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A Disruptive Ontology of Caring Time: overcoming moral harm in care through an emancipatory ethics of time

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ABSTRACT

Care ethics emphasizes the incessant nature of the work of care. The other-oriented focus of care work and the asymmetric relation between the one-caring and the cared-for entails a normative commitment to a cyclical conception of living time on the part of the one-caring. Moreover, in care, we must think of the time of the self as intertwined with the time of the other, thus constituting a mutual temporality. However, from the perspective of a feminist phenomenology of time, potential moral harms can be identified in the temporal structure of care, which may cause caring time to degenerate into uncaring time for the one-caring. To avoid such a predicament, it is imperative to develop an emancipatory ethics of time at the heart of the relational ontology of care. I argue that when various modalities of living time in care sediment into a coherentist ontology of time, only then is there a degradation into uncaring time. To positively reconstruct a radical notion of caring time, we must build a disruptive ontology within our conception of caring time, which highlights the significance of rupture, dissonance, disruption, and distortion within the everydayness of care. The argument in the paper serves a normative purpose since it draws our attention to what we owe morally to the one-caring in terms of their time. My analysis weaves together care ethics, feminist phenomenology and feminist writing from India through a philosophical engagement with Amar Jiban by Rassundari Devi.

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Introduction

Scholarship in care ethics emphasizes the incessant nature of the work of care, that is, its everydayness and the repetitive nature of responding to the needs of the other for whom one is responsible. Additionally, in light of the other-oriented focus of care work and the asymmetric nature of the relation between the one-caring and the cared-for, an underlying commitment to a cyclical conception of time as lived (henceforth, “living time”) on the part of the one-caring may come to constitute an integral normative element of care. I believe that not only is the arch of temporality in care extended, but providing care involves a constant turning back or concretization in the here and the now, which we may characterize as phenomenological turning points. The moral ontology of care also pushes us to think about time for the one-caring as intertwined with the cared-for. This entanglement means that thinking time for the self within a care relation is impossible without thinking time with the other. I characterize this peculiar phenomenology of caring time, with its focus on betweenness, as having the structure of mutual temporality.

Feminist phenomenologists such as Simone de Beauvoir note that particular temporal structures, including cyclicity and repetition, have been the plight of living time by women and other marginalized groups. Beauvoir also links these modes of temporal being with a phenomenology of oppression. Time, from a feminist phenomenological lens, can be seen as playing a crucial role in creating obstacles to freedom from oppression by freezing marginalized subjects into specific orientations of living time. Beauvoir, however, is not often read in relation to an ethics of care; in fact, some even consider her a traditional liberal feminist, which may make her point of view appear as a counter to the commitments of the care tradition. On my part, I approach Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* through a hermeneutics of care. I then bring a feminist phenomenological perspective on temporality to bear on the discussion of the temporality of care to argue for the need to attend to potential dangers in the underlying temporality of care. As I put it, we must prevent caring time from degenerating into uncaring time for the one-caring. When this happens, the one-caring gets lost in the work of care. If the meaning of care is predetermined for the one-caring, then this will obstruct their possibility of constituting both the meaning of care as well as exercise moral agency through caring over time. I argue that this kind of degradation in the underlying structure of the temporality of care must be considered as a form of moral harm. To avoid such a predicament, it is imperative to develop an emancipatory ethics of time at the very heart of the relational ontology of care.

I finally turn to the work of Rassundari Devi,¹ one of the early women writers from Bengal in nineteenth-century colonial India, and draw out resources, which can help us to reflect further

¹ The paper uses Enakshi Chatterjee’s translation, which first appeared in 1999. The edition of the translation being used is the 2022 Writer’s Workshop corrected and expanded third edition. Chatterjee notes that it was not

on the nexus between care and time. Rassundari was an upper-caste Hindu housewife who wrote an autobiography in Bengali titled, *Amar Jiban* (translated as *My Life*). This book is the first autobiography to be written by an Indian woman, and it consists of two parts. Rassundari finished writing the book when she was eighty-eight years old.¹ Although the text has been approached so far through the lens of women's writing, the genre of autobiography, and as a text in social history (see, for instance, [Sarkar, 1999](#); [Tharu and Lalita 1991](#)), engagement with the text from the lens of philosophy is absent in the scholarship. My paper offers a philosophical lens by approaching the text through a care-based and phenomenological lens. In this way, the reading brings unique resources for interpreting the text. By considering Rassundari's work, I further develop my conception of uncaring time to argue that only specific forms (not all) of the underlying temporality of care may be considered problematic. The temporality of care threatens to sediment into uncaring time when it degrades into, what I call, a coherentist ontology of time. A coherentist ontology of time is defined as marking the present only in terms of its consonance, resonance, and similarity with the past, and in relation to a future, which appears to be fixed. I believe that Rassundari's work, written a century before the care tradition came into existence or, for that matter, preceding Beauvoir's foundational text in feminist phenomenology, helps us to understand the dangers of a coherentist ontology of time. In light of this, I argue that the link between care and time must be conceptualized in an emancipatory vein, that is, in a way that preserves the agency of the one-caring within everyday intimate relations of care. Accordingly, we must find ways for caring time to subvert and/or not lapse into a coherentist ontology. To do so, we must highlight the significance of rupture, dissonance, disruption, and distortion within repetition and the everydayness of care. I conclude that to positively reconstruct a radical notion of caring time, especially one that retains its critical edge, we must build a disruptive ontology within our conception of caring time. A disruptive ontology of caring time lays the ground for an emancipatory ethics of time to overcome potential moral harms in care.

Section one titled, "Time of the Self *and* Time of the Other: The Constitution of Mutual Temporality in Care," outlines various intrinsic features of caring time, including its inherent

customary at the time for women to use surnames – it had to be Devi for the Brahmins and Dasi for the rest. The Bengali text mentions the author as Rassundari Dasi. However, Chatterjee observes that Susie Tharu and K. Lalita's anthology on women's writing, in which excerpts of the Rassundari's text first appeared in English, has given her a Devi status, perhaps unknowingly. Chatterjee states that she does not correct the mistake in the translation since this designation has become popular in the scholarship and any change now would lead to confusion. On my part, I choose to use Rassundari's first name only in the paper since this suffices to foreground her voice and is in keeping with the style of Bengali narrative discourse.

¹ There is some confusion regarding the exact date of publication of Rassundari's book. Chatterjee, in her translation mentions that according to Rassundari, her book (the original in Bengali, that is) was first printed in 1868, but no such edition has been found so far. The earliest existing edition, of the first part only, dates to 1875. Chatterjee also claims that Rassundari certainly revised Part I later since the complete text in its present form, including Part II, contains references in Part I to her older years.

structure of what may be termed as, *mutual temporality*. The radical potential of the underlying order of temporality in care for constituting an ontology of connectedness as well as an ethics of care is discussed. Section two titled, “Potential Moral Harms in Caring Time Captured through a Feminist Phenomenology of Time,” however, develops a critical perspective on caring time through the lens of a feminist phenomenology of time. I argue that a feminist phenomenology of time enables us to discern potential moral harms in the temporal structure of care, especially how caring time might degenerate into, what I term as *uncaring time* for the one-caring. The analysis also highlights the need to actively resist uncaring time within the structure of mutual temporality. In Section three titled, “Towards a Disruptive Ontology of Time: Overcoming Moral Harm by Resisting a Coherentist Ontology of Time,” I offer an interpretation of Rassundari’s book *Amar Jiban* to nuance my argument on uncaring time further by highlighting that when various modalities of living time in care (repetition, cyclicity, turning points to the present, etc.) sediment into a *coherentist ontology of time*, only then is there a degradation into uncaring time for the one-caring. Moreover, I argue that to positively reconstruct a radical notion of caring time, we must build a *disruptive ontology* within our conception of caring time. The analysis in the paper also serves a normative purpose since it draws our attention to what we owe morally to the one-caring in terms of their time.

