



Reflections on the Value of Vulnerability: Towards a Relational Understanding of Vulnerability with Ethics of Care

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Abstract: *Vulnerability is an inalienable aspect of human existence. In spite of the fact that sufficient groundwork has been done on the notion of vulnerability, it is to be noted that until now, vulnerability has typically been conceived as a negative condition relating to dependency, weakness, fragility, passivity and exploitation. Contrary to this, this paper attempts to re-consider the concept of vulnerability along positive lines by principally focusing upon the moral and ontological roots of vulnerability by employing the Feminist Ethics of Care model. The exponents of Care Ethics extend a normative version of vulnerability with prime emphasis on two aspects, namely, vulnerability as a compositional form of relationality and responsibility. The question that will be addressed in this paper is, 'How can we construct a progressive and value-laden approach to vulnerability by employing the principles of an Ethic of Care?' Fundamentally, it will be argued that between the individual and the universal, lies relationships that have been overlooked while discussing the notion of vulnerability. This study therefore, aims to unlock the moral dynamic of vulnerability with ontological implications. Subsequently, an idea of Shared human vulnerability will be authentically introduced in the paper which will help us to think about the power of vulnerability with the existential genesis of Care Ethics.*

Keywords: *Ethic of Care; Feminist Ethics; Relational Ontology; Shared Human Vulnerability; Vulnerability; Vulnerable Subject.*

INTRODUCTION

We are not merely bodily or social beings, but are also affective beings; hence we have a natural propensity of being vulnerable to one another and to the state of affairs around us. It is also true that various social and political encounters related to vulnerability such as need, violence and exploitation raise certain moral questions. For instance, Judith Butler (2004) has explored the notion of vulnerability as an ontological human condition and by doing so she makes an attempt to offer new theoretical outlook for investigating several social inequalities and discriminations. Similarly, Kemp (1999) identifies vulnerability as an ontological condition by focusing on the negotiations in the realm of Bioethics. In this regard, Kemp writes that a vulnerable being is one "whose autonomy or dignity or integrity is capable of being threatened". Both, Butler and Kemp have made an attempt to acknowledge the moral status of the vulnerable through an ontological lens. The point that has to be noted here is that both of them have identified the notion of vulnerability concerning an individual condition (as an individual state) or a particular category/ group (as a universal state).

Differing from this approach, this paper makes an attempt to widen and supplement the interpretation of vulnerability by progressing beyond the individual and universal outlooks that were uniformly rendered. It will be posited that the moral value of Vulnerability is chiefly connected with the inherent nature of a vulnerable self that is closely tied to *relationality* and *inter-subjectivity*. Therefore, what binds us together is the affection of *Shared Human Vulnerability*.

Moreover, this array of vulnerability is central to various feminist and ethical theories and one of them is the Feminist Ethics of Care ideology. D. Engster (2005), in his article, "Rethinking Care Theory: The Practice of Caring and the Obligation to Care" writes that care theory can serve as a resource to acknowledge our fundamental vulnerability and spells out the resulting importance of care for survival and basic well-being. In similar frame of reference, it will be exhibited that the Ethics of Care model manifests significant ontological elements attached to humans as vulnerable beings that ultimately tender valuable moral undertones. The idea here is not to intelligibly neglect and disserve from the rigid political, social, ontological or cultural understandings of the notion (for instance, the direct connection between vulnerability and sexual violence/harm), but the fundamental idea that motivated this paper is to regard the relational aspect of the ontological bearings that vulnerability has. A study of vulnerability along this framework will therefore serve as a foundation for understanding the 'relational value of vulnerability' and arrive at a 'progressive approach to vulnerability'.

Vulnerability: An Ethical Overview

Let us start the discourse by quoting from Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers and Susan Dodds' (2014), "Introduction: What is Vulnerability, and Why Does it Matter for Moral Theory?" as written in the book, *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*, Their description of vulnerability as an indispensable human condition is established upon the expression that: "Human life is conditioned by vulnerability" (Mackenzie et al. 2014, 1).

