

**Promoting Ethical Reflection in the Teaching of Social Entrepreneurship: A
Proposal Using Religious Parables**

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Abstract

This paper proposes a teaching alternative that can encourage the ethical reflective sensibility among students of social entrepreneurship. It does so by exploring the possibility of using religious parables as narratives that can be analysed from Ricoeur's hermeneutics to provoke and encourage ethical discussions in social entrepreneurship courses. To illustrate this argument, the paper makes use of a parable from the New Testament as an example of a religious narrative that can be used to prompt discussions about social entrepreneurs' ethical dilemmas. The paper adds to the limited works that consider the teaching of ethics within social entrepreneurship education. It also advances studies that seek alternative strategies to teaching ethics in business contexts, making these strategies discernible for discussion within the broader business and management literature.

Keywords: teaching ethics, social entrepreneurship education, religious parables, narratives, Ricoeur

Introduction

The ethical sensibility of social entrepreneurs is a feature that has been widely noted in the popular media and social entrepreneurship literature. Social entrepreneurs have been presented as individuals who have a strong sense of ethics (Bornstein 2007), care for the most serious social problems (Seelos and Mair 2007) and have a robust determination to address these problems (Zahra et al. 2009). Indeed, social entrepreneurs have gained ethical recognition due to their drive to create social value, as opposed to the economic

value creation that primarily distinguishes their commercial counterparts (Bacq et al. 2013; Teasdale 2012). This suggestive discourse has mediated the understanding of social entrepreneurship as an ethical variant of entrepreneurial activity (Dey and Steyaert 2012, 2016) and has contributed, in great part, to the steady growth of social entrepreneurship not only as an interdisciplinary research area (Dacin et al. 2011) but also as a field of academic teaching (Chell et al. 2007; Spais and Beheshti 2016; Steyaert and Hjorth 2006). Nonetheless, a recent research stream, framed in what Chell et al. (2016) describe as postmodern and critical approaches to social entrepreneurship, is seeking clarification of ethical/social confusion and providing new insights that invalidate the perception of the social entrepreneur as an ethical hero (e.g., Bacq et al. 2016; Dey and Steyaert 2012; Zahra et al. 2009). One of the main effects of such scholarship is the correspondingly greater concern for the teaching of ethics within social entrepreneurship courses.

Notwithstanding the recent increased attention to ethics in social entrepreneurship education, issues concerning methods, approaches and materials remain compelling (Spais and Behesti 2016; Zainal et al. 2017; Zietsma and Tuck 2012). The specificity of the problem, when compared with related areas such as business ethics education, or the teaching of ethics in management, lies in the broad assumption of ethics as a trait that already belongs to the social entrepreneur (Chell et al. 2016). Such an assumption suggests, on the one hand, the existence of an “ethical substance” (Dey and Steyaert 2016, p.626), a fixed property in social entrepreneurs, which may give the incorrect impression that their lives lack ethical quandaries (Zahra et al. 2009). On the other hand, it encourages us to think about the relationship between ethics and the social entrepreneur as inactive or static (Dey 2007; Dey and Steyaert 2016), thus suggesting that there is no need to pay attention to the teaching of ethics in the training of social

entrepreneurs. The situation is, at least, paradoxical: the identification of the social entrepreneur as an ethical entrepreneur might be hindering a deliberate commitment to the ethics of social entrepreneurship in both practice and teaching. Prominent scholars have called for teaching approaches that consider such paradoxical circumstances (Lindbergh and Schwartz 2018; Dey 2006, 2007; Howorth et al. 2012). This paper is an attempt to respond to this call.

While the broader field of business ethics has long dealt with strategies to develop business ethics education (e.g., Swanson 2004; Park 1998; Trevino 1992), the teaching of ethics in social entrepreneurship education remains in a period of experimentation (Zainal et al. 2017). However, as with any period of experimentation, it lives in the moment of the play of ideas free of authoritative paradigms. This is the moment, as Marcus and Fisher (1999) noted, that provides critical and reflexive views of the subject and that is open to diverse influences, tolerance for uncertainty and incompleteness of some of its projects while embracing whatever seems to work in practice.

One of the main points of this paper is the reconsideration of ethics as it is presented in the dominant discourse within social entrepreneurship education. This paper is guided by the appeal to introduce approaches that nurture the view of ethics as a relational dimension that requires a permanent life effort, including an effort by social entrepreneurs (Dey 2007; Elmes et al. 2012; Zietsma and Tuck 2012). As a concrete proposal, the literary use of religious parables is suggested. In particular, religious parables are introduced as a type of narrative material that can prompt ethical reflections among students and aid in understanding of the ethics of social entrepreneurship, especially in the context of business schools' MBA courses. This, however, should not be seen as a complete, isolated attempt. Certainly, the use of religious parables as narratives may be considered another sign of the "linguistic turn" that has occurred in

the broader fields of entrepreneurship and business ethics education (e.g., Gabriel and Connell 2010; Ladkin 2018; Tyson 2016). Moreover, the proposal may also be in line with previous efforts to use the ethical insights from religious sources in the teaching of management, business, and entrepreneurship (e.g., Calkins 2000; Case and Chavez 2017; Case and Smith 2012; Epstein 2002; Koehn 2005; Koys 2001; Toledano and Karanda 2017). Nonetheless, as it will be discussed, the present proposal goes beyond previous works.

Religious parables, as are understood here, constitute a literary genre that appears in the sacred texts of various religious traditions¹ (Geertz 2010; Govier and Ayres 2012). Although religious parables share common features with non-religious and philosophical parables (Dillon 2014; George 2016; Govier and Ayers 2012; Kirkwood 1992), they are typically distinguished by their poetic connotations and ethical messages (Stern 1994; Hedrick 2004; Stiller 2005); they use hyperbolic language to convey messages that are ethical in nature (Kirkwood 1983, 1985). Such messages are usually embedded in short stories about social relationships and common encounters between different parties, such that ethical dilemmas are implicit rather than explicit (Stern 1994; Stiller 2005). While ethical resonance as an enduring human effort may also be found in a number of well-studied literary and philosophical classic texts (Greenwood and Freeman 2017; Molyneaux 2003), we argue that religious parables, because of their literary nature, can be useful in informing different ethical discussions in social entrepreneurship courses and that their application in these courses is a useful addition to the narrative repertoire. Invoking Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics on ethics, narratives and religious narratives, we show how religious parables can complement our current educational tools and approaches. While we use a New Testament parable from the Christian faith as an illustration to expose our proposal, our remark is that other western

and eastern faith traditions, in their scriptural sources, include parables that can also provide useful lessons to social entrepreneurship students.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section addresses the ethics of social entrepreneurship as it is depicted in academic discourse and in social entrepreneurship education. Then, an alternative understanding of ethics and a particular form of narrative analysis is presented based on Ricoeur's works. The potential and challenges of using religious parables in social entrepreneurship courses is then discussed, and the following section responds more concretely to the questions of why and how we can take this novel path to teach ethics within social entrepreneurship education by illustrating the arguments with a teaching example. The paper concludes with the main implications, limitations and conclusions of this work.

Repositioning ethics in social entrepreneurship discourse and education

Ethics in social entrepreneurship discourse

During the last few decades, social entrepreneurship educational activities have significantly grown across universities. Steyaert and Hjorth (2006) emphasized the unprecedented speed with which social entrepreneurship courses have entered the programmes of top-tier business schools in the US (such as Harvard, Duke and Columbia) and Europe (London and Said Business School). Dey (2007) made the observation on the increasing number of business schools that offer courses through MBAs, and Pache and Chowdhury (2012) have more recently noted the rising number of faculty involved in social entrepreneurship teaching in a variety of institutions across the globe. It is expected that this increase will continue so that the number of social entrepreneurship courses may be extended among faculties and universities in the coming years (Bandinelli 2016; Clark 2009; Howorth et al. 2012).

