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Gilligan and complexity: reinterpreting the "ethic of care"

In *In a different voice* (1982) Carol Gilligan argues for an "ethic of care", which she links to a "moral voice" of women. This stance has been criticised as being essentialist and reinforcing gender stereotypes. This article, however, argues that the concept of an ethic of care could be a creative way of approaching ethics in a complex social system. Its position is supported by arguments from deconstruction discourses.

Gilligan en kompleksiteit: 'n herinterpretasie van die "etiek van sorg"

Carol Gilligan (1982) argumenteer in *In a different voice* ten gunste van 'n "etiek van sorg" wat, volgens haar, 'n skakel is met die morele stem van vroue. Hierdie standpunt is gekritiseer deur aan te voer dat dit essensialisties is en gender stereotipes versterk. In hierdie artikel word daarteenoor geargumenteer dat die "etiek van sorg" 'n kreatiewe benadering tot etiek in 'n komplekse sosiale stelsel kan wees. Hierdie posisie word ondersteun met argumente vanuit dekonstruksie diskoerse.

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> [T]here is a point or limit beyond which calculation must fail, and we must recognize that ... [a] democracy or a politics that we simply calculate, without justice and the gift, would be a terrible thing, and this is often the case.
>
> Jacques Derrida (Derrida & Caputo 1997: 19)

Carol Gilligan's controversial *In a different voice: psychological theory and women's development* (1982) (hereafter *In a different voice*) was written largely to challenge the claims of Lawrence Kohlberg in *The philosophy of moral development*.[1] Kohlberg (1981) argued that there are six stages of moral development, and that women do not "fully develop" to the sixth stage. The crux of Gilligan's argument is that there is more than one "moral voice": there is also an "ethic of care" that can be contrasted with the "logic of justice" which Kohlberg views as the highest level of moral development.

Gilligan's thesis of an "ethic of care" has been criticised, sometimes viciously, for being essentialist and reproducing the very stereotypes that feminism aims to challenge. In this article, however, it will be argued that Gilligan's concept of an ethic of care could be an interesting way of viewing ethics within society as a complex system.

Before going any further, two points should be made. First, the understanding of ethics in this article follows Drucilla Cornell (1992: 13) seeing it as the quest for a non-violative relationship with the Other. This understanding of ethics places a renewed emphasis on choice and responsibility. It demands more than merely following rules or calculating "correct" ethical behaviour. Rather, it demands decision-making, choice and, most importantly, taking responsibility for those choices.

1   Carol Gilligan received her doctorate in social psychology from Harvard University in 1964. In 1970 she worked as a research assistant for Lawrence Kohlberg, whose work she would later criticise. She published her most famous work *In a different voice: psychological theory and women's development* in 1982. She taught at Harvard University and the University of Cambridge and was closely involved with the founding of the Harvard Center on Gender and Education. She is currently a full-time professor at the New York University.
    Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg is known for his research on moral development, specifically his "stage theory". He received his doctorate from the University of Chicago and, until his death in 1987, taught at Harvard University, where he founded the Center for Moral Education.

Secondly, an important role will be played by the concept of "complexity", and specifically the idea that society can be viewed as a complex system.[2] In such systems an enormous number of individuals interact constantly in a rich and dynamic way. The importance of seeing society as a complex system — instead of as a chaos that needs to be ordered — is that it recognizes and gives importance to the multitude of contingent relationships that exist in society and to the dynamic interaction between these relationships. Thus there is a move away from an overemphasis on universal issues to an "appreciation" of the singular. There is no abstract *a priori* position from which we can accurately describe a complex system, no "god's-eye-view". Since there are no "objective" descriptions available, we cannot escape assuming responsibility for the way in which we describe these systems. This responsibility cannot be shifted to some set of rules or laws, or onto institutions (Cilliers 1995: 131). To underestimate or disregard complexity is not simply a technical error, but an ethical mistake.

