J Bus Ethics (2016) 133:627–641
DOI 10.1007/s10551-014-2450-y

Rethinking the Space of Ethics in Social Entrepreneurship: Power, Subjectivity, and Practices of Freedom

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Published online: 19 November 2014
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Abstract This article identifies power, subjectivity, and practices of freedom as neglected but significant elements for understanding the ethics of social entrepreneurship. While the ethics of social entrepreneurship is typically conceptualized in conjunction with innate properties or moral commitments of the individual, we problematize this view based on its presupposition of an essentialist conception of the authentic subject. We offer, based on Foucault's ethical oeuvre, a practice-based alternative which sees ethics as being exercised through a critical and creative dealing with the limits imposed by power, notably as they pertain to the conditioning of the neoliberal subject. To this end, we first draw on prior research which looks at how practitioners of social enterprises engage with government policies that demand that they should act and think more like prototypical entrepreneurs. Instead of simply endorsing the kind of entrepreneurial subjectivity implied in prevailing policies, our results indicate that practitioners are mostly reluctant to identify themselves with the invocation of governmental power, often rejecting the subjectivity offered to them by discourse. Conceiving these acts of resistance as emblematic of how social entrepreneurs practice ethics by retaining a skeptical attitude toward attempts that seek to determine who they should be and how they should live, we introduce three vignettes that illustrate how practices of freedom relate to critique, the care for others, and reflected choice. We conclude that a practice-based approach of ethics can advance our understanding of how social entrepreneurs actively produce conditions of freedom for themselves as well as for others without supposing a 'true self' or a utopian space of liberty beyond power.

Keywords Ethics · Foucault · Governmentality · Neoliberalism · Practice theory · Social entrepreneurship

We cannot jump outside the situation, and there is no point where you are free from all power relations. But you can always change it.
Michel Foucault (1997a, p. 167)

Introduction

Ethics has had a dubious career in the domain of entrepreneurship studies. While at first it was literally non-existent, ethics has over the years become a more recognized focus within the field of entrepreneurship research (e.g., Buchholz and Rosenthal 2005; Cressy et al. 2011; Hannafey 2003; Harris et al. 2009). Reductively put, one can subdivide the available literature into accounts that assume a positive relationship between entrepreneurship and ethics and those which evaluate the entrepreneurship–ethics nexus more skeptically. Characteristic of the former case are accounts that suggest that entrepreneurship is structurally linked to the 'good society' (Brenkert 2002), or which align entrepreneurship with issues of emancipation to underscore its ethical thrust (e.g., Goss et al. 2011; Rindova et al. 2009). However, such affirmative readings of entrepreneurship are clearly outnumbered by accounts that evaluate the relationship between ethics and entrepreneurship more critically. For instance, Blackburn and Ram (2007) have cautioned against exaggerated expectations in the ethical potential of

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source: https://doi.org/10.24451/arbor.13098 | downloaded: 25.4.2024

entrepreneurship, pointing out that the research community must "maintain a perspective based on evidence rather than idealized notions" (p. 76). While some commentators have promulgated the view that entrepreneurship and ethics constitute a love–hate relationship (Fisscher et al. 1984), other appraisals have been more trenchant by envisioning ethics and entrepreneurship as being mutually exclusive (Carr 2003). Overall then, this raises the question of "whether entrepreneurship may be considered ethical at all" (Jones and Spicer 2009, p. 103).

This reluctance to credit entrepreneurship with ethical currency contrasts sharply with the literature on social entrepreneurship. Notwithstanding some notable critiques of social entrepreneurship's ethical base (e.g., Eikenberry 2009), existing research has mainly been premised on the assumption that social entrepreneurship is at the service of the common good, thus exhibiting a thoroughly synergetic relationship with ethics. Since the inception of social entrepreneurship as a field of academic research, it has been commonplace to support the ethical exegesis of social entrepreneurship through cliché-like comparisons between the prototypical business entrepreneur, who is conceived of as egotistic, selfish, wayward, dominant, and opportunistic, and the social entrepreneur who is portrayed as the proverbial embodiment of ethical virtuousness. The image of social entrepreneurship as a preeminent moral actor further relies on the contention that the motives of social entrepreneurs are impeccable and noble (Goss et al. 2011), and that social entrepreneurs are able to attain large-scale, systemic change (Cukier et al. 2011).

Such panacea-like qualities are inter alia epitomized in a recent interview with Michael Porter, the Harvard-based management guru, who points out "that social entrepreneurship is an important transitional vehicle toward the creation of shared value and a capitalist system in which meeting social needs is not just a peripheral activity but a core aspect of every business" (Driver 2012, p. 421). Porter's prophetic enunciation reflects the widespread belief that social entrepreneurship will be capable of instigating a move toward "a more ethical and socially inclusive capitalism" (Dacin et al. 2011, p. 3). Although it must be kept in mind that the term 'ethics' is used rather sparingly in the available literature, it is still possible to see the ethical substrate of social entrepreneurship in the way it is positioned as a viable alternative to capitalism 'as we know it' (Shaw and de Bruin 2013). Media coverage and promotion agencies further advance these eschatological sentiments by linking social entrepreneurship with a paradise 'yet to come' which is eventually made possible through the miraculous deeds of some extraordinary, rare individuals (Dey 2007).

The main effect of such accounts is probably that readers are provided with a fairly optimistic appraisal of the potential that social entrepreneurship has for navigating society into safer, more sustainable territories. For our part, we are reluctant to support these insights uncritically for they appear not to tell us anything very useful about the ethics of social entrepreneurship. Among the central problems of prevailing estimates is that they attend to an essentialist perspective which views social entrepreneurs as a priori ethical. This forms a misleading interpretation for it tends to reify ethics by construing social entrepreneurship as wholly authentic, whereas it is a deeply contradictory endeavor. By implication, idealized versions of social entrepreneurship tend to veil the complex ethical decisions and dilemmas that lie at the heart of social entrepreneurs' mundane reality. Thus, as a result of naturalizing ethics as a property of the individual, ethics is actually not explained, but instead explained away. That is, it is removed from anything which is difficult, contradictory or ambivalent, in short, anything that has to do with the prosaics of the ethical experience (Dey 2007; Dey and Steyaert 2010; Steyaert 2004; Steyaert and Dey 2010).