Furthermore, they write about vulnerability as a shared human condition:

"As social and affective beings we are emotionally and psychologically vulnerable to others in myriad ways: to loss and grief; to neglect; abuse and lack of care; to rejection; ostracism and humiliation. As sociopolitical beings, we are vulnerable to exploitation, manipulation, oppression, political violence and rights abuses. And we are vulnerable to the natural environment and to the impact on the environment of our own, individual and collective, actions and technologies."¹

Talking about the theoretical perspectives on the idea of vulnerability, it is widely maintained that vulnerability is closely entwined with various other concepts such as care, concern and responsibility on one hand and abuse, harm and victimization on the other. The first Ethical speculation of vulnerability highlights two sub- types of vulnerabilities namely, vulnerability as a universal concept and secondly, vulnerability as a situational/circumstantial concept. For instance, Paul Famosa (2014) writes that Kantian ethics focuses on the universal aspect of vulnerability and in fact the set of moral duties that Kant emphasizes are set forth on the basis of human vulnerability.² In a broad sense, vulnerability plays a significant role in procuring the moral duties in Kantian ethical doctrine. Specifically, Kant focuses on the fragility and vulnerability of human rational capacity and the vulnerability of the human bodies on which the rational capacities depend. Famosa (2014) gradually submits that Kant considers two facets of vulnerability namely, vulnerability as bad/unjust and secondly, vulnerability as neither bad nor unjust.

The situational conception of vulnerability maintains that vulnerability is a narrow conception where it is understood as a condition which is not equally shared by all humans. To be precise, there are certain individuals who are more prone and sensitive to certain mistreatment and harms.

Addressing the feminist abstraction of vulnerability, Mackenzie addresses the question, 'what is vulnerability?' in her book *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*, and further responds to this question in the following ways-

1. Firstly, she describes vulnerability as an *ontological* disposition. She writes that it is, "a universal, inevitable, enduring aspect of the human condition" (Mackenzie 2014, 4). The thinkers who follow this path are A. MacIntyre, M. Nussbaum, J. Butler, B.S Turner and few others.

¹ Catriona Mackenzie(2014) in the first chapter namely 'The Importance of Relational Autonomy and Capabilities for an Ethics of Vulnerability' of her book, *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy* demonstrates the interconnection between the ontological and social structures . Here, she discusses three aspects, namely, firstly the socio-ontological dimension of vulnerability, secondly, the connection between relational autonomy and human vulnerability, and lastly, it is argued that there is also a connection between relational autonomy and social justice approach.

² Martha Nussbaum (2006) contends that the conventional moral theories have followed the Kantian mode of understanding human vulnerability.

2. Secondly, Mackenzie then explains vulnerability as a *relational* phenomenon. She writes, “On this view, the, vulnerable persons are those with reduced capacity, power, or control to protect their interests relative to other agents” (Mackenzie 2014, 6). R.E Goodin and M.A Fineman support this version of vulnerability.

Furthermore, in the feminist discourse, the model of *corporeal vulnerability* was taken up by Judith Butler, about this she writes: “The body is constitutively social and inter-dependent” and it is this embodied vulnerability to others that makes human life precarious (Butler 2003, 31). Here, Butler outlines an ethical account of vulnerability by employing the corporeal facet of human existence. Thus, Butler’s account of vulnerability can be considered as an amalgamation of both ontological and ethical aspect attached with human vulnerability. Butler says that it is vulnerability (mainly corporeal vulnerability) that unites each human being. The question that arises is, ‘how can such a negative condition foster unity among humans?’ Butler answers this by substantiating two positive implications of vulnerability, they are- A sense of Responsiveness to Others and Openness to Others.