1. Gilligan's argument

Gilligan's (1982) argument is two-fold. Firstly, she refutes Kohlberg's (1981) contention that women's moral development is insufficient. Kohlberg identifies six phases in a moral development that moves gradually from an egocentric to a (more) universal understanding of ethics where the principles used to make moral judgments are universal and abstract in nature. According to Kohlberg, the highest level of moral development is achieved once ethics and ethical decision-making are freed from historical and psychological constraints, in other words, concreteness and particularity. Gilligan refers to this understanding of ethics as "the logic of justice". In contrast to this understanding of ethics, she argues that there is also an "ethic of care". Whereas the logic of justice emphasises the application of abstract rules and principles (by the autonomous individual), the focus of the ethic of care is on relationships and the interdependence between human beings in specific contexts. Gilligan challenges "the logic of justice", in other words, an abstract and universal idea of justice. She

2   Cf Cilliers 1998 for more detail.

proposes an alternative, namely, the ethic of care — an understanding of justice that takes both concrete aspects and singularity seriously.[3]

Gilligan illustrates the difference between the male and female approaches to moral problems with her famous "Heinz example" (which was also used by Kohlberg). The following story is told to two eleven-year-olds, Jake and Amy. A man, Heinz, has a wife who has a life-threatening illness. He cannot afford the medicine to save her and is confronted with the choice of whether or not to steal the drug from the pharmacist (Gilligan 1982: 25-6).

Jake argues as follows. A human life is worth more than the financial loss that the pharmacist will suffer; Heinz's wife will die unless she gets the drug, whereas the pharmacist can always make more money. Heinz's wife can never be replaced, therefore he is justified in stealing the drug (Gilligan 1982: 26). Jake makes a logical argument that there is no doubt about the fact that Heinz should steal the drugs; the "solution" to the dilemma is obvious to him. It involves a calculation of competing rights, and of placing these rights in a particular hierarchy. He reduces the problem to terms of rights and property. He then ranks the values at stake (the right to life versus the right to property) and selects the ranking value.

In contrast to Jake's quick answer, Amy is not convinced that there is an easy solution to the dilemma (Gilligan 1982: 27-9). She argues that, even given Heinz's situation, stealing remains wrong. She is very concerned with the pharmacist's failure to respond to Heinz's dilemma. She has some hope in the fact that "if [they] talked long enough, they could reach something besides stealing" (Gilligan 1982: 29). Her focus is, therefore, not the competing rights, but the concrete situation of the dilemma and the relationships between the people described in it. To her, the pharmacist's right to property and transaction is less important, not only because the life of Heinz's wife

3   In terms of feminist theory, Gilligan belongs to the second phase of feminism. First-phase feminism argued simply for the equal treatment of men and women, in other words, for formal equality. Second-phase feminism argued that there are differences between genders and that these should be taken seriously. There are two schools in this phase: dominance theory, of which Catherine MacKinnon is the main advocate, and relational feminism, in which Gilligan is an important figure (Van Blerk 1996: 177-9).

is at stake (the importance of her right to life) but also, and more importantly, because the pharmacist is a party to a relationship with Heinz and his wife (Gilligan 1982: 33). Furthermore, Amy is also concerned with the unforeseen consequences — even when doing "the right thing" — that Heinz's actions might have. He might be arrested for the theft and go to jail, leaving his wife with no one to care for her (Gilligan 1982: 28). In other words, Amy sees the world as composed of relationships between people rather than as a system of rules, competing rights and hierarchical values.

Gilligan summarises the difference between Jake's and Amy's interpretations of the dilemma as follows. Jake, who, according to Kohlberg's model, is morally more developed than Amy, sees the dilemma as a "math problem with humans in it" (Gilligan 1982: 28). Amy, on the other hand, places the emphasis on the relationships. She sees the world as "comprised of relationships rather than of people standing alone, a world that coheres through human connection rather than through systems of rules" (Gilligan 1982: 29). Individuals are defined not as atomistic and separate, but as "delineated through connection" (Gilligan 1982: 33). Whereas Jake sees the problem as an impersonal conflict of claims to be mediated by systems of rules and law, Amy places her trust in relationships and communication (Gilligan 1982: 32, 33).

Gilligan's conclusion is that there is more than one "voice" when it comes to moral problems. That which Kohlberg discards as "underdevelopment" is in fact a "different voice"; in what Kohlberg labels a weakness, Gilligan finds a new and richer understanding of morality — or, from Derrida and Cornell's perspective, a richer understanding of ethics. The "different voice", in contrast with the logic of justice, moves the emphasis from the abstract values of universality, logic and detachment, to a emphasis on relationships, care and responsibility. Gilligan (1983: 40) writes:

> [W]hereas justice emphasizes the autonomy of the person, care underlies the primacy of relationship [... t]hus justice gives rise to an ethic of rights, and care engenders an ethic of responsibility.

