RDT), which argues that organizations' behaviour is partly a function of the availability of resources. RDT has been (mis)used by some non-profit scholars to imply a causal relationship between cutbacks in public spending and the emergence of social entrepreneurship in the non-profit sector. As the authors state, a "number of non-profit scholars have held that non-profit commercial activity increased significantly during the 1980s and 1990s. [. . .] they suggest that non-profits use commercial income as a replacement for lost government grant" funding (p. 1). Based on RDT, it is claimed that traditional non-profit organisations were experiencing financial pressure as governments were less and less able to finance their services. As a result, they had no other option than to accept that "they must increasingly depend on themselves to ensure their survival [. . .] and that has led them naturally to the world of entrepreneurship" (Boschee and McClurg, 2003, p. 3). Used in this way, RDT positions non-profit organisations in a Darwinistic plot, as only the most flexible and entrepreneurial organisations are deemed fit enough to morph into social entrepreneurship, thus averting their looming demise. One of the most pervasive assumptions implied in this use of RDT is that non-profits immediately and rationally adapt to changing financial circumstances. Commercial activity becomes something which non-profits can willingly and spontaneously switch on and off, depending on the availability of public money (and private donations). If this were correct, then non-profits' economic behaviour would be purely opportunistic: during prosperous years, they rely on public grants (and public donations) and in less prosperous ones, they look for earned-income possibilities to fill the financial gap. We do not claim that RDT is absurd; indeed, it appears reasonable to assume that non-profit organisations have turned towards commercial activities to become self-sufficient. However, its claims were often taken out of context, were not tested, or were tested based on weak empirical data. As Kerlin and Pollak (2010) make clear, "scholars have largely lacked the data to substantiate claims that government cuts directly resulted in increased non-profit commercialization" (p. 2; see also Child, 2010).

This inquiry by Kerlin and Pollak represents one of the first tests of RDT that meets the standards of academic rigour. Using the Internal Revenue Service's Statistics of Income, which provides reliable financial information on charitable organisations in the United States, the authors were able to unambiguously identify non-profits' revenue streams over an extended period. On an aggregate level, their results, based on financial information between 1982 and 2002, indicate that non-profits' commercial revenue rose more or less steadily throughout the investigated period, but has actually been smaller than assumed: "commercial income as a percentage of total non-profit revenue rose from 48.1 per cent in 1982 to 57.6 per cent in 2002" (pp. 7-8). They demonstrated that "commercial revenue was not a factor in 'filling in' for losses in government grants and private contributions" (p. 8), and state that government grants and private contributions too rose over the observation period; together, these findings undoubtedly call into question the myth of the "commercial turn" in non-profit organisations (Child, 2010).

These findings by Kerlin and Pollak cannot be ascribed to established traditions of critical thought, nor do the authors claim they can be; still, in our view, they can be regarded as a highly critical contribution, because they create a sense that something is

fundamentally wrong with how (the emergence of) social entrepreneurship has previously been understood. Thus, their contribution should be conceived of as positive, as it compels both scholars and practitioners to find better explanations for the reality of social entrepreneurship. Kerlin and Pollak take the dismantling of RDT as myth as a point of departure to probe alternative theoretical explanations. They end their contribution by suggesting that institutional theory might offer a better frame for explaining changes in non-profits' commercial activities. They conclude that their results support such a theoretical shift as the increase in non-profit commercial activity can be interpreted as a passive acceptance of the broader environment and a response to outside pressures "rather than a deliberate effort to subsidise declining revenue from discreet sources" (p. 3). Kerlin and Pollak, whose study epitomises a strong scepticism *vis-à-vis* over-confident truth claims, are willing to sacrifice beloved myths for a clearer understanding of social entrepreneurship. Aligned in principle with the scientific method, they open up social construction to its own flaws and errors so as to create space for whatever lies behind the myth (read: the truth). In the next section, we address a form of critique that is interested not so much in the truthfulness of given statements as in its relationship to power/knowledge and ideology.

4. Critique of power effects: denormalising discourses, ideologies, and symbols

> [. . .] we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc. (Foucault, 1978, p. 97).