The successful arrival of social entrepreneurship to the scene of academic teaching is in great part associated with the heroic rhetoric constructed around the identity of social entrepreneurs, which portray them as a type of morally superior beings (Dey 2006, 2007; Steyaert and Hjorth 2006). The acknowledgement of the failures of previous organizational forms – i.e., conventional businesses, non-profit organizations – to address the problems of the poor and most disadvantaged collectives came accompanied by the subsequent hope in social enterprises (Bull and Ridley-Duff 2018; Teasdale 2012). Attention has been paid to the courage, compassion and social vision that drive social entrepreneurs' activities (Bornstein 2007; Miller et al. 2012a). Inspirational stories of their success have proliferated, partially through a heroic discourse² that has spread from the US to all over the world (Bull and Ridley-Duff 2018; Defourny and Nyssens 2010), and it is mirrored in many of the academic teaching narratives of business schools (Bandinelly 2015, 2016; Dey 2006, 2007; Steyaert and Hjorth 2006).

Taking together the early academic literature and main textbooks, one can notice how in much of the writings, social entrepreneurs appear depicted as exceptional individuals who are involved in extraordinary experiences of ultimate good (e.g., Dees 1998; Dees et al. 2001; Dey 2006; Fayolle and Matlay 2010; Roberts and Woods 2005; Seelos and Mair 2007; Parkinson and Howorth 2008). In Gregory Dees' (1998) seminal work, social entrepreneurs were described as charismatic natural leaders who possessed a set of exceptional behaviours, even spiritual gifts. Dees and his colleagues subsequently remarked that the main objective of social entrepreneurs “is to make the world a better place” (Dees et al. 2001, p.4). This view is supported by Fayolle and Matlay (2010, p.3), who emphasize that social entrepreneurs, by addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged individuals, are the type of entrepreneurs that are supposed to contribute to the overall “development of humanity”. This humanistic perception of social

entrepreneurs was also plainly acknowledged by Sullivan Mort et al. (2003), who identified social entrepreneurs as ethical individuals in terms of their integrity, compassion, empathy and honesty and claimed that social enterprises have a spiritual or virtue dimension. The spiritual echo is suggested even more clearly in Bornstein's (2007) highly cited book, *How to change the world: Social entrepreneurs and the power of new ideas*, in which St. Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan Order, appears to be qualified as a social entrepreneur.

The analogy of social entrepreneurs to exceptional, even spiritual, people is remarkable because it has been highly influential in the increase of popularity of social entrepreneurship courses and centres within business schools. As several studies have noted (Bandinelli 2016; Dey 2006, 2007; O'Connor 2006; Steyaert and Hjorth 2006), such optimistic and moral accounts have attracted the attention of philanthropists and institutions that have supported the education of social entrepreneurs at elite business schools and are relying on their potential to solve the world's most pressing problems³.

The heroic narrative of the early literature and the interventions of some influential social agents have reinforced one another such that their influence has been noticed in the large proportion of students who enroll in the courses enticed by the idea of becoming agents of change (Bandinelli 2015, 2016). Yet, the rosy picture of social entrepreneurship has also arrived from other corners of society and, therefore, there can be no clear assessment on the contribution of each agent⁴. Nonetheless, the influence of the heroic social entrepreneur's discourse can still be perceived in many of the academic programmes, text books and formal teaching narratives that use idealized ethical conceptions of social entrepreneurs to publicize the courses on their homepages (Bandinelli 2016; Dey 2006, 2007; Parkinson and Howorth 2008; Scofield 2011).

In the last years, however, prominent social entrepreneurship scholars have raised questions concerning the optimistic discourses (Chell et al. 2016, Dey 2007; Dey and Steyaert 2016; Zahra et al. 2009). One of the major criticisms is that by framing social entrepreneurs in a language of morality, their ethics might be taken for granted (Dey and Steyaert 2016), and the challenges derived from addressing a range of stakeholders (Pache and Chowdhury 2012) or from the simple human fragility that is shown in everyday interactions between workers and social entrepreneurs (Bull and Ridley-Duff 2018; Dey and Steyaert 2012, 2016; Zahra et al. 2009) may be overlooked. We agree with the scholars who recognize the need to problematise the ethical assumptions that still underpin an important part of the social entrepreneurship discourse (Chell et al. 2016; Dey and Steyaert 2016, Zahra et al. 2009), especially the scholars who have noted that such problematisation merits attention in the design and approaches of social entrepreneurship courses (Dey 2007; Murdock et al. 2013; Karatas-Ozkan et al. 2016; Zhu et al. 2016). In this context, this paper aims to open spaces of discussion concerning possible ways of overcoming some of the limitations of previous educational approaches by emphasizing the teaching of ethics in social entrepreneurship education. However, before explaining our proposal, we briefly review what has been accomplished so far in this respect.

Ethics in social entrepreneurship curricula and business schools

The social entrepreneurship literature has echoed the attempts made over recent years to advance ethical teaching within social entrepreneurship education (Brock and Steiner 2009; Elmes et al. 2012; Mirabella and Eikenberry 2017). From this literature, we can distinguish two types of initiatives. First, at the institutional level, some business schools have fostered business ethics by ensuring that ethical codes of conduct are

reflected at every stage of social enterprise business planning and development (Christensen et al. 2007; Dey 2007). However, this use of prescriptive rules has been criticized because it is seen more as a way of making the social business marketable than as a genuine concern with ethics (Bandinelli 2016; Dey 2007). Second, there are scholars who have suggested teaching proposals that reflect the importance for social entrepreneurs of genuinely caring for the needs of other people (Elmes et al. 2012) and that stress the ethical dilemmas that global social entrepreneurs may face in unfamiliar contexts (Zietsma and Tuck 2012).

Despite the above initiatives, recent studies have raised reservations regarding the contents and approaches that are mostly used at universities and business schools (e.g., Brock and Steiner 2009; Mirabella and Eikenberry 2017; Spais and Beheshti 2016; James and Schmitz 2011; Wiley and Berry 2015; Zietsma and Tuck 2012). Brock and Steiner (2009) and Miller et al.'s (2012b) reviews examine the syllabi of social entrepreneurship courses based at universities across the world and shed light on the ethical bias within social entrepreneurship education. The results in both studies revealed that ethical issues, despite being seen as important, are not regarded as part of the key topics within social entrepreneurship programmes. Mirabella and Eikenberry (2017) have more recently addressed the same question but limited their analysis to 17 social entrepreneurship and enterprise programmes at some of the most important universities in the US. They examined the courses offered in its programme description and various aspects of course syllabi and found only one course that included ethics as a part of a social entrepreneurship concentration programme. Undoubtedly, there are limitations in the conclusions that we can make from these works. Indeed, programme descriptions cannot reflect exactly what occurs in the classroom and cannot grasp the entire understanding that students obtain or the complexities of the interactions between

teachers and students as the courses develop. However, despite these limitations, programme descriptions might give us several clues about some of the topics and approaches that are considered to be most important in social entrepreneurship curricula.

Thus, according to the available literature so far, the primacy of the social mission of business in the curricula seems to be clear by including more traditional topics of entrepreneurship courses, such as opportunity recognition, the marshalling of resources, and the creation of new ventures (Spais and Behesthi 2016). In terms of teaching methods, classical and rational instruction based on business plans and other proposals taken from the business and management tradition overshadow the rare attempts to apply more humanist and participative approaches that encourage transformative experiences or critical thinking (Nilsson et al. 2015; Spais and Behesthi 2016). For our part, however, the greatest problem is that as managerial tools become more applicable in the teaching of social entrepreneurship, the managerial role becomes more central; thus, there may be a greater risk that what was supposed to be an ethical version of entrepreneurship remains more economic than initially expected. Social entrepreneurship courses may then run the risk of being understood as another subject that presents a technical activity, while creating the impression that social entrepreneurs operate devoid of ethical struggles. In this context, we concur with other authors (Dey 2007; Zainal et al. 2017; Zietsma and Tuck 2012) that social entrepreneurship education needs to advance to make ethics a more critical and relevant topic. In this sense, it is vital to provide approaches and materials that allow students to practice ethical reflection and increase their moral imagination (Blenker et al. 2011; Kim and Leu 2011).

