

Vulnerability and flourishing: Are they exclusive? The common experience in the context of life circumstances

Martina Vuk

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Abstract

The Covid-19 crisis adds an intolerable burden to humanity, not only exposing common experience of vulnerability, but also raise an awareness of how to live a flourishing life in a time of crisis. This further postulate a question on the integration or separateness of the notion vulnerability and flourishing. The puzzling situation between these two notions, however, not only demonstrates the contemporary-oriented denial of vulnerability and appraisal of flourishing, but invokes a search for an adequate stance on the correlation between the concept of flourishing and vulnerability. Moreover, besides conventional agreements on the meaning of vulnerability as a condition of being easily wounded and flourishing as human desire for growth and happiness both concepts requires a pragmatic approach, one where human experience is in the midst of such reflection. The current article presents a brief interdisciplinary assessment of the concept of vulnerability and flourishing outlining their circumstantial and interdependent dynamic. This will be done by outlining a brief assessment of the notion of vulnerability, in the first part; the notion of flourishing in the second; and as a point of conclusion, the article set forward the structures of their collaboration and interdependency.

Keywords: vulnerability, flourishing, interdependency, human embodiment, life circumstances

Introduction

During the last year and a half, a great variety of articles, academic conferences, media links, and personal testimonies have been written about a mysterious new virus causing Covid-19. Interestingly, these works depict not only the complexity of the virus itself but also the complexity of the human condition that not only presses, on the surface, human vulnerability in its most challenging and uncertain form but also the intertwining and perplexing nature of human vulnerability and flourishing. Despite vulnerability already constituting too common an experience for many, within the period of Covid 19 life has become precarious for a greater part of humanity. However, the *denial* in the recognition of vulnerability as a universal human condition and flourishing life as a vision peculiar to all despite life context and circumstances is always a challenging task. Vulnerability, instead of being recognized as a universal human condition, is a mark for disabled people, the elderly, women, people with Alzheimer's disease, and migrants. Flourishing, on the contrary, is an attribute prescribed to the wealthy, successful, and beautiful. Amid the pandemic, this has changed. The vulnerable are not only those whom *Belmont Report* (Belmont Report 1979), or *Universal declaration on bioethics and human rights* (UNESCO 2015) classified as vulnerable but also people from a gradient of socioeconomic groups who might struggle to cope financially, mentally, or physically with the crisis. Our human quest, on the one hand, echoes more frequently a question of how to live a flourishing life in a time of crisis or, on the other hand, we become more frequently aware of the reality of our own and other people's vulnerability in circumstances in which we live. Thus, the reality of living with the pandemic pressures us to rethink notions of vulnerability and also the concept of flourishing—not only as separated but collaborative notions. The puzzling situation between these two notions, in my opinion, not only demonstrates the contemporary-oriented denial of vulnerability and appraisal of flourishing but invokes a search for an adequate stance on the correlation between the concept of flourishing and vulnerability. My intention in the following article is to present a brief interdisciplinary assessment of the concept of vulnerability and flourishing; secondly, I will portray those concepts as circumstantial; thirdly, I will conclude by presenting my ideas regarding their collaboration and interdependency.

The vulnerability: brief outline of the notion

The notion of vulnerability, in recent decades, has increased the socio-cultural interest and expanded the pole of academic research. According to Google scholar, in 2021 the number of articles concerned with human vulnerability has been larger than previous years.¹ However, the definitions of the term vulnerability still vary and the concept itself remains elusive. There are layers to understanding the notion of vulnerability (Luna 2009a) ambivalences in opinions, (Vuk 2020) and distinctions in approaches (Zagorac 2017). In entries on “vulnerability,” the major contemporary dictionaries rely on its Latin origin: the noun *vulnus* (wound) or verb *vulnerare* (to wound). English dictionaries such as *Merriam Webster*, *Oxford Online Dictionary*, and *Cambridge Online Dictionary* define vulnerability as openness to harm; the possibility or potential to be easily influenced; attacked; or hurt physically, emotionally, or mentally. French dictionary *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique D’Ethique Chretienne* is a little richer with respect to the distribution of concepts and thus provides a three-dimensional understanding: vulnerability as a concept, manifestation, and structure. According to this understanding, vulnerability is an integral part of human existence: as appearance, vulnerability is manifested by sad emotions (anxiety, despair, and repulsion) in a period of insecurity, violence, or death. At the structural level, the notion of vulnerability is often used as a synonym for fragility, weakness, and suffering—although it differs from these concepts due to the obvious conceptual difference between them.