In many instances the "facticity" of a given statement might be less a function of its correspondence with reality than of its normalisation through dominant discourses and technologies of power. This imposes limitations on myth-busting, for prevailing systems of power cannot necessarily be altered through objective truths. Hence, where myth-busting's main opportunity lies in opposing prejudice and established errors *vis-à-vis* an audience which acknowledges its flaws and is willing to endorse the truth (Gasché, 2007), what we refer to here as a "critique of power effects" takes a more political stance towards knowledge and the "truth". In particular, such inquiries into power effects have been undertaken in the realm of what can be broadly called "critical sociology"[5], which encompasses accounts that are interested in understanding power in its relationship with shaping, controlling, and even dominating individuals, groups, and organisations. As an umbrella term that captures a broad array of theoretical perspectives on power, critical sociology might take the form of governmentality studies (Foucault, 1991) which look into how people come to rely on expert knowledge (e.g. guidebooks on non-profit management) to govern themselves according to the stipulations of post-welfarist societies, and how such a process comes to imply a transformation into responsible subjects. Alternatively, it would be possible to use Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) theory of ideology to inquire how entrepreneurial reforms in the third sector are justified as necessary, and how social entrepreneurship is presented to the individual as offering "attractive, exciting life prospects, while supplying guarantees of security and moral reasons for people to do what they do" (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005, pp. 24-25). Or, one might look at social entrepreneurship as an indication of symbolic violence (Žižek, 2008) in order to inquire how it works to preserve the social order, including instances of inequality, domination, or suppression.

The pre-eminent aim of these approaches is to develop an understanding of how power conditions the contours of truth, and in turn renders individuals (and organisations) amenable to political forms of (self-)control. Hence, the essential difference between myth-busting and the critique of power effects is that the former inquires whether popular (yet untested) ideas stand the test of reality, whereas the latter approaches such ideas as political truth effects which enable processes of cultural reproduction or self-imposed control. The shift of perspective entailed in the analyses of power using the approaches of critical sociology is that given statements are not evaluated in terms of "right or wrong", but in terms of the kind of political reality a given statement comes to prioritise or normalise, including the sort of consequences which derive from this normalisation. What this implies for the critical inquiry of social entrepreneurship is a meticulous analysis of the material, historical, economic, discursive, or linguistic structures and practices that constitute the conditions of possibility of social entrepreneurship and of which social entrepreneurship is an effect.

Using the above as a starting point, we now deepen our engagement with the critique of power effects through a revealing study by Sarah Dempsey and Matthew Sanders (2010). These authors shed light on how accounts of iconic social entrepreneurs are used to normalise a particular understanding of meaningful work. Analysing autobiographies of the US-based social entrepreneurs John Wood, Greg Mortenson, and Wendy Kopp, the authors demonstrate that those accounts provide people in the non-profit sector with a deeply moralised style of existence, which engenders a rather problematic understanding of work/life balance. For instance, the autobiographies instigate a "complete dissolution of a work/life boundary" (Dempsey and Sanders, 2010, p. 449) by promoting a standard of meaningful work based on self-sacrifice. Showing that the autobiographies are replete with notions of sleep deprivation, lack of spare time, inexistent personal life, long working hours – in short, frail emotional, social and physical well-being – Dempsey and Sanders conclude that social entrepreneurship is a double-edged sword. On the one hand it offers "alternatives to traditional corporate career paths" while on the other it delineates meaningful work as presupposing "stressful working conditions, significant personal sacrifice and low wages" (p. 438).

The important point to note here is that the autobiographies do not ideologically conceal the downsides and exploitative nature of non-profit careers. Rather, these negative aspects are explicit yet normalised in conjunction with the idea that meaningful work in the non-profit sector must necessarily be arduous; as if to provide evidence for this idea, the authors portray themselves "as willingly trading a work/life boundary in return for being able to engage in work that they find truly meaningful" (p. 451). As Dempsey and Sanders rightly contend, one of the most serious problems with such representations of social entrepreneurship is that people come to accept that having a higher calling, and experiencing social and moral meaning more generally, presupposes significant personal sacrifices. The further consequence of this normalisation is that people who become involved in social entrepreneurship might not even try to protect their private life, as popular images of social entrepreneurship propagate the idea that the sense of satisfaction and meaningfulness one gains from working in the non-profit sector will (or indeed must) compensate for the social and personal costs related to this kind of work. On the other hand, heeding the self-exploitative nature of non-profit work might weaken the cause of social entrepreneurship by making people less likely to identify with a professional career in