In the remainder of the paper, we will introduce an alternative yet challenging proposal based on the use of religious narratives and, more specifically, the genre called parables. The challenge may not only be to the imagination or our ability to overcome the blinkers of embedded cultural attitudes and conventional patterns; it may also be a challenge to radically reconsider the use of language and narratives in this educational area and to effectively communicate the ethical insights from other disciplines. While the value of language-based analysis for understanding how social entrepreneurial practitioners address dominant discourses has already been noted in previous literature (Dey and Steyaert 2015, 2016; Howorth et al. 2011), in this study, we attempt to make use of this value in the context of teaching ethics in social entrepreneurship courses. Paul Ricoeur's conjoined hermeneutics of ethics and narratives seems appropriate for helping us to introduce this approach.

Ricoeur's hermeneutics

Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics approach serves two main purposes in this paper. First, it serves as a guide to interpret the ethics that can affect social entrepreneurs' actions. To this end, Ricoeur's hermeneutic of ethics and narratives can help us move away from the typical heroic discourse of social entrepreneurs as ethical individuals and towards repositioning ethics from a social, caring and cautious perspective. It invites us to enter a deeper level of analysis that should ultimately provide alternative interpretations on the ethics of social entrepreneurs or, in other words, different possibilities for ethical behaviours. Second, Ricoeur's application of his hermeneutics in religious texts is useful as a foundation to draw upon religious parables as narrative texts that can serve to promote ethical reflection among social entrepreneurship students.

Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethics and narratives

For Ricoeur, the ethical aim is informed by a reflexive hermeneutics that enables responsible human action (Carter 2014; Kearney 2004, 2010; Kemp 2002). However, a responsible action, in his view, only comes through an understanding of our relation with the other (Ricoeur 1992). Thus, moving away from any comprehension of ethics as determined by a lightly individual intention, Ricoeur (1992) reminds us that ethics cannot be understood without a permanent and genuine commitment in the encounter with the other. Nonetheless, he also clarifies the difficulties – even the impossibility – to completely fulfil such a commitment. A major theme to explain this paradox is Ricoeur's idea of the “capable human being”, which provides an account of human beings as autonomous, rational, and responsible actors but also as vulnerable acting and suffering selves (Wall et al. 2002). Such vulnerability and fragility come from the recognition of human subjects as embedded subjects in relational processes that take place in intimate connection to otherness (Ricoeur 1992). This means that the human agent is always vulnerable to the actions of others, to factors beyond her or his own control (Carter 2014).

Central to Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethics is the use of narratives (Kemp 2002; Kemp and Dilworth 1988). Objectively, a narrative can be understood as the representation of a sequence of events that has a unified subject and a retrievable temporal order (Andrews et al. 2008). Yet, what is important from Ricoeur's perspective is narrative's capacity to represent the human experience of time (Venema 2000). He acknowledges the power of narratives to represent the complexity of human life in a composite temporal framework (Ricoeur 1985). Because human life has, for him, an ethical aim (Carter 2014), each narrative embeds, in some manner, a particular ethical view. However, Ricoeur (1991) insists that such an implicit view does not limit narrative

interpretations; on the contrary, by combining characters and events, time and spaces, narratives are able to unfold a creative process that allows readers to imagine alternative interpretations that go beyond the original meaning attributed by the author. Thus, narratives can be read allegorically (Kearney 1995; Whitehouse 2002), which means that although each narrative is deeply contextual, its meaning is not restricted to or even accountable to the experiences described.

Ricoeur's (1991) hermeneutics also offer a particular mode of narrative reading and analysis. He encourages readers to resist any given interpretation and, at the same time, invites them to interpret in the text a proposed world to inhabit, one in which they may project their own possibilities (Dey and Steyaert 2015). To facilitate this, Ricoeur (1991) proposes two approaches that have been coined the "hermeneutics of suspicion" and the "hermeneutics of affirmation" (Kearney 1995).

The hermeneutics of suspicion is characterized by scepticism towards what may be the first obvious interpretation of a narrative. It emphasizes our partial perspective and pretends to awaken our consciousness about our limited capacities to understand a bigger picture (Kearney 1995). Indeed, it is a basic structure of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion to promote the critique of illusions and to confront philosophy and common-sense understanding with sharp critique insofar as they rest on the assumption of a self-sufficient, self-reflexive ego (Streib 1998). This hermeneutics can help us to be critically aware of the times our understanding becomes strongly limited to our own self – our wishes or constructs (Kearney 1995). Unlike the hermeneutics of suspicion, the hermeneutics of affirmation involves a transgression of our limited perspective. By projecting alternatives to that which exists, a hermeneutics of affirmation involves remaining open to the possibility of discovering alternative modes of existence (Ricoeur

1991). Therefore, it can help us to improve our ethical actions in encounters with the other.

In a number of works, Ricoeur illustrates his hermeneutics of suspicion and affirmation through the analysis of religious narratives and, particularly, narrative-parables (e.g., Ricoeur 1975, 1980, 1981, 1995). Indeed, as some authors suggest (e.g., Klemm 2002; Streib 1998; Treanor and Venema 2010; Wall 2001; Wiercinski 2003), it is his philosophical interpretation of religious narratives as literary texts that has been translated into the hermeneutic practice of suspicion and affirmation that we know today. We now discuss Ricoeur's interpretation of these texts.

Ricoeur's hermeneutics of religious narratives and parables

Ricoeur's interest in religious narratives was based, in large part, on the peculiarities of their language (Keith Putt 2017; Klemm 2002; Wall 2001). For Ricoeur (1980, 1995), language, as it is used in many genres included in sacred texts, is characterized by an abundant use of limit expressions. According to the philosopher, limit expressions are forms of language that evoke limit experiences (Ricoeur 1975). They transgress and rupture ordinary human understanding with various kinds of paradoxes and hyperboles, but they also help to reorient human understanding towards its own ultimate possibilities (Ricoeur 1995). Importantly, in these disorienting and reorienting dimensions Ricoeur sees the distinctive logic of religious narratives over other types of narratives, and it is precisely this approach that underlies his hermeneutics of suspicion and affirmation (Klemm 2002; Wall 2001; Wiercinski 2003).

For Ricoeur, among religious narratives, narrative-parables (parables, hereafter) constitute one of the clearest examples that proceed as "reorientation by disorientation" (Whitehouse 2002). As Ricoeur sees it, the parable is "the metaphorization of

discourse” (Ricoeur 1975, p.32); he describes it as “a conjunction of a narrative form and a metaphorical process” (Ricoeur 1975, p.30). For Ricoeur, to call a certain narrative a parable is to say that the story refers to something other than what is told; it “stands for” something else (Ricoeur 1975, p.32). The parable is, according to his view, a mythos (a heuristic fiction) that has the mimetic power of “redescribing” human existence (Ricoeur 1975, p.32). It allows the communication of something about human experience that cannot be conveyed in any other way (Whitehouse 2002). The parable’s referent is therefore human experience, conceived as the (ordinary) experience of the whole (wo)man as interpreted in light of the mimetic resources of some realistic and extravagant fictions, themselves embedded in specific narrative structures (Ricoeur 1975). Envisioning parables as freely invented stories rather than truthful narratives, Ricoeur was interested in their typical elements: vivid imagery (the shock generator), conceptual simplicity (the authority and the victim), a story line leading to a probing question (How far do you think people will go?), and an outcome that few expected (Shuman 2010).