According to her, these two aspects are the central traits attached with humanization and also yield all-embracing ethical accountability and assignments. I quote her in this respect, she writes: “Vulnerability is fundamental sociality of embodied life and therefore is a product of subjects’ inevitable, undeniable and ineliminable interdependence” (Butler 2004a, 28). We can trace a synthesis of an ontological and ethical narration of vulnerability by closely scanning Butler’s model of Corporeal Vulnerability. Therefore, corporeality is an essential part of vulnerability.

Erinn Gilson (2014) in her work, *The Ethics of Vulnerability: A Feminist Analysis of Social Life and Practice*, develops an Ethics of Vulnerability where she advocates that vulnerability is fundamental, pervasive and shared. She puts it: “Vulnerability is presumed to be a common feature of the human condition, a basic susceptibility that all Possess. As such, an idea of vulnerability underlies our notions of harm and well-being, interests and rights, equality and inequality, and duties and obligations” (Gilson 2014, 15). Gilson goes on to explain the normative nature of vulnerability by exhibiting the intimate relationship between the relational position of human beings and ethical responsibilities that encircle them. This way, feminist thinkers like, Mackenzie (2014), Butler (2005) and Gilson (2014) have made known the value of vulnerability as it plays a remarkable role to better understand mutual bonds, maintaining inter-personal relations and fostering a sense of ethical responsibility and responsiveness.

To summarize, I can now submit by saying that the above discussed approaches to vulnerability pursue two diverse avenues; one over-emphasizes common and equal openness to vulnerability and the other focuses on the context-specific approach to vulnerability, taking into account power dynamics, individual capacities and social inequalities.

The ethical meaning of vulnerability was further reviewed by Barry Hoffmaster (2006) in his article, “What does Vulnerability Mean”. Here, he argues that there has been an under-theorization of the notion of vulnerability in the realm of Ethics and Moral Philosophy. I shall consider his explication here as he doesn’t merely attempt to define vulnerability, instead offers three tentative possibilities that explain the foundational causes behind the under-theorization of an ethics of vulnerability. The reasons are as follows:

1. Until now, the domain of Ethics and Moral philosophy was widely influenced by the long-established *individualistic* accounts on moral life. And, as far as the ethical bearings of vulnerability are concerned, it cannot be effectively understood in the light of a highly individualistic and autonomous account of morality. Therefore, an ethical approach to vulnerability is the antithesis of this conventional project of ethics.
2. Secondly, talking about Corporeal Vulnerability, Hoffmaster argues that the conventional theories of morality have methodologically disregarded the “body” and have overemphasized the “mind” (as they have focused on reason and intellect). Contrary to this, Hoffmaster maintains that vulnerability is very much a feature of corporeal or embodied human existence. Thus, it is necessary to contrive an ethical exposition of vulnerability by shifting our attention towards a different ethical framework on the whole.

3. Thirdly, until now the nature of the traditional projects of ethics and moral philosophy was distinctly *rational*. Hoffmaster in this respect argues that an ethical model of vulnerability cannot be vindicated by focusing solely on reason. He associates vulnerability with human emotions and moral sentiments.³

As Hoffmaster clearly delineates perceptible inadequacies in the regular classical theories of ethics; this eventually devises a necessity for re-thinking ethical theories in order to come up with an ethical doctrine that has the capacity to give thought to the moral and ontological value of vulnerability. In this light, it becomes vital to introduce and discuss the Ethic of Care project and demonstrate how the moral value of vulnerability can be understood along this line of thought. For the sake of clarity and precision, it is important to mention that the proponents of Care Ethics have not colossally examined or presented a veritable exposition of vulnerability as such. Even so, it can be discerned that they have in a way more often situated the concept of human vulnerability around the idea of dependency, attentiveness and care.⁴ However, it will be manifested that instances of an optimistic and forward-looking approach to vulnerability can be traced in Virginia Held's idea of mothering, Kittay's conception of love and Joan Tronto's idea of attentiveness.