To move beyond idealized conceptions of social entrepreneurship which prevent us from grasping the complex ways in which social entrepreneurs actually 'do' ethics, in this article, we propose to re-conceptualize the ethics of social entrepreneurship by introducing three interrelated concepts which appear most helpful for such a task: power, subjectivity, and freedom as practice. Invoking Michel Foucault's ethical oeuvre to develop a practice-based understanding of ethics, we demonstrate that the ethics of social entrepreneurship is not given a priori but is immanent in ongoing struggles related to becoming an ethical subject. The chief value of a practice-based approach is that it compels us to consider ethics from the viewpoint of the practices through which social entrepreneurs actively shape their subjectivity and their relations with others so as to temporarily transgress attempts that seek to determine who they should be and how they should live. Creating a circuit between Foucault's ethical work and social entrepreneurship thus enables us to dereify ethics by pinpointing its produced character. Conceptually elaborating and empirically illustrating how ethical practices are enacted, we seek in particular to emphasize the quotidian ways in which social entrepreneurs actualize liberating forms of individual and collective existence. Overall then, cultivating a sensibility that ethics is something which is done by social entrepreneurs on a day-to-day basis rather than possessed once and for all, the central contribution of this article is that it offers a starting point for investigating the different forms that the ethical practice of social entrepreneurship can take.

The paper proceeds as follows. We first challenge accounts which identify the ethics of social entrepreneurship in conjunction with some innate property of the

autonomous individual, and then elaborate an alternative understanding based on Foucault's writing on ethics. Developing a practice-based framework which delineates ethics as exercised through a critical and creative dealing with existing limits, we review prior research to pinpoint how social entrepreneurs engage in practices of freedom that resist governmental power which demands that they must act and think more like prototypical entrepreneurs. To chart further manifestations that practices of freedom can take, we introduce three vignettes that emphasize how practices of freedom relate to issues of critique, the care for others, and reflected choice. We conclude by evaluating the value of a practice-based view of ethics for social entrepreneurship scholarship.

On the Ethics of Social Entrepreneurship: From Authentic Self to Practices of Freedom

However valuable recent inquiries into the ethics of social entrepreneurship might have been, we believe that ethical readings of social entrepreneurship entail a problem which merits critical attention. This problem is chiefly related to approaches which conceive, either implicitly or explicitly, the ethics of social entrepreneurship as an innate property of the authentic individual. This is apparent in the rhetoric of many intermediary organizations, such as Ashoka, one of the eldest and most salient agencies promoting social entrepreneurship. For instance, in what at times appears like an evangelist discourse, Ashoka purports on its homepage (cf. www.ashoka.org) that the individual's ethical fiber forms a sine qua non for becoming part of their illustrious circle of social entrepreneurship fellows. Construing ethics as a trait of the individual is also part of the academic discourse; for example, Hemingway (2005) mentions that "it is the personal values of the individual that may make the difference between the private or public sector entrepreneur and the social entrepreneur" (p. 237). The image of social entrepreneurs as ethical subjects is premised to a large extent on the assumption that their involvement in projects or ventures which try to liberate people from systematic life disadvantages such as poverty requires a kind of ethical virtuousness which only very few people possess. Without an ethical fiber, it would seem unlikely that social entrepreneurs would be able to endure the hardship involved in alleviating such suffering. It is because the moral commitments of the individual social entrepreneur exceed the kind of sacrifice an average individual would be able (and willing) to make that social entrepreneurship gets to represent a higher calling rather than just an ordinary profession or career (Dempsey and Sanders 2010). In this way, the social entrepreneur is elevated to the status of a *sui generis* entity, that is, a class of its own whose superiority is rooted in the ethical properties of the individual.

This said, it should be borne in mind that it is not uncommon in theories of ethics to place the individual center stage (Painter-Morland 2008). Yet, what we find problematic about the view that social entrepreneurs are more virtuous and ethical than ordinary people, or that they are ethical all the time, is that this suggests the existence of an ethical substance, a pre-ordained and fixed property of the authentic individual. In our estimate, such assumptions are misleading for they conceive of the relationship between ethics and the social entrepreneur as static and essentialist, thus encouraging the impression that one is either ethical or not. This quite evidently ignores the fact that the everyday life of social entrepreneurs is replete with ethical quandaries (Zahra et al. 2009). Thus, the ethics of social entrepreneurship might not always already exist, like a material object, but might instead be in need of constant protection and nurturing. Hence, denoting ethics as an innate property of the individual obscures the possibility that the ethics of social entrepreneurship is a very fragile endeavor that is lined with not only intermittent moments of success but also with frequent setbacks. Lastly, the essentialist view of ethics is problematic because it inadvertently gives rise to the view that the successes, as well as the failures, of social enterprises are primarily or exclusively related to the moral state of the individual entrepreneur. This not only ignores the fact that social entrepreneurship is an inherently collective phenomenon but also fails to take notice of what actually happens when social entrepreneurs get to employ their ethical motives and aims in the context of everyday practices. Consequently, using the moral state of the individual as a proxy for the ethics of social entrepreneurship might too readily ignore the role which mundane practices play in such ethical undertakings.

Therefore, it is crucial to reassess the view of the social entrepreneur as an authentic subject whose ethical decisions and deeds are merely the material representation of some innate ethical traits. Deeming it urgent to rethink the ethics of social entrepreneurship, the underpinning argument in this paper is that the ethics of social entrepreneurship should be conceived from a perspective which emphasizes the minutiae of how ethics is actually 'done'. Michel Foucault's perspective of ethics seems ideal for such a task for it helps us move away from an understanding of ethics premised on the normative idea(l) of an authentic individual and toward an understanding of ethics as a practice.

Foucault's Ethics

While practice-based ethics has garnered increasing attention in the discourse of business ethics (e.g., Clegg et al. 2007;

Loacker and Muhr 2009; Painter-Morland 2008), in this article, we home in on the work of Foucault, particularly the ethical work he pursued toward the end of his life (e.g., 1987, 1988a, b, 1990, 1997b, 2011). To start, we should note that Foucault did not conceive of ethics as a moral theory which seeks to stipulate universal moral criteria for evaluating people's actions. Rather, he was interested in the variegated practices through which people turn themselves into ethical subjects. To grasp the basic thrust of Foucault's ethical work, it is important to mention that many have seen his 'ethical turn' as signaling a radical break with his previous work on power (Flynn 1985), which was concerned primarily with the normalizing/disciplinary effects of power and discourse (Foucault 1973, 1977). Yet, a more productive way of looking at Foucault's turn toward questions of freedom and ethical self-care is to see it as complementing rather than as substituting for his earlier work. Although Foucault's earlier work, notably *Discipline and Punish* (1977), conceived of subjects as constituted through disciplinary regimes of power, Foucault (Foucault 1988a) later conceded that this work might have been focusing "too much on the technology of domination and power" (p. 19). Moving away from an understanding of subjectivity as determined by technologies of power, Foucault came to reintroduce a sense of individual agency into his work on power by emphasizing the practices of the self through which individuals constitute themselves as subjects of their own knowledge. While it should be Foucault's instead of Foucault (1984a) earlier work on power was addressing the question of "How we are constituted as subjects who […] submit to power relations" (p. 49), his ethical work complements this focus by addressing the question if and how individuals are able to destabilize the call of power by creatively transgressing the subjectivity offered to them as their true nature. Put succinctly "How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions?" (ibid.).