In addition to the appreciation of the metaphoric quality of the parable, its transformative power is another prominent theme in the work of Ricoeur. The philosopher considers parables transformative forms of language (Klemm 2002). While Ricoeur’s view of parables’ language presupposes a force to transform prior categories, it is important to stress that this force forms a pivotal element of the way he understands parables, in their poetic connotations, as the means to stimulate the imagination. By the creativity of the poet, the imagination of the reader is stimulated and prompted to create original and novel possibilities beyond what is common (Keith Putt 2017). In rupturing the ordinary, parables disorient and provoke a tension with the ordinary, but they disorient in order to reorient, to allow the discovery of another way of seeing things

(Keith Putt 2017). Presenting parables as an enigma, Ricoeur came to emphasize the need for interpretation embedded in parables. As a poetic type of discourse, they can be applied to ordinary life without appealing to any religious meaning, but they cannot be taken simply and interpreted solely with regard to what is said and told (Klemm 2002; Whitehouse 2002).

As Ricoeur reinvigorated the hermeneutical treatment of religious narratives and parables, he also clarified the ethic of care embedded in them, which was akin to his own ethical view. In several works, he makes a point of their implicit ethics as relational, premised on the relation with others: highly caring, inspiring to do the highest good one can conceive for the other but, at the same time, cautious in the achievements (Carter 2014). Stories that depict the “Golden Rule” of treating others as one would want to be treated are illustrative of such ethics and can be found in the texts of most of the great religious and wisdom traditions (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism), although formulated in different manners (Melé 2009). However, it may take a slightly greater stretch of the imagination to accept a literary use of parables in social entrepreneurship courses. In the following section, we will attempt to justify this claim.

The ethical space of religious parables in social entrepreneurship education

Transposing Ricoeur’s hermeneutics to the context of social entrepreneurship courses in business schools’ MBAs programmes, we may approach the teaching-learning of ethics using religious parables as mediators to encourage ethical reflection among students. Specifically, inspired by Ricoeur’s thoughts, we propose to introduce parables as a type of religious narrative that can be read as literary works and that embed a particular – but not negligible – relational care ethics through particular yet interesting forms of

language. However, it would be naïve to ignore the problematic that such proposals may generate because of the religious resonance that parables carry. In this section, we elaborate on these ideas, beginning with the potentialities that parables can have for the teaching of ethics within social entrepreneurship education.

The potential of religious parables in social entrepreneurship education

While social entrepreneurship's heroic discourse suggests an incorrect identification of ethics with social entrepreneurs' individual intention (Dey and Steyaert 2016), we frame the use of religious parables for social entrepreneurship courses as challenging such a perception. As noted earlier, the consideration of the ethical dimension within social entrepreneurship education requires highlighting the caring encounter between the social entrepreneur and the other (Elmes et al. 2012; Zietsma and Tuck 2012). Therefore, if we want to make explicit such a dimension, it seems that we should provide means to help students appreciate ways of being social entrepreneurs that encourage humanizing relationships. The call to (ethical) perfection – sometimes referred to as “holiness” – that resonates in religious parables may serve this purpose in a twofold way.

On the one hand, in religious parables from most faith traditions (e.g., the Talmud in the Jewish tradition, the Baghavat Gita in Hinduism, the New Testament in Christianity) the signs of heroic virtues are clear and the sacrifice of one's life for others is constantly recalled (Lester and Roberts 2011). The use of hyperbolic language is also common in all of them (Kirkwood 1983, 1985). This language recalls many of the heroic expressions employed by social entrepreneurship students (Bandinelli 2015, 2016; Dey 2006, 2007; Scofield 2011), which may initially help to catch their attention. Moreover, in a number of cases, the ethics inherent in parables is presented through commercial

imagery (Epstein 2002; Rodgers and Gago 2006; Warter and Warter 2016), which may also facilitate ethical discussions among social entrepreneurship students. In addition, the ideals of love, respect for persons, and a sense of others that echo in the notion of holiness embedded in parables' stories may provide a different framework to discuss the deepest social problems that surround us and the ethical – not just social – approaches to face them. Indeed, the relational care ethics embedded in parables, especially when it is analysed from Ricoeur's (1991) hermeneutics, might help students to reflect on the narrowness of the individual ethics depicted in the broad social entrepreneurship discourse (Dey and Steyaert 2016) and to think differently about the possibilities and outcomes that a social business can produce in both stakeholders and social entrepreneurs.

On the other hand, the call to perfection that resounds in parables' stories might also serve to awaken students' consciousness about the fragility that surrounds all human beings, including social entrepreneurs. As Ricoeur (1975) recognizes, parables have both the ability to describe the extraordinary (a quasi spiritual human endeavour) and to show the ordinary intermingled with the passions and brokenness of human nature (e.g., selfishness, ignorance, absence of effective self-control). In this sense, parables might help students disrupt the idealized presuppositions and shared understandings that are presumed in the social entrepreneurship heroic discourse and that form the cognitive grounds on whose bases have been designed an important number of social entrepreneurship courses (Bandinelli 2015, 2016; Dey 2006, 2007). This should not serve to renounce students' honourable wishes but rather as an appeal to strengthen their consciousness about the required efforts. As Dey (2007, p. 558) notes with reference to social entrepreneurs, "being social requires hard work, inescapable suffering and true modesty". Thus, in social entrepreneurship courses, we should help students reflect on

these dimensions. Religious parables, as they are presented here, may be a useful tool. However, despite their potential, it is necessary to call attention to the possible challenges involved in their use.

The challenges of religious parables in social entrepreneurship education

Allegations against the use of religious sources in related fields such as business ethics courses or the teaching of ethics in management have taken on different shadings (Carr 2005; Epstein 2002). Broadly, the discomfort and suspicion that religious texts generate in these contexts are provoked for two main reasons: a literal understanding of such texts and their association with religious institutions. This leads us to raise questions concerning the present proposal and to consider whether similar challenges may appear to the suggestion of using religious parables in social entrepreneurship courses.

Referring to the problems that come from a literal reading of religious narratives, Carr (2005) recognizes that such interpretation has led to the belief that these texts can only find meaning among those who tell these stories. Transposed to the argument for using parables in a social entrepreneurship course, we may also find such objections. For example, it might be argued that if parables from the Hebrew Bible, Qur'an or Talmud do not depict ethical dilemmas directly associated with current social entrepreneurs, it might be difficult to obtain prolific ethical lessons for social entrepreneurship students. The underlying assumption is that the differences in time and context between the actors depicted in the texts and those who read them would eliminate any potential learning.

Several scholars, however, have noted the contradictions of such a view (Case and Smith 2012; Epstein 2002; Geertz 2010; Koys 2001). Generally, their arguments reinvigorate the idea that any appeal to learning from classic writings – including religious texts – has relatively little to do with their local cultural origins or the literal

depictions of these works. Rather, the common view is that meaningful learning and valuable critical thinking can be stimulated when a literary and metaphorical approach is applied to classic texts such as the Hamlet of Shakespeare, the Don Quixote of Cervantes or the Parables of Jesus. Moreover, scholars in the organizational aesthetics field (e.g., Anderson 2005; Epstein 2002; Gotsis and Drakopoulos 2011; Linstead and Hopfl 2000; Molyneux 2003; Taylor and Elmes 2011) have provided a range of examples concerning the benefits of using the lens of aesthetics to read, analyse and apply insights from such narratives in the organizational world. Common to these examples, however, is the understanding that the meaning of these texts is not anchored in space or time but, as Anderson (2005, p. 591) puts it, “is illustrated in both space and time”.

The second important resistance to the use of religious narratives in social entrepreneurship courses may emerge from their association with the religious institutions that have traditionally made use of these texts. Here, Michel Foucault’s (1980, 1999) works on power, institutions, and his view of religion as the means of social control may provide counterarguments to our proposal. Foucault understood religion as a conceptual apparatus to disciplinary power and saw it as a coercive technology of behaviour via the production of “truth” (Carrette 2000, p. 31). This view has gained popularity in educational contexts, leading to a denial of any legitimate knowledge that may be derived from religious sources in the name of so-called indoctrination (Carrette 2000). Although Foucault’s thoughts may be applicable to some fundamentalist religious expressions within contemporary societies, a generalization of his arguments to every aspect of religions – including the use of religious parables for the encouragement of ethical reflection – should be taken as doubtful, especially under

the current condition of religious pluralism where individuals move freely between different faith orientations (Ghatak and Abel 2013).