The paper returns us to the primary impetus behind the birth of care ethics as a critical philosophical tradition. It takes us back to the private sphere, the sphere of intimate relations to which care was historically relegated, and a critical interrogation of which was at the root of the generation of the care tradition. While recognizing the importance of care for a public ethic and also endorsing its extension to our social and political lives, this paper forces us to turn some of our critical energies back to the private sphere. The intimate sphere continues to witness the highest burden of care work in most societies while manifesting various vulnerabilities associated with care. If an ethics of care seeks to translate into an emancipatory philosophy, we can never leave the private sphere behind as a domain of critical analysis on the subject of care. The paper hopes to reinvigorate our thinking about care within our spheres of intimacy by generating a radical emancipatory vision of caring time. In highlighting concerns and possibilities inherent in the everydayness of care, the text also stipulates a hitherto unknown genealogy into these debates from the lens of feminist writing from India.

1. Time of the Self and Time of the Other: The Constitution of Mutual Temporality in Care

The functionally specific work of the professional is, we can say, interventionist, not sustaining. The functionally diffuse work of the dependency worker... sustains her charge by means of her (often daily) care. (Kittay, 1999, 39)

The quote from Eva Kittay poignantly drives home core commitments in the work of care. While considering the relation between care and time is not Kittay's project in *Love's Labor* (1999), in this quote, she brings attention to a crucial classification between two kinds of work. The professional intervenes to respond to a specific set of demands and then steps away, that is, their responsibility is over when the relevant task is complete. (Kittay, 1999, 40). Care, on the contrary, is the work of everyday sustenance. Sustenance demands constancy, stability, repetition, and the daily keeping-at-it. In this sense, the temporal arch of care is extended and cannot be captured as a series of isolated events. Therefore, care as a process oriented to constantly meet an identifiable set of needs cannot be approached through an interventionist frame. Perhaps a tacit recognition of these elements pushes care ethicists to accord a great deal of significance to epistemic virtues such as trust, engrossment and a receptive attitude (Noddings, 2013) on the part of the one-caring from the early days of care ethics. Both commitment and work over an extended time are required for these virtues to emerge.

Kittay recognizes the immense responsibilities of care with humility as she speaks about her own responsibility in mothering a child with intellectual disabilities, "Taking care of Sesha, meeting her daily needs, interpreting her needs and desires, not over the span of twenty-seven months, but twenty-seven years, has posed a substantial challenge." (Kittay, 1999, 155) While focusing on a key site of care in the private sphere, Sara Ruddick defines mothering as a practice (maternal work) that is primarily organized to meet three demands (Ruddick, 1995). Although Ruddick again, does not highlight the temporal dimensions of care in mothering, one could draw up an arch of living time in care given the incessant nature of the work. The work of care may not allow respite and stepping away is not an ethical option in most cases. This vigilance is especially so, given that asymmetry is a fundamental aspect of the relation of care.¹ An implication of this as far as the relation between care and time is concerned is that although one can be creative in how they do the work of care, and in what they can achieve through it, repetition, monotony and cyclicity continue to be key aspects of living time by the one-caring. This temporal relationality also means that in care, one needs to move from an abstract notion of time to constantly *concretizing time*.

Concretization involves breaking time down hour by hour and minute by minute as one thinks, plans and acts to meet the specific needs of the cared-for. In fact, to epistemically capture needs one must constantly keep turning back from an objective conception of time to its concrete, including its lived dimensions, which are encapsulated in the here and the now. We can characterize the latter as *phenomenological turning points*. Care would fall through the cracks without concretization. Negotiating with the present, including moment-to-moment transactions, implies that the notion of lived time must be attributed greater precedence in care

¹ Kittay's famous dependency critique (1999) of Rawlsian liberalism exposes how assumptions of equality and symmetry between parties in a care relation breaks down.

compared to any notion of time as an objective fact. From the point of view of the one-caring, an objective conception of time independent of the time of the other (the cared-for) is virtually impossible to both think and live in a relation of care. In this sense, caring time ruptures a purely subjectivist understanding of time and draws our attention to the inter-subjective space between the self and the other. A notion of time as an ontological horizon for projecting into one's future may also crucially hinge on dialogue and negotiations with the other regarding relations of care. As far as the notion of phenomenological turning points is concerned, we understand that while one can plan one's own as well as the cared-for's future, turning back, concretizing and readjusting one's plans concerning what one learns in the concrete moments of care, along with bringing this knowledge from the past into the present, is crucial for epistemically grasping the needs of the cared-for and providing them with good care.¹

I cannot care unless the care is received by the concrete other, and the response that is care as well as its fulfilment are, therefore, crucially dependent on the other. Virginia Held captures the moral ontology underlying the work of care very well when she observes, "Persons in caring relations are acting for self-and-other together. ... the well-being of a caring relation involves the cooperative well-being of those in the relation and the well-being of the relation itself." (Held, 2006, 12) Kittay also tries to capture this dimension when she highlights how the care-worker must often put the dependent's needs before them and must look out for the latter's interest. The one-caring, therefore, cannot function as a self-interested agent. Neither Held nor Kittay, however, speak of time. I believe that when the moral ontology of care is defined in the terms mentioned, we must think of time of the self in their capacity as the one-caring to be intertwined with the time of the other in the latter's capacity as the cared-for. As a structure of living time, care is therefore marked by relationality. If I am no longer a self-interested agent and a self-validating source of moral entitlement, my moral claim and that of the other for whom I am responsible are intimately bound. A crucial entailment of this binding is that thinking *time of the self in care* is impossible without thinking *time with the other*.

¹ A simple thought experiment may help to drive home this point. A mother may expect that her child will win a trophy in the sports event at her school this year. This is a kind of projected futurity, which may define what sorts of caring actions the mother will take toward her child. For instance, the mother can support her child in her training, cooks nutritious meals, take them for coaching, and so on. However, let us imagine that the child suddenly falls sick on the day of the sporting event. Inherent to caring well would be the capacity to turn to the present moment (the now) in order to understand the child's needs and to subsequently readjust one's projected vision for the future based on this kind of concretization of time. Care, and its goals, may have to be redefined in relation to the now. In light of such turning points, part of providing good care to the child means, for instance, bringing the child to terms with the fact that winning a trophy should not be given undue significance, that plenty of such opportunities will open up in the future, and that one must set healing as the primary goal for now. This thought experiment helps us to understand why lived time takes on precedence over a notion of objective time for a normative understanding of care. Care cannot operate with a fixed notion of objective time, but must turn back constantly to the here and the now to interpret and understand the needs of the cared-for as a concrete other.

The relational moral ontology of care calls for a framing of time which recognizes the bond between the self and the other, and in this sense, time lived in care must be conceptualized as being constituted in this *inter-subjective space between* the self and the other. Focusing on the betweenness allows us to characterize caring time as having the structure of *mutual temporality*. The framing of caring time as mutual temporality emphasizes that care does not simply happen in time, but in turn, time as lived in care also comes to be constituted in terms of care's characteristics. This formulation also challenges an individualized conception of time in the sense of "my time" versus "your time," and draws attention to the fact that the self and other are mutually constituting each other's time. Therefore, "my time" cannot be understood as freestanding of your time. The conception of mutual temporality further highlights that time cannot be taken to be linear and defined in and through the trajectory of one's own life alone; rather caring time evolves in and through feedback loops between the self and the other. In this sense, caring time is a transactional relation, which is marked by a back-and-forth movement between my time and that of the other. If so, the temporal arch of caring time must be understood as being multiple, fragmented, and dynamic as it constantly evolves in the *space-between* the self and the other.