Although Foucault's work on ethics does not add up to a self-contained theory, the question his multifaceted elaborations tried to address was how one is able to live an ethical life in the absence of universal moral codes or imperatives. His contention that many liberation movements had failed precisely because they tried to base moral obligations upon the idea of authentic subjectivity (Foucault 1984b) prompted him to engage with antique (Greek and Roman) ethics which offered new insights into how morality is practiced outside of the mere obedience to established codes of rule. As he reinvigorated philosophical treatises of ethical self-care, he did not so much nostalgically glorify a bygone era as realize that cultivated work on the self offered an alternative to approaches which saw the lawful use of reason as the only mechanism through which subjects could be liberated from their enslavement.

Foucault's interest in Greek ethics was based in large part on the realization that it locates the freedom of the individual in the practices of self-care. Freedom thus encompasses a critical and creative engagement with normalizing approaches that outline how one is supposed to live and who one is supposed to be. Importantly, the understanding of freedom which informed Foucault's ethical work contrasts sharply with approaches that see freedom as the antagonism of domination which represses, alienates, and conceals the individual's true nature (Foucault 1997a, b, c). Although Foucault did not denigrate the significance of liberation as manifest, for instance, in processes of decolonialization (Foucault 1987), his own theorizing was interested more in freedom as a phenomenon which does not so much try to dispense with power as to creatively transgress the limits that power imposes. Envisioning freedom as a practice rather than a *telos*, Foucault was interested in how individuals bend and breach the norms, rules, and definitions that impel them to define themselves in particular ways. While freedom presupposes a critical, yet creative, engagement with existing limits, it is important to understand that such constant vigilance and a "hyper- and pessimistic activism" (Berard 1999, p. 222) form pivotal components of how Foucault understands ethics. This critical attitude, or what Foucault (1997c) called the art of voluntary inservitude, is essential for retaining a critical awareness of how one is shaped by various technologies of power, and for preserving one's ability to make choices about what to do and who to be. It is precisely since forming a practice rather than some finite state that freedom can never be fully realized nor ever fully suppressed, as it is subject to ongoing struggles around subjectivity.

Social Entrepreneurship and Practices of Freedom

Transposed to the present argument, we can see that Foucault's ethical oeuvre works as an invitation to study how social entrepreneurs engage in practices of freedom whereby they resist and appropriate the discursive and institutional limits which demand that they act and think in particular ways. Understanding how social entrepreneurs practice freedom thus requires revealing the mechanisms of power that shape the work and subjectivity of social entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, a practice-based view calls attention to how social entrepreneurs creatively breach the normalizing effects of power. Shedding light on social entrepreneurs' embedded practices of freedom makes it possible to understand that although they are always limited through the normalizing force of power, they are also capable of appropriating power relations in ways that let them expand their possibilities for action. Rather than

forming a homogenous set of practices, freedom can be enacted in quite different ways. It is to this difference that we will now turn. Before doing so, however, we offer an account of governmentality as the form of power which operates by shaping the subjectivity of social entrepreneurial practitioners.

Neoliberal Governmentality

In advanced liberalism, according to Foucault (1991), governing is an 'art' which involves forms of power that are transmitted through the production of subjectivities. Unlike previous regimes of governing which were based on more authoritarian and hierarchical forms of power, governing in advanced liberalism involves an exercise of power which primarily relies on introducing an ethos of responsibility through various measures of individual empowerment. Where Foucault's (1991) discussion of neoliberal governmentality shows how political forms of government are extended to forms of self-improvement, we can see that governmentality is less a matter of dominating people than of optimizing their capacity for social production by making them "fit", "flexible" and "autonomous" (Lemke 2001). Bluntly put, neoliberal governmentality relies on the technologies of power to produce a certain action-orientation on the part of those being governed.

While neoliberal governmentality is indicative of a fundamental transformation of the relation between the state and civil society, this transformation comprises the much-heralded demise of the welfare state model as one of its most salient phenomena. Neoliberal governmentality places a strong emphasis on proactive individuals who participate in the quest to improve their own welfare. Thus, in what Dean (2010) calls the post-welfarist regime of the social, the role of the state is less to secure welfare directly (e.g., by providing public services), and more to create the conditions under which individuals and groups within society are able to solve their own problems. This activation implies a process whereby individuals and groups become located in a network of obligations that impels them to act and think in determinate ways. Examples of this can be found in today's work integration programs: the unemployed individual is expected to make his or her own arrangements to become integrated into the job market (e.g., by participating in educational or coaching programs), thus averting the risk of becoming welfare dependent. In this way, neoliberal governmentality constitutes the process through which political problems such as unemployment are transformed into a matter of individual engagement and self-management. An ethos of proactiveness is placed at the heart of the social by creating a felt responsibility for particular issues or populations and, most significantly, by emphasizing enterprise as a normative strategy for both the individual and for organizations.

Social Entrepreneurship and the Governing of Civil Society

While neoliberal governmentality involves infusing market logics into all domains of social life, and constituting 'responsible' subjectivities that take their fate into their own hands, this makes it clear why so many governments have keenly endorsed social entrepreneurship as a policy instrument for governing civil society (Carmel and Harlock 2008). First and foremost, social entrepreneurship policies make it possible to position competition, flexibility and managerialism as normative models for civil society, meanwhile excluding or marginalizing explicitly pro-social norms and values (Eikenberry 2009). Critical commentators have been quick to suggest that the discourse of social entrepreneurship is a technology of power through which elite actors get to justify the roll-back of the state in its role as a provider of public welfare and to shift responsibility to independent agents within civil society (Mason 2012). In this logic, social entrepreneurship forms an ideology which promotes a more business-like ethos in quite diverse areas such as health, social care and regeneration (Baines et al. 2010).