the sector. Put differently, once people can fully grasp the inevitable disenchantment associated with social entrepreneurship, they might, as Dempsey and Sanders warn us, conclude that the entry barriers for working in the non-profit sector are simply too high. Though such disenchantment over the "reality" of non-profit work might fuel "lack of understanding, conflict, misallocation of resources and loss to the sector" (Parkinson and Howorth, 2008, p. 286), we should not ignore the possibility that people submit to a career in social entrepreneurship despite their full awareness of the high social costs related to such a move. Why might people be willing to tolerate being exploited, to the point where they actively endorse their own subjection? Maybe they have come to accept that no remedy is possible without sacrifice. If this were the case, practicing individuals should be seen not merely as ideologically misguided subjects but as reflective beings who more or less willingly sacrifice their personal desires for a higher cause. In any case, a question remains: Do people who are subjected to, or subject themselves to, dominant conditions of power/knowledge actually have a chance to resist, the ideological climate of which they are part (Jones *et al.*, 2009)?

5. Normative critique: marking moral foundations

> Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust (Rawls, 1999, p. 3).

What myth-busting and critiques of power effects have in common is that they both problematise social entrepreneurship – but without giving clear indications as to what it should be instead. In clear contrast to that, what we refer to here as normative critique is explicit about the kind of trajectory social entrepreneurship must endorse. Where normative critique might begin with a thorough inventory of the inherent intuitions of mainstream accounts of social entrepreneurship, its ultimate objective is to perform a moral judgement of social entrepreneurship, particularly pertaining to its role in society. This might in fact sound like an easy task. In contrast to traditional business entrepreneurship, whose normative foundations mark a highly debated issue, social entrepreneurs and enterprises are usually regarded as good, *a priori*. Though the meaning of "social entrepreneurship" varies from author to author, it is usually said to alleviate social problems, to catalyse social transformation, or to make conventional businesses more socially responsible (Mair and Marti, 2006). Yet, where scholars have mostly remained positive about the redemptive qualities of social entrepreneurship (Yunus, 2008), seeing the market as the means for solving problems which neither the state nor the non-profit sector were able to solve, a normative check is worthwhile, as the assumed synergies between the social and the economic might be more controversial than the literature suggests.

As a cursory look into scholarly texts reveals, one of the most pressing domains of normative reflection concerns the idea that the linking of the two terms "social" and "entrepreneurship" necessarily engenders an uncontested win-win situation. Indeed, many initially saw it as an oxymoron (e.g. Hervieux *et al.*, 2010); the more normatively inclined objections held that social entrepreneurship is a euphemism for undermining the social mission, heritage, or identity of non-profit or voluntary-sector organisations. Instead of taking the "social" for granted, including suggesting that it is at all easy to balance social and economic objectives (Bull, 2008), scholars were quick to raise the

question of social entrepreneurship's normative inadequacies. In particular, trading and earned-income strategies were regarded less as merely technical or instrumental-rational matters than as organising metaphors that exert a distinct influence on social entrepreneurship's normative foundation. One of the main concerns was related to the belief, epitomised in mainstream publications, that markets would be able to tackle social and environmental problems (Humphries and Grant, 2005); this view becomes questionable as it suggests that the single best way of solving the ills of the market is through the market (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Such a proposal is not just contestable logically (e.g. because of its circularity); it also raises normative issues related to the potential totalisation of economic thinking. Dey and Steyaert (2010) touched upon this problem tangentially, using academic texts to probe the normative foundation of the "social" of social entrepreneurship; they found that social entrepreneurship is often embedded in discourses stressing rationality, utility, progress, and individualism. These discursive significations delineate social entrepreneurship as a "societal actor that confirms the modernist, Western notion of order and control, while contributing to the impression that social change can be achieved without causing debate, tensions or social disharmony" (p. 88). Dey and Steyaert point out that such alignments are problematic to the extent that social entrepreneurship is conceived of as worthwhile if, and only if, it bears immediately measurable (economic) utility. By extension, then, seeing social entrepreneurship primarily as a means for compensating for ostensible state and market failures makes it possible to transform the subject matter into a de-politicised, quasi-economic entity.

