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Jacques Rancière and Care Ethics: Four Lessons in (Feminist) Emancipation

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Abstract: This paper proposes a conversation between Jacques Rancière and feminist care ethicists. It argues that there are important resonances between these two bodies of scholarship, thanks to their similar indictments of Western hierarchies and binaries, their shared invitation to “blur boundaries” and embrace a politics of “impropriety”, and their views on the significance of storytelling/narratives and of the ordinary. Drawing largely on *Disagreement*, *Proletarian Nights*, and *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, I also indicate that Rancière’s work offers crucial and timely insights for care ethicists on the importance of attending to desire and hope in research, the inevitability of conflict in social transformation, and the need to think *together* the transformation of care work/practices and of dominant social norms.

Keywords: care ethics; feminism; Jacques Rancière; Carol Gilligan; politics



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1. Introduction

In *Joining the Resistance* [1], Carol Gilligan reflects on the troubled reception history of her first book *In a Different Voice* [2]—a work of moral psychology that largely founded feminist care ethics.¹ Looking back to both the enthusiasm and the stir it caused, she suggests that her book was misunderstood by some because it was read through a patriarchal lens. Indeed, several of the claims she made to describe and rehabilitate a marginalized “different” moral voice were wrongly read as essentialist claims about women: “these misinterpretations reflect an assimilation of my work to the very gender norms and values I was contesting.” [1] (p. 19) Indeed, the sad irony here is that the book’s point was precisely to show that the dominant paradigm in moral psychology—which considered disincarnated rationality, impartiality, and universality in moral reasoning as the clearest signs of ethical maturity—was a patriarchal paradigm that pre-orient us to *mishear* or dismiss the “different”, more marginalized way of approaching moral dilemmas.² Gilligan’s reception history is, in a sense, a fine illustration of what contemporary political theorist Jacques Rancière calls a “*més-entente*”. An important term of art in Rancière’s work, “*més-entente*” has no good equivalent in English;³ it plays on the double-meaning of the French “*entendre*” as hearing and understanding. A “*més-entente*” thus refers at once to a *sensory* failure in listening/hearing, and a *cognitive* failure in understanding. Gilligan’s book was the object of this twofold failure on the part of some.

This paper’s main purpose is not to use Rancierian concepts to revisit the reception history of Gilligan’s ground-breaking text. I rather wish to orchestrate, more widely, a conversation between Rancière’s work and care ethics. This is largely uncharted territory for care ethics, if one sets aside three notable exceptions: Gradon Diprose’s [3] appeal to Rancière’s account of radical equality to analyze alternative ways of exchanging care labour, Ella Myers’ recourse to Rancière to theorize a caring democratic ethos [4], and Jorma Heier’s [5–7] illuminating resort to Rancière’s writings to theorize repair and the political more generally. Apart from Diprose, Myers, and Heier, scholars have yet to explore at length the affinities between Rancière and care ethics. This paper proposes a modest first step in this direction.

Naturally, care ethics cannot be boiled down to a single, unified perspective; it is a multidisciplinary and polyphonic scholarly field (e.g., Engster and Hamington [8]; Barnes et al. [9]; Urban and Ward [10]; Bourgault and Vosman [11]). My characterization of care ethics will hence be incomplete, and some of the parallels drawn between Rancière and care ethics might do violence to some articulations of care ethics. Nevertheless, I show that Rancière's work speaks most clearly (*but not exclusively*) to that one "strand" of care ethics that sees this ethics as a critical theory devoted to undermining patriarchal dichotomies and hierarchies (e.g., Gilligan [1,2,12]; Laugier (in [11]); Paperman and Molinier in [11]; Robinson [13]; FitzGerald [14]). The second strand of care ethics (as identified by Fiona Robinson and Maggie FitzGerald) is that which envisions care ethics chiefly as something to be *applied* to specific policies, occupations, or institutions (health care, home care, etc.).⁴ I shall return to this typology later in the paper, in order to complicate it.

More specifically, this paper's chief objective is to show that Rancière's thought is particularly relevant for care ethics in light of: (1) its indictment of Western philosophical binaries and hierarchies; (2) its account of politics as a matter of challenging "miscounts" (i.e., socio-political exclusions) and of blurring boundaries; (3) its emphasis on story-telling/narrative and listening as crucial for 'un-learning' inequality; and (4) its call to attend to *ordinary* heroes and to *desiring*. I also indicate, throughout, some differences between Rancière's work and care ethics scholarship—differences that, I suggest, serve as useful correctives or ways to illuminate blind spots and tensions in their respective works.

The paper will argue that reading Rancière is quite instructive for care ethicists because his work resolutely underscores the conflictual nature of politics. As I will explain below, this is an insight I consider of utmost importance for care ethics scholars as they reflect not only on how to (re)distribute care responsibilities and challenge privileged positions, but also on what some of the short-term *effects* of this redistribution might be (namely, a fair amount of discomfort, grumbling, and tensions). What my conversation between Rancière and care ethics also indicates is the desirability of interrogating the separation of care ethics research into two separate strands. My intention here is not to deny that there are numerous and quite distinctive types of work done (and methodologies used) in care ethics. But what I suggest, with Rancière, is that the most fruitful way to carry out social transformation might be to attend to both "strands" *simultaneously*. And finally, I argue that another uptake of reading Rancière for care ethicists lies in his compelling invitation to always emphasize hope and desire in research on oppression and inequality.

Some might wonder whether Rancière has ever read (or cited) care ethics scholarship. As far as I know, the answer is no. But in a sense, the question is moot. In the spirit of Rancière's own method, my intention is not to demonstrate intellectual debts or trace direct lines of influence. It is, more modestly, to seek out a few *resonances* and offer a prolegomenon to more sustained conversations between Rancière scholarship and care ethics. As we shall see, Rancière's methodological motto (see [15])—*find resonances*⁵—is one he invites scholars to take up not only when studying old philosophical *texts*, but also when engaging with all real-life experiences and contemporary stories. For him, it is in part through the creation of these resonances that concerned scholars, teachers, parents, civil servants, or activists might contribute (if modestly) to an emancipatory politics.

2. Putting the Western Philosophical Tradition on Trial: Of Hierarchies and Binaries

"I've never imagined my work developing *from* politics *to* aesthetics, especially since *it has always sought to blur boundaries*." Rancière [16] (p. 203; my italics)

Rancière's oeuvre is vast and multidisciplinary, dealing with subjects as diverse as literary theory, education, cinema, workers' history, aesthetic theory, Marxism, etc. This is hardly surprising in light of Rancière's own self-description as someone who has always been committed to challenging disciplinary boundaries—if not, in fact, *all* boundaries. But there is still one crucial idea or concept that traverses all his writings: namely, that of equality—the equality of intelligence of all human beings. Indeed, Rancière is of the view that all individuals are capable of thinking, learning, and communicating with others,

and this thesis informs everything he says about socio-political life⁶ (see [17]), art, and education. For Rancière, equality is not an ontological principle, a ground for politics or a (future-oriented) *goal* to be pursued via various social reforms. It is a *presupposition* that ought to inform how people think, feel, and act *right now*. For him, equality is an opinion that, when upheld, can have radical effects—particularly when it is upheld by those on the margins of socio-political life. For this reason, he writes: “our problem isn’t proving that all intelligence is equal. *It’s seeing what can be done under that supposition*. And for this, it’s enough for us that the opinion be possible” [18] (p. 46; my italics).