Thankfully, some academics have developed a more detailed approach. For instance, Maillard (Maillard 2011) addresses types of vulnerability: corporeal, socio-relational, and anthropological. Accordingly, the corporeal type of vulnerability signifies biological corporeality; socio-relational vulnerability considers human dependency and interpersonal social relationships; the anthropological type designates inherent fragility of body, physical and emotional integrity, as well as other human capacities.

¹ The use of human vulnerability from 2020 until 2021 has been in potential increase. The term has appeared around 71, 900 (2000 in Social Sciences, 5000 in Medicine and Health; 3500 in Business, Economics and Management and around 2000 in Humanities and Arts). Just for the sake of comparison lets mention that the term human flourishing in 2021 has been used 29, 700 times.

Similarly, the mainstream socio-cultural account of vulnerability addresses it as a human category of being wounded or exposed to harm, and the adjective vulnerable—as many dictionaries indicated—often indicates one's inclination towards weakness, limitations, or wounds (Gilson 2011; Turner 2003).

The context of scholarly discourses concerning the notion of vulnerability provides multiple and diverging analyses and approaches. Until 1970 the word vulnerability appeared within contexts of medicine (Ten Have 2015) referring to bodily and psychological conditions. After 1976 the term was used in a broader sense (McGilloway 1976). Since then (especially the early 1980s), actual awareness of the *occurrence of vulnerability* within daily living and the interest in exploring its meaning in the scope of academia emerged rapidly (Matthews and Tobin 2016). The implication is that the meaning of vulnerability, originally a subject of marginal academic interest, has moved to the center stage of anthropology, moral philosophy, sociology, feminist and care ethics, economics, as well as theology. Since each of these disciplines operates differently, the notion of vulnerability has been conceptualized in various ways and approaches.² Major arguments within biomedical discourses discuss vulnerability within the context of disease (e.g., corporeal and biological fragility, susceptibility to illness, or to be operated upon, manipulated, or influenced). Although the term vulnerability includes the concept of the human body and corporeality, susceptibility to illness, and the physical condition of the patient, authors such as Callahan (Callahan 1984) and Kottow (Kottow 2003) for instance, underline the notion that vulnerability is essential to human persons universally. Rendtorff in *Basic Ethical Principles in European Bioethics and Biolaw*, recognizes vulnerability as a basic moral category, a universal and existential component of every human being (Rendtorff 2002) and not merely a condition of medical patients. Like the biomedical settings, the care ethics and nursing ethics approaches go beyond merely corporeal understandings of vulnerability by stressing the context of living experience (Denier et al., 2013) and the relation of vulnerability to the principle of justice (Tronto

² In this approach, I briefly present the main ideas about notion of vulnerability in selected academic fields that have impacted larger discourses on vulnerability in popular magazines and discussions. For a more robust and detailed analysis another approach is required to be undertaken.

1993). From the philosophical point of view, vulnerability is the ontological and (existential) category of humans (Hoffmaster 2006; Lambert 2011). It is, furthermore, often discussed in relation to autonomy and physical embodiment (Butler et al. 2016; Maillard 2011; Pelluchon 2011). or as a category for certain groups of people who require adequate protection (Turner 2006).

Sociologists distinguish between vulnerabilities impacted by the social environment and vulnerable social groups that need protection (e.g. people with disabilities, migrants, women, newborns, children, the elderly).³ Social vulnerability refers to the characteristics of a person or group in terms of their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard or social environment (Blaikie et al. 2005). Accordingly, vulnerability is not only a social entity, but distinctive social vulnerabilities arise within social environments and society at large because of social incompatibilities and social oppression. Additionally, social philosophers and feminist theorists, besides acknowledging vulnerability as a fundamental condition of human inferiority, focus on external social, environmental, and economic factors that cause or exaggerate one's vulnerability (e.g. poverty, exclusion due to race or gender, additional harm, mutilation of woman, etc.). Such arguments can be found in the work of Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum 2006), Eva F. Kittay (Kittay 1999), Ruth Macklin (Macklin 2003); Mary C. Ruof (Ruof 2004) Robert Goodin (Goodin 1985) and others. The Disability Studies discourse on vulnerability distinguishes between its positive and negative meanings. One camp of researchers sees "vulnerable" as an oppressive category for people with disabilities which threaten their existence (Marks 1999) others follow its broader application by acknowledging that vulnerability is part of the universal human condition (Shildrick 2000).