To summarise, the ethic of care develops from an emphasis on relationships and on the interdependence between human beings. It values these connections and contextual thinking, whereas justice

emphasises the autonomous individual (Gilligan 1982: 46). The logic of justice (as in the case of distributive justice) places emphasis on rights and formal equality; the ethic of care focuses on responsibility and respect (Gilligan 1982: 164-5).

Both these concepts ("ethic" and "care") need to be considered more carefully. Firstly, ethic/s should not imply a set of rules that must be followed. Cornell (1992: 13) argues that ethics is the quest for a non-violative relationship with the Other and Otherness in general. It assumes, in Cornell's (1995: 78) view, a "responsibility to struggle against the appropriation of the Other into any system of meaning that would deny her difference and singularity". Any understanding of care should take serious cognisance of the fact that control of the Other is dangerous for ethical reasons. Care should rather imply a play of nearness and distance; a relationship in which participation is not a declaration of mastery (White 1991: 101). At this point another aspect of this understanding of ethics, as formulated by Halie (1984: 37), becomes important:

> If ethics is about ethos, the character of a particular person, why shouldn't it be deeply involved in using the particular names of people in the context of their particular doings and sufferings? And why shouldn't we use the verbs of narratives in these contexts instead of using only the empty, timeless verbs that connect high abstractions with each other?[4]

Gilligan's argument is, however, not without its problems. First, the way in which she proclaims the different voice to be a distinctly feminine attribute (a different voice) is problematic. Catharine MacKinnon (1987), a proponent of radical feminism, accuses Gilligan of merely reinforcing gender stereotypes and warns that emphasising difference (at all costs) could foreclose some possibilities. MacKinnon argues that sexuality is socially constructed in order to keep the gender hierarchy intact, and that Gilligan is doing much to aid this. To MacKinnon the only difference that requires serious attention is a differ-

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4   Compare Hannah Arendt (quoted by Luban 1990: 239): "No philosophy, no analysis, no aphorism, be it ever so profound, can compare in intensity and richness of meanings with a properly told story". Also, Patricia Williams (1989a: 2148): "I think silence is too common, too institutionalized, and too destructive not to examine it in the most nuanced way possible".

ence in power. In a later work MacKinnon (1989: 219) claims, indirectly referring to Gilligan:

> Difference is the velvet glove on the iron fist of domination [...] [t]he problem then is not that differences are not valued; the problem is that they are defined by power.

Secondly, Gilligan seems to assume, too quickly, that the logic of justice and the ethic of care are necessarily opposed. Moreover, Diprose (1994) is concerned that Gilligan is too willing to surrender the logic of justice as "male", ignoring possible positive elements in this approach. Perhaps the two opposite "poles" can instead form a dynamic interaction. Together they may force a continual redescription of what justice and law entail. A more "generous" reading of Gilligan could propose that she does not reject the ideas of the "logic of justice" altogether, but only that understanding of justice which ignores the importance of relationships and context.

Gilligan could also be criticised for underestimating the importance of difference. Carol Stack (1986) notes that Gilligan's argument does not hold for the black community in the USA. In this community men also place great emphasis on relationships with others.[5] She argues that this understanding is not the result of gender, but rather of economic deprivation. The category of women, to which Gilligan ascribes the different voice, is itself a diverse group, something she does not acknowledge. Diprose (1994) raises the concern that Gilligan does not take the complexity of (sexual) difference seriously enough. Are these differences natural or socially constituted, and can they be generalised?

Gilligan comes close to essentialising the voice of care, attributing it solely to women. But, as Kerber (1986: 308-9) points out, women fail — as often as men — to challenge a calculated ethic of justice with the ethic of care. She gives two examples. First, American women, after being "granted" the vote, voted according to race and class, not gender. They did not unify into a different voice or highlight new interests. Secondly, in oppressive societies such as Nazi Germany,

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5   Stack (1974) developed these ideas in *All our kin: strategies for survival in a Black community*. She describes the role that community networks and a co-operative lifestyle play (a form of connectedness).

women failed to disrupt the dominant ethic of their society — they were as militant Nazis as their male counterparts. For example, they were in favour of eugenics and the German Women Doctors' organisation expelled Jews from its ranks.