While focusing on the mutuality in the underlying temporality of care, I emphasize that relational temporality is not simply a passive effect or a by-product of the work of care. Rather, living time in dialogue with the other actively constitutes the relation of care. It does so in two ways. First, the work of care needs to be sustained in time, as the discussion of cyclicity, repetition, etc. highlights. Second and more importantly, the relational temporal arch actively contributes to the constitution of ontological mutuality, which is at the heart of an ethic of care. Caring over time makes us realize that one is not the master of one's time and therefore, one is not an autonomous, self-contained being. By doing so, care enables us to overcome an ontology of self-sufficiency as well as an epistemology of domination towards the other. In this sense, the normative orientation of living time in a caring manner opens us up to a phenomenological orientation towards the world, which is embedded in connection. Care as both disposition and value developed over time enables us to see these connections, while care as work through an extended period of time enables us to act on the commitment of fostering connections. These aspects allow us to arrive at a model of creativity, which focuses on sustaining relationality. Routine and cyclicity are structures of living time in care; therefore, they serve a normative goal. Repetition in responding to the needs of the other makes visible the presence of others along with their needs and, in fact, stipulates entire orders of being with the other from which we ought not to turn away as ethical subjects. Caring time reminds us of our ontological connectedness and of the porosity of the boundary between the self and the other, which a self-governing conception of living time on one's own terms is incapable of revealing. Herein lies the striking normative potential of caring time.

2. Potential Moral Harms in Caring Time Captured through a Feminist Phenomenology of Time

While the radical potential of the temporality of care lies in the fact that it enables us to overcome an individualist notion of self along with any illusions of mastery, there is also a danger of shrinking the range of the self and of the world for the one-caring. This section focuses on delineating potential moral harms in the underlying structure of temporality, especially the threat of what I designate as, *uncaring time* for the one-caring. The work of Simone de Beauvoir inspires my phenomenological analysis. Beauvoir notes how cyclicity and repetition have been the plight of oppressed groups, thus creating obstacles to their freedom. Beauvoir's interpretation of transcendence underlies the connection she draws with repetition as being an aspect of the temporality of oppression. Beauvoir, however, is not read in relation to the ethics of care. On my part, I read excerpts of *The Second Sex*, especially the part on "The Mother," to argue that one of the significant concerns in Beauvoir's critique of motherhood (a primary site of care-work in the private sphere) pertains to the underlying temporality of care.¹ Approaching *The Second Sex* through a care-based interpretative lens can not only help us understand Beauvoir through different eyes, but this interpretation is useful for critically interrogating the implications of the temporality of care. In short, a feminist phenomenological approach aids in developing a critical perspective on caring time's emphasis on mutual temporality and its role in the constitution of ontological mutuality, both highlighted in the previous section. The critical interrogation is not undertaken with the intent of disavowing the notion of caring time. On the contrary, I consider the critique an integral aspect of our attempt to rethink mutual temporality in ways that open up agential possibilities for the one-caring.

In the "Introduction" to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir writes, "... there is no justification for present existence than its expansion to an indefinitely open future. Every individual concerned with justifying his existence experiences an indefinite need to transcend himself..." (Beauvoir, 2011, 17) This quote highlights that justification of one's existence lies in the ability to transcend the brute facticity of one's present existence toward an open future. According to Andrea Veltman, the definition of the term "transcendence" in the sense of "constructive or creative work" (Veltman, 2006, 116) is a distinct contribution of Beauvoir. On the other hand,

¹ My aim is not to endorse or argue in favor of Beauvoir's views on motherhood or even to assume that her discussion of motherhood captures any universal experience. In fact, I do not read Beauvoir as evolving a universal position on motherhood since she attends to its context-specificity by situating motherhood within a nexus of institutions such as family, economics, society and politics. All these, she argues, create different meanings and experiences for women coming from varied social locations. Although Beauvoir's analysis might be inflicted with Eurocentrism and a Western sensibility, which is problematic, it must nevertheless be acknowledged that she attends to the context-specificity of care in a manner, which is nuanced for her time. I believe that certain problems, which are revealed through Beauvoir's analysis of motherhood (as a crucial site of care) warrant our attention as we analyze the underlying temporality of care in order to develop an emancipatory ethics of time in care.

immanence involves negating one's freedom. According to Beauvoir, "Every time transcendence lapses into immanence, there is degradation of existence into "in-itself," of freedom into facticity; this fall is a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if this fall is inflicted on the subject, it takes the form of frustration and oppression; in both cases it is an absolute evil." (Beauvoir, 2011, 16) Activities tied to immanence lack creative potential and are "... required for the sheer perpetuation of existence..." (Veltman, 2006, 115) Moreover, while transcendence is oriented towards the future through the emphasis on the projects that one pursues and thus appeals to the creative dimension of human nature, immanence entails the closing off of the future and a complete subjugation to the present.

For Beauvoir maintenance as a temporal act is concerned with the continuity of different moments, and not with their scattering in the sense of opening up multiple trajectories of action along with their unique temporalities. In other words, this mode of temporal being is concerned with repetition rather than disruption, parts of which would resonate with the discussion of caring time in the previous section. Immanence, therefore, calls for a phenomenology of time that differs from transcendence. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir connects the experience of time as mere repetition to oppression with the individual's confinement to immanence. The oppressed are denied an orientation toward an open future. Beauvoir writes in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that the oppressed are, "... condemned to mark time hopelessly in order merely to support the collectivity; their life is a pure repetition of mechanical gestures" (Beauvoir, 1976, 83). This experience of being completely engulfed by the present and being deprived of the possibility to pursue future projects, which would enable one to make the world, results in the feeling of alienation under oppression. In passages such as this, a direct conceptual link is established between temporal structures such as repetition, stability and cyclicity with or as intrinsic aspects of a phenomenology of oppression. This understanding of temporality, I argue, is at the core of the concerns with care work that Beauvoir raises in *The Second Sex*.

For Beauvoir, the body is that through which we grasp the world. If embodied intentionality is at the core of how we apprehend the world and ourselves, then the body must be considered to be critical to living time. One of the places in *The Second Sex* where the nexus between embodiment and time is perhaps most poignantly explored is in the section, "The Mother." I focus on this part of the text in my analysis. Beauvoir writes about pregnancy and gestation, "... pregnancy is above all a drama playing itself out in the woman between her and herself. She experiences it both as an enrichment and mutilation; the fetus is part of her body, and it is a parasite exploiting her; she possesses it, and she is possessed by it; it encapsulates the whole future, and in carrying it, she feels as vast as the world; but this very richness annihilates her, she has the impression of not being anything else." (Beauvoir, 2011, 538) This passage encapsulates, I believe, the idea of caring time as a kind of mutual temporality. At the same time, it captures various quandaries of living time as a kind of inter-subjective betweenness

along with potential costs to the one-caring. There is ambiguity in an act of care, as the quote highlights. Care not only opens us up to the other, but also to a vision of the future for oneself and the other (the fetus one is gestating in this case), where the two futures appear inextricably linked. In fact, the very possibility of an open future for the cared-for hinges on the one-caring if we understand gestation as an act of care. There is transcendence from the flesh and the possibility of making the world for the other in and through care.

On the other hand, Beauvoir highlights the ambiguity of care since the same act deeply entrenches woman in immanence. The feeling of being prey at the mercy of the species and forces outside her may result in various negative intentional moods, which are discussed at length in the text. Temporally speaking, the one-caring can be said to be subjected to the now, constraining her future in particular ways. Beauvoir observes that some women feel alienated in nursing since the child confronts her as another freedom, which her own existence must now confront. They may, as Beauvoir puts it, "... resent feeling their cracked breasts, their painful glands; the baby's mouth hurts them.... He inflicts a harsh servitude on them ... she feels hostility for this individual who threatens her flesh, her freedom, her whole self." (Beauvoir, 2011, 551) The woman is reminded of her body as mute flesh. As the child's temporal possibilities extend into an open future, the one-caring's world shrinks or is perceived to be shrinking. This is especially the case when she must confront her body and its temporal arch as being enclosed and subservient to the life of the species in ways that she cannot simply transcend.