Where normative critique quite generally calls for elaborating the sort of common good that social entrepreneurship seeks to offer, we would like to illustrate this point based on an eloquent treatise by Angela Eikenberry (2009). She contends that the non-profit and voluntary sector is currently witnessing a shift towards "a normative ideology surrounding market-based solutions and business-like models" (p. 586; see also Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004). Social entrepreneurship is conceived of as an inherent part of this normative shift as it is argued that non-profit organisations should take on more market-based approaches to acquire funding. According to Eikenberry, what is problematic about social entrepreneurship, which chiefly implies that non-profits must develop earned-income strategies to meet their financial needs, is that non-profits risk weakening "their appeal to donors because individuals think their donations are not needed" (p. 587).

In addition to obscuring the validity of their non-profit status, there is also evidence that social entrepreneurial non-profits draw attention and resources away from their social mission: "marketisation is problematic for the potential democratic contributions of non-profit and voluntary organisations. Although these institutions have long been admired for their democratic effects, a market discourse appears to compromise the contributions non-profit and voluntary organisations might make to democracy" (p. 588). As one way to counteract the "colonialisation" of non-profits by the market logic in general and social entrepreneurial funding strategies in specific, Eikenberry recommends setting up "spaces for citizen participation and deliberation" (p. 583), which she sees as a corrective to the market's antisocial effects. In particular, she assumes that involving diverse stakeholders of non-profit organisations in organisational and societal governance, and in agenda setting, deliberation, and decision making, will allow for "a more just, humane, and socially cooperative future" (p. 593). Her treatise is testament to the urgency of further investigating the (moral) role

of social entrepreneurship in today's society. In a very important way, it offers an analytic perspective for disentangling social entrepreneurship from its economic and managerial over-codification, and for (again) rendering it a matter of society (Steyaert and Katz, 2004; Hjorth, 2009). In the next section we present a fourth type of critique that places the perspective of practitioners at centre stage.

6. Critique of transgression: resisting and re-appropriating prescribed routes

> [. . .] to attempt explanations without reference to the meanings [. . .] held by actors, and without regard to their underpinning symbolic codes, is to provide a very thin account of reality (Freeman and Rustin, 1999, p. 18).

Properly understanding the distinct contribution made by the critique of transgression requires a brief reflection on the immanent limits of both normative critique and the critique of power effects. As discussed above, normative critique is mainly concerned with analysing and taking issue with moral justifications of social entrepreneurship and, when doing so is expedient, prescribing a more worthwhile moral foundation. The innate cul-de-sac implied in such a gesture is that the critic might end up replacing one ideology (e.g. marketisation) with another (e.g. participative democratisation). Though Eikenberry (2009) seems aware of this trap, mentioning that she does not "intend to create another hegemonic discourse" (p. 593), it is hard not to suspect that her choice reflects her own (ideological) perspective. Put unapologetically, normative critique will always be ideological, for the simple reason that there is no space beyond ideology (Boje *et al.*, 2001). A second, related, limitation is associated with normative critique: it privileges the views of social scientists over those of the subjects being researched. This objection also holds true for many critical approaches from critical sociology, which has been accused of denying that the people being studied have any competence to critically consider their own situation. As Boltanski and Thévenot (1999) have argued in this respect, if "we want to take seriously the claims of actors when they denounce social injustice, criticise power relationships or unveil their foes' hidden motives, we must conceive of them as endowed with an ability to differentiate legitimate and illegitimate ways of rendering criticisms and justifications" (p. 364). By extension, unlike both these forms of critique which maintain a hierarchical distance from their subject of inquiry, the critique of transgression takes people's perspectives, utterances, stories, etc directly into account. As a result, such critiques look at how people reflect on, criticise, and resist the social reality of which they are part. Speaking of resistance, it must remain clear that the term does not imply a space beyond power (i.e. a sacred space of the authentic individual). Instead, and in accordance with Foucault (1978), the critique of transgression concedes that "resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (p. 95). Hence, the concept of "transgression" entails "emancipatory" practices through which individuals appropriate authoritative discourses and technologies of power to their own ends (Foucault, 1998). Though individuals are never beyond power, they might punctuate, breach, and creatively reassemble that which is given and taken for granted, thus creating conditions that facilitate "becoming other". Transgression thus implies looking at how people create their own freedom within the limits of power and how they use the cultural resources provided to them as a means for their own emancipation. Thus, Foucault's elaboration on transgression offers an invaluable

contribution to the understanding of resistance in that it stimulates a shift from the metaphor of resistance as opposition (e.g. defense, guarding, protecting, etc) to one which highlights movement (e.g. traversing, crossing, permeating, etc).