It is this radical egalitarianism that also informs Rancière’s critique of the Western tradition. Indeed, his writings propose an indictment of the way Western philosophers have, ever since antiquity, divided the world into two types of people (superior vs. inferior, ‘those who think’ vs. ‘those who don’t’)—a division closely tied to other binaries such as reason/affects, mind/body, public/private. From Aristotle to Arendt and Bourdieu, Rancière sees in intellectuals (including the most well-meaning ones) a regrettable hierarchical “division into two” of individuals, to which various expectations and norms are attached (whether the ranked division is *fought against* or *celebrated* by a philosopher is unimportant for Rancière; the *effects* are ultimately the same). First, there are those individuals whose possession of rational speech (*logos*) makes them fit for political participation, leisurely activities, and detached reflection on justice. Second, there are others (workers, slaves, women) whose laboring bodies are unceasingly preoccupied with need satisfaction and who are unfit for politics and noble leisure; they lack *logos*, energy, and time, and they only seem capable of communicating emotions and “noise”—a “mere” expression of suffering and pain. Throughout his career, Rancière tirelessly sought to contest this “division into two”—whether it concerns that between necessity/freedom, emotion/reason, manual/intellectual work. Rancière’s first major book, *Proletarian Nights* [19], sought to show how poorly these divisions captured the reality of working-class experience and abilities. The book chronicles, based on a lengthy study of 19th century workers’ archives (diaries, letters, plays, poetry), everyday blurrings of the dichotomies mentioned above: countless examples of metalworkers, shoemakers, and seamstresses using their evenings and nights *not* to rest their tired bodies or sedate their suffering with “light” entertainment (as Bourdieusian intellectuals tend to think, according to Rancière), but rather, to engage in leisurely pursuits devoted to many other things than simply expressing suffering. Through these pursuits, workers effectively *demonstrated* their equality: they took up artistic and intellectual activities that did not match the expectations of the dominant classes. Note here that Rancière does not deny that many of these (exploited) workers were indeed *suffering*—he does acknowledge harsh work conditions and low pay—but his work is chiefly devoted to showing that: (1) workers’ bodies and minds are about *so much more* than suffering or the dire pull of necessity; (2) workers do not need to have their suffering *explained* to them (they already understand it).

The inequalitarian division of the world into (ranked) types is part and parcel of what Rancière refers to as “the police”: that is, a hierarchical way of ordering or “partitioning” the socio-symbolic order, a hierarchical way to share power and authority. In Rancière’s view, all societies are shaped by implicit laws and norms that govern their *sensory order*, their modes of perception (i.e., what gets heard and seen vs. what does not). The police “distributes bodies within the space of their visibility/invisibility, and aligns ways of being, ways of doing and ways of saying *appropriate to each*” [20] (p. 28; my italics). The police’s norms, processes and implicit laws “organize” bodies, names, and places not only according to a principle of hierarchy, but also according to a principle of “saturation”; the police *claims* that everyone has been “counted”/acknowledged, and thus that “all is well” [21] (thesis 8). But all is not well; there *are* always un-counted or excluded individuals in the police order (*les sans-parts*, those “without a part”). There are always *wrongs*, miscounts in “the count of community parts”; all societies are based on exclusions and miscounts, and processing (or contesting) those wrongs is what politics is about [20].

We shall return below to what politics accomplishes. For now, let us focus on the binaries that organize our world and briefly discuss the Rancierian concept of the “partition of the sensible” (*le partage du sensible*). With this term of art, Rancière plays with the double meaning of the French word *partager*, referring at once to “that which separates and excludes”, and “that which allows participation” or inclusion [21] (thesis 7). A partition of the sensory thus always produces both exclusions and inclusion; and as noted above, an (inegalitarian) partition such as the police’s will shape how we perceive and relate to others. We come to “imbibe” the prevalent *opinion* of inequality, which affects how we acquire and *share* knowledge and how we live our socio-political lives more generally. An *opinion* for Rancière [22] (p. 26) “is the framework within which we learn and know, within which the work of our mind is linked with that of all the other minds”. This explains why emancipation requires *un-learning* the opinion of inequality.

For now, what I wish to suggest is that we can describe patriarchy (as defined by care ethics scholars) as an inegalitarian “distribution of the sensible”. Indeed, one finds in Gilligan, Robinson, Laugier, Molinier, Heier⁷, and FitzGerald’s respective works an indictment of the Western philosophical tradition that is quite similar to Rancière’s: they fault our tradition for having split humans into two (superior vs. inferior), for having posited dubious binaries between men and women, mind and body, thinking and feeling. In *Why does patriarchy persist?*, Gilligan and Snider define patriarchy as a framework that profoundly shapes both our affective/sensory and our cognitive/intellectual skills (like Rancière, the authors regard the two sets of skills as inseparable). “Patriarchy exists as a set of rules and values, codes and scripts that specify how men and women should act and be in the world”, the authors write [23] (p. 6). “Patriarchy also exists internally, shaping how we think and feel how we perceive and judge ourselves, our desires, our relationships and the world we live in.” Patriarchy is hence akin to a Rancierian *police* distribution of the sensory, operating based on an inegalitarian logic. Gilligan and Snider [23] (p. 33) write: “Patriarchy is an order of living that privileges some men over other men (straight over gay, rich over poor, white over black, fathers over sons [. . .]) and all men over women. The politics of patriarchy is the politics of domination.” The sensory and epistemic framework that is patriarchy is thus responsible for multiple forms of oppression; and it is on the basis of passages such as these that Robinson [13] argues that care ethics *can* respond to the charge that care ethics is almost exclusively concerned with *gender* (or differently put, that it is not intersectional enough). For Robinson [13] (p. 17), the criticism is misplaced, since care ethics challenges *multiple* hierarchical divides at once—not simply gender divides.

For Robinson [13] (p. 20), one can effectively answer the critique if one regards care ethics not chiefly as one to be “applied” to policies or institutions (one strand of care ethics, for Robinson), but rather as an epistemic, critical framework that seeks to challenge patriarchy’s binary logic (the second main strand of care ethics; see [13]). This is also the way Maggie FitzGerald defines care ethics—namely, as a “critique of existing hierarchies [. . . that] has the potential to transform governing norms, the institutions shaped by these norms and values, and most radically, the current configuration of ‘the political’ itself.” [14] (p. 261) While FitzGerald does not draw on Rancière, much of what she has to say about “the political” clearly speaks to a Rancierian account of political life and reiterates his invitation to “blur boundaries”; for FitzGerald, critical care ethics has the power to “erase the boundaries that define dualistic categories” ([14], (p. 252)). For Robinson, the two most crucial binaries challenged by care ethics are those between reason and emotion, and between mind and body. Robinson is absolutely correct to observe that “care ethics brings back the body into view” [13] (p. 17), as the work of Pascale Molinier [11,24] and Maurice Hamington—to mention only those two—clearly illustrates. The latter’s writings have certainly emphasized care’s radically *embodied* nature. For Hamington, care is regarded as a “mind-body activity”, an “embodied performance that can disrupt knowledge” [8] (p. 279). As we will see, Rancière also underscores—albeit from a different angle—this ability of bodies (particularly bodies *out of place*) to disrupt epistemic frameworks.