Ethics of Care and Vulnerability

Susan Dodds (2014) in her essay, "Dependence, Care and Vulnerability" does not address this relation directly but gives exposure to the basic connection between dependency and human vulnerability. According to her, "Dependence is one form of vulnerability" (Dodds 2014, 182). She further writes that vulnerability can be considered a basic human condition, which we all experience to some degree or the other. But, dependency is not a stable and explicit human condition. It is a form of vulnerability and requires the support of another in the form of *care* or *caring relationships*. This distinction between dependency and vulnerability conveys that we are all vulnerable beings in some way or the other, but are not always dependent. Just like dependency conveys about the relational reality of human beings, in similar spirit vulnerability is a disposition of relational beings.

In this tune, I shall strictly argue that the progressive value attached to vulnerability is rooted in an Ethic of Care in a very significant way. Contrary to Kantian Ethics (which overemphasizes the role of rationality and individualism), the Ethics of Care project focuses extensively on emotional inclinations, inter-subjectivity and relational aspect of human life and existence. An eminent Ethic of Care theorist, Virginia Held (2006) writes:

"Contemporary society is in the grip of contractual thinking. Realities are interpreted in contractual terms, and goals are formulated in terms of rational contracts. The leading current conceptions of rationality begin with assumptions that human beings are independent, self interested or mutually disinterested, individuals; they then typically argue that it is often rational for human beings to enter into contractual relationships with each other. [...]" (Held 2006, 45).

This quotation from Held clearly conveys that this sort of contractual thinking (as proposed and promoted by liberals like Kant and Rawls) extends a very incomplete and surfaced account of human existence. There has been politicization of the human subjects as they are characterized simply as individualized, liberated, self-contained, mutually disconnected and rational beings. As it was conventionally expostulated that being vulnerable indicates a form of weakness or fragility, Held makes an attempt to offer a positive dimension of human relations that further paves a way for a positive approach to human vulnerability by maintaining that each one of us need care and love at some stage or the other. This way we can track an intrinsic connection between care and vulnerability. She puts it:

"An Ethic of Care conceptualizes persons as deeply affected by, and involved in, relations with others; it does not assume that relations relevant for morality have been entered into voluntarily by free and equal individuals, as do dominant moral theories. It appreciates as well the values of care between persons of

³ In the section named, 'Vulnerability and Bioethics', Wendy Rogers extensively discusses Hoffmaster's analysis of relative vulnerability.

⁴ For the exponents of Care Ethics, the central theme for moral analysis is the idea of care. Even though they have not examined the notion of vulnerability in the strict sense of the term, but as their account of care is closely interlinked with the idea of dependency and mutual reliance. They propose a relational account in the realm of morality and offer a reformed version of the moral subject/self.

unequal power in non chosen relations such as those between parents and children and between members of social groups of various kinds” (Held 2006, 46).

She therefore floats the concept of *Mothering* and maintains that the mother-child approach to human bonds and relationships has the potentiality to serve as an excellent paradigm for human relationships that revolves around the ideas of mutual care and dependency.

Talking closely about the notion of vulnerability, Eva Feder Kittay (1999), unlike Sara Ruddick and Virginia Held who had overemphasized the concept of maternal thinking introduces the idea of “dependency relations”. Dependency relations revolve around the ideas of mutual care, concern and connectedness. This dependent relation is also an integral part of our existential vulnerability as inter-dependency entails a sense of shared vulnerability. Similarly, according to Joan Tronto (1993), “care is nonetheless a universal aspect of human life [as] all humans need to be cared for” (Tronto 1993,110). Further, she describes care as a practice that endeavors to maintain interpersonal relationships and sheds light on the values attached to each one of us. She gives great importance to particular situations and significant ontological aspects that were ignored by the traditional moral thinkers. I quote her in this context: “The ethic of care shifts the focus to the unique demands of specific situations and to the virtues and feelings that are central to close personal relationships like empathy, compassion, love, sympathy, and fidelity (Tronto 1993,104). This ethical approach can therefore be termed as *Relational Ethics*.