Theologians discussing vulnerability associate it with human creatureliness (Reynolds 2008) woundedness and brokenness (Brock 2019) and, otherwise, as a human condition that is contrasted with Enlightenment principles of autonomy and selective projection upon others (Reynolds 2008; Tonstad 2020). As a theo-anthropological

³ The factor to categorize the socially vulnerable groups according to a mainstream socio-cultural index includes poverty, class, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, disability, poor health, literacy, etc.

concept vulnerability is often associated with the meaning of suffering or is understood as a form of transformation that pushes one individual towards its acceptance, recognition, and affirmation (Collaud 2014; Gandolfo 2017; Taylor, C.R. and Dell’Oro 2006).

Although the majority of authors discussed here show inclinations toward valuing vulnerability either as an existential condition for all (Hoffmaster 2006; Rogers et al. 2012) others address it as a condition for only a few vulnerable individuals who require adequate protection (Ruof 2004; Schroeder and Gefenas 2009) or, according to those following assessments of vulnerability, who need protection. For this reason, the broad discourses on vulnerability remain divided between those who consider it to be positive and those who see it as a negative connotation or even a threat.⁴ Because of this, the meaning of vulnerability fails to be applied univocally with either positive or negative connotations. This is the reason why continuous conceptual division in opinion between its positive and negative aspects continues. Despite inconsistency in conceptual agreements regarding the notion of vulnerability within academia and even popular culture, there is still an obvious contemporary “push” expressed in the human need for the recognition of vulnerability as a living reality (especially in the present pandemic). This is to say that, besides vulnerability being a subject of academic discourses, it is also a part of each person’s daily experiences and life circumstances. Each human person lives in a particular social environment consisting of interdependent relationships where one’s own vulnerabilities and the vulnerabilities of others are part of everyday life. For this reason, vulnerability requires a pragmatic approach—one that not only counterbalances flourishing but where vulnerability and flourishing are regarded in relation to each other and are reconsidered from contextual and circumstantial perspectives such as life experience.

⁴ A number of scholars stress attention upon the negative side of the term where vulnerability is reduced to only a few individuals who require protection (e.g. persons with disabilities, women, children, elderly) or is considered as a sign of manipulation, projection, sentiment of pity and suffering. Others see vulnerability as something positive associating it with a meaning of existential importance or as a sign of hope and acceptance.

The idea of flourishing—a brief assessment

Human flourishing as a concept and practice is multifaceted and multidimensional. Besides its theoretical basis, it is a blank query subject of study. Its origins are from ancient Greece (*eudaimonia*), and it remains one of the most challenging questions for late modernity. The concept itself has often been associated with the theme akin to happiness, (e.g. *Nicomachean Ethics*) well-being, positive feelings, quality of life, (e.g. WHO 1998) prosperity, the common good, spiritual transformation, (e.g. The Fathers of the Church) and the beatitudes (e.g. Thomas Aquinas). Cambridge's online dictionary defines it as growing or developing successfully. The World Health Organization defines it with regard to quality of life and with reference to individual goals, expectations, standards, and concerns (WHOQOL 1998). Academic discourses regarding the theme of flourishing cover a variety of perspectives, sources, and themes. (e.g. Annas 1993; Aquilina 2013; Atherton, Steedman, Graham 2010; Knut 2017; Volf 2017, 2019). The flourishing for economists has become the idea of achieving material prosperity directed by utility (Dembinski 1991; 2008; Galbraith 1994; Hollenbach 2002); psychologists associate it with personal well-being, (Calhoun and Tedeschi 2014; Diener et al. 2010; Galati and Sotgin 2004); positive feelings, and mental functioning (Anand 2016; Diener and Chan 2011); medical ethics associates it with quality of life and health (Einaudi 2015; Moatti 1996); sociology associates it with distribution of individual rights and civic freedoms, supportive social relationships, and adequate social environment (Sayce 2018; Sevenhuijsen 1998; Silvers 2005); philosophers and ethicists associate it with the virtues, the common good (Nussbaum 1997; Nebel & Collaud 2018), spiritual transformation or the life of the beatitudes. The concept of human flourishing associate's distinctive characteristics depending on social environment and personal preferences. It is validated with the meaning of some desirable positive effect, and measured as integrative and holistic, delineating its teleological nature, attention, as well as external and internal goods. Despite the term's contemporary existential and practical usage that includes exemplification and activity, its basis is still overly theoretical. For this reason, it ought to be studied from a more creative and interdisciplinary perspective both empirically and conceptually (Levin 2020).