Nevertheless, there is an interesting paradox in considering Foucault's work as a possible challenge to the present proposal because it may also provide the foundations for arguing for its potential. In particular, an application of his claims regarding power to current social entrepreneurship education could drive criticism of the restrictive force of certain public higher education institutions (Bandinelli 2015, 2016; Dey 2006, 2007) and raise consciousness on how certain forms of teaching are disallowed through the prioritization of approaches based on traditional objective logic. As some authors note (Dey 2007; Grey 2004; Pfeffer and Fong 2002; Pfeffer and Salancik 2003), implicitly or explicitly, public universities and business schools tend to marginalize approaches and sources that do not fit well with the standard and saleable knowledge. Thus, it might be more valuable to consider Foucault's works as an inspiring perspective to apply our curiosity and "social entrepreneurial spirit" in attempting to bring "disadvantaged" sources of knowledge and approaches to social entrepreneurship courses and even to extend this, in some manner, to other teaching initiatives that are associated with ethics and businesses (e.g., teaching business ethics, teaching ethics in management courses).

Our key point here is to argue for embracing different ways of learning that offer reflective opportunities for students involved in ethical discussions. When religious parables are used as tools to encourage ethical reflection, the place in which the stories occur becomes less relevant, as does the issue of whether the action that is described is in the past or is a more immediate and personal application. The interest, in contrast, is to approach the religious texts academically and to set aside cultural backgrounds, including one's religious tradition. Nonetheless, to be useful, this approach would require us to consider the notion of social entrepreneurship as a complex social process

that emerges from social and economic exchanges in which there are always intermingled ethical issues (Chell et al. 2016; Dey and Steyaert 2016). In this case, we contend that religious parables might be an alternative to allow students to develop a reflective task concerning the ethics of social entrepreneurs, especially from the perspective of relational care ethics. However, since the ethic embedded in religious parables is not so transparent as to be directly associated with the ethical dilemmas that might be raised in social entrepreneurs' daily activities, two important questions are still left: i) why would we expect teachers and students to be seduced by one implicit theme in religious parables instead of by another, far more explicit theme in conventional material? In case we became seduced by using religious parables, ii) how might we then use them in a social entrepreneurship classroom? In the next section, we will attempt to respond to these questions.

A risky teaching step towards roads not taken

Broadly, we can discuss two main ways of promoting ethical reflection among social entrepreneurship students: an explicit way or short route and an implicit way or long route. The explicit or short route represents the way that ethical reflection is mainly thought to carry itself directly to the level of the content of the ethical dilemma that is depicted, which suggests argumentative reasoning in a straightforward manner and encourages the adoption of a concrete solution. Thus, students would not enter this way of understanding by degrees, little by little, but they may be transported there by a sudden reversal of a question. For example, "what solution should we give to "X" ethical dilemma considering "Y" ethical criterion?" The ethical decision and criterion would be searched first and foremost.

Although we give full credit to this way of working, the route that we propose here is the long and implicit route. With the long route, the implicit way, we aspire to address ethical dilemmas by degrees by following sequential steps and promoting ethical reflection along the way. Its main benefits are explained below. Nonetheless, a clarification may be important to provide at this point: approaching ethical teaching through implicit themes embedded in religious parables does not need to be a contrary alternative to the use of explicit themes. Accordingly, any approach should not force us to choose one alternative and dismiss another alternative; for our part, both methods might be seen as different – although both are valid – ways of addressing the teaching of ethics in a social entrepreneurship course.

Why might we take a risk?

It is recognized that religious parables make ethical points under the perspective of relational care ethics (Carter 2014; Ricoeur 1992). Particularly, we agree with Ricoeur (1992) and his scholars (Carter 2014; Keith Putt 2017; Klemm 2002) that the care ethics embedded in religious parables invite us not only to see solidarity and generosity as key attitudes for all human relationships – which may include the relationships that occur in the context of social entrepreneurship – but also to obtain insights on how difficult it is to act on such terms because of the fragility rooted in human nature.

However, as noted above, the ethic implicit in religious parables is not itself transparent so that, a priori, it can hardly help us to find a solution to social entrepreneurs' ethical dilemmas. Indeed, religious parables do not provide explicit answers; on the contrary, they tend to leave us with no clear clues about what to do when we face an ethical dilemma. Although it might be seen as a weakness of the use of religious parables, particularly compared with the logic embedded in conventional scientific texts, we

argue that this lack of clear answers may actually become a strength to promote ethical reflection in social entrepreneurship students. In the difficulty to understand a concrete solution, fresh reflections can emerge in directions that go beyond the social-economic confrontations with which most social entrepreneurs' ethical dilemmas have been associated (Bull and Ridley-Duff 2018). This, then, can be considered as a thematic enrichment for both teachers and students, since through religious parables, we might get fresh ideas on the ethics of social entrepreneurs.

In addition to this thematic enrichment, a second benefit lies in the space that religious parables open to move students outside their comfort zone. Recognizing the pedagogical merit that religious parables' poetic form has for business ethics students, Koehn (2005) emphasized their potential to challenge students' conventional responses to ethical dilemmas. Unlike conventional scientific texts that address ethical topics explicitly, religious parables' narrative devices invite readers (students) to foster their imaginative and emotional involvement in the narrated situation, which sheds light on what some of their deepest commitments are and leads them to conclusions that they might not otherwise have reached (Koehn 2005). In fact, although explicit ethical themes can enhance discussions that manifest students' thoughts about such themes – to think about the story – a parable's engagement of students' emotions and imagination may push them to think in a more self-reflexive way – to think with the story. In this context, we argue that the use of parables can lead to the self-reflective enrichment among their readers – whether teachers or students.

Therefore, the claim of new methods of teaching ethics in social entrepreneurship courses is directed not only at instilling new contents and possible ethical problems but also at promoting ethical thinking in different forms of reflection. How these possibilities can work is elaborated in the following section.

How might we take the risk? Using New Testament parables in social entrepreneurship courses

Many parables can be found in the sacred texts of most faith traditions (Lester and Roberts 2011). To illustrate how parables can be used for a social entrepreneurship course in the context of business schools' MBA programmes, we discuss a New Testament parable. The use of this example does not imply any superiority of these texts compared with others from different religious traditions. Nonetheless, the literary use of parables has been studied most intensely by New Testament scholars (e.g., Johnston and McArthur 2014; Smith 2013). Their works have advanced the study on parables and narrative generally and can provide fruitful insights on which to build. Moreover, despite the increasing diversity of faith religious among academics and students, Christianity has been one of the strongest religions in the Western world (Epstein 2002; Kim et al. 2009; Melé and Fontrodona 2017; Rossouw 1994) and many of its parables have become familiar for its inhabitants, regardless they share this religious faith or not. Thus, this study proceeds like other academic works, inspired by what we already have and without assessing the religious meaning of the material chosen.

To show our arguments we use the parable of the Labours in the Vineyard from the Gospel of Matthew (20:1-16). The evidence arising from a selective and database search shows consensus among scholars about the importance of this parable to reflect on socio-economic issues, particularly in terms of justice, entrepreneurs-workers relationships and conflict in the marketplace⁵. Inspired by recent studies that have emphasized the pedagogical potential of this parable premised on the ethical insights that it can bring to its readers (e.g., Diller 2013; Eubank 2013; Van Eak 2009; Vearncombe 2010), including business ethics students (e.g., Koehn 2005; Koys 2001),

we argue that it can also work for social entrepreneurship master students. In the next sub-sections, we briefly review how this parable has been used and interpreted in the past and how it might also work currently in the teaching of ethics in social entrepreneurship education.