But if both Rancière and care ethics challenge the mind/body divide, I want to argue that care ethics' treatment of the dichotomy is more robust and radical because it is *consistently* tied to a challenge of the distinction between ('low') manual labor vs. ('high') intellectual labor. (This is one of the many reasons why a dialogue between Rancierian scholarship and care ethics is valuable: namely, for uncovering some of the *limits* of Rancière's treatment of (manual) labor—limits that have been too rarely noted by researchers.) Rancière understood his oeuvre as devoted to challenging the "very old hierarchy that subordinates those who are 'destined' to work with their hands to those who have received the privilege of thought,"⁸ but it seems to me that this dichotomy eventually sneaks in through the back door in his writings. Rancière is so intent on underscoring that workers *can* "think" and do art/philosophy, and that they are equal, that he ends up reiterating at times the old (Aristotelian) assumption that some pursuits (e.g., poetry, painting, theater) are *higher* than those involving the body (e.g., carpentry, farming, or knitting). Indeed, despite his best intention, I think that *Proletarian Nights* ultimately presents "bourgeois" leisurely activities as highly desirable *escapes* from physical work. By contrast, I wish to suggest that care ethicists have much more *consistently* sought to underscore the *nobility* and indispensability of more manual work, in its own right (e.g., Molinier [24]).

One other difference between care ethics and Rancière is that the latter does not seem to be as preoccupied with explaining *why* our epistemic/sensory frameworks are so informed by binaries. Much of Gilligan's recent work is about figuring out *why* humans come up with and hold onto binaries if they are so toxic. Gilligan's answer is multi-layered [1,23,25]. She first acknowledges the evident fact that patriarchy greatly *benefits* some individuals (an obvious obstacle to challenging the privileged irresponsibility of many). But she also proposes another, more psychologically-rooted explanation for patriarchal binaries: they exist because human beings (incorrectly) believe patriarchy will shield them from suffering. Individuals sacrifice love and equality for hierarchy because they hope—after having experienced some (traumatic) losses of love—that this will protect them from *further* losses and vulnerability.

That Rancière may not seem interested in the emotional or psychological forces that could explain *why* individuals embrace hierarchies will not surprise readers. After all, if care ethics is commonly associated with an interrogation of the emotion/reason split and with celebrations of emotions such as empathy (e.g., Slote [26]; Brugère [27]; Pulcini [28]; cf. Paperman [29])—few associate Rancière's name with a deep concern for emotions (many rather associate him with the opposite (e.g., Davis [30])). But Brigitte Bargetz has shown that while *explicit* references to emotions are rare in Rancière, one may still label him a "political philosopher of affect." [31] (p. 588) It is possible to do so, she insists, if one considers *le partage du sensible* as a partitioning that concerns affects and emotions (two terms Bargetz uses interchangeably). In Bargetz's view, the distribution of the sensible not only entails a separation between those who (are said to) think/speak and those who don't; it also "marks a distinction between those whose feelings *constitute the existing distribution* of the sensible and *those whose feelings are excluded*." [31] (p. 589) Rancière's work could thus enrich feminist theory in light of its fine grasp of the power of "feeling scripts" (i.e., what should (or should not) be felt or expressed, by whom, and in what circumstances). Following Bargetz's lead, one might indeed try using a Rancierian lens on affects to take up Gilligan's depiction [1] of the (patriarchal) feeling-script tied to anger—i.e., anger is an "appropriate" emotion in boisterous boys and "real men", and an "improper" one in "good" girls. A Rancierian perspective on anger and gender roles could in fact bring new energy, more widely, to the existing feminist literature on the value of anger for social transformation (e.g., see the writings of Sara Ahmed, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks). What Rancière would bring to the subject is not only a rich account of the "distribution of the sensible", but also singular reflections on what *education* and *everyday/ordinary* affective gestures can do to trouble existing gendered and racialized feeling scripts. (There is one additional way to nuance the prevalent view that Rancière has almost nothing to say about affects, and it is to consider the significance he ascribes to the *passion* for equality, which I will do below.)

To recapitulate, what I have claimed is that there are good grounds to embrace Bargetz' reading of Rancière as a theorist of emotions. But what I am *not* claiming is that Rancière is *as* concerned by emotions (or by the emotion/reason split) as care ethicists are. For one thing, the remarks on the subject are too rare. Although this is speculative on my part, I think that what partially explains his reticence to discuss emotions at length might be his often-expressed fear (e.g., [32]: p. 112) of making any strong ontological or anthropological claim about humans (whether he *can* in fact avoid these altogether is, of course, is a complex issue that would be worthy of an entirely different paper).

3. Laboring Bodies, Women, and Dirty Diapers “Out of Place”: Politics as the Processing of Wrongs and Blurring of Boundaries

As noted above, if “the police” is an inegalitarian logic or series of processes that organize people according to identities, functions and places, “politics” for Rancière is an egalitarian logic that illuminates and *disturbs* the police. In line with his idiosyncratic way of (re)defining standard concepts, Rancière uses the term “politics” in a very particular manner. Much of what we usually understand as “political” (policymaking, parliamentary life, elections, parties) Rancière [18,20] subsumes under the heading of the “police”; this becomes a gigantic concept that engulfs norms, values and implicit laws, *and* “concrete” processes and institutions (courts, political parties, media, police force, etc.). In turn, politics takes on a specific, narrow meaning, referring to fairly rare moments when the police order is disturbed by the appearance of an excluded group, a “part of those without a part”.

At the heart of the Rancierian portrait of the police and of politics (see [33–35]),⁹ one finds a radically categorical dismissal of institutions: Rancière repeatedly insists that *all institutions* inevitably rest on an inegalitarian explicatory logic and that, as such, no institution “will ever emancipate a single person” [18] (p. 102). While these statements are unsurprising given Rancière’s characterization of his work as *polemical* interventions [17] (p. 116), they do preclude any extensive discussion of what *some* state-funded programs could do (and what they *already do*) to participate in an emancipatory feminist politics (e.g., universal, accessible daycare services). This is a significant gap, and the fact that this neglect of institutions might be the “mere” result of his lack of interest in them (as he suggests in an interview¹⁰) does not make this any less of a problem. Care ethics offers here a healthy corrective, since many of its scholars have argued that a truly egalitarian democratic politics can very well coexist with (caring) institutions and social programs (e.g., Tronto [36]). For feminist care ethicists, we cannot have social transformation without attending to *both* individuals and institutions—and the latter need not *necessarily* be an embodiment of an inegalitarian logic.

So far, I have noted that Rancière sees politics as what can modify a *partage du sensible*. Politics accomplishes this partially by revealing that there are individuals who are not “counted”, and it can do so in several different ways. One of these is simply by having bodies show up in a place or at a time they are *not* expected to, or where they take up tasks in a manner they were not expected to be able to. For him, “Politics begins exactly when those who ‘cannot’ do something show that in fact they can” [16] (p. 202). Rancierian politics is thus, once again, about impropriety or, to use his own term, “dis-identification”: it is a stepping aside from the categories, norms, and expectations assigned by the police. And it is precisely in these moments of *dis*-identification that a political subject is created and that a distribution of the sensible gets illuminated *and changed*. Dominant norms get probed as bodies move “out of place”, as politics takes place; what was accepted as self-evident becomes—momentarily—less so.

A politics worthy of the name for Rancière is thus about the blurring of various boundaries (a blurring that obviously echoes much feminist theory, not only care ethics). As he explains:

Political action consists in viewing as political what was viewed as ‘social’, ‘economic’, or ‘domestic’. It consists in blurring the boundaries. It is what happens whenever ‘domestic’ agents—workers or women, for instance—reconfigure their

quarrel as a quarrel concerning the common [. . .] *there is politics when there is a disagreement about what is politics, when the boundary separating the political from the social or the public from the domestic is put into question*. Politics is a way of re-partitioning the political from the non-political. This is why it *generally occurs 'out of place'*. [35] (p. 4; my italics)

What Rancière attacks here, then, are the binaries of ancient philosophers such as Aristotle, but also, insistently so, those of Hannah Arendt. While Rancière acknowledges his debts towards her, he nevertheless understands his own work as a *reaction* to her oeuvre and particularly her distinctions between “mere life”/“political life”, “the social”/politics, needs/freedom, noise/logos [16] (p. 202). He is convinced that these distinctions regrettably reiterate old inegalitarian distributions of the sensible and that Arendt failed to appreciate what politics is about: a contest over these very distinctions. For him, “Political activity is whatever *shifts a body from the place assigned to it* [. . .] It makes visible *what had no business being seen*, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise” [20] (p. 30; my italics).