The question that follows next is, ‘why should we employ the ethical doctrine of an Ethic of Care for exemplifying the progressive and positive value of vulnerability?’ According to me, a downright answer to this question would be- because an Ethic of Care empowers us to firstly, move beyond the conventional version of vulnerability and the vulnerable subject and secondly, it enables us to re-address and recognize our ties and attachment to significant others. Thus, Care Ethics, as discussed above, has the potentiality to affirm that vulnerability has a dual connotation- on one hand it reveals a sense of insecurity and fragility, on the other, it amounts to certain ethical performance fundamentals.

The Notion of Shared Human Vulnerability: Ethics Meets Ontology

I shall now reflect on the primary questions raised in the paper i.e, ‘Can we re-think the concept of Vulnerability by employing an Ethic of Care?’ and ‘How can a positive approach to vulnerability be constructed by employing the principles of Ethic of Care?’ In this respect, the notion that I would like to introduce in order to present a robust account of the value of vulnerability is the idea of *Shared Human Vulnerability*.⁵ The idea of *Care, Caring, Caring about* and *Being Cared for* orbits around a very standard aspect of reality and human existence, i.e the fact that individuals express love and care for fellow individuals, thus acting as responsible and related beings. In short, what binds us together is the affection of *Shared Human Vulnerability*. Here, I turn to address the claim that the value of vulnerability rests upon the closely acquainted relationship between ethics and ontology. Consequently, the idea of *Shared Human Vulnerability* highlights the ontological aspect of vulnerability with the primary objective of discerning the value of attached with vulnerability.

I thereby argue that the notion of *Shared Human Vulnerability* extends a positive account of vulnerability by giving prominence to two cardinal prospects of Ethics of Care. They are as follows-

Emphasis on Relational Ontology:

The exponents of Care Ethics have characterized vulnerability and dependency as an indispensable part of human existence. Joan Tronto (1993) in this respect asserts that just like autonomy and freedom, dependency and vulnerability are an essential feature of human life (Tronto 1993, 134). Moving back, a conventional political understanding of vulnerability emphasizes the independent and autonomous angle attached to human existence. The uniform moral theories had mainly emphasized the idea of individualism and rationality, but Care Ethics makes a place for the realm of relations and emotions. For instance, M.A Fineman (2008) in her article, “The Vulnerable Subject”, extensively discusses the nature of the vulnerable subject and his/her needs. She writes: “The vulnerable subject approach does what the one-dimensional liberal subject cannot: it embodies the fact that human reality encompasses a wide range of differing and interdependent abilities over the span of a life time”. She also develops her project on

⁵ This theme of Shared Human Vulnerability is my own authentic finding that is employed in order to construct and outline a ‘relational’ value attached with human vulnerability.

vulnerability by focusing on the insights of feminist ethics and some dimensions of bioethics. Her literature on vulnerability is intimately connected to the feminist Ethics of Care model with its focus on the relational character of vulnerability. This way, in order to come up with a value-laden and positive understanding of vulnerability, it is required that we firstly scrutinize the relational nature of the vulnerable self/being.

Let us now explore what the feminist ethicists have to claim about the nature of the subjects. In the context of Ethics of Care, a very significant critique of the liberal and independent approach to moral self was offered by Kittay (1999). Kittay primarily articulates vulnerability by considering the idea of dependency that prevails between a disabled dependent individual and the one upon whom he/she depends. She introduces the concept of a *Transparent Self*⁶ which signifies a self that cares for the other and whose existence is marked by unreciprocated human inter-connection. Transparency serves as a “benchmark for the self-conception of the individual who cares for a dependent person” (Kittay 2013, 312). Kittay scrutinizes the contractarian understanding of human needs and dependency which assumes that there exists a background of reciprocity and equality among individuals. In opposition to this, Kittay recommends that dependency and the obligations to care do not operate in a fair and indifferent environment as we are not equal beings. Talking about mutual respect and dignity she writes: “Our dignity, I want to argue now, is bound both by our capacity to care for one another and in our being cared for by someone who herself is worthy of care” (Kittay 1999,113). She challenges the individualist and a contractualist narrative of dignity by maintaining that inter-dependency is the central origin of respect and dignity. This way, both Tronto and Kittay offer a revised version of the moral subject. This ontological construct gives value to the subject as a connected, dependent and attentive being. A focus on the doctrine of relational ontology offered by an Ethic of Care changes the way we react to the concept of vulnerability. The intention here is to investigate vulnerability from a relational stance by re-phrasing the individualistic and universalized positions. If we unite the subject in the ‘care’ (interdependent) and the ‘justice’ (independent) perspective we can come up with something called ‘relational ontology’.