The Parable of the Labours in the Vineyard: a timeless story

Throughout centuries, the *Parable of the Labours in the Vineyard* (P-LiV, hereafter) has been read in many different contexts (Van Eck 2009; Verancombe 2010). Despite the distance between the epoch in which the parable was written and the different times in which it has been interpreted, New Testament scholars have emphasized its timeless nature as a fictional story (Van Eck 2009; Verancombe 2010). Particularly, by depicting gestures of solidarity within an ideal society, it has been emphasized how the parable has paradoxically served to trigger reflections regarding the never-ending story of inequality that has characterized human history in all its ages (Van Eck 2009; Van Eck and Kloppenborg 2015; Verancombe 2010). It is generally admitted that the parable comes from a world wherein society was divided between a minority ruling class (élite) and the peasants (the ruled non-élite), and the minority ruling class lived at the expense of the peasants (Van Eck 2009). Another socio-economic aspect that sounds timeless refers to the lack of work opportunities that existed for ordinary citizens to make a decent living (Van Eck and Kloppenborg 2015), a reality that is not unfamiliar to many people in our current world.

Despite this common agreement in terms of the P-LiV's context, its interpretation has widely varied over time, which shows how the parable can function at different levels (Verancombe 2010). To provide some background to our further comments, we summarize the P-LiV as follows.

The parable begins with a comparison of the kingdom of heaven, which is assumed to be a kingdom of moral and ethical perfection, with a landowner who goes out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. The landowner meets some labourers and agrees that they will work in the vineyard in exchange for a denarius a day. After the agreement is made, he sends them to work in the vineyard. Later, at 9 a.m., he sees others in the marketplace standing idle and agrees to hire them to work in his vineyard in exchange for a just wage – “whatever is right”. Repeating this several times, the farmer goes out at noon, at 3 p.m. and at 5 p.m. and hires more labourers each time for a just wage. When evening comes, the landowner instructs his manager to pay the wages, beginning with those hired last. They receive the usual daily wage – one denarius. Thus, the labourers hired earlier expect to receive more money, but they also receive one denarius. They grumble at the landowner, saying, “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat”. His reply argues for the correct fulfilment of the contract with them: “I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?” He defends his right to decide on the wage: “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?” Finally, he contrasts virtues and vices in human relationships by saying, “Are you envious because I am generous?”

Several scholars have emphasized how the bulk of the P-LiV has been interpreted and reinterpreted differently to illuminate the diverse concerns of its readers (Beutner 2007; Van Eck 2009; Koehn 2005; Scott 2007; Tevel 1992). Tevel (1992), for example, pointed out how some of the Church Fathers, who focus on the detail of the householder’s five episodes of hiring, had allegorically interpreted the P-LiV in relation to the five stages of world history: Adam and Eve is the first stage, followed by Noah, Abraham, and Moses, and the fifth stage is the people who could see Christ. Koehn

(2005), who focused on the entrepreneurial side of the parable, proposes a contemporaneous reading for business ethics students to challenge their rational economic logic that emphasizes the values of profit and self-interest as the “normal” thought in the business world. More recently, Capps (2012), by exploring the generosity versus envy issue raised at the end of the parable, has proposed a psychoanalytic reading with a Freudian approach to provide insights concerning the figure of the super-ego.

Similarly, other contemporaneous readers can direct their attention to other details of the parable, such as the payment to the workers, and may well interpret it as a story that reflects a compensation decision taken by a landowner regarding how he will pay different categories of employees. However, from a wider perspective, it may also be understood as a criticism of the prevailing system of redistribution and general (or even negative) reciprocity (Verancombe 2010). Although the rivalry of the interpretations may provoke some conflict among the interpreters, it only reflects the possibilities that religious texts give to a multi-understanding. As Ricoeur (2004 [1969], p.4) recognized, “the apostolic generation’s interpretation of the Old Testament in the light of the Christic event gives quite another reading of the events, institutions, and personages of the Bible than the rabbinical interpretation”. Thus, it might be possible to examine the parable from a particular perspective, without completely disposing of a different point of view; indeed, parables are recognized as polyvalent in their meaning and interpretation (Ricoeur 1975).

Accordingly, by proposing the reading of the P-LiV from a social entrepreneurship perspective, we appeal to a notion of signification that is more complex than the system of so-called univocal signs required by the logic of argumentation. We warn, however, that in the following paragraphs, we can hardly exhaust the possibilities of its meaning

even within this particular context. Assuming this limitation, we next exhibit how such a re-reading of the P-LiV, through Ricoeurian hermeneutics, may help social entrepreneurship students to enhance their reflections concerning the ethics of the social entrepreneur.

Re-reading the P-LiV from a social entrepreneur's lens and through Ricoeurian hermeneutics: an illustrative example

Recent literature on the ethics of social entrepreneurship serves us in recognizing the difficulty, if not impossibility, of uncovering all ethical dilemmas that social entrepreneurs can encounter, especially when we consider the ethical dilemmas beyond the public/private (social-commercial) dichotomy (Bull and Ridley-Duff 2018; Dey and Steyaert 2016). At the same time, Ricoeur's (1975, 1992, 1995) studies on ethics, parables and hermeneutics make us aware of the impracticability of uncovering all meanings of a text, particularly sacred texts such as New Testament parables, where the use of limit expressions and hyperbolic language abounds.

With these constraints in mind and following Ricoeur's (1991) suggestions, we should start with a reading of the parable in the light of the social entrepreneurship literature. Such a reading may lead us to identify the landowner with a social entrepreneur who wanted to offer employment (and therefore a wage) to as many workers as possible, considering their disadvantaged situation in the marketplace. As the parable tells us, they were waiting to be hired; therefore, the landowner might be concerned by the social problems of the place, such as food insecurity or unemployment. He may primarily be concerned about showing special care to the landless labourers, who were considered the social outcasts of his world, as some commentators have pointed out (e.g., Van Eak 2009; Verancombe 2010). The landowner thus may be socially driven to

do something to meet their basic needs, making the ethical decisions that he would consider to be appropriate in the framework of the activities and relationships that occur in his (social) business. Thus, the parable builds towards the (un)ethical interpretation and, therefore, the ethical dilemma, that emerges in the climax of the story: the payment of an equal wage to all labourers regardless of time worked and the conflict between the social entrepreneur – the landowner in the parable – and the full-day workers.

The purpose of this first reading is, according to Ricoeur (2004 [1969], p.16), “to conquer a remoteness, a distance between the past cultural epoch to which the text belongs and the interpreter himself”. According to the philosopher, by overcoming this distance, by making the interpreter contemporary with the text, s/he can appropriate its meaning to herself or himself: a foreign text is then made familiar, that is, it is made to be her/his own (Ricoeur 2004 [1969]). Thus, not every detail of the parable necessarily has a referent in real life (Ricoeur 1975). Subsequently, Ricoeur’s (1991) double hermeneutics should be applied. The expected outcome of the exercise can be stated in terms of inciting students – as potential social entrepreneurs – to reflect on how they would feel and think about the ethical aspects insinuated in the text by assuming the role of the different agents. There would be a twofold assumption. First, taking into account the relational care ethics embedded in religious parables (Carter 2014), there should be an emphasis in considering how students understand the relationships that are depicted in the P-LiV and consequently, the ethics from this point of view. The second assumption is that this reflection, guided by Ricoeur’s (1991) hermeneutics of suspicion and affirmation, should facilitate the opening of new meanings to the ethics of social entrepreneurship. Since this hermeneutical approach would consider the students’ own best possibilities, it would enhance their self-reflection and provide a thematic enrichment on the content of the topic.

Regarding the concrete practice of Ricoeur's (1991) hermeneutics of suspicion, the ethical reflection should be led to show scepticism towards the first reading of the parable to overcome what might be at first a limited and partial perspective. A possible starting point for this hermeneutics may be the heroic discourse that embeds the idea of the social entrepreneur being an ethical entrepreneur (e.g., Bornstein 2007; Dees 1998). Such a view is questionable deeming not only the recent critical approaches to the ethics of social entrepreneurship (Chell et al. 2016; Dey and Steyaert 2016) but also the application of the hermeneutics of suspicion to the P-LiV.