The ambiguity in the underlying temporal arch of care for the one-caring as her work of care continues through time may be modified by time itself. Reflecting on a mother's care for a daughter as she matures, Beauvoir reflects how, "... every year brings the mother closer to her decline; from year to year the youthful body develops and flourishes; this future opening up to her daughter seems to be stolen from the mother.... This new woman is offered *still-indefinite possibilities* in contrast to the *repetition* and *routine* that are the lot of the older woman...." (Beauvoir, 2011, 564) This observation can be insightful since it pushes us to see that part of the challenge in care lies in assuming and negotiating the contested temporalities between beings who are connected via the relation of care. Time itself is negotiated in the act of care since the mother and child begin as mutually connected beings, that is, where the future of one is intertwined with the other's futurity. The mother invests herself (including her time) to preserve the child in time and for the sake of time (the child's future). On the other hand, these very connections are contested as care fulfills itself over time. Eventually, these connections may be disrupted as the two increasingly find themselves on differing and even opposing modalities of living time. The fact that care is a temporally extended process also challenges the very ontology of mutuality that it seeks to constitute. This may be because, as Beauvoir puts it, mothers may sometimes have the cruel realization, "She cannot accept that her daughter will

really become her double, a substitute of herself. Yet it is still more intolerable that she should boldly assert herself as another.” (Beauvoir, 2011, 564). One’s time, which was being extended in and through the other, in this instance, may suffer a cruel rupture as the time of the other (the cared-for) runs ahead of the time of the one-caring. However, the very success of care would lie in being able to live this rupture without imposition on or dissociation from the other so that the cared-for can realize their potential, including the ability to live their present and their future in their own person. Passages like these in *The Second Sex* echo various ambiguities of care work and potential powerlessness one may suffer, especially pertaining to the constitution of mutual temporality.

The excerpts also highlight the potential for “theft of time” in care work, to use a phrase from Bonnie Mann (2012)¹. Loss manifests as a curtailment of the self of the one-caring if she entraps herself in the caring relation to the point that she becomes dependent on the dependent. Entrapment manifests as the folding in of one’s own future for the sake of the other. In such a scenario, the cared-for becomes both the limit and exhaustive of the temporal horizon for the one-caring. Consequently, caring time becomes a trap for the one-caring. I believe that such entrapment constitutes a form of moral harm, which, if not attended to, may go on to undermine the caring relation in the long run. It must be noted that vulnerability to this kind of moral harm for the one-caring arises because of the relationality underlying the temporality of care.

Furthermore, suppose freedom is located in our ability to actively engage with the world and make it a certain way through our projects. In that case, the success of the action is fundamentally dependent on how the world responds to our calls. I would like to emphasize that the latter also has serious implications for our capacity to live time. The silence of the world, that is, obstacles in our situation (a phenomenological category to think freedom in Beauvoir’s later work), including the lack of response from others, can obstruct the realization of our freedom. Such obstruction manifests as a closing off of our access to an open future, an inhibited power to actively constitute the present (and not just passively live it), and an inability to imagine the past differently. The notion of situation helps set up the conceptual framework necessary for evaluating the roles of and also critiquing institutions such as patriarchal conceptions of family and romanticized understanding of love and care in Beauvoir’s framework. To this, and specifically from the lens of care ethics, I would like to add the potential threat of romanticizing the idea of caring time. From the point of view of a feminist

¹ Mann (2012) discusses the phenomenon of “stealing time” in the context of developing a feminist phenomenological perspective on temporality in sexual harassment. She points to the potential threat of mediation of one’s intentionality in and through the other in her discussion of creeps. In a distinctly Beauvoirian mode, Mann observes how the mark of freedom in any human relation, erotic or otherwise, must appear as an open structure, one in which modes such as curiosity, humility, playfulness, responsiveness, self-disclosure, etc. is possible as the relation unfolds in time. Part of the harm in sexual harassment in Mann’s terms is that the creeper, “steals your time.” (Mann, 2012, 7)

phenomenology of temporality, we can say that one is tied to immanence when the meanings of the present and the future (both towards care and of developing an ethical ideal rooted in care) appear to be pre-determined. When meanings are determined before action, there is a moral harm one suffers as a being living time. The harm is encapsulated when the latter no longer allows an individual to project into an open future. Accordingly, the future is already foreclosed with a sedimented set of meanings, for instance, when mothering is defined in patriarchal terms even before the work of care has been lived. In these situations, the ontological mutuality constituted through caring time, both between the one-caring and the cared-for as well as between the one-caring and the world, maybe predicated on a primordial violence through which care is defined to begin with. I believe that one of the most powerful insights we can draw from Beauvoir's reading of motherhood is that various institutions including patriarchy may map out meanings and practices of motherhood (and care) before one has had the freedom, or even has the opportunity to see themselves as having the freedom to imagine a future where this work is taken up in freedom. Only when such freedom is ensured, can care potentially transform into a site of creative activity through which one aims to transcend toward an open future, others, and the world. A critical engagement with care from the lens of a feminist phenomenology of time allows us to argue that, without interrogating the underlying structure of caring time regarding the situation in which time is lived in care or as an aspect of care, we would fail to identify and mitigate potential moral harms. The threat of moral harms arising from the care structure as mutual temporality must be avoided so that time in care can be lived in the mode of freedom rather than oppression.

There are several other passages in *The Second Sex* where Beauvoir reaffirms her claim that material conditions or the situation a woman finds herself in, heavily structures her experience of freedom. Being confined to the domestic sphere in a subordinate (and relational) position to her husband, dependent on him for mediating her grasp on the outside world or the public realm, and caught up in the cyclicity of house-work where the dust never settles and "... the child is the enemy of waxed floors" (Beauvoir, 2011, 569), may influence how the woman relates to her children. Beauvoir points to a tension when she observes, "Maternal love is often lost in the reprimands and outbursts that underlie the concern for a well-kept home. ... She can never save herself by her work alone; it keeps her occupied, but does not constitute her justification..." (Beauvoir, 2011, 569) Beauvoir's analysis of the phenomenology of oppression leads her to locate the source of conflict and fraught relationship between the mother and daughter in the subordinate status of the mother herself within the home and society. In her work on Beauvoir's contribution to a feminist phenomenology of temporality, Megan Burke argues that Beauvoir's work in *The Second Sex* highlights that the triadic structure of temporality discussed in much of phenomenology as a universal human orientation towards time, is not readily available to women. While I have focused on potential moral harms arising from repetition and cyclicity,

along with the danger of being frozen in the present in the work of care, Burke's work can complement this discussion by focusing on the temporality of waiting. Burke, however, does not read Beauvoir through the framework of care.

According to Burke, "... Beauvoir understands the temporality of waiting, or a passive present, to be an underlying structure of women's existence and subordination." (Burke, 2018, 111) Burke defines "waiting" according to Beauvoir as "a temporal hiatus between the past and future, which means that waiting is a distinct experience of the present as passive – it neither reaches back to the past nor toward a future." (Burke, 2018, 117) Waiting, in short, is a "temporal suspension achieved by a break with the past." (Burke, 2018, 118) Concerning Mann's work, Burke argues that Beauvoir's discussion of girlhood shows her in the present as merely a phase of transition, waiting for "Man"; and looks into the debate on heterosexual initiation and marriage as well to demonstrate how, according to Beauvoir, that within these institutions women experience a "temporal isolation" which is complete in heterosexual marriage within a patriarchal society where women come to enjoy a relative existence and "...deepens women's suspension in the present as a temporal limbo." (Burke, 2018, 118) Drawing from Beauvoir's phrasing of this as the "icy present," Burke writes, "When she becomes a part of her husband's universe, she becomes a stranger to her past and her future and is incorporated into his time. This leaves woman exiled in a present that refers only to itself." (Burke, 2018, 118) The harm of temporality constitutes a harm and ensues in oppression since, as Burke points out, "... Beauvoir argues that to be enveloped in and thus to assume the present is to be mired in what is here and now in such a way that diminishes a woman's capacity to build her own world, an activity that relies on an open structure of temporality. As such, the passive present is an existential confinement and closure of the world that keeps a woman in her place." (Burke, 2018, 121) Burke's analysis comes together with mine in the accent on the materiality of existence and its associated temporal structure for Beauvoir's understanding of immanence. Moreover, various aspects of my discussion of the chapter on motherhood, demonstrate the potential confinement to the "icy present," which may lead to temporal isolation if one becomes entrapped in care such that the one-caring's temporality becomes completely mediated and seeks justification in the cared-for.