One vivid example used by Rancière [32] (p. 120) to capture the way boundaries can be disputed by a mere body “out of place” is that of Rosa Parks: Parks’ body sitting on a bus where it was *not supposed to*, a black body causing through this impropriety significant political effects. Another story of a woman “out of place” often used by Rancière [20,32] is that of French revolutionary Jeanne Deroin. When Deroin ran as a *candidate for office* in 1849 (at a time when women could not even vote), she effectively exposed the “misfit” or gap between the egalitarian rhetoric of universal rights and suffrage, and the (inegalitarian) logic of women’s relegation to the domestic sphere. Women are both included and excluded in the police order of Republican France, and Deroin’s act exposed that paradox. For Rancière, Olympe de Gouges grasped the paradoxical inclusion/exclusion of women quite well when she reflected on her tragic fate as a female revolutionary: if one can be guillotined for political reasons, she wondered, shouldn’t one be allowed to climb up on the tribune [37] (p. 35)? In brief, what political action accomplishes is to expose the various paradoxes and “miscounts” in the dominant social order. It makes visible “what had no business being seen” in public (manual workers, pregnant bodies,¹¹ dirty diapers, female revolutionary heroes), and hereby blurs boundaries. Rancierian politics is, in short, a politics of *impropriety* (as Davide Panagia has convincingly shown).

While their overall theories are far from equivalent, there is an important resonance between Rancière’s commitment to impropriety and the “blurring of boundaries” and Tronto’s critique of several binaries. Recall that in her ground-breaking *Moral Boundaries*, Tronto sought to denounce several regrettable dichotomies that have led to care’s disregard (not all of these are central to Rancière’s work, but most certainly the private/public one is). Many feminist scholars have heeded Tronto’s call to blur boundaries and to address one grave “miscount”: the non-recognition of the significance of care work and the invisibilisation of all those individuals who ‘maintain and repair’ our world. Countless care ethicists have busied themselves with revealing this miscount, making visible what most privileged individuals would “prefer not to see” (Molinier [24]). In Gilligan and Brugère as well, democratic politics gets framed largely in terms of addressing “miscounts” and achieving *equality of voice*. Indeed, for Brugère, politics largely hangs unto what is heard/not heard. Hers is a “sensate” theory of democracy: a caring democracy worthy of the name (equality of voice) will not come without a *simultaneous* reform of our socio-political normative and sensory order—a far-reaching disturbing of the “established order of places” (Brugère [38] (p. 145)).¹²

Note here that for Brugère, Robinson, and Gilligan, as much as for Rancière, the concept of “voice” is a radically *relational* one. Speaking matters only if it is perceived, i.e., meaningfully *listened* to. What politics calls into question, then, is not only the private/public divide, but also the divide between what is *said* to constitute “discourse”/rational speech” and what is *said* to constitute “noise”. Politics entails changing our *perception*, reconfiguring “the way we share out or divide places and times, speech and silence, the visible and the invis-

ible" [16] (p. 203). Rancière thus complicates the old binary between speech and silence posited by our logocentric tradition. Since Aristotle, most have associated rational speech (*logos*) with intelligence, freedom, and activity, and silence/listening with stupidity, servility, or passivity, and many have *used* this logocentric binary to *justify* the distinction between those who (should) have citizenship and those who should not. Rancière challenges this dichotomy—most notably in *Disagreement*, but also in an essay on “un-learning” inequality [22], where he invites us to reconsider the view that politics necessarily requires *audible* claims. He does so in part by underscoring the significance of *silent* bodies assembling (see his discussion of the quiet resistance of the “silent standing man” in Turkey’s Gezi Park ([22]: p. 45).

The interrogation of the old binary “speech” vs. “silence/listening” is something I consider central to care ethics; a few scholars have critically re-evaluated the dichotomy or highlighted the crucial role of (silent) attention and listening (e.g., Brugère [27]; Casalini [39]; Laugier [11]; Robinson [40]). (see also [41])¹³ For several care ethics scholars and Rancière, listening (and non-listening) plays a key role in the mechanics of domination *and* of politics/emancipation. After all, as Rancière [21] (thesis 8) correctly observes: “If there is someone you do not wish to recognize as a political being, you begin by not seeing them as the bearers of politicalness [. . .] by not hearing that it is an utterance coming out of their mouths.” Naturally, neither care ethicists nor Rancière dismiss the desirability of having a “voice” altogether, but they insist that without *genuine* listening (e.g., attentive, caring silence), speech means little. As Gilligan puts it: “speaking depends on listening and *being heard*, it is an intensely relational act” [2] (p. xvi) (see also [42])¹⁴ In her piece “Stop Talking and Listen” [40], Robinson also offers a crucial corrective to mainstream discourse ethics, one that speaks to Gilligan’s insights.¹⁵ Robinson argues that merely including in dialogue previously excluded parties is inadequate without a genuine commitment to *listen* on the part of dominant groups—a commitment that ought to be informed by a clear awareness of various relationships of dependency, and of the norms and power inequalities that have shaped (and continue to shape) the dominants’ relationship to the excluded (e.g., female migrant care workers [40]). Robinson’s depiction [13] (p. 20) of what care ethics calls for in order to remedy “miscounts” is something Rancière would be sympathetic to: “The task for care ethicists . . . is not simply to ‘bring in’ marginalised perspectives [. . .] it is to make more visible the way in which care ethics can offer a critique of the psychological and structural forces that actively repress and militate against our ability to think and respond to others through relational lenses”.

In short, I am suggesting that the Rancierian account of politics and of the reconfiguration of the sensory is quite relevant for care ethicists’ theorization of social transformation (and here I follow in the footsteps of Heier [7]). To capture succinctly this relevance, allow me to juxtapose briefly a “care ethics” voice to Rancière’s voice, in this passage from *Disagreement*:

The police is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of *ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying* . . . an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a *particular activity* is visible [e.g., production or protection] and another is not [care and reproductive work], that this speech [about markets or war] is understood as discourse and another [about child care or decent housing] as noise . . . I propose to reserve the term politics for an extremely determined activity *antagonistic* to policing: [. . .] political activity is always a mode of expression that undoes the perceptible [patriarchal] divisions of the police order. [20] (pp. 29–30; my italics)

Two important things are worth noting here in my view: first, the extent to which, according to Rancière, particular activities and occupations are *inseparable* from the epistemicosensory order (e.g., what we see and hear/what we don’t). That a particular activity/work might be deemed “invisible” (washing floors, changing diapers) and thus poorly paid and funded is not separable from the symbolic order, from the ways we allocate “ways of doing, being and seeing”. Stated differently, the “miscounting” of essential care workers and the

lack of decent funding and attention given to certain care services and policies are very closely tied according to a Rancierian lens to the norms of the “police” order and to our field of perception. My point here is that Rancière’s work may force us to consider anew whether the gulf between care ethics’ two “strands” is as wide as we think (and if it is so, whether we wish to *keep it* that way). As mentioned above, several scholars have suggested that there are two main strands in care ethics (FitzGerald, Robinson, Conradi): one that uses care ethics as a framework to assess concrete care *work*/practices/policies, and another that is said to consist in a *critical* theory that seeks to trouble existing norms and dominant epistemologies (e.g., Robinson [13]; FitzGerald [14]). What I suggest here is that Rancière’s oeuvre interrogates the view that it might be possible—or desirable from a feminist activist point of view—to separate these two strands.