The main task deriving from the critique of transgression is to stick as closely as possible to what people say and do (in the face of existing relations of power); this is largely in accordance with recent pleas to better understand how social entrepreneurs themselves perceive and experience their everyday work, including the variety of motives and ideologies they endorse (Boddice, 2009). Shedding light on what practitioners do and say offers fresh insights into how they resist their potential (discursive) subjection or domination (e.g. by the market discourse; see Eikenberry, 2009), and "how they navigate the resulting work/life tensions" (Dempsey and Sanders, 2010, p. 454). A good way to illustrate such transgressive moves is through empirical inquiries, which look at how social entrepreneurs react in and towards the ideological climate in which they operate. The study by Caroline Parkinson and Carole Howorth (2008) is particularly fitting, as it was carried out in the United Kingdom, a context in which social enterprise has "been heavily promoted and supported as a site of policy intervention" (Teasdale, 2011, p. 1), and thus used to promote an efficiency logic of "more for less" (Hogg and Baines, 2011). To understand how social entrepreneurs view the dominant understanding of social enterprise (as produced and disseminated by UK policy-makers, funders, and support agencies), the authors used a linguistic approach to study the disjuncture between official reasoning and practitioners' sensemaking. Their analysis revealed that the official discourse of social enterprise placed great emphasis on individual capabilities as well as on a managerially defined model of community service delivery; the authors then used discourse analysis to probe the extent to which social entrepreneurs' language mimicked or transgressed notions of problem fixing, individualism, and managerialism. Their analysis revealed that social entrepreneurs did in fact use business terms, though mostly in conjunction with negative attributes such "as 'dirty', 'ruthless', 'ogres', 'exploiting the black economy', 'wealth and empire building' and 'treating people as second class'" (pp. 300-301). Importantly, when they were asked whether they saw themselves as social entrepreneurs, interviewees often dismissed the concept, saying, for example, "'it's amusing!', 'it's ridiculous!'" or "'too posh [. . .] I'm working class'" (p. 301). Parkinson and Howorth provide ample evidence that social entrepreneurs' articulations are at odds with UK policies on social enterprise, which chiefly promote efficiency, business discipline, and financial independence. At the same time, however, their analysis also indicates that social entrepreneurs' talk does partially echo the ideological context in which they work, notably what concerns the framing of local problems and their respective solutions.

Following Parkinson and Howorth, the critique of transgression acknowledges that resistance is often transient and partial, as social entrepreneurs are never fully outside the influence of power (though never completely infiltrated by it, either). The obvious merit of such a view is that it offers a more nuanced understanding of how dominant discourses or prevailing ideologies are contested at the level of practice, while raising awareness that this contestation must not necessarily take the form of rational, deliberate, or even conscious opposition. Putting a spotlight on social entrepreneurial practitioners is important: Doing so simultaneously offers "a better understanding of how social entrepreneurs define themselves" and sheds light on "whether the discourses of social entrepreneurs are consistent with those of the actors that study, fund and teach them" (Hervieux *et al.*, 2010, p. 61). The ideological voids and

disjunctures, which necessarily emanate from such empirical journeys might in turn be used not only to oppose dominant formations of knowledge but, importantly, to redefine the conditions under which something new can be produced.

7. Interventionist critique: opening up more radical trajectories

Given the seemingly infinite possibility of critique, we must bear in mind a notorious danger: critique remains an intellectual undertaking, which does not necessarily have real effects on the level of practice. For this reason we will use the discussion section to elaborate on the social dynamics that might alter the conditions of critique and de-intensify their effects, in order to suggest critique with an "interventionist edge" as a promising way forward.