In conclusion, a feminist phenomenological approach may be insightful in several ways. First, it points towards potential threats within an ontology of mutual temporality, whereby the claim to time of the one-caring may become subsumed or incorporated into the time of the cared-for. Such subjugation to the time of the other may happen due to material factors, but this may be accentuated manifold when one comes to make the other a "proxy" through which "... she transcends herself through the universe and time," which Beauvoir discusses as one of the potential orientations through which one may begin to live care (Beauvoir, 2011, 568) Such subjugation, I believe, must be construed as a moral harm since it may result in the diminishing

of the self of the one-caring -- a grave injustice in the heart of care. Second, care is essentially a relation negotiated in the space between the self and the other and is, therefore, critically mediated by the other. While the positive aspects of such mediation and care's ability to constitute an ontology of mutuality has been discussed in section one, this section helps foreground potential threats in this structure of temporality. Through a detailed consideration of the temporality of immanence, I have tried to draw attention to the fact that when the temporality of the one-caring is fully mediated by the intentionality of the other, then there is the danger of being frozen in the present. Such a situation marks the suspension of freedom for the one-caring. The theft of time that it entails constitutes a moral harm. In such moral harms, caring time may degenerate into *uncaring time* for the one-caring. To retain the critical potential of an ethics of care, therefore, it is crucial to prevent such degeneration in care's structure of mutual temporality.

3. Towards a Disruptive Ontology of Time: Overcoming Moral Harm by Resisting a Coherentist Ontology of Time

I have argued that a care-based relational ontology must entail an emancipatory ethics of time. On the negative side, we must be cognizant of potential threats to the underlying temporality of care and the possibility of degrading into uncaring time. On the positive side, we must envision new resources to prevent caring time from degrading into uncaring time and realize its radical potential. This section builds on both these dimensions. I refine the concept of uncaring time further by highlighting that only when modalities of living time in care (repetition, cyclicity, concretization, etc.) sediment into a *coherentist ontology of time*, only then does caring time degrade into uncaring time for the one-caring. On the positive side, I argue that we must open up a space for thinking disruption and dissonance within caring time to escape coherentism. As I term it, we must build a *disruptive ontology* within our conception of caring time. Only then, can we truly hope to realize the radical potential of mutual temporality in a way that preserves all parties in the caring relation. With this in mind, I turn towards an engagement with Rassundari's book, *Amar Jiban*.

Amar Jiban is an account of Rassundari's life in her own words. Rassundari struggles against all odds to educate herself. Faith is an integral part of her life and every chapter or "composition" interestingly begins with an invocation of God. Two leading male intellectuals of the time, Jyotirindranath Tagore and Dinesh Chandra Sen wrote introductions to the book. Sen clearly outlines the significance of the text, "We do not have a second book of this kind in our Bengali literature where the situation of women is so exactly and frankly drawn. Come to think of it – if this book had not been written, an entire chapter of Bengali literature would have remained incomplete." (Devi, 2022, 11) While the framework of care ethics provides a hermeneutic for evolving a philosophical reading of this text which comes a century before the care tradition, the text can help radically reimagine the relation between care and time. An

engagement with this work also provides an alternative genealogy into the care tradition from the lens of the Indian feminist tradition. *Amar Jiban*, however, provides a different point of entry into the idea of care. This is because care ethics emerges as a mode of resistance to the dominantly individualistic male-stream Western intellectual tradition, which is marked by the dominance of theories such as contractarianism, deontology and utilitarianism. Hence, its emphasis on relationality and vulnerability brings a unique perspective to moral philosophy, which was dominated by the normative importance of autonomy, equality and self-governance.

On the other hand, Rassundari's work, like much of women's writing in India, begins from the point of a relational ontology and sense of self that sees itself as connected. The challenge here is to define a self, and even to preserve it amid relational existence. In Sen's words, "... a Hindu home is not just the home of a husband and wife. The woman of the house receives no appreciation unless she excels also as a daughter, sister, sister-in-law, daughter-in-law and mistress. Yet poets tend to isolate her from her total background.... We hardly ever get to see her as a complete person in fiction and poetry. Her natural reticence has prevented Rassundari from dwelling on her own love-life though other facts of her life stand out in double clarity. She has started from where poets and novelists leave off." (Devi, 2022, 12) As my reading highlights, the domestic sphere of intimate care work becomes a critical point of departure for both thinking about the normative potential of the caring self and the moral burdens of care simultaneously. I believe that Rassundari's genius lies in the fact that while her text highlights various oppressive dimensions of care work in the domestic sphere, her reflections also push us to interrogate and question patriarchal societal ideals of care and how women may reclaim agency. On my part, I focus on outlining the true temporal costs when the future of the caring self is foreclosed with a sedimented set of meanings and how we may envision resistance to this kind of negative temporality in care.

Rassundari was twelve when she got married and raised eleven children during her life (Devi, 2022, 46). On her account, she was treated well in her marital home. Her days began early and she had no respite from housework until midnight. After feeding her children, she would also need to make offerings to the family deity and cook for the rest of the family. She had one household help to assist her with care work in the inner quarters of the house. She describes a situation in the text that I believe indicates a unique but difficult-to-capture problem in the underlying temporality of care. I turn to a consideration of this to argue that it is not merely repetition, circularity, waiting, etc. that are problems, but rather, the danger lies when these interweave to form an internally coherent structure such that the one-caring cannot get out of it. Rassundari recounts the following scenario. One afternoon, she is about to sit down and eat after feeding her family when a guest arrives. Since there is no time to cook, she offers the guest her own meal. Deciding that she would cook something in the evening, she returns to household chores. She cooks, feeds the children, puts them to bed in the evening and waits for

her husband to return. However, as soon as her husband returns and she serves him food, one of the children wakes up and she tries to put him to sleep. While she says she could have eaten with the child sleeping on her lap, another wakes up. At this point, writes Rassundari, ““Never mind,” I said, “I’ll hold both of them and manage to eat.” So I picked up the other child from his bed. Suddenly, when I began to eat, a storm started blowing. The lamp went out. This scared the children and they began to cry again. I was so hungry I would have eaten in the dark if I did not have to hold the children. ... It was better that I did not eat.” (Devi, 2022, 48) Once the storm blows over and the children are asleep, Rassundari is too tired to eat and goes to bed. Next day, she goes through her regular routine in the kitchen. After feeding everyone, and just as she finally thinks she will be able to eat, the baby needs milk. Then, just as she sits down with a plate of rice with the baby in her lap, the baby urinates and the rice is washed away. At this point, Rassundari exclaims, “This was an act of God and it made me laugh. I did not tell anyone that I had been without food for the last two days. It was an *embarrassing subject* and I did not want others to discuss it. So I preferred to keep quiet about it. Thus on many occasions I was forced to go without food.” (Devi, 2022, 48)