The second thing I wish to underscore from that passage from *Disagreement* is the *necessarily conflictual* nature of politics—something that Rancière asserts loud and clear throughout his writings, but that care ethicists have been a lot less vocal about. While care ethicists have not completely overlooked conflict (e.g., Tronto [43]: p. 109), they have overall given it a fairly modest place in their account of what social transformation might imply (notable exceptions here are Mayer [44], Heier [7], Vosman [45]). Rancière’s thesis might thus be worth considering at greater length by care ethicists; after all, denouncing and rectifying miscounts (including miscounts pertaining to care responsibilities) is bound to cause discomfort and conflict. The processing of wrongs (i.e., meaningful public debates about who does what/who does not, and in what condition, etc.) is no easy deliberative affair. For one, people who benefit greatly from a hierarchical way of “distributing places” will not easily accept a reconfiguration of names, responsibilities and roles, especially if this leads to a significant *loss* in privilege and power. As we saw above, Rancierian politics is what *disturbs* existing norms and existing ways of doing/saying/sharing [20] [21]; it is hence what causes (at least in the short term) a fair amount of unease and trouble. After all, politics shows what had “no business being seen” and it voices *wrongs* (past *and* present); it brings attention to the least admirable periods of our histories, to the margins, and to what many (privileged) individuals would prefer *not* to see, *not* to know. It is, as such, bound to generate conflict and unease. Indeed, (Rancierian) politics is no picnic. And what I wish to argue here is that it might be of utmost importance for care ethicists to keep this (apparently) simple thesis in mind as they reflect on how to challenge unjust care distribution and hierarchical structures.

4. Un-Learning Hierarchies, Making Voices Resonate: The Significance of Narratives

“The teacher is first of all a person who speaks to another, who tells stories . . . ”
Rancière [18] (p. 6)

“My research began with questions about voice: who is speaking, and to whom?
In what body? Telling what stories about relationships? In what societal and
cultural frameworks?” Gilligan [1], (p. 5)

I now wish to turn to a book of utmost importance for Rancière’s intellectual trajectory, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster. Five Lessons in Emancipation*. This is no standard work of philosophy: it is, rather, storytelling. The (true) story in question concerns Joseph Jacotot, a French revolutionary forced into exile in Holland in the 1820s who has to teach literature to Flemish students who know no French (and he knows no Flemish). Thanks to these odd circumstances, Jacotot ends up “discovering” a controversial method of teaching, based around the following principles: that humans possess equal intelligence, that students need no detailed explanation to learn, and teachers need not know about a subject to “teach”. Indeed, the “Jacotot method” makes it possible for an illiterate mother to teach her children how to read.

If students do not need detailed explanations to learn, why are these so central to our education system? Part of Jacotot/Rancière’s answer is that “it is the *explicator* who needs the incapable”. After all, “to explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself. [. . .] explication is [. . .] the parable of a world

divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones.” [18] (p. 6) The “explanatory logic” is thus a stultifying way of interacting with others that subordinates, and that seeks to justify the division of the world into two. This is not only a logic found in schools, but in all institutions for Rancière: “explication is not only the stultifying weapon of pedagogues but the very bond of the social order. Whoever says order says distribution into ranks. Putting into ranks presupposes explication, the distributory, *justificatory* fiction of *an inequality that has no other reason for being*” [18] (p. 117; my italics).

Now, one cannot conclude from this that Rancière wants to get rid of “teachers” altogether (a tempting conclusion to draw given Rancière’s numerous anarchist quips): teachers *can* play a role in emancipatory practice (a role that can be taken up by *all* concerned social scientists, activists, or parents in his view).¹⁶ Part of this role consists in working on students’ will to learn and their attentiveness, which can be accomplished in part by making them embrace the *opinion* of equality. For Rancière/Jacotot, an emancipator is someone who can offer the “consciousness of what an intelligence can do when it considers itself equal to any other and considers any other equal to itself [. . .] Emancipation is the consciousness of that reciprocity” [18] (p. 39). Moreover, an “ignorant”¹⁷ teacher can also ask questions [18] (p. 30); through this interactive questioning, *both* parties learn *and* teach something to the other. Finally, and most significantly for our purposes, a good teacher will *tell stories*, as Rancière thinks he is doing in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (a book in which he merges his voice with that of Jacotot). What ought to replace the dominant “explanatory logic” of institutions is a narrative¹⁸ one: storytelling is a way of *sharing* knowledge that does not subordinate one’s interlocutor(s). It is a communicative mode that *presumes* a basic equality; when one tells a story, one rarely pauses to *explain* what is going on or to append lengthy theoretical addendums.

Rancière also employed this narrative mode in *Proletarian Nights* [19], doing his best to resist the temptation social scientists regularly face to offer, first, a “pure” rendition of a working-class archive (via the recounting of a letter or poem), followed by a theoretical analysis to *explain* the worker’s experience. As noted above, explanations are undesirable (they have stultifying effects); they are also, most often,¹⁹ completely unnecessary. For Rancière, workers (and most marginalized groups) are aware of their domination; they rarely benefit from a well-meaning sociologist such as Bourdieu explaining it *to them*. There are thus close ties between Rancière’s celebration of storytelling, and his polemics against intellectuals such as Bourdieu. The latter, according to Rancière, problematically claimed to know best workers’ domination and thought, as such, that he could speak *for* them.

Rancierian storytelling is a way to speak *with* rather than *for* people—something Rancière wants social scientists to do to help “erase the hierarchical privilege of the comment (of the scholar) whose words explain the words that are its ‘object’” [22] (p.38). For Rancière, there is a way to present stories—via a deliberate yet subtle intermeshing of voices—that won’t reinforce existing epistemic power hierarchies. For him, this is an intermeshing that ultimately reflects the narrative ambiguity of *all* human experience and that can inform an emancipatory politics, by purposefully blurring the line between *past* stories of emancipation and *present* possibilities. What is produced via this intermeshing of different voices, temporalities, and levels of meaning are what Rancière calls “resonances”, which help create an *intensification* of stories (they allow us to grasp and feel better a particular situation). Whether one is entirely convinced by Rancière’s clear-cut distinction between *his* narrative method and more “standard” ways of presenting archival material is an open question (I am of the view that his polemical attacks against Bourdieu have clouded his judgment on this). Also open is the question of whether there is a contradiction between Rancière’s egalitarian call to dismantle (epistemic) hierarchies, and the baffling impenetrability of some of his writings. (Tackling these complicated questions would require another paper.)