Though we partly sympathize with this reading, we also feel that it would be premature to identify the main function of social entrepreneurship programs and policies in the ideological veiling of sectional interests. Although it is correct that social entrepreneurship works to confer responsibility from the state to individuals and communities within civil society, this is achieved not only by introducing tight measures of surveillance and control, but also, and probably even more so, by producing the conditions under which individuals can be acted upon as free beings (Dey 2014). Such processes can be observed in social entrepreneurship policies and programs which demand that individuals and organizations operating within civil society should engage in commercial activities and become (more) business savvy (Parkinson and Howorth 2008). Hence, such endeavors appeal to the freedom of those working in and for civil society by suggesting that everyone should know that the best way forward as a charity manager, social leader or community activist is to believe in the ideas of management and business entrepreneurship. Many social entrepreneurship programs and policies work on the assumption that promoting (quasi)markets and competition between providers will drive down costs and improve efficiency (Carmel and Harlock 2008). This is probably nowhere more evident than in Britain, where social entrepreneurship has been

used to align the provision of public services more along the lines of market principles (Hogg and Baines 2011; Teasdale 2012). Through this process, social entrepreneurship as an organizational form relying on earned income strategies has been established as not merely one model in the welfare mix; rather, it is used as a normative point of reference which is expected to encourage all other organizations to endorse earned-income strategies. From the vantage point of governmentality, social entrepreneurship works to generalize a commercial logic to any organizational form within civil society which uses limited means to accomplish social ends.

One of the preeminent techniques for fostering goals related to social entrepreneurship, such as financial self-sufficiency, accountability or commercial revenues, has been performance-based government contracts (Curtis 2008). Whereas the explicit objective of such contracts is to bring about social entrepreneurship by providing money and various forms of coaching and guidance, they also enlist the respective individuals and organizations in a regime of accountability and transparency in which they have to constantly prove they are trustworthy and creditworthy (Dean 2010). Performance-based contracts work to shift the responsibility for providing welfare exclusively to the contracted partner who is then held responsible if the conditions of the contract are not fulfilled. Put succinctly, government contracts are a mixed blessing: at the same time that they make certain things possible, such as stabilizing social enterprises' revenue streams, they also enjoin practitioners to emulate the norms and subjectivities stipulated by the government authorities.

The freedom produced through contractual arrangements in general and social entrepreneurship programs and policies more specifically remains a paradoxical freedom: it not only works to make individuals and organizations in civil society 'fit' but also tries to bring them in line with the particular interests of government. Individuals and organizations become governable as they are expected to use the freedom they are bestowed with to fulfill the stipulations of the respective plan or policy (Curtis 2008). The price of neoliberal governmentality is that practitioners "must assume active responsibility for [their] activities, both for carrying them out and, of course, for their outcomes" (Burchell 1996, p. 29). In light of this we must remain mindful that even the best-intended social entrepreneurship program and policy might eventually encourage the rise of effects that are inimical to the possibilities of being free. Particularly important with regard to neoliberal governmentality are the constraints engendered by the constitution of entrepreneurial subjectivities that demand that practitioners in social enterprises should act and think more like actors from the private sector. The question then is: what are the possibilities of social entrepreneurial practitioners' freedom under conditions of governmental power?

From Objects of Neoliberal Governmentality to Subjects of Resistance

So far we have presented social entrepreneurship as part of the repertoire of neoliberal governmentality which permits acting upon individuals and organizations in civil society as proper enterprises, but some empirical studies provide evidence that practitioners rarely identify themselves in the prescribed terms. For instance, Howorth et al. (2011) show that the language of business and entrepreneurship being used by policy-makers, funders and support agencies to project the way forward for the social sector was not in accord with the way that social entrepreneurs construe their worlds and their selves. Baines et al. (2010) come to a similar conclusion, suggesting that government authorities, who tried to advance entrepreneurial and business-like approaches in the realm of public service delivery, and practitioners from social enterprises, often found it difficult to relate to the other party's world view and assumptions. By the same token, Parkinson and Howorth (2008), inquiring about the use of language by practitioners involved in social entrepreneurship, provide evidence that their language conventions stand in sharp contrast to those of social enterprise policies. Froggett and Chamberlayne (2004) complement this picture by showing that the 'entrepreneurial action story' disseminated via social policies did not adequately capture the subjectivity of practitioners. Emphasizing that the reality and subjectivity of practicing social entrepreneurs are far more complex and variegated than the business discourse inherent in government policies would suggest, these findings reveal that issues of agency take on a completely different meaning when studied at the level of practice, as compared to the level of social entrepreneurship programs and policies. While social entrepreneurial practitioners mostly refuse to identify with the kind of ideal subjectivity set down by government stipulations, this chiefly illuminates that "there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight" (Foucault 1982, p. 225). Pinpointing the reversibility to which social entrepreneurship programs and policies are prone, the results offer a glimpse into the subtle ways in which practitioners enact freedom by refusing to be who they are supposed to be. Hence, though practitioners might be called on to think and act like real entrepreneurs, they are still agents capable of reflecting on and opposing the way they are being shaped. Importantly, it is by acting irresponsibly that practitioners in fact get to behave responsibly by way of adopting an active role in shaping their subjectivity. Instead of merely embracing the entrepreneurial subjectivity offered to them by discourse,

practitioners engage in practices of freedom by creating the conditions under which they are not governed all that much.

To further explore the co-implication of resistance and ethical subjectivity, but also to make it clear that agonistic engagements with existing limits are just one way in which freedom can be practiced, we will now present three vignettes from our own research.

Practices of Freedom: Three Vignettes

Drawing from the first author's research (Dey 2007), we discuss three forms that practices of freedom can take. The first is practices of problematizing through which practitioners enact freedom via accounts that undermine dominant conceptions of entrepreneurial reality and subjectivity. The second is practices of relating through which practitioners forge links with others that transcend hierarchical and instrumental models of co-existence. And the third is practices of reflective affirmation, in which practitioners freely choose to identify themselves with the prescribed subjectivity. First, however, we offer a brief description of the research project, including its broader context and abductive mode of inference.

Description of Research Project: Context, Sample and Data

The research project from which the ensuing vignettes are drawn was triggered by the realization that organizations operating within civil society were increasingly being construed as actors who were sensitive to business and the market. In line with this observation, the project investigated the extent to which individuals in civil society organizations were incorporating and re-enacting entrepreneurial and managerial values and principles at the level of their mundane practices. Thus, the overarching objective was to gain novel insights into how the ubiquitous appeal to become leaner, more transparent, and more businesslike and enterprising, had already permeated these organizations' thinking and acting or, contrariwise, how these organizations managed to position themselves outside of the entrepreneurship mantra. Based on a synchronic research design, a sample consisting of 12 organizations was created. Though the organizations differed markedly in terms of their commercial activities, size or age, they were united by their focus on issues and activities related to development aid. That is, all organizations in the investigation were engaged in relief work, ecological, economic or sustainable development, human rights, migration, medical provision, or education in countries in the global south. All but one had a non-profit status as denoted by the Swiss federal certification agency and none was established or regulated by the national government. All but two organizations were financed, at least in part, via government grants.