The above scenario may appear extreme to the contemporary eye, but it is powerful for developing various dimensions of uncaring time. First, it points towards threats within an ontology of mutual temporality, whereby the claim to time on the part of the one-caring may be subsumed into the time of the cared-for. It also highlights the dangers of mediated temporality and the freezing of the one-caring in the present. Perhaps the point about theft of time could not be more apparent as it is here. However, the events recounted by Rassundari enables us to develop further critical points. In some cases, living temporality in care through the arch of routine, repetition, cyclicity, waiting and mediation may generate a sense of internal coherence for the one-caring. By internal coherence in temporality, I mean the danger of seeing the past, present, and future as a linear structure, where the meaning of one is pre-determined by the other, such that all events come to make sense in a singular way. No doubt, the coherentist model of time departs from a linear model of time, which sees the flow of time in one direction. However, despite admitting cyclicity along with conceiving of greater interaction between past, present and future, a coherentist ontology nevertheless closes off possibilities for oppressed identities. If the past and future appear as fixed and not open to creative intervention through imagination and action, then there remains very little hope of living the present differently in care, and of transforming the future through living time in care. For instance, at one point during the first day when she goes without food, Rassundari writes, “If others came to know that I had not eaten, they’d have made a lot of fuss – that was what I told myself. Besides the children always bother the mother if they find her eating. What was the point of creating all that *fuss*?” (Devi, 2022, 47) With these words, Rassundari goes back to her chores on a hungry stomach. The sense of feeding the hungry body as being an

“embarrassing subject” and hunger appearing as a point of “fuss” or annoyance rather than a need to be met for the one-caring is striking. The story exposes how the one-caring may forget her entitlement to care while doing the work of care. In this scenario hunger, which could have been a potential disruptor to the coherentist ontology, fails to be so when Rassundari reduces herself to a being responsible for caring through the past, present and future. As she sidelines her entitlement to care and comes to see all events in a singular way, that is, through her responsibility to care, she loses hold over the triadic structure of temporality. Here the drama of conflicted temporalities between the one-caring and the cared-for, which was discussed through a consideration of the mother-daughter relation in Beauvoir, takes on a much more contentious form since the conflict in temporalities seems to be playing out in Rassundari’s own sense of self in her role of the one-caring.

A coherentist ontology of time emphasizes the continuity of different moments, and disregards any potential of their scattering in the sense of opening up multiple trajectories of action along with their unique temporalities. As Rassundari fully subsumes her moral entitlement to care under the moral responsibility of providing care, her role as the one-caring consumes her. Consequently, her bodily needs are subsumed within the over-arching extended temporality of caring for others. Perhaps this explains how hunger, which may cause pain in the moment and carries the potential to scatter a unified sense of the present to propel action into a different trajectory in the future, ultimately gets integrated into the immediacy of care in the moment. As repetition and cyclicity, waiting for others to be fed and cared for, and mediation of one’s body through the needs of her dependents take precedence, all these modes within the temporality of care create a sense of internal coherence. Consequently, the one-caring encloses themselves in, what I call, a *temporal cocoon*. In this scenario, feeding the hungry body of the one-caring and satisfying their need into an open future may begin to appear as fuss, according to Rassundari’s words. In light of this discussion, we must nuance a critical feminist phenomenological framework to argue that when the regular modalities of living time in care sediment into a coherentist ontology, then caring time degenerates into uncaring time for the one-caring. The presence of a coherentist ontology of time, in turn, is indicative of moral harm to the one-caring.

The world for the one-caring shrinks as they find themselves in the depths of a temporal cocoon, whose internal coherence means that one is only guided by the clock of care. The concept of the temporal cocoon is offered to signify a kind of entrapment. As Rassundari puts it beautifully, “I was so immersed in the sea of housework that I was not conscious of what I was going through day and night.” (Devi, 2022, 50) When this happens, the one-caring is bound to privilege the responsibility to care while neglecting their entitlement to care. A coherentist ontology works with a self-sufficient internal logic. While the relationality of caring time (in the sense of the time of the self in their capacity as the one-caring being intertwined with the

time of the other in the latter's capacity as the cared-for) persists, the mutuality in this temporal structure collapses since the time of the one-caring gets completely folded into the time of the cared-for. The breakdown in mutual temporality occurs when caring time, which ought to evolve in and through feedback loops between the self and the other, stops being so, and the inter-subjective betweenness yields ground to a one-way traffic. In this scenario, the layered multiplicity of caring time, which ideally should be construed in a dialogical mode, degenerates into a monologue as the time of the one-caring is stolen from them. In this scenario, relationality manifests through a rigid and violent temporal arch instead of being constituted as a dynamic form of mutual temporality. The phenomenological turning points which mark the concretization of care and should ideally be taken up through an open structure of time, that is, a structure that allows for envisioning multiple possibilities for growth and action, take on an illusion of continuity of different moments and no longer carries the promise of their scattering. While the normative potential of caring time is to disrupt the fantasy of individualism and self-sufficiency, a coherentist ontology poses a challenge in the opposite direction. It threatens to reduce care to altruism, a formulation of care which is celebrated within patriarchal ideals of care and one that the feminist care ethics actively resists.

If a temporal cocoon is formed around the one-caring, then any claims to moral entitlement, which emerge from outside it and/or does not align with the temporal universe of the immediate caring relation may be summarily dismissed. As the future does not appear as still comprising of indefinite possibilities, uncaring time modifies the temporal arch for the one-caring and creates damaging costs for the caring self through entrapment. Rassundari's testimony shows us that even her hungry body fails to disrupt a coherentist ontology of caring time. Herein lies the true possibility of moral harm. The text is a call to action, as Rassundari powerfully deploys the imagery of the "caged bird" in many places. She writes, "Even now I remember those days. The caged bird, the fish caught in the net." (Devi, 2022, 36) Again in her words, "People put birds in cages for their own amusement. Well, I was like a caged bird. And I would have to remain in this cage for life. I would never be freed." (Devi, 2022, 37) The imagery is striking in highlighting various limitations that the demands of relationality put on her and is useful for capturing the potential for moral harm in care. In fact, towards the end of Part I, she writes, "Now I am a mother to everybody. The name which I once had at my parents' place is long forgotten. ... I am putting a stop to my life story for the present. The rest may get written after my death." (Devi, 2022, 88)

While a coherentist ontology may be a comfortable and/or accepted way of living time in care, a feminist perspective must expose the potential moral harm that such a state of living time entails. The epistemic coherence generated by the underlying temporality may lead to further entrapment in the present, and in this way, it actively contributes to oppression when the one-caring no longer feels a need to move beyond the present towards a different future.

And, as she gets increasingly frozen in the passive present, she loses hold on an active sense of the future. Perhaps the greatest danger of a coherentist ontology of time is that it may lull us to a false sense of security in the given moment and also force upon us a sense of the inevitability of this moment. This may result in a passive acceptance of the status quo, which serves a phenomenology of oppression well. After all, the possibility of freedom from the standpoint of the oppressed lies in experiencing incoherence, and seeing how a future that appears to be inevitable now can be critiqued, challenged, and defined anew through imagination and action. I now turn towards theorizing the possibilities that dissonance and disruption might provide in breaking out of the temporal cocoon and for outlining a radical ethics of caring time.

To preserve agency of the one-caring, we must centralize notions of temporal rupture, dissonance, disruption and distortion within the everydayness of care. These can give us a way to both reconceptualize cyclicalities and start laying the ground for a more radical feminist phenomenology of caring time. Again, Rassundari's text, I believe opens up critical possibilities to navigate this impasse. At the same time, she acknowledges with humility how she succumbs to what we have designated as a coherentist ontology of caring time. Incoherence needs to be created to break through the temporal cocoon of care and to not make oneself a proxy to the other. Incoherence indicates the lack of fit, which in turn has the potential to point towards an excess beyond the given moment. We have discussed how one way in which moral harm occurs within the mutual temporality of care is by folding in the one-caring's future into or for the sake of the cared-for. Thus, the cared-for becomes the limit and exhaustive of the one-caring's temporal horizon. When moral harm takes this form, then overcoming it requires securing a new ground beyond the immediacies of care and the temporality of the cared-for, that is, a third relation that would provide the one-caring with possibilities to project into the future in distinct ways that exceeds these immediate relations of care. For Rassundari, faith in God¹ opens up the possibility of envisioning a third relation, which ultimately allows her to imagine a different future and subvert the present in creative ways beyond the possibilities available to her. By establishing an embodied connection to God in the form of different deities, Rassundari can transcend both the constraints of domestic spaces and uncaring time. She can resist being frozen in the present. To this discussion, I now turn.