On the relationship between critique and change, several insightful studies, both theoretical and empirical, have pointed out how ruling systems of power are able to absorb, domesticate and neutralise critique (e.g. Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Instead of overthrowing its object or adversary, critique itself becomes instrumentalised in ways that maintain prevailing hierarchies, and relations of domination and social segregation (Willig, 2009). In relation to social entrepreneurship, we see quite clear indications that the more critical potentials of the concepts are being sidelined by political, business, and academic discourses. Instead of being seen as an instrument for unsettling ruling conventions, paradigms, or dominant (economic) systems (Edwards, 2008), social entrepreneurship is mostly envisioned as a pragmatic instrument for expanding entrepreneurial forms to the social sphere, for saving tax money, or simply for rendering people and organisations in the non-profit sector more responsible and accountable. The integration of social entrepreneurship into business schools seems to have accelerated dominant approaches which are mainly used to envision social and ecological problems and solutions in line with iconic images of "progress". Using a study by Cukier *et al.* (2011) as an example, we come to understand that the academic representation of social entrepreneurs relies strongly on well-known cases such as Bill Drayton, Fazle Abed, Jerry Greenfield and Ben Cohen, Muhammad Yunus, and Ibrahim Abouleish. Though these references are not problematic per se, they become problematic when they keep us from understanding that this group of iconic individuals, including the kind of societal blueprints they produce, and the sorts of institutions that award and support them, collectively produce a rather selective understanding of what is good for society as a whole. If we take this to its logical conclusion, we must address whether the kind of critique we discussed above has any chance of changing the "standard language" of social entrepreneurship.

If spectacular representations have already normalised a biased understanding of social entrepreneurship, then it is even more urgent to create the conditions of critique under which new things (both ideologically and materially) become possible. This entails not only uncovering and confronting the conservatism inherent in the everyday activities of policy-makers, academics, think thanks, incubators, etc. It entails, above all, moving beyond the work of conservative imagination to actively produce the space in which the unexpected can take flight. The task in front of us, following Nealon (2008), is to find ways to intensify the sort of tensions and struggles discussed in conjunction with the critique of transgression; this makes it necessary to conceptualise the nexus between critical thinking and intervention (Steyaert, 2011). To begin with, we would like to use the concept "intervention" to signal a rethinking of the conventional, academic understandings of critical research. Interventionist research

sees the researcher not in a state of external reflection on the research "objects", but in a state of active and internal alliance with them. To interventionist research, being allied is a precondition for remodelling social entrepreneurship in inventive ways. Interventionist research relies on participatory modes of interaction to co-produce new knowledge while simultaneously enacting new realities (Steyaert and Dey, 2010). Writing with social entrepreneurs and not about them, interventionist research represents a political stance, as it is first and foremost interested in acts of world-making (Beyes and Steyaert, 2011). Such ontological processes cannot help but be critical, as they bring new issues to our attention (i.e. those which cannot be imagined in the parameters of academic reason) and clearly give taken-for-granted assumptions a different feel (Beaulieu and Wouters, 2009). A key characteristic of interventionist critique is its interest in intervening as societal and community issues are enacted; thus its yardstick is less representation and understanding (though they might play a role) than the extent to which research is able to "reconfigure what is sayable and visible in a specific social space" (Beyes and Steyaert, 2011, p. 112). Fostering dissensus and antagonisms instead of consensus and agreement, interventionist research disrupts the taken-for-granted knowledge about social entrepreneurship by mobilising the immanence of the people on the ground (Willig, 2009; see also section 6, above). Shaking up the self-content of elitist imagination, interventionist research becomes, as Steyaert (2011) tells us, *parrhesia*: an event that speaks out against authority and creates reality in the name of another truth. For such a novel critique of social entrepreneurship, which intervenes in order to invent (Steyaert, 2011), the task is to try to change the sclerotic organisation of experience by sensing and amplifying the "not-yet" (Bloch, 1986) that manifests itself in ephemeral pulses of the social. Hence, by staying close to, and reflecting and amplifying, the spontaneous potentials of practitioners, and their ideas and inspirations, interventionist critique might support social entrepreneurs in releasing society's always present (yet thoroughly contained) emancipatory promises.

In light of what has been said, it might have been helpful to illustrate exactly what interventionist critique looks like, and what the inventive intervention into societal or community issues actually means. Yet, telling readers precisely what is expected from them would have run counter to our conviction that any overtly prescriptive account can hamper, rather than enable, the reinvention of social entrepreneurship critique. Put differently, a pedagogical take on intervention critique could easily lead to the (mistaken) impression that intervention forms a programmable undertaking rather than, as we like to see it, being a singular, non-repeatable event. Consequently, we suggest that the void being opened here is instrumental for calling upon scholars' curiosity and imagination, and enlisting them as inventive and interventionist participants in tomorrow's critical research agenda of social entrepreneurship.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that as the field of social entrepreneurship has emerged, its discourse seems to pre-empt the possibility of critique as it reproduces itself as an ideal solution that does not need any counter-options. To reclaim critique as a necessary practice within the academic field of social entrepreneurship, we have reviewed some early, but convincing, examples of critique that resist the tendency to protect a too narrow path for social entrepreneurship studies and that help us to outline a typology that can unfold a critical space for social entrepreneurship research (see Table I).