Besides conceptual tendencies towards understanding the theme of flourishing and global challenges and pandemic uncertainties, contemporary society accepts the modern notion of morality including human flourishing and the idea of the other. The biggest influence within this framework, as Charles Taylor points out, are modern moral intuitions about the meaning of human life, human dignity and respect, and concerns about human welfare, power, and suffering (Taylor 1989). This, with regard to the theme of flourishing, means not only that the idea of the good life and the concept of flourishing have become highly materialized but that global thinking about flourishing is often isolated from suffering (Hauerwas 1997; Mayerfeld 1999; Nussbaum 2001). Moreover, the pursuit of flourishing life has been often seen as living a good, happy life avoiding the vulnerability of life-threatening situations. Not only are vulnerability and suffering seen as obstacles to pursuing happiness, (Bentham 1988; 1996 - revisited editions; Mill 1861) but also as impediments to true human flourishing. This thinking orders the contemporary concept of living a good life: in order to flourish, one needs to be happy; in order to be happy, one needs to eliminate suffering. Additionally, this has often resulted in the socio-ethical system which has created the mantra that only humans who are capable of achieving certain qualities can live a flourishing life or are worthy of living (Engelhardt 1995; Fletcher 1990; McMahan 2002; Rachels 1979; Singer 1997, 2001). Controversially, complete human flourishing, however, cannot be reduced to mere material prosperity. It is associated with the idea of achieving peace, love, serenity, healing, or via meaningful social relationships. The key question, though, is whether amid life-threatening situations or elsewhere, one can live a meaningful or flourishing life (Hauerwas 1997; Moltmann 1993; Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina 2013; Nebel and Collaud 2018; Peterson and Seligman 2004; Salvifici Doloris 1984; Volf 2019).

In my opinion, the flourishing life is not only an objective concept opposing suffering. It is also a subjective construct and for this reason requires a profound reconsideration not apart from but because of and despite life-threatening situations. Rethinking flourishing in the presence of increased human vulnerability, such as the presence of vulnerable groups (people with disability, people with Alzheimer's, newborns, etc.) or within the present pandemic, could challenge the practice of

living well and discourses on the idea of human flourishing but demonstrate its limitations within contemporary academic and socio-cultural discourses. The first limitation, in my assessment, targets anthropological universality. Namely, it often seems that when the concept of human flourishing accepts the ideas of vulnerability and suffering, it appears to be merely inclusive of autonomous individuals and, in contrast, excludes the “more than vulnerable.” Secondly, it follows that the anthropological gap between vulnerable and non-vulnerable individuals creates socio-ethical and relational barriers between people, reducing them to those who flourish and those who are less capable of leading a flourishing life. Vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, the elderly, and newborns are not only perceived as a burden to human freedom and happiness but they represent a socio-economic burden to democratic welfare which makes them subjects of additional social exploitation.

This questions not only established theories of human flourishing but re-opens the further question of whether the implications of human vulnerability and suffering affect the very concept of flourishing. Or does the concept of human flourishing itself need to be reconsidered? Is human vulnerability merely a condition of those we called disabled, elderly, and dependent, or is it shared by all humans?

Vulnerability and flourishing as a common experience in the context of life circumstances

As seen in the above discussion, most contemporary scholarship addresses vulnerability as the capacity to be wounded whereas flourishing is understood as the internal/external achievement of certain goods. The Covid-19 crisis, adds an intolerable burden to humanity, but also press an additional query to established concepts of human vulnerability and flourishing. This is to say that beyond academic discourses focused mostly on understanding the concepts, additional emphasize on vulnerability and flourishing as an integrative factor of life circumstances, social relationships, and social environments has been missing.