MacKinnon (1987) argues vehemently that the idea of caring entrenches gender stereotypes. Moreover, as Noddings (1993) points out, caring can lead to self-sacrifice (by women). This claim could be countered by two arguments. First, following Noddings (1993: 387-8), the ethic of care is not intended as an ethic for women only, and it should be used precisely to undermine the ethic of dominance. Secondly, Derrida's criticism of Levinas could also be useful here (cf Derrida 1978). Just as the Self should not become the slave of the Other, care should not swallow the "care-giver" whole. There is still a moment of sameness, reciprocity and mutual responsibility.

Responding to criticism, in an article written after the publication of *In a different voice*, Gilligan (1987: 24-5) argues that care should be understood within the framework of justice, as something that tempers justice and emphasises respect for people on their own terms. In an even earlier article she states:

> [T]hrough the tension between the universality of rights and particularity of responsibility, between the abstract concept of justice as fairness and the more contextual understanding of care in relationships, these ethics keep one another alive and inform each other on critical points [...] In this sense, the concept of morality sustains a dialectical tension between justice and care, aspiring always toward the ideal of a world more caring and more just (Gilligan 1983: 47).

This constitutes a realisation of the complexity of context, that individuals are not atomistic units, but stand in relation to others. Their decisions and judgments can have far-reaching consequences — some of which are not intended, but for which they still need to take responsibility. It is a realisation that matters of justice are not merely calculations in a sphere of competing demands and rights, but involve concrete individuals and singular situations. As Gilligan (1977: 483) points out:

> The blind willingness to sacrifice people to truth [...] has always been the danger of an ethics abstracted from life [...] This willingness links Gandhi to Abraham.

Gilligan (1980: 241) argues that the absolute nature of the principles of the logic of justice coexists with feelings of intolerance, since they do not take concreteness or consequences into account.

It could thus be argued that Gilligan's work represents an important move in the debate on justice, law and ethics. She defends herself against the accusation that she attributes the characteristic of a "Different Voice" to women, in an essentialist manner by saying "I saw in women's thinking the lines of a different conception, grounded in different images of relationships and implying a different interpretive framework" (Gilligan 1986: 326). She also notes:

> [T]he title of my book was deliberate; it reads, 'in a different *voice*, not 'in a woman's *voice*' [...] this voice is identified not by gender but by theme (Gilligan 1986: 327; emphasis original).

She points out that Amy's different perspective on the Heinz example is not only rendered incomprehensible by Kohlberg's framework, but also devalued as "under-development" (Gilligan 1986: 329).[6] One of Gilligan's most important contributions, writes Cornell (1991: 136),

> [...] was not that the form of moral reasoning correlated with women's emphasis on care as opposed to rights thinking should be hailed as inherently better, but only that a woman's different voice should not be inherently inferior.

In other words, by valuing the different voice, Gilligan forces a redescription of what counts as ethical decision-making.

This concludes the outline of Gilligan's position. The table below provides a brief summary of the main differences between the ethic of care and the logic of justice. In the paragraphs which follow it will argued that her idea of an ethic of care could be supplemented in an

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6   Beverly Thiele (1986), identifies three "vanishing acts" in which issues involving women are excluded from political and social thought. This, of course, holds true for other groups (eg blacks, Jews — members of the non-WASP group). The three strategies are exclusion, pseudo-inclusion and alienation. This is achieved through decontextualisation (abstracting from real people, real activities and events in order to make generalisations about 'Man', 'Society' and so on — in other words, essentialising categories that are violent to difference), universalism (which obscures the value-laden nature of the concepts), naturalism, dualism (which creates a value-laden hierarchy), propriation and reversal (by which women's activities are denigrated and trivialised) (Thiele 1986: 35-8).

interesting way with concepts from complexity theory, specifically the implications of complexity for our understanding of ethics.