About the idea of relational ontology, Care Ethicist, Annette Baier (1981) argues, “persons are essentially second persons” (Baier 1981, 172). I interpret her idea of second persons in two ways, firstly, we are second persons because since birth, our entry into the world has been introduced by others and secondly, we have the tendency to know ourselves principally as ‘you’ before realizing that we are primarily an ‘I’. This explanation of beings offered by Baier reveals a very elemental side of the vulnerable subject, i.e the relational aspect of human beings. Gilligan (1987) also recognizes the revised ‘voice’ as one of care and responsibility, of concern and connection with other people. It is to be noted that she has constantly emphasized the idea of ‘connection’ and ‘relation’ which establishes that the individual doesn’t exist independently or all by himself/herself, instead, he/she lives in a chain of relations. In the words of Gilligan “From within the care perspective, the relationship becomes the figure, defining self and other” (Gilligan 1987, 53).

The Ethics of Care ascribes intrinsic value to relationships because relating to others in a loving way is a basic human need. In this light, Held (2006) formulated:

“It recognizes that human beings are dependent for many years of their lives, that the moral claim of those dependent on us for the care they need is pressing, and that there are highly important moral aspects in developing the relations of caring that enable human beings to live and progress” (Held 2006, 10)

Here, she tries to convey that caring relationships form an integral part of moral life and it is through these bonds and relations of caring that humans prosper and advance in life. Thus, the value of vulnerability can be grounded in human relations.

In contemporary literature, M.A Fineman (2004) seems to acknowledge the theoretical insights rendered by the theorists of Care Ethics. In her book, *The Autonomy Myth*, she writes that we have

⁶ See Kittay’s, *Love’s Labors* (1999), 51. Here, she introduces this account of self in close connection to a vulnerable subject which is always dependent on others. Kittay writes about her own experiences of raising her daughter, Sesha who has profound cognitive impairment. She tries to make a phenomenal distinction between being ‘interdependent’ and ‘dependent’ by demonstrating how Sesha is simply a dependent being and will always be vulnerable in her relations with others.

extensively focused on a highly liberal account of vulnerability and vulnerable state of being. She argues that there is a need to consider the theory of care and dependency in order to come up with a revised version of the vulnerable subject and to deduce the positive value attached to vulnerability. Just like dependency and mutual reliance, vulnerability uncovers various facets of relational ontology. Fineman, additionally institutes the 'vulnerable subject model' which subsists in contrast to the 'liberal subject model'⁷ I shall now adduce similarities between the 'interdependent subject' as discussed by the exponents of Ethics of Care model and the 'vulnerable subject model' as propounded by Fineman.

Fineman's model of vulnerability and the vulnerable has onto-ethical groundings as it focuses on the following claims- vulnerability is a universal condition of our embodied humanity, vulnerability is a constant feature of human condition and vulnerability focuses on the conception of responsibility.⁸ This way, Fineman's account of vulnerability as a form of relational ontological condition resonates with corresponding contentions built by the Care ethicists, like Kittay (1999), Held (2006), and Tronto (1993). Similarly, feminist author, Catriona Mackenzie in her book, *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy* has given thought to this relational aspect of human existence as a parallel to the viewpoint of the Care Ethicists as she sustains the assertion that vulnerability is a *Shared* trait of human beings and humanity (Mackenzie 2014, 46).