Since childhood, Rassundari has described herself as a vulnerable, timid and fearful girl. Her friends often bullied her and she was afraid of being reprimanded by adults, although most of her family members were affectionate towards her. Her introduction to God did not arise due to religious dogma or as a matter of conforming to social customs. Rather, faith in God as being a companion in her life is bestowed by Rassundari's mother as a gift to her child. Her mother recognizes Rassundari's vulnerabilities and knows that she cannot always be beside her child.

¹ In the Tenth composition of Part II, titled "The Theater of the World," Rassundari proclaims in spiritual depth, "Dear Lord, you cover the entire world, taking various shapes and incarnations...." ([Devi, 2022, 111](#))

So she gifts the assurance of faith to Rassundari. Referring to the family deity, her mother tells the young Rassundari, ““There is nothing to fear. ... We have Dayamadhav, so don’t worry, whenever you feel scared call Dayamadhav and all your fears will disappear.” These words of my mother gave me courage.” (Devi, 2022, 25) Faith here becomes a gift of care from her mother, which is not determined in abstraction but is a way to foster care-based connection. God appears to stand in for her mother when Rassundari’s mother is not there with her. In Rassundari’s words, “Since that day the *mantra* given by my mother – the name of Parameswar had entered my heart.” (Devi, 2022, 30) It is even more interesting to note that God continues to serve as a point of connection between Rassundari and her mother even after Rassundari leaves for her marital home in a faraway village very early in her life. While leaving her parental home, Rassundari manages to ask her mother with tears in her eyes, “Are you sure that Parameswar will go with me?” to which her mother replies, “He will be with you all the time....” (Devi, 2022, 34) The deity creates a symbolic space of intimacy to exert Rassundari’s relation to her mother, thus retaining the future possibility for Rassundari to exert herself as a being who is entitled to care. The relation to God allows Rassundari to relate to her past and keep it alive. In this way, she can resist subjugation to the pure moment, which includes leaving behind her relation to her parents.

The image of the deity in various forms, allows Rassundari to fashion, I think, a new hermeneutics of caring time. One night a fire burns down her parental home and, in anguish, little Rassundari, along with her brothers hides in the fields by the river. In anguish, they begin to pray to Dayamadhav. Finally, some people from the other side of the river rescue them and Rassundari believes that Dayamadhav has rescued them. Later her mother explains to little Rassundari that the deity they have in their house is Dayamadhav, he is God and heard their cries of anguish and sent someone to rescue the children. To this, Rassundari in her innocence asks, “But mother, how can Dayamadhav hear us from inside the building?” to which her mother replies, “... he is everywhere, that is why he can hear us all. He is able to hear the call from anyone from any place – if you call him loudly or softly or just think of him. This is because He is no ordinary person....” (Devi, 2022, 30) Her mother’s word confers “moral courage” (Devi, 2022, 30) on Rassundari. This exchange, which is remarkable in its simplicity, carries a deep implication for the question of care. As Rassundari realizes that “God is always with us” (Devi, 2022, 30), she can loosen her hold on the present. As a new inter-subjective betweenness opens up through her relation to God, this space is not defined through fear, but rather through care. Moreover, God is personified sometimes as a father and sometimes as a mother (Devi, 2022, 86); irrespective of whether God is envisioned as a father or a mother, the relation to God is always voiced through the language of care – God recognizes Rassundari’s entitlement to care. He/she is there with her in the present, but also at times past and in the future. For instance, Part I of the book opens with Rassundari evoking the female God of

knowledge Saraswati, “I pay my homage to you mother Saraswati, the giver of strength and wisdom... Be kind enough to dwell in the seat of my heart. ... I am your weak and ignorant daughter ... I earnestly hope that you will dwell in my voice....” (Devi, 2022, 21) Here God stands in for her as a mother. Writes Rassundari in one of her other invocations, “O you Lord of the world ... Leaving the protection of my mother, I appeal to you in dire distress and fright. ... I cried for my mother and you gave me refuge Like a true mother. ... Instantly you picked me up, wiped my tears....” (Devi, 2022, 35-36) Again, expressing her relation to God, she writes, “You cannot escape Rassundari clinging to you till she gets shelter at your feet and gets a word of encouragement from you.” (Devi, 2022, 67) God retains a dual character for her – He/she is a part of her intimate circle of care. He is feeling with her, listening to her, and is witnessing her suffering and triumphs. Writes Rassundari “Dear God, I can learn to read and write only if you teach me. Who else is there to be my teacher?” (Devi, 2022, 51) Again, “You have been with me through good days and bad days. You know all that I have experienced; I cannot keep anything back from you.” (Devi, 2022, 44) Yet God also transcends the space and time of the intimate sphere. Therefore, through her embodied connection to God, Rassundari herself is able to transcend the present, and project into the past on her own terms for instance as a daughter. She can also imagine a radically different future, as we will see shortly.

In the context of her deep affective connection to God, Rassundari is able to dream of and ultimately pushes herself to realize a new kind of future. At the time, women were generally not allowed to read and write. Rassundari puts it thus, “Women were not supposed to get an education those days, they had to stand by demurely near the master of the house after all their housework was over, as though they had no other work except household tasks.” (42). While maintaining her relational existence in the household, Rassundari defines a separate space for herself through education. The interesting point to note, however, is that Rassundari’s desire to read and her imagination of her educated self are articulated in light of her relation of care to God rather than in the language of rights, autonomy or material gains. The relation to God creates a strong desire to read the *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, a religious scripture. The relation eventually enables her to question the norms pervading her relational existence in the private sphere merely as a wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. Regarding the philosophical vocabulary we have been developing thus far, it may be said that Rassundari’s relation to God introduces dissonance within the internal coherence created by the temporal cocoon of care. In her words, “People used to deprive women of learning. ... But somehow, I could not accept this. I was very keen to learn the alphabet.” (Devi, 2022, 51) The relation to God creates a stubborn determination on Rassundari’s part to pursue the path to education despite all odds. In Rassundari’s words, “I don’t know how to write, I am as good as a donkey. ... Whatever I speak or think Are all directed towards reaching you.” (Devi, 2022, 61) On the other hand, through

the relation, Rassundari envisions God as a constant companion and guide who would accompany her on the path to realizing her goal.

While functioning as a point of rupture in the temporal cocoon and thereby creating dissonance within a coherentist ontology of time, the relation to God retains an aspect of continuity simultaneously. This is because the triad of past, present and future is also imagined through this relation. However, any understanding of an open future and the self in individualistic terms is put to rest. While the threat of a coherentist ontology in mutual temporality in Rassundari's relational existence as wife, mother, etc. must be overcome, a new care-based relation to God sustains her in her project. This relation as a kind of new inter-subjective betweenness appears to provide an independent objective ground beyond the immediacy of care-work and helps secure Rassundari's moral entitlement to care. The folding in of one's time to the other is resisted not through a logic of self-governance, but through imagining mutuality in relation to God in a way that creates a new kind of betweenness.¹ This opens up the possibility for unique trajectories of living time to emerge for the one-caring. From the point of view of the relation, Rassundari can create a temporal gap within coherence and exert her entitlement to autonomy through an assertion of relationality!

The above discussion, I believe, reveals a striking dimension. By anchoring herself in the relation, Rassundari can preserve the porosity of the self that care work demands, and yet she is able to secure its boundaries to transcend the present and define a new future for herself in a creative manner. While in the Western philosophical tradition, care is emphasized as an antidote to a conception of an autonomous and self-governing moral subject, the perspective emerging from this text enables us to break through the autonomy/care binary. Perhaps this is best expressed through Rassundari's words, "I used to feel as though I was six-handed. Two of my hands wanted to do all the household work to the satisfaction of everyone – from the young to the old. Another pair of hands wanted to keep my children close to me. The other pair wanted to catch the moon. How strange! It left me absolutely speechless." (63) And catch the moon, Rassundari did. The reader is astounded by her journey to becoming educated when she teaches herself to read and write. All the while she imagines that God is holding her hand.