Table 1: The differences between the ethic of care and the logic of justice

Ethic of care	Logic of justice
Relationships	Rules
Interdependence and connections	Autonomous individual
Decision	Calculation
Responsibility	Duty
Responsibility and respect	Rights and formal equality
Context	Formal rights and rules

2. Complexity, boundaries and ethics

Social systems are complex, thus they embody the characteristics of complex systems in general.[7] The nature of a complex system is determined by a large number of elements that interact in a dynamic and non-linear fashion. There are many loops and feedback paths in these interactions. Furthermore, complex systems are open, operating under conditions far from equilibrium. They interact with their environments, and it is therefore difficult to determine their boundaries. The identity and actions of a system are constituted through patterns of interaction, not by fixed or *a priori* components. Because of its non-linearity, an accurate description of such a system would entail a detailed description of every single interaction, an impossible task for finite beings to perform. Although one can discover general patterns, the whole system cannot be described without running into difficulties. A complex system cannot be replaced with an equivalent system that is simpler — complexity is incompressible (Cilliers 1998: 9-10).

These characteristics are also reflected in society (Cilliers 1995: 129-30; 1998: 119-23). A society consists of an enormous number of individuals who interact constantly in many different capacities. There is constant activity, and different groups interpret both information and history differently. Society is an open system made up of many layers, the meaning of which is not pre-ordained but in constant transformation. (Cilliers 1998: 42-3).

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7   Cf Cilliers 1995 & 1998 for detail.

At this point it is important to emphasise that an acknowledgement of the complexity of society does not imply that it is chaotic. Acknowledging complexity is not an argument against structure, boundaries, rules or laws as such. However, one has to acknowledge that any description of a system or structure will necessarily be incomplete, given the incompressibility of a complex system. This does not mean that the effort to create structure and meaning is a senseless activity; it just means that such activities have limited success.

Davies (1996) remarks on the importance of the notions of limits and boundaries in the social context. They are, she argues, an end to thought, action and even the way in which we define ourselves (Davies 1996: 13). They limit thought since "something is there preventing us from thinking that". This inhibits our ability to take action, since our thought, which runs into these limits, makes us see the world in a certain way. Limits also define what we are and how we behave (Davies 1996: 14). They are paths, argues Davies, "that we follow to determine our existences" (Davies 1996: 15). They not only define what counts as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, but what it is to be human.

Limits and boundaries, according to Davies (1996: 14) are thus not purely negative:[8] "The limit gives us a place to begin, a place to put our thoughts, a place to proceed and a place to make conclusions". The limit is also a call to action and an invitation to think beyond (Davies 1996: 14). In other words, we have a responsibility to transgress limits, which is at the same time both a necessity and an impossibility. Furthermore, as Davies points out, to transgress a limit does not destroy it, but may have consequences (Davies 1996: 16). It can, however, create space for transformation and, perhaps, even a moment of justice. The call to action is embedded, writes Davies (1996: 14), in the idea of a limit: "The limit [...] in some instances [...] empowers us to act and to be".

The (ethical) importance of both a sensitivity to complexity and a need for boundaries — which has a specific relevance for the tension in Gilligan's argument between the logic of justice and the ethic of care — is reflected in Derrida's argument on the difference between law and justice.

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8   Cf Cilliers 2001 for a similar discussion in the context of complex systems.

3.   The law versus justice

Derrida's (1992) understanding of justice differs from traditional theories of justice — for example, those of Rawls (1971), Nozick (1974) and Walzer (1983) — where the emphasis is primarily on abstract rights and procedures that (are hoped to) guarantee justice. By contrast, Derrida argues for the impossibility and the urgency of justice. An important aspect of his argument is the way in which he contrasts law and justice.

Derrida's argument is complex and only its main points can be discussed here. The law can be seen as a system of rules and therefore assumes the "generality" of a rule, a norm or a universal imperative (Derrida 1992: 17). The law consists of "the positive structures that make up judicial systems [...] that in virtue of which actions are said to be legal, legitimate, or properly authorized" (Derrida & Caputo 1997: 130). Justice, however, cannot be bound to a "system"; it exceeds the limits of the system, or, more correctly, disrupts (or deconstructs) the system by demanding from it that which it cannot provide.[9] Justice is, therefore, concerned with critically and continually rede-scribing the boundaries of a system. Law needs the boundaries to be set, otherwise it would not be law; justice cannot live with bounda-ries/limits that proclaim themselves to be natural and fixed. The main foci of the law — not unlike Gilligan's description of the logic of justice — are rules and the calculation between rights and duties. By contrast, there is a similarity between Derrida's understanding of justice and Gilligan's ethic of care in that both place emphasis on context, singularity and the importance of relationships between in-dividuals and groups.