Additionally, the dominant late modernity socio-cultural framework eclipses the meaning of vulnerability as something positive and separates it from the idea of human flourishing. (MacMahan 2002; Singer 1997; 2001). Within such a framework, it is the notion of invulnerability,

instead of vulnerability that represents a more favorable human condition enabling one to flourish. Initiating the reconsideration of such a thinking, besides abovementioned requires a more holistic and correlative picture of vulnerability and flourishing where our embodiment (including physical, emotional, social and spiritual vulnerability) simultaneously present a threat to our agency, but also where vulnerability as a human condition push forward our human desire for true flourishing. What I aim to address is that I am looking at both vulnerability and flourishing from the perspective of a single person outlining their pragmatic and correlative application This in my view address that vulnerability and flourishing besides conceptual implies practical relevance. Firstly, the vulnerability and flourishing are indispensable part of human experience and secondly, they intersect within such life experience. Not only are vulnerability and flourishing context-specific and circumstantial but depend upon social, economic, cultural factors, and particular social environments that include life-threatening situations. The life vision, as it touches a person, includes a person's life circumstances and personal agency that among the other social benefits includes social relationships.

The dynamic correlation between vulnerability and flourishing is possible within a circumstances where vulnerability is evaluated as something positive and essential to human flourishing. Taken in this way vulnerability indeed makes us suffer and expose us to harm, but at the same time it increases our human capacity to openness, relationship, love, empathy, compassion and transformation. As Alisa L. Carse (Carse 2006, 35) addresses: "Life worth living is full of risk. While our flourishing can be imperiled by our vulnerability, it also requires us to be vulnerable – that is, our flourishing is in crucial ways constitutes by vulnerability."

Every life circumstance not only perplexes life-threatening situations with human flourishing, but rather they simultaneously depend on it. Life circumstances and life-threatening situations (including environmental factors, certain traditions, nationality, socio-relational factors) all belong to this category. Not only are they part of circumstances and processes, but dynamic of vulnerability and flourishing are constitutive of such circumstances and experiences. In the procedure of a following discussion, I aim to demonstrate this dynamic referring to several

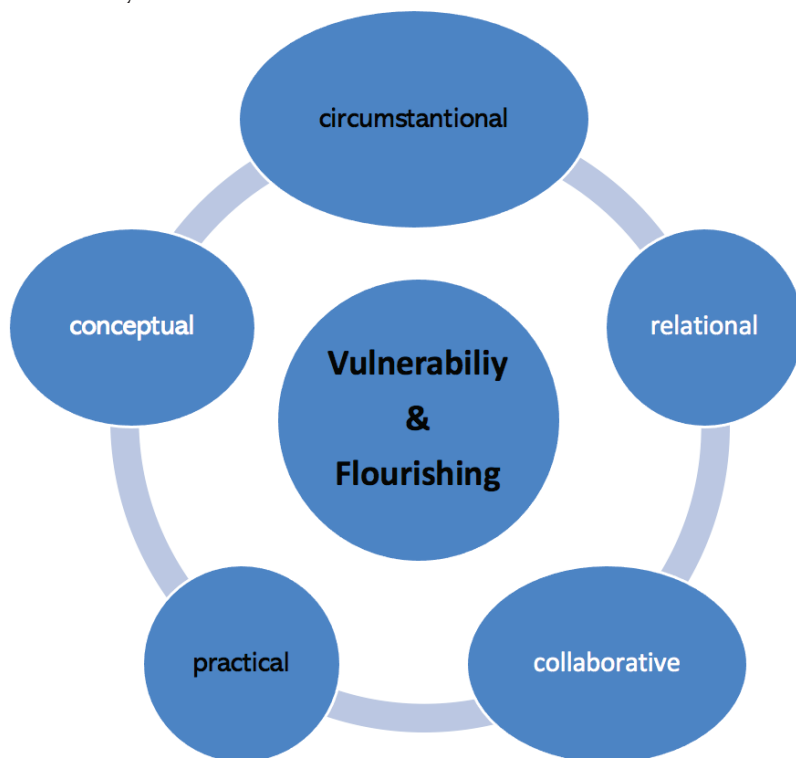
examples. The narratives of disabled, demonstrated that people with disability (who society often limits relationally and marking them vulnerable) address friendships as possibility for growth, joy, and well-being. (Bogdan and Taylor 1987; Pottie and Sumarah, 2004; Reimer 2009). Several authors engaged into research on friendship with people with disabilities also demonstrated people with disability capacity and potential for developing meaningful friendly relationships (Chappell 1994; Knox & Hickson 2001; Pockney, 2006). Feminist approaches to maternal experiences portray the situation where the bodily pain conditions mothers vulnerability to the anxiety, guilt and suffering, but simultaneously offers an appreciation for the interdependent nature of vulnerability resulting in self – affirmation of one self and the others (Chase & Rogers 2001; Farley 2005; Miller-McLemore 2006). Similarly, in her account on power and vulnerability of love, Gandolfo, address a few examples of women who inhabit vulnerability with courage and compassion and, despite life contradictions, demonstrated that it is possible to flourish in the midst of impossible, frightening, and painful circumstances (Evans et al. 2017; Gandolfo 2015). The outcome of threatening life circumstances even within the current pandemic (such as our human need for social contacts and communication, physical activity and play) has brought transformation and stimulated the emergence of a more resilient attitude and we more profoundly realized our human need for social contacts and dependence on other person (Borst 2020; Roseanu 2021).