Practice of critique	Core idea	Core theoretical reference	Example in social entrepreneurship	Illustrative approach	Limitations and problems
Myth-busting	Challenge popular ideas; test assumptions and false premises	Aristotle, Descartes	Cook *et al.*, 2003; Kerlin and Pollak, 2010	Empirical (exploratory or hypothetico-deductive) reality tests	Objectivist understanding of research; neglects the nexus between "truth" and prevailing systems of power
Critique of power effects	Inquire into normalising effects of discourses, ideologies, and symbolic violence	Foucault, Bourdieu, Žižek, Boltanski and Chiapello	Dempsey and Sanders, 2010	Meticulous analysis of material, historical, economic or discursive structures and practices through discourse analysis, narrative analysis, etc	Might evoke distance towards subject of inquiry and privilege a priori critical stances
Normative critique	Inquire into normative foundations and marking of just trajectories	Rawls, Habermas	Eikenberry, 2009	Thorough checks of inherent moral judgments and justifications	Replaces one ideology with another dominant view; privileges views of social scientists
Critique of transgression	Inquire into micro-resistance and emancipation	Foucault, Latour, Boltanski and Thévenot	Parkinson and Howorth, 2008	Inquiry into everyday practices of practitioners and how they contest prevailing ideologies	Can overestimate the broader impetus of instances of micro-resistance; going native
Interventionist critique	Enact spaces for experimenting and radical inquiry	Law and Urry, Debord	Steyaert and Dey, 2010; Friedman and Desivilya, 2010	Participatory action research, minor analysis, aesthetic intervention	Might become co-opted and domesticated

Table I.
Overview of critical approaches to social entrepreneurship

Our typology is not classificatory but heterotopic (Foucault, 1989): it provides scholars with other forms, practices, and discourses for enacting research in social entrepreneurship. While we have emphasised the possibilities of the practices of denaturalising and denormalising, and of inquiring into moral foundations and reflexive enactments, this range of options is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive. Instead, we consider these forms of critique as possible practices of engagement through which we can attempt more radical enactments of the social in social entrepreneurship (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006). Also, in our take on critique we have not attempted to withdraw to an ivory tower or armchair position. Rather, we emphasize that critique can be undertaken in various ways; there is no one best way. Indeed, to develop social entrepreneurship as a critical space, there is as much need to be critical of critique, to be tactical with critique, as to experiment with more radical, interventionist trajectories.

Notes

1. We use the term homology to signify the sort of situation in which discourse proceeds without tension and contestation, that is, where one finds a certain consensus regarding the essence of social entrepreneurship.
2. As used by Derrida (2004), the term denotes forms of research which are pledged in advance to some utilitarian purpose as programmed by the agencies and instances of state, civil society, or capital interests. In the present context, the term implies interpretations of social entrepreneurship that stress some *a priori* meaning.
3. Note that critical research on social entrepreneurship derives primarily from scholars in the non-profit, voluntary, and third-sector realms. Though we cannot offer an elaborate treatise on why other streams of social entrepreneurship research have not engaged in critical reflection, we believe that the critical thinking in these three realms is mature enough to justify making it an explicit focus here. Another point worth addressing is the geographic bias of our inquiry. That is, the literature we use to map existing critiques of social entrepreneurship relies strongly upon studies produced in European countries and the United States, making it highly "unbalanced".
4. Based on the well-known programme MythBusters on the Discovery Channel (see www.yourdiscovery.com/web/mythbusters/). The cast actively creates the (experimental) conditions for subjecting a given myth to scientific scrutiny. The myth is said to be "busted" when the team's experiment does not create the results the myth projected.
5. It should remain clear at all times that critical sociology is not internally homogeneous or even consistent. The term has risen to prominence not least due to Boltanski and Latour's critique of Bourdieu's critical project; as used in the present context it extends beyond Boltanski's (2011) rather narrow usage. That being said, we are indebted to Boltanski's thoughtful comment that critical sociology entails a tension in that it pretends to know what the subject under investigation does not know: "that they are dominated without knowing it" (p. 20).

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