One of the most important aspects of Derrida's argument, how-ever, is the that the relationship between law and justice is not an either/or choice. Law is problematic and violent, but we still need it since we cannot reinvent strategies to cope with (rather than control) the complexity of the world every day. Above all, justice needs law. In other words, while natural law can argue that if there is an unjust law we can simply disregard it, and bank on justice to save us, things

9   Justice, declares Derrida (1992: 14-5), is deconstruction. Cornell (1992: 1) re-
     defines deconstruction as "the philosophy of the limit".

are more complex to Derrida. The complex relationship between law and justice is an aporetic one: law and justice, even if they contradict each other, need each other.

Similarly, it could be argued that the ethic of care and the logic of justice need not stand in opposition to one another, but can rather enrich each other. The ethic of care needs to consider rules and rights in order not to sink into a fuzzy, feel-good approach; the logic of justice can be tempered by the ethic of care's emphasis on context and relationships between people.

To summarise: There is a gap between law and justice, and yet they need each other. Justice cannot be content without law; law would be a monster without justice. It is justice's concern with singularity, with irreplaceable individuals and with groups that leads us to its impossibility, to the aporia of its relationship with law. The aporetic relationship between law and justice is the "result" not only of the emphasis on singularity, but also of the need for justice to be "applied". Therefore, Derrida's understanding of justice (and law) leaves us with a challenge, a call to action and, above all, a renewed emphasis on the importance of choices and responsibility. This brings us to the possible relevance of Gilligan's ethic of care.

4.   The relevance of the ethic of care

The ethic of care emphasis that society consists of complex relationships between individuals, and is therefore too complex to be thought of solely in terms of rights and procedures. Such rights and procedures assume universalism and abstract individuals, but also pretend to be neutral concepts. As Baier (1987: 49-50) points out:

> The moral tradition that developed the concept of rights [...] is the same tradition that provided the justifications of the oppression of those whom the primary right-holders depended on to do the sort of work they themselves preferred not to do.

In other words, the genealogy of rights should not be ignored. Baier points to one aspect of the problems related to an emphasis on rights, namely the "generosity" that accompanies the "granting" of rights of marginalised groups (blacks, women, etc). These groups are "granted" (*de iure*) rights by groups/individuals in the superior position not in

order to empower the marginalised, but to strengthen their own power positions by a moment of benevolence.

Gilligan's plea for an ethic of care also highlights many of the problems with rights. They are abstract and do not necessarily change institutional contexts, and there is a gap between *de iure* rights and *de facto* injustice. Gabel & Harris (1989: 304), two critical legal studies scholars, make an important point:

> [T]he great weakness of a rights-oriented legal practice is that it does not address itself to a central precondition for building a sustained political movement — that of overcoming the psychological conditions upon which both the power of the legal system and the social hierarchy in general rest [...] in the long run it tends to reinforce alienation and powerlessness, because the appeal to rights inherently affirms that the source of social power resides in the state rather than in the people themselves.

Gilligan (1980: 225) argues that the ethic of care highlights responsibility instead of over-emphasising abstract rights and is, therefore, also sensitive to context and consequences. The ethic of care "allows for fine-grained judgments and discretionary responses to particular persons in actual situations with distinctive histories" (Walker 1997: 64). Her argument is not a attack on the idea of rights, but rather a plea that rights are enacted (or not) within a specific context. Furthermore, ethical decision-making cannot merely be reduced to a calculation between rights since it, most importantly, involves human beings — or, to quote Derrida (1992: 17) "singularity, individuals [… and] irreplaceable groups and lives".

Furthermore, the idea of an ethic of care carries with it a greater willingness to be open to particularity. It is not without its problems. Gilligan has been accused — by MacKinnon (1987) and Noddings (1993), for example — of reinforcing stereotypes and of underestimating difference. The ethic of care, however, is (at the very least) a move in the direction of complexity and responsibility — aspects that are lacking in "the logic of justice". The emphasis that the ethic of care places on responsibility (not duty) and the interdependence of human beings could be an interesting way of approaching ethics in a complex social system. In a complex system the interactions are dynamic, rich and mutually influential. Furthermore, these interactions are non-linear, meaning that they cannot be collapsed into a smaller

system. Also, small causes can have large effects and *vice versa*. Gilligan's plea for the importance of context and relationships between people thus links well with this approach.