The data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, observations in the respective organizations, and publicly available texts such as documents, interviews and media reports. The sampling procedure (i.e., maximum variation sampling) of the respondents aimed at maximizing the heterogeneity of perspectives and practices by including individuals from different occupational positions and hierarchical ranks. The sample, which included a total of 30 respondents, extended from office (full-time and part-time) administrators, project administrators and assistants, heads of projects/nations, and volunteers, to directors and managers as well as founders. The interviews lasted between one and two hours and were all digitally recorded, transcribed and re-analyzed for the purpose of this article. The interviews were analyzed in the original language (Swiss German) and only the excerpts used for illustration were translated into English.

Analyzing Practices of Freedom

In re-analyzing the transcribed interviews we placed our focus squarely on language as a central aspect of practices of freedom (Foucault 1997a, b, c). The value of language-based analyses for understanding how social entrepreneurial practitioners deal with dominant discourses has been convincingly demonstrated by Hervieux et al. (2010), Howorth et al. (2011), Parkinson and Howorth (2008) and Seanor and Meaton (2008), to name just a few. For the present purpose, the focal point of our attention was how practitioners were talking about their everyday work, thus offering an account of their subjectivity and their relationship with others. Applying the analytical method promoted by micro-discourse analysis which focuses on what people actually do with language (Alvesson and Karreman 2000), we investigated in detail how the informants used language to engage with prevailing discourses that compel them to endorse a more entrepreneurial way of acting and being. Hence, our objective was to explore the complex ways in which the interviewees engage in work around subjectivity, placing particular heed to how their linguistic accounts relate to issues of freedom. The interview transcripts were analyzed using the principle of abductive inference. Abductive inference does not assume that theories emerge exclusively from the data. Rather, abduction flexibly aligns the conceptual and empirical realms of research (Dubois and Gadde 2002), while using existing knowledge to make empirical observations amenable to conceptual reflection. Incrementally making sense of the data from the perspective of practices of freedom, we

engaged in an iterative process which involved on the one hand multiple readings of the interview material, and on the other hand constant comparisons with existing research, particularly as it relates to practice-based ethics, neoliberal governmentality, and social entrepreneurship. The relevant insights from readings are interlaced with the ensuing presentation of the three vignettes.

Vignette 1: Practices of Problematization

To be able to comprehend what practices of problematization entail, it is important to understand that, since the 1990s, the field of development aid has witnessed a fundamental refashioning of its modus operandi and reason for being (Desai and Imrie 1998). In part because organizations could not deal effectively with such problems as abject poverty, they were increasingly confronted with novel demands and imperatives. Among other things, this instigated what Desai and Imrie term a new public management revolution: a call to integrate various ideas and practices derived from the private sector such as impact measurement, auditing and transparency. As part of this change, some suggested that organizations should become more entrepreneurial and that development aid quite generally should endorse a more business-like ethos (Ranking 2001). The first vignette illuminates practices of freedom based on the problematization of contemporary rationalities of development aid. Problematization thus designates the process whereby a certain field of experience or a set of practices is turned into a 'problem'. Problematization plays an important role in Foucault's (1991) thinking: he saw it as a crucial mechanism for making a given practice or institution amenable to renegotiation. Since acts of problematization open up a space for change by dint of questioning what is taken for granted, it becomes clear why problematization plays such an important role in Foucault's understanding of freedom as critical practice.

The case we use to illustrate practices of problematization involves the founder of a small development organization. Previously trained as a secondary school teacher, the practitioner set up his own organization to provide affordable medical care in developing countries. In the first extract, he gives an account of his estimate of how development aid is traditionally being practiced.

> … yes WELL I've … I've traveled a lot and have visited people who work in [development] projects and I've never actually been satisfied with how problems were usually approached and how things were done …

While he expresses his negative estimate of canonical development projects, the interview continues with the practitioner clarifying what he sees as the biggest drawback of development: the managerial and ethnocentric execution of aid-related projects.

> … I've also seen a project in which western medical education was provided in the K [name of mountain region] … but for the people themselves … I mean for the indigenous doctors that wasn't right… yes I wasn't particularly happy and thought that a different principle should have been adopted …

In this extract, the practitioner points at difficulties around implementing western knowledge (i.e., 'western medical education') in the context of a particular developing country; at various points in the interview he made it clear that the indigenous doctors were not enthusiastic about managerial practices that aimed to make health services more efficient. The following extract is from another point in the interview where he renders development as problematic by portraying it as inadequate to solve the problems at hand.

> … there are those development specialists who come into a foreign culture… and who introduce western management knowledge there … and then they leave again just when [the indigenous] people learn how things would work … and that's why the projects don't work and [the indigenous] people do what they are told until the consultant is gone …

In this extract, the respondent clarifies that development aid is often insensitive to 'foreign culture' in that it introduces western knowledge without paying sufficient attention to adequately embedding it in the local circumstances. This is characteristic of the rest of the interview, in which the practitioner pinpoints obstacles and dead ends related to the managerial provision of medical care in developing countries. In doing so, he positions these practices not as a specific problem of development aid, but as a general one. Essentially, the practitioner's account problematizes the nexus between managerialism and development aid, as at the point where he claims that the introduction of western health care by development-oriented organizations does not allow enough time for the indigenous medical professionals to 'learn how things would work'. The practitioner gets to speak his mind, making it clear that health care practices and development aid at large lead to unsustainable solutions and to harmful dependencies of the indigenous people, implying that this situation had to be changed accordingly.

Such practices of problematization can also be found in the available literature, particularly in studies of practitioners of social enterprises who are confronted with the government discourse of the entrepreneurial subject. For instance, Seanor and Meaton (2008) reveal how social entrepreneurs come to reject the prevailing image of the

heroic leader and even deny that they want to become social entrepreneurs. Parkinson and Howorth (2008) give us an even clearer picture of how practices of problematization might look: they show how social entrepreneurs problematize the language of business as used in government programs as "'dirty', 'ruthless', 'ogres', 'exploiting the black economy', 'wealth and empire building' and 'treating people as second class'" (pp. 300–301). Importantly, being asked whether they saw themselves as social entrepreneurs, the practitioners got to dismiss the concept, with phrases like "'it's amusing!', 'it's ridiculous!', 'too posh … I'm working class'" (p. 301). Even though these utterances might appear pejorative, the point here is that speech which tells the truth beyond rhetorical dissimulation is a precondition for an ethical reformulation of oneself (Foucault 2001, 2011). Consequently, practices of problematization always seek to clear a space where individuals can relate to themselves in a different manner, one which increases the possibilities of becoming an ethical subject.