As her thirst to read the *Chaitanya Bhagavata* deepens, the first problem facing Rassundari is the procurement of the book. She believes the book must be in the house, but how can she

¹ While developing a feminist perspective on violence in intimate relations, I have previously argued (Banerjee 2008) that while relations may need to be severed in cases such as abusive marital relationships to ensure survival, other relationships and connections (and not detachment or isolation) often help survivors to rebuild their lives. In short, new forms of inter-subjective betweenness are needed to mitigate violence suffered in existing relationships. Although the previous paper makes the argument from the lens of a feminist pragmatist ontology of interweaving and does not include an analysis of time, the basic claim aligns with aspects of a care-based understanding of relationality and its quandaries, which is the topic of this paper. In both cases, the possibility of resistance lies in envisioning new connections rather than asserting autonomy through an individualistic model of the self.

recognize it? “So I prayed to God again, saying: You are the friend of the poor; allow me to recognize the book. ... You are the only one whom I can approach.” (Devi, 2022, 52) Rassundari then recounts how strangely God puts the book in her hands. One day her husband comes into the kitchen, lays down the book and tells her son who was there to bring it to the outer quarters when he calls for it. Rassundari takes this opportunity to detach one page from the book and hides this sheet of paper in the kitchen. Her caring responsibilities did not leave time for study and days passed. She always has a silent conversation with God and draws encouragement from the relation. This keeps the hope alive. She begins to hold the sheet of paper in her left hand while cooking with the right and occasionally glancing at it through the sari, which was drawn over her face, but she could not recognize the letters. Rassundari was allowed to sit with some other children in primary school at a very young age and could only recognize a few letters she had seen there. The creativity she displays is astounding. She takes one of the palm leaves on which her son used to practice handwriting. She writes, “One look at the leaf, another at the sheet, a comparison with the letters I already knew, and, finally, a verification with the speech of others – that was the process I adopted for some time.” (Devi, 2022, 53-54) Ultimately, she would compare the letters of the palm leaf and the sheet of the book with the memory of the alphabet she had.¹ She writes, “After a great deal of time and with great effort I somehow managed to stumble through the *Chaitanya Bhagavata*. Books were not printed in those days. The handwriting was difficult to decipher. Oh, the trouble I had to take to read!... I never through I would be able to read. The little that I have learned was possible because God guided me.” (Devi, 2022, 55)² In fact, for some time, Rassundari recounts that no one apart from the domestic help knew that she was able to read. Eventually, she began to have secret reading sessions with other women in the neighborhood where they would go through the *Chaitanya Bhagavata* together – Rassundari would read to them while someone kept watch. In time, she confides in her sisters-in-law and begins to give them reading lessons. She writes, “Since there was no need for secrecy after that, I read from the scriptures right in front of them. ... God had granted my long-cherished wish. ... Housework seemed very light to me. I used to feel contented the whole day.” (Devi, 2022, 65) Eventually, Rassundari can read books to her heart’s content. She thanks God for being by her side, “He has made my wishes come true. ... My mind, so keen to read, was satisfied by reading all the books we had in the house --

¹ Rassundari had no formal education. As a child, however, she did sit with her male cousins in the outer quarters of her parent’s house where a missionary woman came to teach. She listened to the boys and tried to learn from the alphabets written on the board. However, the school burnt down. This is the memory that Rassundari refers to.

² While doing a literary analysis of women’s autobiographical writing and analyzing *Amar Jiban* as challenging a theory of autobiography which treats identity and subjectivity as givens, Aparna Mandal writes that, “... the author’s sense of self can be seen as getting constructed through an identification and association with divinity. The self which gets articulated in and through the process of writing is itself conceived as an act of God’s grace where the self gets sublimated into a higher metaphysical plane and it becomes rather difficult to etch out the crude boundaries of an individualistic self.” (Mandal, 2021, 10)

Chaitanya Bhagavata, the eighteen volumes of *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, Jamini Bharat, *Valmiki-Purana*.” (Devi, 2022, 69) However, Rassundari is far from being satisfied – she does not yet know how to write! She says, “I used to complain to God saying “Dear God, you have kept me in a fairly satisfactory situation. You have given me a lot of all that is needed to carry on a family life. My only regret is that I do not know how to write. Please teach me.” (Devi, 2022, 70) Eventually one of her sons studying in Calcutta asks her why she doesn’t reply to his letters. Rassundari replies that she is hesitant since she cannot write. The son says that he cannot live away from home without hearing from his mother and gifts Rassundari paper, pen and ink and leaves for his college. She eventually teaches herself to write with a great deal of perseverance and practice. As she puts it, “The process of my education was not easy at all. It was really a painstaking one. ... It seems God was my teacher....” (Devi, 2022, 71) The temporality of waiting during the whole process takes on a new connotation in the context of Rassundari’s relation to God. Waiting is no longer a mark of passivity and of mediated temporality, but in the context of a disruptive ontology of time, it takes on an emancipatory character. Waiting here is an integral part of the journey to self-definition since it indicates hard work, opening up an altogether different future.

God becomes a living, breathing intimate other for Rassundari. God serves as a horizon of interpretation, against which established traditions could be questioned.¹ Rassundari’s faith allows her to imagine her past and present differently, creatively even; and it also allows her to carve out a new sense of future. She breaks out of her temporal cocoon and releases herself from an entrapment in care, while also allowing her to fashion a more robust ideal of an ethical self rooted in care. The ideal of the caring self she develops allows for a claim to herself (including to her own time), but it also helps constitute her relationality with intimate others in more agential ways. While the caring relation to God releases her from the clutches of the icy present, it also opens up new spaces of reciprocity with others in the intimate sphere where Rassundari’s entitlement to care is recognized by those she cares for. Her caring relation with her sisters-in-law and sons, for instance, are retained; now she can dare to ground a claim to reciprocity in these relations in ways that contribute to her self-definition.

The analysis points to the role of disruption and dissonance and their creative potential in resetting existing relations of care and fostering new ones so that care can be sustained over time. Rupture within a coherentist ontology may make the triadic structure of time available to

¹ While reading *Amar Jiban* to construct a counter history to the malestream hegemonic nineteenth century narratives, Nabanita Paul (2022) situates Rassundari’s account within complex negotiations with both nation and the domestic sphere. In this context, Paul discusses the role of God in Rassundari’s life and its implications for subverting social norms. In her words, “... Rassundari turned out to be a “bhakta” who submitted herself completely to the will of God. Thus, by subjugating herself, she gained immense agency. She could do whatever she wanted because all her wants belonged to the God she worshipped, she could even transgress social norms for it was God who wanted her to do that.” (Paul, 2022, 39)

the oppressed and create the possibility for imagining and creatively redrawing one's relation to care on one's own terms. The subversion of time in this manner is critical for subverting oppressive tendencies within intimate spaces. We must frame the idea of caring time as a transactive relation, which emerges in the inter-subjective space between the self and the other. The need to centralize an appeal to reciprocity within the inter-subjective space, in turn, is critical for developing a radical conception of caring time. Part of preserving caring time for the one-caring involves being assured of temporal modes, which allow for disruptions, ruptures, and the possibility of laying out novel trajectories for future. Dissonance creates a crack in the temporal cocoon. The imagined connection to a third (namely God in Rassundari's case) provides the one-caring an opportunity to renegotiate the boundaries of her caring self. It allows the caring self to see itself as a part of the larger whole, thus disrupting its entrapment into the immediate present. In other words, the third makes possible both disruption from the immediate present as well as reconciliation with it in relative freedom. Ultimately, a *disruptive ontology of time* is critical for envisioning an emancipatory ethics of care. Through the analysis, we can also outline a new normative requirement at the heart of care ethics: what we owe to the one-caring regarding their time. We ought to centralize the moral needs of the one-caring as a being that lives time and does the work of care over time.

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