Entailment of Ethical Responsibilities:

I shall begin by quoting Virginia Held (2006), when she says: "Sympathy, empathy, sensitivity and responsiveness are seen as the kind of moral emotions that need to be cultivated ... to better ascertain what morality recommends" (Held 2006, 10). We can now infer that Held has emphasized the role of human emotions and sensitivity in her ethical doctrine which also suggests that the nature of the moral self is emotional, affective and responsive. Also, let us consider the four phases in reference to care as outlined by Tronto, encompassing "caring about, attentiveness; taking care of, responsibility; care-giving, competence; and care-receiving, responsiveness" (Tronto 1995, 142). Tronto contends that there is a close correspondence between the above mentioned four phases of mentioned above. Care is a cardinal facet of human existence and this practice elementally orbits around the gestures of attentiveness, responsibility and responsiveness.

My arguments here revolve around the contributions made by feminist, Erinn Gilson who too has inspected the significance of an Ethic of Care for comprehending the ethical dimension of vulnerability and the state of being vulnerable. She writes: "As potential, vulnerability is a condition of openness, openness to being affected and affecting in turn" (Gilson 2014, 310). Here, she tries to communicate the socio-ontological import of vulnerability in an attempt to discern an ethical appreciation of the notion. Her work examines the notion of vulnerability by operating at three inter-connected degrees, namely; the ethics of vulnerability, the bodily vulnerability and the care approach to vulnerability. Essentially, Gilson seeks to elucidate the normative impetus of vulnerability with the motive to imply the power and value attached to it. In an argument, she mentions that as vulnerable beings, each of us act as caring and responsible beings (Gilson 2014, 15). Therefore, vulnerability entails and encourages a sense of ethical responsibility between individuals.

I think Gilson is in a way able to expand the theoretical perspectives on vulnerability by deriving its subject matter from the literature offered by the Ethics of Care doctrine. There are ontological implications within her ethical exposition of vulnerability, for instance in the instance when asserts that "we are related to others in a social world and the nature of ethical responsibility" (Gilson 2014, 55). Therefore, according to Gilson there prevails an ontological significance of vulnerability which upholds human relations and establishes a sense of ethical responsiveness and responsibility between human beings.

⁷ The liberal subject model was earlier discussed in this section where I have made an attempt to revise the nature of the moral subject as presented by the advocates of Liberal tradition.

⁸ In this analysis, I apply the theorization of vulnerability as developed by Catriona Mackenzie et al. (2014) in the first chapter namely 'The Importance of Relational Autonomy and Capabilities for an Ethics of Vulnerability' of her book, *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*.

Consequently, the value of vulnerability lies in an earnest articulation of the ethical purport of relational ontology. It is an exhibition of our relational bonds expressed in numerous forms of care such as responsibility, respect, love and sensitivity. To sum this section, I would like to submit by stating that vulnerability appears to be an underlying reality of human existence. Therefore, the goodness of vulnerability rests on a key assumption that each and every individual is unrelentingly vulnerable and sensitive to fellow beings.

Conclusion

This philosophical paper expanded the meaning of vulnerability beyond the uniform negative sense. Understanding and readdressing social and ethical interrelatedness of human beings is one of the central means to decipher the goodness of vulnerability and for arriving at a moral and value-laden understanding of vulnerability. Therefore, the idea of *Shared Human Vulnerability* which I have introduced inspects the co-constitutive parallelism between ethics and ontology. Furthermore, I have ventured into the deliberation by looking at the recent contributions made by the proponents Feminist Ethics of Care. Thinking about vulnerability along the lines of Feminist Care Ethics helped us delineate vulnerability as a dispositional property. Therefore, the fundamental aim of this paper has been to discover a connection between an ethical approach to vulnerability and the relational form of human existence that subsists. It is important to employ an Ethic of Care mode of thinking in order to get a positive understanding of human vulnerability by dissociating it from violence, a sense of weakness and the idea of imperfection.

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