Considering the thematic of the course, there may be students who identify themselves with the ethical and social entrepreneur – the landowner in the parable. However, according to the hermeneutics of suspicion, they should raise doubts about the social entrepreneur's actions. Specifically, by focusing on the scene of hiring labourers, several questions may arise as follows: "Why did the landowner fail to estimate his labour needs efficiently?", "Could he have a selfish goal in mind?", and "It might not be possible that the different visits of the landowner to the marketplace were the result of his eagerness to maintain his labour costs as low as possible, following the conventional business logic based on profit and self-interest?". Additionally, by focusing on the payment scene, students may ask "Why did he only pay one denary?", "Would this amount be enough to meet the needs of an unemployed day-labourer?", "Why did he first pay to the last hired labourers when it may generate some disappointment in the labourers hired earlier?", and "Is he trying to demonstrate his goodness in search of honour?" or "Is he trying to humiliate the earlier-hired labourers?" As we have seen, discourses that give credit to the ethics of social entrepreneurs without questioning the difficulties that lead to becoming an ethical being encourage the idea that social entrepreneurs will always be motivated by pure and ethical reasons (Zahra et al. 2009).

Ricoeur's (1991) hermeneutics of suspicion, however, helps to appreciate the temptations that social entrepreneurs may face in their ethical decisions as fragile human individuals.

From another perspective, and because business school students have probably been trained under an economic logic, students may also identify themselves with the grumblers, the workers who represent what appears to be a more "reasonable" and habitual legalistic way of thinking. In terms of suspicion, the reflection may revolve around questions such as "Why are generosity or care ethics seen as unethical in some contexts and for some people?", "Can a relational and care ethics work in a business context, although it is in the context of a social business?", "What about the people who are called to work for social entrepreneurs?", "Should they share the same view of social entrepreneurs?", and if so, what should they have thought?", and "How were they supposed to feel before and after they were hired?" Because one of the ethical challenges associated with social entrepreneurs is the great burden that they face when addressing a wide variety of stakeholders (Pache and Chowdhury 2012), such questions may prompt discussions regarding stakeholders' opinion in terms of the right-to-work law, motivation to work in a social business, responsibilities of acting as a social and ethical entrepreneur, compensation and rewards, and employee rights.

To complete the application of Ricoeur's (1991) double hermeneutics, we should consider the hermeneutics of affirmation. From this perspective, the emphasis is on what is missing in the parable context for the best to occur in an ideal social entrepreneurship case. An incipient open question may take the form of "What might have happened if...?" Bringing the hermeneutics of affirmation in conjunction with a social-entrepreneurial reading of the P-LiV may involve reflecting on how an ethical act of care, solidarity and generosity may peacefully work in social entrepreneurs'

decisions. Students should be encouraged to imagine ways of attaining ethical achievements that surpass what has been thought before, by figuring different alternatives to which exist. As we have mentioned earlier, social entrepreneurs have been portrayed in the literature as change-makers (Bornstein 2007). Since the parable, at first, may be depicting a generous social entrepreneur, a key question might be how social entrepreneurs, with their “goodness”, might transform other spaces and relationships, including social entrepreneur-employee relations.

In addition, one of the purest expressions of affirmation can be found in attempts to give voice to the experience of the subjects who are marginalized, dominated or excluded in society (Dey and Steyaert 2015). Several additional questions might then be introduced to fuel the acknowledgement of the landless labourers – the workers – such as “What might be the social entrepreneurs’ greatest ethical responsibilities to their stakeholders, especially employees?”, “What might be the employees’ ethical responsibilities with the entrepreneurs and their new colleagues?”, “How might a proper balance among stakeholders’ interests be achieved to reach harmony in the social business?”, “What ethical ideals should a social entrepreneur prioritize in his/her relationships with stakeholders?”, and “What criteria may guide the recruiting politics of a social entrepreneur?” As the parable suggests, workers’ opinions about their gratification change over time. Their perception of what justice means evolves; in fact, it appears to have different meanings for different people and thus becomes the result of a comparison. In this case, it may also be asked, “How secure can one be – whether a social entrepreneur or an employee – that his/her comparison is completely correct?” Discussions of these questions may help students to consider the persistent possibility that one make think that s/he is making the right decision but is instead not responding to a particular person or group, or vice versa.

Accordingly, drawing on the above application of Ricoeur's (1991) double hermeneutics on the reading of the P-LiV from a social entrepreneurship perspective, we have shown how a religious parable can invite creativity by motivating students to raise questions that otherwise may not have been considered. As we have seen, there may be risks that by reducing social entrepreneurship discourses to the heroic figure of the social entrepreneur, one can close the possibility towards the actual ethical dilemmas that s/he may face in daily business life (Chell et al. 2016; Dey and Steyaert 2016). It is precisely in this context that when Ricoeur's (1991) double hermeneutics is applied to religious parables such as the P-LiV, it provides an opportunity to overcome the limitations that can come from an ethical/social confusion in the identity of a social entrepreneur. It may be a good stimulus to search instabilities to change previous discourses. Indeed, Ricoeur's (1991) hermeneutics of suspicion and affirmation work by an ethos of possibility, which can help both students and teachers to envision new ideas about the ethics of social entrepreneurs, whether limiting the ideas that already exist or extending them towards scenarios that transcend the "reasonable" conventional logic. The thought of such new ideas is facilitated by parabolic language (Keith Putt 2017; Klemm 2002; Wall 2001) and the relational care that ethics embed in religious parables (Carter 2014). In fact, by reading the P-LiV through social entrepreneurs' lenses, we will hardly be led to think about the ethics of social entrepreneurs in terms of a solitary affair, as is suggested in the social entrepreneurship heroic discourse (Chell et al. 2016; Dey and Steyaert 2016), but rather as a collective achievement that is made visible in the encounter with the other (Ricoeur 1992).

Implications, limitations and conclusion

The recent increased concern about ethics in social entrepreneurship has correspondingly increased interest in emphasizing the teaching of ethics in social entrepreneurship courses, especially in business schools' MBAs (Dey 2007; Zainal et al. 2017; Zietsma and Tuck 2012). This increased concern and the lack of well-known proposals within this field are the reasons we chose these educational institutions and the graduate level as the focus of the proposal presented here. The suggestion of promoting ethical reflection through a literary analysis of religious parables following Ricoeur's (1991) hermeneutic approach may be meaningful for those involved in the design and development of such courses. While the unique characteristics of social entrepreneurship, especially its social conception of business and the peculiar notion of the business-society relationship derived from it (Bacq et al. 2013), urge us to envision specific approaches that enable a proper integration of ethics in its teaching, this is nevertheless an opportunity to allow the unique features of social entrepreneurship education to inform the field of teaching business ethics. In this way, we highlight that while traditional business ethics courses can inform social entrepreneurship courses, the opposite can be true as well.

Therefore, the ideas posed in this paper may serve to identify alternative strategies to the traditional business ethics education based on cognitive approaches, whose effectiveness has been debated (Bosco et al. 2010; Buchko and Buchko 2009; Crane and Matten 2004). In addition, our proposal may be valuable to allow a fuller appreciation of the role that religious sources can play in the promotion of ethical thinking. It may also be valuable to help us to leave aside the narrowness of the individual ethics that is suggested in a great part of the social entrepreneurship heroic discourse and to instead embrace the treatment of ethics in its relational character. Seen from this perspective, one of the major contributions of this paper is to shed light on the importance of

religious materials and hermeneutics approaches to enlarge the possibilities of introducing ethical discussions at different levels (Bachelor's or Master's degree courses) and in related teaching fields (e.g., business ethics courses, teaching ethics in management or entrepreneurship courses), just as so in any subject where there is a need to discuss ethical questions that affect business areas (e.g., finances, marketing, strategy). It is unquestionable that religious parables, whether they come from western or eastern faith traditions, have not received sufficient attention in these curricula or in academia so far. In this context, Ricoeur's (1991) hermeneutics may be seen as a reflexive means to add them to our pedagogical repertoire.