Seeking out resonances and ascribing significance to the narrative mode are also crucial for Gilligan’s method and project, as she herself acknowledges repeatedly. In *Joining the Resistance*, for instance, she writes: “I am a woman who listens. My research began with

questions about voice: who is speaking, and to whom? In what body? Telling what stories about relationships?" [1] (p. 5). Like Rancière, Gilligan thinks narratives can powerfully capture both affective experiences and *reflection* on these experiences: "My interest lies in the interaction of experience and thought [. . .] in the stories we tell about our lives." [2] (p. 2) Moreover, what Gilligan [46] (p. 121) believes she accomplished in *In a Different Voice* is somewhat akin to what Rancière thought he did: namely, she made voices resonate. Gilligan sought to interlace discreetly her voice *and* that of other women to that of Amy (one of the young girls she interviewed for her 1982 book), so that the latter's voice could be "intensified". Through these "relational resonances" [46] (p. 125), Gilligan hoped that Amy's (different) perspective on what matters for moral reasoning could be taken more seriously by unreceptive academic institutions and by a patriarchal culture. I would like to argue that behind Gilligan's embrace of the desirability of "making resonate" rests the (Rancierian) view that what concerned scholars should do is not chiefly *speak for* or *speak of*, but rather, what I have referred to as *speak with*. Moreover, like Rancière, Gilligan considers the narrative mode helpful for communicating knowledge in an accessible, *egalitarian* manner and for seizing the polyphonic nature of human experience (her "Listening Guide" is there to help scholars "tune their ear to the multiplicity of voices" present in every human being; see [47] (p. 76); [2] (p. 2).

Several care theorists have appealed to the work of Gilligan and that of Iris Marion Young [48] and Margaret Walker [49] to emphasize the importance of narratives (but cf. Tronto [36]: p. 63). Jorma Heier [5], for instance, has shown the significance of Young's discussion of alternative forms of communication (e.g., greeting, storytelling) for addressing historical injustices and improving democratic participation more generally. Care ethicists such as Alain Loute and Patrick Schuchter also propose fine reflections on "storytelling" in their work on the relevance of narrative ethics within clinical settings. Inspired by the work of Rita Charron (an authority on narrative ethics), Loute [50] argues that such ethics can help democratize healthcare institutions and participate in the cultivation of better listening and attention skills in health care professionals. (Note that Gilligan's "listening guide" [47] begins with a brief passage from Charron).

Schuchter and Heller's [51] analysis of "care dialog" echoes partially Rancière in that it underscores the powerful *effects* of sharing stories and of *thinking with* stories. Also similarly to Rancière, these authors suggest that storytelling can blur the line between who teaches and who learns; it can help flatten (epistemic) hierarchies in ethical decision-making. Based on many narrative workshops held in nursing homes, they came to one of the following conclusions:

The only chance to equalize asymmetries and create understanding beyond social roles is to give priority to the elementary storytelling of the individuals concerned. By giving narratives (stories) the status of the central language game in ethical deliberation, the dominance of expert knowledge is annulled in favor of a democratization of the opportunities to speak and a consequent participation. [51] (p. 59)

Like other care ethicists interested in narratives, Schuchter and Heller do not, of course, completely dismiss the relevance of medical knowledge/expertise, but they think patients ought to better participate in the decision-making that concerns them. (Needless to say, this widely embraced acknowledgement on care ethicists' part that narrative modes may *not* be appropriate in *all* settings and situations is in harmony with care ethics' commitment to always attend to particulars.) I wish to suggest that care ethics' and Rancière's insights on narratives are quite pertinent for the communities that seek to answer their citizens' desire to have more deliberative, *shared* decision-making in health care and to finally put to rest the old paternalistic (and hierarchical) relationships between doctors and patients. For example, the Canadian Royal College of Physicians [52] has explicitly committed to an approach to physician-patient relations that is more dialogical and participatory, and that gives a pride of place to the knowledge and situatedness of patients—to their values, preferences, and experiences (all of which are often communicated in a *narrative mode*). While Rancière himself

might have suspicions about the possibility of enacting these learning models chiefly in traditional, hierarchical medical education, I would like to suggest that a very practical application of his insights (and of care ethics') might entail medical and nursing faculties adding more training in narrative ethics to their curricula. After all, as some researchers have indicated [53], it is precisely those groups most marginalized (e.g., racialized groups, the elderly) that have so much to gain from a flattening of epistemic hierarchies and from a better appreciation of the powers of story-telling.

5. The Importance of "Ordinary Heroes" and of Desiring Equality

"Love is the enemy of patriarchy, crossing its boundaries, dissolving its hierarchies." Gilligan [1] (p. 42)

The previous section indicated that Rancière's analysis of narratives echoes with care ethics scholars', but we have yet to consider what "type" of stories we are talking about here. What I would like to suggest below is that what both Rancière and care ethics seek are stories about the *ordinary*. One of the more implicit intentions in what follows is to nuance the prevalent interpretation of Rancière as a theorist of radical exceptions or ruptures. (If that prevalent reading were entirely correct, this would obviously make him a poor friend of care ethics in my view.) I wish to argue that if Rancière is partially a theorist of ruptures—he *is* fascinated by singular "events" and the heroic, as indicated in his book *Disagreement*—he *is also* an inspiring theorist of the ordinary. For both care ethicists and Rancière, the word "ordinary hero" is no oxymoron.

The care ethics scholar who has been most central for giving center stage to the ordinary is Sandra Laugier, whose writings have heavily drawn on Ordinary Language Philosophy' (e.g., Stanley Cavell and Cora Diamond). In Laugier's view, care ethics—just like Ordinary Language Philosophy—redefines ethics as a matter of "attention to ordinary life", to "what we are unable to see, to what is right before our eyes" (Laugier in [11]) (p. 33). Contrary to dominant moral theories that begin *from* universal principles, care ethics for Laugier *begins* with *experiences of the everyday* and the "moral problems of real people in their ordinary lives." As such, care ethics has contributed to a revolution in philosophy by giving "a voice to the ordinary" (Laugier in [11]) (p. 31)—precisely what Gilligan accomplished in her 1982 ground-breaking work according to Laugier. For Pascale Molinier as well (Molinier in [11]) (p. 88), care ethics' study of the "ordinary" and everyday life radically changed philosophy and disciplines like sociology of work.²⁰ One can see Molinier's strong interest in ordinary men and women in much of her scholarship, where she gives central stage to janitors, personal support workers, and numerous ordinary care *receivers* caught up in various challenges and (all-too-human) desires, joys, and frustrations. Consider the (real) story of long-term care home resident "Monsieur Georges", thoughtfully recounted by Molinier to capture the messy complexity of care receiver/giver dynamics, and the subtle heroism of the staff that attends to the disagreeable Monsieur Georges [24] (pp. 237–241).

If the claim that care ethics is inseparable from attentiveness to the ordinary is hardly a controversial one, the same cannot be said for Rancière, whose name tends to be commonly associated with the "exceptional". But perhaps there is another, more nuanced and appropriate way of reading Rancière. Above, we discussed various aspects of his method of equality, which informs his approach to knowledge (co)production and sharing, and his approach to social transformation. Recall that Rancière wants us to appreciate the *radical effects* the presupposition of equality can have—but he seeks to unearth these in *everyday* practices. Jacotot's method can be set to "work everywhere at any time" [32] (p. 155); and dissensus, Rancière insists, "can start from an imperceptible modification of the forms of *everyday experience*" [32] (p. 140). Recall that this is what *Proletarian Nights* depicted: the (heroic) power of "simple" nightly pursuits taken up by workers.

Jason Frank [54] (p. 259) is thus correct to suggest that there is a rich "politics of the ordinary" in Rancière's early work. We also see this "politics of the ordinary" cohabitate with a "politics of the extraordinary" in a brief text [37] where Rancière comments on the

publication of a massive history of women. Rancière celebrates the project of bringing women out of history's margins, but he faults the editors of *L'Histoire des femmes* for having paid insufficient attention to women's work—effectively making “the quotidian disappear” [37]—and for having paid insufficient attention to singular or “atypical”, “heroic cases”. While most of us would see an evident tension in these reproaches (there seems to be at once insufficient and excessive attention paid to the “ordinary”), Rancière sees none. In harmony with his account of politics as a “crossing of boundaries”, Rancière is convinced that many historical cases and stories can cross the border “between the event and non-event, the ordinary and non-ordinary” [22] (p. 39). Differently put: the singular can live *in* the ordinary, the heroic in the everyday.