Vignette 2: Practices of Relating

In the previous vignette, practices of freedom took the form of a problematization of the canon of development aid. Problematizing official truths thus opens up possibilities for alternative practices of the self and, by extension, for subjectivities beyond the image of the enterprising self. Whereas the discussion above might have fostered the impression that Foucault's ethics is unduly self-centered, this is wrong to the extent that Foucault (1988b, 2004) assumed that the human becomes an ethical subject by establishing not only ethical relations with him- or herself but also with others (Halperin 1995). An emphasis on otherness is important simply because contemporary development aid entails a tendency to impoverish social relations with the aim of rendering them governable. Even though myriad attempts were made to render development aid more participatory and inclusive, these endeavors have often worked as opportunistic mechanisms for implementing new measures of control over the beneficiaries (Cook and Kothari 2001). In a similar vein, attempts to render development aid more transparent and accountable have had the unintended effect of undermining rather than strengthening the position of aid beneficiaries, who probably represent the most important stakeholder of development-oriented organizations. For instance, Ebrahim (2003) found that accountability mechanisms have prioritized the interests and agendas of strategic constituents such as government agencies or private donors to the detriment of the beneficiaries. In the context of the increasing economization of civil society, recipients of aid are inscribed into a relationship of conditional exchange: they are expected to behave according to the stipulations laid out by the organization which provides aid. As a result, relationships between development organizations and their beneficiaries in many ways have become, despite claims to the contrary, more hierarchical and control-oriented. These negative developments reflect, somewhat paradoxically, attempts to increase the effectiveness of development aid by adopting the entrepreneurial form as a standard for relating to aid recipients.

With this as a backdrop, the present vignette highlights practices of freedom which cultivate relations with others that go beyond the kind of instrumentalization visible in government programs aimed at empowering aid recipients (Brigg 2001). The case from which this vignette is drawn involves a practitioner who works as a project manager for a medium-sized organization; he is responsible for overseeing its activities in countries in Central America. The extract below is taken from a passage where the practitioner elaborates on the sort of relations he and his organization seek to foster with their beneficiaries.

> … for instance … our approach in development work is based on the premise that one is among equals …

Employing the notion 'equals' to delineate the approach his organization uses in relating to beneficiaries, the interview continues with the practitioner giving an account of the parameters which determine an equal relationship. Among other things, he stresses the need to remain 'close to', to 'commit to', and to 'learn to identify with' the indigenous other.

> … I think we're dealing with a lot of difference which we have to mobilize … and that's why it has to become our primary goal to bring all people to the same human level, yes … otherwise it won't turn out right …

What is revealed in this second extract is that equality is not seen as a pre-given condition of sameness but rather something which has to be actively fostered and constantly nurtured. At different moments in the interview, the practitioner portrays equality as a critical factor in development initiatives, one that goes beyond a priori values such as respect or tolerance. A further relational aspect he repeatedly stresses is participation. He thus denotes participation not only as an instrumental means toward other ends (i.e., success) or as a euphemism for unequal relations of power (Cook and Kothari 2001) but as a form of relating with the other which allows for mutual satisfaction.

> … for instance I'm dealing with people … there are those stories which I get to hear on a daily basis and which also enliven my life … I … I gain a lot [i.e. emotionally] from those people …

In this extract, the practitioner emphasizes that his encounters with the indigenous people and in particular the stories he hears from them 'enliven' his life ('I gain a lot from those people'). He thus makes it clear in the course of the interview that development should not be practiced through a hierarchical model of exchange. Doing so, he suggests, would undermine not only the overall chance of development projects succeeding but, even more importantly, make impossible the 'gratifications' implied in genuinely participatory development. In this way, the practitioner sketches out a mode of relating with beneficiaries which is clearly beyond the sort of instrumentalism embodied by the contract culture as the new paradigm of social welfare provision (Curtis 2008). What this case shows is that 'participation' and 'equality' are used as ethical yardsticks for establishing relations that grant an adequate voice to the indigenous other. However, conceiving those properties as part of a process, the practitioner makes it clear that 'participation' and 'equality' require ongoing commitment, and hence time, humility and caution.

These cursory illustrations stand in obvious contrast to accounts of development aid based on a hierarchical distinction between experts on the one hand and beneficiaries on the other. Judging from what has just been said, it is evident that even though government strategies might try to render development-oriented organizations' relations with their beneficiaries leaner, and more transparent and professional, they have not succeeded in fully shaping these relationships according to an instrumental logic. That practitioners are well able to influence and protect the relationships in which they participate is supported by Seanor and Meaton (2008): their study challenges the idea that the novel focus on market-based solutions in the social sector will necessarily marginalize the 'social'. This finding also resonates with those of Levander (2010), who notes that practitioners are able to introduce "an alternative order of governing that is distinct from norms in the business sphere and the public sector" (p. 222). In a similar vein, Curtis (2008) states that even though one "would expect high levels of mimetism and a dominant neoliberal/NPM [new public management] discourse", he found that social entrepreneurs "developed richer relationships than is suggested by the contractualism literature" (p. 286). This is relevant to the extent that the introduction of social entrepreneurship to development aid has been accompanied by concerns that doing so will make it impossible to establish and nurture relationships which allow for participation, dialogue and equality. Moreover, it was assumed that the novel focus on 'results-based management', which aimed to make development organizations more effective (Murphy 2000), would lead more or less directly to the establishment of instrumental relations at the expanse of "themes of social justice, community cohesion, and healthy communities" (Seanor and Meaton 2008, p. 26). Accordingly, it becomes possible to argue that practitioners often do give relative priority to a relationality based on an interest in alterity and otherness (Loacker and Muhr 2009), thus dispensing with the sort of instrumentalism which is at the heart of the 'enterprising up' of their work.

Vignette 3: Practices of Reflected Affirmation

With this last vignette we intend to shed light on practices of freedom which neither resist nor appropriate entrepreneurial and managerial invocations but endorse them through a process of reflected judgment. To understand why such acts of ostensible servitude might qualify as practices of freedom, remember one of the central ideas of Foucault's (2010) later work: power is not simply exerted on the subject since the subject needs to assume power. Hence, rather than power being something exercised against the will of the individual, it implies a subject who affirms power, and who decides to endorse its productivity. What this implies is that individuals can use their critical faculties not only to displace subjectivities ascribed to them from the outside but also to affirm them. Allowing power to shape one's subjectivity does not automatically mean that an individual is a 'docile body' who will blindly follow the call of power. Instead, the individual who endorses rather than criticizes demands to become a particular kind of subject might nevertheless be engaged in practices of freedom insofar as his or her affirmation is driven by a desire to expand the possibilities for relating to themselves (and others) as ethical subjects.