It should also be pointed out that Gilligan argues that the logic of justice and the ethic of care need not be mutually exclusive, but they can inform each other in a powerful way. Gilligan (1982: 173-4) writes:

> Just as the language of responsibilities provides a web-like imagery of relationships to replace a hierarchical ordering that dissolves with the coming of equality, so the language of rights underlines the importance of including in the network of care not only the other but also the self [...] by positing instead two different modes, we arrive at a more complex rendition of human experience.

The disruptive force of the ethic of care — as a "redefinition of the social vocabulary" — should not be underestimated. It should not be understood as merely emotion or "nice warm feelings", but as a move away from seeing problems of justice as maths problems with human beings in them, a move away from calculation towards an "inherent" sensitivity to the complexity of society and the relationships between people within it. An important part of Gilligan's work, which Diprose (1994: 11) acknowledges, is that it is a move away from the concept of the atomised individual and towards a renewed understanding of responsibility and care as well as of the importance of social context and singularity. The ethic of care challenges narrow conceptions of ethics, and is a move in the direction of the content given to it by Cornell (1992: 12), namely, the quest for a non-violative relationship with the Other.

To summarise: Gilligan's ethic of care — as a challenge to the logic of justice — ties in with a view of society as a complex system. Complexity places emphasis on rich, dynamic interaction; the ethic of care with its emphasis on context and relationships provides a way of taking this dynamic interaction into account in ethical decision-making. A complex system cannot be collapsed into a simpler description, for technical and ethical reasons; the ethic of care highlights the fact that ethical decision-making cannot be reduced to a calculation of rights. Where does this leave the status of rules and laws? If complexity is taken seriously and read together with the ethic of care, rules and laws remain important. We do not reinvent the world every

day, and laws provide a powerful tool to protect the vulnerable. How-
ever, rules and laws do not operate in a vacuum; they function within
a complex society, where the ethic of care, informed by the logic of
justice, can provide a creative way of dealing with ethical decision-
making.

5. Conclusion

If one takes the notion of society as a complex system seriously, then
the relationships and dynamic interactions between individuals become
increasingly important. So too does the realisation that rules and ab-
stract principles, although important, do not lead to ethical decision-
making. Complexity places emphasis on the multitude of relationships
that exist within society. The ethic of care emphasises the role of these
relationships in ethical dilemmas, refusing to override their importance
by reference to rules and rights. Both complexity and the ethic of care
give renewed value to the importance of choice and responsibility by
arguing that there is no way of calculating an ethical choice by
merely using rights and rules.

Gilligan's most important contribution lies in her challenge to
the logic of justice, in other words, ethical reasoning on an abstract
level, as the correct form or highest level of ethical decision-making.
The ethic of care points out that considering the relationships between
people and the context in which they find themselves are as important
as the abstract rights and principles at stake. It highlights the fact
that moral dilemmas and ethical decision-making are more than a
"math problem with humans in" (Gilligan 1982: 28). Ethical decision-
making should never amount to a calculation between rights and
rules; it should, to quote Derrida (1992: 27-8), be haunted by the
ghost of the undecidable.

Does this imply that the logic of justice is useless or, worse still,
unethical? Gilligan herself denies that the ethic of care and the logic
of justice are mutually exclusive. If one explores the concept of jus-
tice in view of the "content" that Derrida gives to the concept, it
becomes clear that both approaches are not only useful, but vital to
ethical decision-making and the quest for a more just society. Derrida
(1992: 10-1) writes that justice is useless without the "teeth" of law,

meaning — to put it rather bluntly — that good intentions are never enough, and that part of the difficulty of justice is that we need the violence of law to implement it. An ethic of care alone, therefore, can never be enough. It can alert us to the complexity of justice and the dynamic interaction between individuals, but care alone cannot answer the call to justice, or do much about injustice.

Perhaps, in sum, the enduring importance of Gilligan's ethic of care lies in the insight that ethics is, above all, concerned with humane, non-violative relationships between human beings.

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