Now, if attending to “small dramas of sensory redistribution” [54] (p. 259) in our *scholarly* work can have radical transformative effects, so can the actual performance of seemingly “ordinary” political acts according to Rancière (recall the example of the silent man protesting in Gezi Park). Rancière likes to underscore the power of certain forms of (non-spectacular) occupation: for instance, an “unexpected crowd of anonymous persons” gathering without “specific claims, just to affirm their refusal of the way in which the spaces and times or (their) lives are managed by the alliance of state powers and financial oligarchies” [22] (p. 43). While these (modest) gatherings may be fleeting and small-scale, he argues that they can chip away at dominant norms and institutions.

We noted above that Rancière is radically dismissive of institutions' ability to participate directly in emancipation. And yet, his is not a theory of socio-political life that entirely discards hope in institutional change (even if ultimately Rancière refuses to see institutional life and change as worthy of the term *politics*). Rancière might be (personally) *uninterested* in institutions, but he does recognize their ability to be improved. And significantly for our purposes, Rancière on occasions notes that this change might come via small-scale contesting of norms and rules. What he terms a “slow subversion” through “ordinary” gestures and claims [22] (p. 43) can have immense significance. After all, “there is no group strength independent of the strength with which individuals tear themselves out of the ether world of inarticulate sounds [. . .] emancipation [makes] its way forward through a multitude of individual experiences” [55] (p. 50).

Hence, in spite of his polemical attack against everything that the police represents and does, Rancière still acknowledges, in rare but significant passages, that “there is a worse and a better police” [20] (pp. 30–31). While this is not really spelled out, he says that one way to identify a *better* police is on basis of whether it has regularly faced (and been receptive to) various mobilizations that affirm equality [20] (p. 31). In brief, there seem to be ‘police processes’ and institutions that are more amenable than others to the expressions of our passion for equality. What this suggests in my view is that the line between hierarchical/“bad” institutions and egalitarian/“good” politics might be much finer than Rancière is willing to acknowledge. Consider the following passage, where he locates (modest) emancipatory practices *within* institutions:

There is no un-explicative institution. But there are a multiplicity of practices, *inside* or outside the dominant institutions, which extend the community of equal speaking beings and open new paths, [. . .] new forms of access to research and knowledge. [22] (p. 43; my italics)

Quite significantly for our purposes, this multiplicity of practices includes moments of subjectivation that are *not* located on the front line of spectacular revolutionary political battles. He confides in an interview that he never wanted to claim that “equality exists only on the barricades”²¹; he is rather convinced that politics and equality are also found in the actions and speech claims of *ordinary* men and women.

This section has, thus far, sought to indicate that the “ordinary” is given a pride of place in Rancière and Gilligan's account of what stories *matter*. What also brings the two authors together is that both seek out (ordinary) stories about something we *all already* have within ourselves: a desire. For Gilligan, this is the desire for love; for Rancière it is the desire for equality. We do not need to ‘learn’ this desire or have it explained to us: both

authors insist we *already know this*. But our desire for equality is buried under something that needs *un-learning*: the *opinion* of inequality.

One can see the significance of the desire for equality in the exchange Rancière had with Axel Honneth. Here, appealing to the stories of Jeanne Deroin and Rosa Parks, Rancière faults Honnethian theory for analyzing politics chiefly in terms of pathologies/suffering that individuals mobilize to address. “When Jeanne Deroin made this claim to be a candidate, she didn’t need to run as a candidate in order to respond to [pathologies]”. Rather, Rancière insists, “she did it in order to construct another world, another relation between the domestic and the political space” [32] (pp. 119–120). For Rancière, what both Parks and Deroin were driven by was a strong *desire* for another world, for “other ways of being” [32] (p. 126).

In Rancière and Gilligan, there is in my view a similar oscillation between exceedingly somber “diagnostics” regarding the hierarchies that have structured our lives for times immemorial, and a disconcertingly naive optimism regarding what is required to overcome these hierarchies. Illustrative of this optimism is the way they both present emancipation/democratic politics as “easy” to achieve: we “just” need to listen to what we *already know* and *feel*. “This is what continues to fuel my optimism”, candidly observes Gilligan, “that we have within ourselves the potential to free our humanity from a false story” [1] (p. 178). Jacotot/Rancière echoes back: surely “you already have all it takes to emancipate yourself”; all you need is the *will* to embrace equality. “What more is needed?” asks Rancière [18] (p. 23).²² The answer: nothing more than *attending* to this desire; it is *that* simple for him.

The feminist materialists among us would undoubtedly want to ask: ... *but is it?* There is indeed a problematic bootstrap kind of argument in Rancière, an argument that is sometimes expressed in individualist overtones that do violence to care ethics (an ethics that ascribes much significance to interdependence and relationality). (Rancière’s bootstrap argument is largely the result of his wariness about institutions and his concern that the latter tend to “stultify” individuals [18].) As noted above, it is here that care ethics can offer a healthy corrective to Rancière, by stressing the *indispensability* and desirability of welfare programs (such as child care) and social distributive measures for (individual) well-being, autonomy, and gender equality. Indeed, care ethics’ radical commitment to a *relational* account of autonomy makes it more fit at assessing what advancing equality and freedom requires (e.g., Doucet [56] on parental leaves and social justice; see also [8–10]). Rancière polemically affirms in several places that just like education, liberty is won and lost “solely by each person’s effort” [18] (p. 62). While Rancière recognizes that differences in wealth, race or linguistic capital will affect one’s life chances, he is so insistent on polemically proposing a theory that starts *from* emancipation (rather than suffering) and that starts *from* the opinion of equality (rather than inequality) that I believe he sometimes completely loses touch with the “Weight of the World”—that weight powerfully described by Bourdieu and his colleagues in a book bearing this very title.²³

6. Conclusions

This paper has sought to initiate a dialogue between care ethics scholarship and Rancière’s work—most notably around their shared critiques of hierarchy and dichotomies, their call to “blur boundaries” and their reflections on the significance of narratives and of the ordinary. My list of affinities between Rancière’s work and care ethics is obviously not exhaustive; much could have been said, for instance, about their shared conviction that *attention* is crucial for ethical life, or about their rejection of the theory/practice split. Throughout, I have also underscored differences in their perspectives, which I argued can serve as friendly mutual correctives. In particular, I noted that feminist care ethics can enrich Rancièrian theory in light of its more nuanced perspective on institutions’ role, and in light of its more radical and *consistent* challenge to the hierarchy between physical and intellectual labor. (Rancière’s “failure” here might partially be the result of his gloomy

assessment of the extent to which *permanent* (as opposed to fleeting) social transformation was ultimately possible).

I have also made the claim that reading Rancière is timely and valuable for care ethicists because of Rancière's insight on the *necessarily* conflictual nature of politics (politics here understood in the specific Rancierian sense). This insight, I argued, is something care scholars might wish to consider a bit more closely as they pursue their reflections on what it would *require* to take away the "free passes" from the hands of the privileged and, more significantly, what the *effects* of this might be. Using Rancière's work, I have also called into question the desirability of separating too neatly the so-called two 'strands' in care ethics research.