Conceiving of practices of reflected affirmation as arising from a reflected dealing with common truths, we would like to illustrate these practices against the backdrop of a retired financial specialist who started working on a part-time basis in an organization engaged in educational projects in Southeast Asia. The following extract derives from an interview sequence where the practitioner argues that the days are gone where they were able to produce and sell goods without first taking into account people's actual demands.

> … one produces just anything … for example sweaters in a traditional way or whatever; and then one tries to sell those things on the basis of the ideal of solidarity … that's no use… I mean from our perspective … one has to open oneself to new concepts… and not only look at the social aspects …

In this extract, the practitioner puts forward a fictional illustration of what she believes represents a typical development project (i.e., trading sweaters): it appears doomed to failure precisely because it relies on the assumption that the product will be sold on the market

solely because it appeals to people's 'ideal of solidarity'. As the interview goes on, the practitioner repeatedly charges traditional development organizations with not paying adequate attention to the economic aspects of their projects.

> … there has to be an economically viable way, a feasible way of making the project sustainable … we certainly provide the projects with an initial financing … if we see a market… but after that it needs to work in a sustainable way …

The practitioner's use of 'sustainable' in the above extract reveals that she construes economic self-sufficiency as an essential aspect of development-oriented practice. In line with managerial definitions of social entrepreneurship, she depicts good development practice as relying on earned-income strategies, which are assumed to liberate development organizations from becoming dependent on government grants. Later on, and as revealed in the extract below, she deploys the notion of 'efficiency' while responding to one of the researcher's questions about what she thinks makes her organization special.

> … what distinguishes us from others is our efficiency …

This extract is only one example of how the practitioner emphasizes the importance of economic parameters or practices. She does not completely downplay the significance of development aid's social foundations since she acknowledges more than once that organizations working in this domain do in fact have 'good ideas'. On the other hand, she makes it very clear that traditional development organizations, lacking economic knowledge and expertise, jeopardize those ideas and even their very existence.

This vignette demonstrates that practices of freedom might be difficult to distinguish from practices of subjection: the practitioner does get to endorse economic ideas such as earned income, managerialism and effectiveness—which have repeatedly been criticized for emptying out the essence of civil society organizations (Eikenberry 2009). However, what separates practices of subjection from practices of freedom is that in the former the subject accepts a truth whose authority is purportedly beyond question, while in the latter the subject chooses to affirm an official truth. Hence, this particular case should be seen less as signaling the practitioner's subjection to economic principles and more as her reflectively adopting regimes of truth, which allows her to act properly within prevailing relations of force. Though some scholars would surely insist that cases like this simply exemplify the totalizing operation of power—in which individuals cannot even understand the degree of their own subjection—we prefer to see practitioners as capable of reflected judgment and ethical decisions. Using this emphasis, we can conceive of practitioners' affirmation of economic principles not as signs of resignation in the face of various pressures and limitations but as indications that individuals desire to govern themselves in the right way. One example is the insightful study by Seanor et al. (2013): they show that the language of enterprise employed in social entrepreneurship policies is not necessarily alienating the true essence of practitioners, and at times even offers practitioners new opportunities to create the conditions of responsible self-care. However surprising this suggestion might be, affirming attitudes and practices such as entrepreneurship and managerialism might eventually enable people to mobilize the often hidden possibilities of ethical becoming.

Discussion and Concluding Comments

Whereas ethics occupies a rather self-evident, albeit often implicit, position in the scholarly understanding of social entrepreneurship, researchers have mostly connected the ethics of social entrepreneurship with some innate capacity of the individual entrepreneur. Based on a skeptical attitude toward such essentialism and a commitment to rethink the ethics of social entrepreneurship outside of an idea of the authentic subject, we have turned to Foucault's work on ethics which urges us to search the ethics of social entrepreneurship at the intersection of power and subjectivity. Our conceptualization has stressed that ethics, rather than being a property of the individual, is a practice through which social entrepreneurs engage—in a critical and creative manner—with existing relations of power. In contrast to theories which associate power exclusively with negative phenomena such as domination or exploitation, we have taken an interest in more subtle forms of power which operate primarily by structuring social entrepreneurs' understanding of what they are supposed to do and who they are supposed to be. Ethics in this framework represents the fugitive acts through which social entrepreneurs resist and temporarily free themselves from existing pressures and limits.

Having construed social entrepreneurs' practices of freedom as co-implied with power, that is, as standing in a relationship of constant provocation (Foucault 1982), a preeminent contribution of our argument is that it calls into question the conventional separation between ethics and politics. The encounter between ethics and politics thus takes the form of a limit experience that arises through struggles around social entrepreneurs' subjectivity. Our contribution has illustrated, both conceptually and empirically, the two sides of social entrepreneurship's ethico-political limit experience: on the one hand, the various forces which aim at shaping social entrepreneurs' space of freedom by delineating who they are and how they should live and, on the other hand, the practices of freedom

through which social entrepreneurs rebut or appropriate these attempts to actualize their possibilities for individual and collective agency. The ethico-political limit experience hence entails the social entrepreneur as an ethical subject who responds to external demands which constrain his or her personal sense of self or entrepreneurial pursuit quite generally. In a broader sense, ethics becomes a shorthand way of describing the practices through which social entrepreneurs escape or bend the variegated forces which encroach upon their everyday lives.

Our excursus on neoliberal governmentality helped us advance our understanding of the political aspect of the limit experience, notably by illuminating how social entrepreneurs in many advanced liberal societies are increasingly called on to become more 'responsible' by emulating the values and behaviors of entrepreneurs from the private sector. From the vantage point of governmentality, there are no charities, nongovernmental organizations or self-help groups, but only entrepreneurs who understand that the only way forward in today's world is to endorse the principles of competition and flexibility in one's practices. Our inquiry into social entrepreneurship policies and programs offered a case in point of how social problems are transformed into a matter of entrepreneurial self-care, and how this transformation in turn renders practitioners in social enterprises governable. Having contended that neoliberal governmentality renders social entrepreneurial practitioners governable by placing an entrepreneurial orientation toward innovation and self-sufficiency at the heart of their actions, we call for greater reflection on whether and how practitioners are able to navigate their way around such forms of subjectivity which are based on an economic logic of individual conduct. We have illustrated this second aspect of the ethico-political limit experience through a re-reading of prior research which showed how social entrepreneurs routinely break free from managerially defined programs and policies by either problematizing them head-on or by creating a sense of self outside of the official terminology. These studies of practitioners' resistance emphasize that voluntary inservitude vis-à-vis ruling conventions and dominant norms are key hallmarks of ethical practices (Foucault 1997c). Cursory as this discussion has been, it has alerted us to the fact that the agonistic practices through which social entrepreneurs increase their possibilities for self-determination represent only one way freedom can be practiced. Our vignettes helped us deepen our understanding of practices of freedom by raising awareness that freedom can be practiced in at least two additional ways: through practices of relating and through practices of reflected affirmation.