Notwithstanding the benefits that this paper may provide to the scholarship in several areas, we do not pretend to be too optimistic about our proposal. Not every teacher or student may find religious parables, especially the New Testament P-LiV, a persuasive example to be used to elicit ethical reflections in the context of social entrepreneurship education. The scientific positivist logic prevalent in business schools may lead people to consider religious parables as ancient artefacts with little relevance to the current business world. Reticence may probably come from the people who associate the use of religious parables with a religious meaning and see them as a possible cause of discomfort for students or academics of different religious backgrounds. In this respect, it is important to distinguish the religiosity of the students, faculty members, and university administrators from teachers and students using religious texts as material with which to work from an academic perspective (e.g., using Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach) to prompt different ethical discussions. This second perspective brackets all questions of religious faith, and it is precisely this view that underlies the present proposal. The adoption of this perspective, of course, should be clarified in classrooms so that it does not eliminate possibilities to enhance debates and discussions that help

nurture students' critical thinking, even though some students might be surprised by the proposal.

In addition, the use of the P-LiV here also has its limitations. For example, we have only illustrated some possibilities to promote ethical reflections from its reading with a focus on an embedded relational ethics, but this does not mean that we have addressed most of the possibilities that the use through Ricoeur's (1991) double hermeneutics might open. Moreover, for students familiar with other styles of writing and reading, it might be difficult to address an exercise similar to the one that we have presented. Nevertheless, such a challenge might serve to increase the learning process and, as Koehn (2005) noted, to allow for a more expressive self-discovery to occur.

The paper has also other limitations that suggest a number of areas for further research. For example, the fact that this paper was guided by the call to critically consider the teaching of ethics in social entrepreneurship education led to a focus on social entrepreneurship courses, which are mainly delivered in business schools' MBAs programmes within North American/European universities. Broadly, in such contexts, it is assumed that students who attend the courses are more interested in creating their own social businesses than in the role they may play as intrapreneurs in established social organizations. Moreover, there is an implicit acceptance that students show a certain level of maturity and that most of their evaluation assignments involve preparing research works in which originality and critical thinking are valuable. For these reasons, this paper leaves outside its scope issues related to intrapreneurship and does not address standard forms of assessment or problems such as free riding or social loafing. Other choices to explore the proposal in different contexts, disciplines and grades (bachelor's and so on) may result in interesting discussions in this respect. This is an endeavor we encourage.

Additionally, as was noted in the Introduction, beyond the New Testament parable used as an example, other religious traditions contain meaningful parables that may be used to develop different exercises to integrate ethics into the teaching of social entrepreneurship or other related business ethic courses. Confucian parables, for example, may have much to say due to the growth of entrepreneurship education in East Asian countries. Analysing these parables and their impact in the ethical reflections that could be elicited from students is, however, beyond the scope and space of this paper but is another key area in which further research is needed. From such applications, other topics in the business and (social) entrepreneurial world may be evoked in discussions to enrich our understanding of the ethics of social/traditional entrepreneurs or business managers (e.g., global supply of commodities, entrepreneurship in rural areas). Going further, other studies may present treatments of the specific religious context of the texts; in this paper, all religious issues were intentionally set aside.

Assessing the efficacy of our proposal in large samples of students will be another important step. Nonetheless, important as empirical demonstrations are, advances in a field involve not only actual works but also, and especially at the initial state of any research field, the creation of alternatives, different ways of seeing things.

Finally, it may be important to consider that integrating the teaching of ethics through narratives, whether they are religious parables, religious narratives, or secular narratives, may carry the risk of leading us to choose well-known stories or even biographies of famous business (wo)men. However, some of the most decisive turning points in world history have been substantially co-determined by individuals never mentioned in history books. Kenneth Gergen, taking a radical position on this point, questions how many experiments we know about which no one cares; he notes that the normal answer is “few indeed”, but these few became classics (cited in Howard 1991, p.

190). Unhitching the social entrepreneurship heroic discourse from its habitual enunciation in many of our classrooms might be a difficult task. Grand narratives may drive us to disregard the learning potential of other stories by thinking, a priori, that they should not be one of the stories we care about (Parker 2002). However, if there is a fruitful learning experience that may come from the use of small stories, even religious parables, why should we not try it? In this paper, we have shown an alternative to initiate a conversation, not to conclude it. The claim here has never pretended to be more than a possibility to enrich the devices that teachers and students have, but neither a road that always must be followed. Our own position is, in fact, to harmonise a combined approach in the classrooms. Our hope is that this paper can serve to encourage future discussions on how to promote ethical reflections in the teaching of ethics within social entrepreneurship education and, broadly, within the teaching of business ethics. We also hope that this paper can cause us to consider how we, as teachers, can wisely manage the academic use of materials from secular and religious sources for the benefit of our students' learning.

Notes

1. The fact that we are focusing on religious parables' literary character implies setting aside all questions associated with religious faith, since no religious or theological meaning is taken into account from their use.

2. Many scholars have emphasized that since the inception of social entrepreneurship as a research field, there has never been a unique discourse that depicts a general understanding of the phenomenon. Although the heroic discourse of the social entrepreneur has spread widely from the US to all over the world, it is worth mentioning that there have been other discourses (for further details, see the works of Defourny and Nyssens 2010 or Teasdale, 2012). Currently, various discourses and conceptualizations coexist in different parts of the world, because multi-

vocal evidence is becoming more palpable with the maturation of the research in the area (see for further details, Karanda and Toledano 2012, Kerlin 2009; Urban 2008); thus, it may be difficult to speak in terms of a unique social entrepreneurship understanding or discourse. Nonetheless, there are some conceptions/discourses that have prevailed in a great part of the academic and formal teaching narrative (e.g textbooks, case studies), as it is the rhetoric of the heroic social entrepreneur, especially in the Western world.

3. The Skoll and Ashoka Foundations are two of the most recalled examples that have contributed to create centres or courses dedicated to social entrepreneurship in relevant universities such as Harvard or Oxford (for further details, see the works of O'Connor 2006 or Stayaert and Hjorth 2006).

4. It is worthy clarifying that the rosy picture of social entrepreneurship is not exclusively driven by research and the academic elite. Instead, the popularity of the heroic view of social entrepreneurs appears to have been the result of matching ideas that have spread concurrently from several agents' discourses (e.g., people from entrepreneurship and business life, voluntary and non-profit organizations, governments, popular press) (see, for instance, the works of Stayaert and Hjorth 2006 or Teasdale 2012). We appreciate a reviewer's note to provide some thought in this point.

5. The evidence comes, on the one hand, from a selective search of articles published in business ethics journals (*Journal of Business Ethics*, *Business Ethics Quarterly*, *Business Ethics: A European Review*, *Journal of Business Ethics Education*, *Teaching Business Ethics*) and, on the other hand, from a database search in EBSCO, SCOPUS and ATLA Religion database that used as keywords "parable" in association with various (social) business terms (economy, business, justice, marketplace and workers). From database results we focused on articles that showed specific parables in titles or abstract; the parable of the Labours in the Vineyard was one of the most cited (along with the Parable of the tenants –Matthew 21:33-46). Nonetheless, although the database search included papers published in some of the top journals of the New Testament such as *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* and *Novum Testamentum*, it should not be understood as a systematic review. The results obtained are in

part dependent on the authors' background and their own research process, so that the review may exclude relevant literature. In any case, it provided a useful and comprehensive coverage, since the objective was not to find a one-to-one correspondence between particular social entrepreneurs' ethical problems and particular parables but rather to get a general overview of recent publications that referred to New Testament parables with a commercial or a (social) business imaginary.

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