In the remaining space at my disposal, I would like to underscore another 'uptake' offered by a dialogue between Rancière and care ethics—one rooted in the issue of desire and hope. What we saw above is that for Rancière, it is critical that the stories told about people not only be about suffering, but also about their desire (and hope) to create a different order (this is what he stressed in his account of the stories of Rosa Parks and Jeanne Deroin, and in those concerning workers (in *Proletarian Nights*)). For him, a Bourdieusian lexicon of "suffering" cannot capture what largely leads to a politics: "acting politically, very often, comes because some forms of ruptures appear *possible* [. . .] It is very rare that suffering produces politics by itself" [32] (p. 126; my italics). Rancière thus invites scholars to exercise caution with a grammar of suffering, which is not equivalent to putting aside the language of injustice: "we cannot break with the logic of the reproduction of suffering if we don't also break with the very language of suffering in approaching society and individuals. Taking injustice as a starting point is not the same as starting from suffering" [32] (p. 127).

What Rancière is claiming here is reminiscent of Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck's characterization of the two main types of research done on marginalized groups: desire-based and damage-based research. For Tuck [57], the later refers to scholarly work that chiefly seeks to chronicle people's stories of pain/brokenness, and while doing so, utterly disregards stories of hope or desire (the latter are deemed less useful for provoking indignation and rectifying oppression). For Tuck, while the strategic goal may be laudable, it is important that scholars be more cognizant of the *impact* this research can have on their research "objects" (here, Indigenous communities). There are consequences for these "objects" to be described *in terms of* suffering or to come to define themselves *chiefly as damaged* [57] (p. 415). Hence Tuck's call for more heavily desire-based research, which documents "not only the painful elements of social realities but also the wisdom and hope" [57] (p. 416). But to be absolutely clear: the goal is definitely *not* to brush aside past (wrongs) or present suffering; it is rather to de-pathologize "the experiences of dispossessed and disenfranchised communities so that people are seen *as more than broken* and conquered. This is to say that even when communities *are broken and conquered, they are so much more than that*" [57] (p. 416; my italics). This is why Tuck regards desire-based research *not* as the opposite of damage-based inquiry, but as a type of research that *troubles* the binary between the endless reproduction (of suffering) and resistance/change.

Rancière's invitation to *begin* with equality and desire in research, combined with his view that suffering workers (and marginalized women) are about *so much more* than tired, "broken" bodies speaks—if imperfectly—to what Tuck is calling for. As we saw, *Proletarian Nights* is desire-based research on 19th century manual workers, whose nightly activities allowed to express pain *and* hopeful desire, and whose accomplishments showed that they could "*already live*" the impossible [19] (p. 8; my italics). This emphasis on hope, desire and present possibilities represents another crucial Rancierian insight that care ethicists may wish to pay attention to. Indeed, as they make their most powerful case against patriarchy-induced suffering and colonial injustices, and as they seek to ameliorate the situation of exploited essential workers, care ethicists might wish to be wary of succumbing to the temptation of conducting (excessively) "damage-based" research. Not only might that bolster the dignity and agency of the "objects" of their research, it might also help them finally lay to rest the old—and dubious—charge that care ethics is tainted by paternalism.

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Notes

- ¹ I say “largely” because one cannot overstate the importance of Sara Ruddick’s “Maternal Thinking” (published before Gilligan’s work). On Ruddick’s significance for care ethics, see Urban and Ward 2020 (introduction).
- ² “Within a patriarchal framework, care is a feminine ethic. Within a *democratic* framework, care is a human ethic” [1], p. 22.
- ³ The term ‘disagreement’ is typically used by translators, but most acknowledge the inadequacy of the translation.
- ⁴ See Robinson (2020) and FitzGerald’s (2020) characterization.
- ⁵ He describes his approach to the study of 19th century texts as follows: “My idea was that there are resonances, and *things you can feel and understand based on those resonances*; there’s no need to know if the workers read Jacotot or if Marx read this particular Saint-Simonian pamphlet or whatever. There are signifiers that circulate and crystallize historic experiences, situations, movements, projects.” [15], p.35; my italics.
- ⁶ E.g., democratic action is “the affirmation of the equal capacity of anybody” [17], p. 120.
- ⁷ Heier [7] (p. 9) argues that Rancière’s account of binaries is highly instructive because it illuminates the problems with too neat a dichotomy between care receivers vs. care givers—a binary that still unfortunately ends to pop up in care ethics scholarship according to her. Hence, for Heier, care ethicists could go *even further* in their “Rancierian” embrace of challenging dichotomies.
- ⁸ Rancière [19], p. 8 (my translation).
- ⁹ Much ink has been spilled over whether this peculiar, quite “narrow” conception of politics is fruitful or problematic. Some have suggested that there is a kind “politics of purity” here that ends up reiterating the binaries Rancière sought to interrogate in the first place (e.g., Slavoj Žižek & Jodi Dean); others have contested this view. For two important texts on this issue, see Samuel Chambers [33] and Todd May [34]. In my view, Chambers convincingly shows us that politics is always interlaced with the police—it is always ‘impure’. See how Rancière himself answers the charge of ‘purity’ at Rancière [35], pp. 2–3.
- ¹⁰ Rancière [16], pp. 199–200.
- ¹¹ Here I am alluding to the certain “horror” with which Arendt describes, in the *Human Condition* (ch.2), the growth of the “social” and the “irruption of pregnant bodies” in the public sphere.
- ¹² Brugère [38], p. 145 (my translation); also Hamrouni 2020, 157.
- ¹³ As I argued elsewhere [41], this has important implications for how we theorize *responsibility* for redressing problems of democratic exclusion: the burden gets shifted onto *listeners* instead of resting chiefly on (marginalized) speakers.
- ¹⁴ Gilligan strikingly sums up her entire output as one “grounded in listening” [10], p. xiii. In some of the interviews she conducted with ‘at risk’ young Black women in the USA (e.g., *Between Voice and Silence* [42]), Gilligan showed quite powerfully that these women had what some people would call a “voice” (many of them were in fact criticized by teachers and by members of dominant institutions for speaking *too loudly*), but they were clearly not *listened* to. Hence, to put it most succinctly: these young women had no voice worthy of the name.
- ¹⁵ I cannot delve into an exploration of Rancière’s correctives to Habermasian discourse ethics; I merely note that some of these echo Robinson’s (e.g., Rancière [18] (ch.5); [20]).
- ¹⁶ We can move between spheres because as Rancière/Jacotot tells us, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is not about education—it is about emancipation and about how the “explanatory logic” affects *all* institutions ([20], p. 33).
- ¹⁷ With this term ‘ignorant’ he emphasizes *ignoring* as discounting or overlooking (of the opinion of inequality).
- ¹⁸ I use the term even though Rancière [38] (p. 62) expressed hesitation about it (he preferred ‘storytelling’). But his qualms only concern a *particular* type of narrative—i.e., “grand narratives” that subsume in a single story a “multiplicity of voices, identities, and language games”.
- ¹⁹ I say most often because ultimately, Rancière does resort to *some* explanations or guidance (so did his ‘model’ Jacotot).
- ²⁰ See also Hamrouni’s insightful account of *ordinary* vulnerability (2020).
- ²¹ This is from an interview (2012), where he also said: “I am not a thinker of the event, of the upsurge, but rather of emancipation as something with its own tradition, with a history that isn’t just made up of great striking deeds but also of the ongoing effort to create forms of the common different from the ones on offer from the state” (cited in [54] 259).
- ²² “Don’t say you can’t. You know how to see, how to speak, you know how to show, you can remember. What more is needed?” [18], p. 23.

- ²³ I am obviously referring here to Bourdieu's edited volume on social suffering, which bears in English the title *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*.

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