First, practices of relating involve a sensitivity to the perspective of the other. This focus on otherness cannot possibly be overestimated because Foucault's account on ethics has been perpetually challenged for being overly individualistic (Cordner 2008). A sound understanding of the relational aspect of practices of freedom appears indispensible, especially given that practitioners in social enterprises often work under conditions that might hamper them in establishing relationships that thrive on principles of solidarity and equality (Eikenberry 2009). Practices of relating, hence, mark a response to the looming instrumentalization of relations associated with impact measurement, auditing, and transparency practices derived from the private sector. Admittedly, it might look as though practices of relating are in line with the burgeoning literature on trust which essentially suggests that dependable relationships are a key resource for creating sustainable ventures (e.g., Curtis et al. 2010). It should be noted that, however, the practices of relating transcend the transactional logic upon which common understandings of trust are premised. In contrast to trust, which evaluates relations with others in terms of their relative utility as exposed, for instance, by Putnam's (2000) contention that where "people are trusting and trustworthy […], […], social transactions are less costly" (p. 288), the practices of relating express a logic of unconditionality that acknowledges others' singularity by treating them as sovereign sources of meaning. This openness toward the other's inalienable alterity is too often ignored in the literature on trust, which focuses mainly on the pragmatic implications of social entrepreneurs' existing relations. Common usages of trust ignore the fact that not all relations have an immediate purpose or function; instead the transactional logic which lies at the center of trust is used to reformulate relations with others as part of the economic which, in extremis, might lead to the annulment of the ethical (Jones et al. 2005). Practices of relating merit further attention in future research for they can help in charting possible ways in which social entrepreneurs can go about protecting the space of the other against the intrusion of overly instrumental and transactional relational models.

Second, reflected affirmation occurs in those instances where practitioners do not problematize managerially codified world views and subjectivities; instead, they identify themselves with these official stipulations. Such ostensible conformity on the part of practitioners is to be read less as a sign of subjection than as an indication that power is exercised not against the will of the subject but through a subject who decides to endorse power's productivity. Affirming the call of power hence reflects the form freedom takes when practiced in a reflective way (Foucault 2010). We see at least two reasons why social entrepreneurs eventually come to identify with the world views and subjectivities offered to them as 'true'. First and foremost, practitioners might endorse official truths because they prove beneficial for becoming an ethical

subject. In this case, affirmation results from the conviction that official truths support social entrepreneurial practitioners in relating to themselves in largely responsible ways. Importantly, social entrepreneurs who affirm the call of power in a reflected manner are subjects who do not naively buy into the kind of forced acceptance of responsibilities that typifies neoliberal investments in entrepreneurial subjectivities. Rather, reflected affirmation assumes that practitioners will try to understand how they are produced within existing relations of forces; thus they chiefly examine the extent to which a given norm either supports or impedes them in actualizing their freedom. The second reason why practitioners might decide to affirm the call of power is tactical. Unlike the first case, where the social entrepreneurial practitioner endorses the call of power out of conviction, in the second case the practitioner's compliance represents a counterfeit identification which in turn permits them to gain access to important resources such as money or reputation. Although critical commentators have described such counterfeit identification as actual misbehavior (Dacin et al. 2011), it should be borne in mind that such a tricking of the system, as it were, can be regarded as a practice of freedom provided that the advantages the individual gains from such behavior are utilized to achieve collective and not just selfish ends.

Having laid out the general tenets of a practice-based understanding of social entrepreneurship's ethics, we will now try to tease out the distinct value of Foucault's approach to ethics by comparing it with the more wide-ranging perspectives of liberation. To begin with, we want to underline that the practices of freedom to which Foucault's work points do not change the relations of power which they temporarily suspend. Given our stress on the routine ways in which practitioners engage with power, it is quite clear that Foucault's understanding of freedom stands in sharp contrast to theories of liberation based on utopian hopes for an alternative future. While our take on ethics assumes that social entrepreneurs' freedom is limited to critique, reflected affirmation, or creative combinations of available truths, one might infer that such a theory is toothless, as it emphasizes a kind of ethical practice which never sets the individual "free from the power of another" (Rindova et al. 2009, p. 478). Indeed, has Foucault not hung the standards of freedom too low by only stressing surreptitious acts of resistance? Would it not be appropriate, therefore, to dispense with Foucault in order to turn toward more serious matters of concern, such as how social entrepreneurs deal with forms of power as they pertain to structural issues and problems such as abject poverty or chronic unemployability? Though these questions are largely rhetorical, thus mainly foreshadowing some of the charges leveled against Foucault's ethical work, we nevertheless deem them significant for they point toward an important distinction between macro- and micro-views of emancipation. It is probably hardly news that the focal point of social entrepreneurship scholarship rests on macro-views of emancipation, which point toward the possibility of a utopian space of liberation unrestricted by the deleterious effects of power. Although it is very difficult to account, either theoretically or empirically, for the ways that social entrepreneurs progressively advance a state which is no longer distorted by oppressive, asymmetrical relations of power, it is still the case that the macro-view of emancipation by far outweighs micro-views of emancipation such as the one we have presented here. This dominance is striking, not the least because macro-views of emancipation have fallen out of favor in many research disciplines and intellectual traditions, including Management and Organization Studies (Barros 2010). Pointing out that macro-views of emancipation are overly grandiose and fail to sufficiently reflect their own connections to power, critical commentators were rooting for more cautious interpretations which conceive of emancipation as an inherently troublesome and fragile process based on a "myriad of projects, each limited in terms of space and time (and of success)" (Alvesson and Willmott 1992, p. 172). While these broader shifts from utopian to more micro-oriented views of emancipation indirectly give legitimacy to our own argument, we do not want this discussion to result in an 'either–or' decision. That is, although our conceptualization of ethics has quite clearly been concerned with a micro-view of emancipation, we did not intend to deny the value of approaches premised on a more far-reaching understanding of emancipation. In our estimate, it is worthwhile to use prospective research to meticulously study social entrepreneurship in its relationship with micro- and macro-emancipation. Interestingly, Foucault (1987) himself had identified a structural kinship between these two forms of emancipation, mentioning that any society, community, or group which appeals to utopian visions of liberation requires a continuous commitment to the sort of mundane practices of freedom we discussed in this article. Further research will be needed to better understand how social entrepreneurs' quotidian practices of freedom might eventually instigate moments of political electricity from which more collective and overt forms of liberation might result.

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