Not only these narratives report situations where encountering one's own vulnerability and the vulnerability of another could result in developing more resilient attitudes, but where vulnerability serve as a stimulus/source for growth toward flourishing. For instance, people who experience economic and material poverty learn to appreciate flourishing beyond material and economic benefits which simultaneously can influence the value of *being* instead of *having*. The isolation and loneliness help realize our human need for others and simultaneously demonstrate that the fulfillment of human life is relational and dependent on the quality of one's *philia*. Providing care for others (e.g. nursing homes) despite being at risk, enables the caregivers' capacity to practice empathy, compassion and responsibility. The external vulnerabilities initiated by social and political injustices impacts the individual tendency to o

work for justice and peace. Pain makes us remove from objects and conditions that causing it, etc.

Thus, – as Gilson (2011, 310) address: “vulnerability is not just a condition that limits us, but one that can enable us, to be open, to learn new things, to love, to find comfort in the presence of others.” The particular social environment impacts and reveals not only the vulnerability of the person’s and the idea of flourishing but, when applied to life circumstances, also reveals the uniqueness of such conditions that certainly can contribute to human flourishing. Thus, the outcomes of vulnerability as circumstantial and an embedded condition revealed a process of life circumstances that interchangeably intertwined risk and openness (Collaud 2014) as well as vulnerability’s positive (e.g. resilience and compassion) and negative impacts (harm or increased vulnerability). Flourishing, within such life circumstances implies not only the experience of a person’s conceptions of what constitutes flourishing, neither is it merely a matter of objective evaluation. Rather, it is a matter of both subjective and objective evaluation, referring to its internal goals and external conception in relation to one’s circumstances and life context. (Volf and Crisp, 2015). Grounded within this premise both the concepts of flourishing and vulnerability are not merely indispensable of life circumstances and context but are interdependent within the perplexities of life circumstances. This means that, conventionally, flourishing and vulnerability as correlational include facets of intention, process, meaning, and final end. The process of living experience and life circumstances cannot be “released” from life-threatening situations such as the occurrence of vulnerability. Neither can circumstances of life-threatening situations completely prevent a person from true flourishing life. There is neither a formula informing a person how to avoid life-threatening situations nor how to achieve perfect flourishing without being exposed (Volf 2019). Rather, addressing flourishing and vulnerability as circumstantial (embedded in life circumstances and context) firstly means that concepts do not only apply to a person’s circumstances such as social, cultural, or environmental life situations, but it rather accounts for complete personhood (his/her inward and outward realities within life circumstances). The flourishing and vulnerability include personal embodiment, life experience, and life circumstances that are not exempt from suffering, life-threatening situations, inner attitudes

and dispositions, or the encounter with one's own vulnerability and vulnerability of the other.



Scheme 1. The relation between vulnerability and flourishing

Concluding remarks

What can be said at the end of this discussion: Are vulnerability and flourishing exclusive? My straightforward answer to that question is that *they are not exclusive but collaborative*. However, there is, certainly, something about the denial of vulnerability within contemporary culture on the one hand and caveats surrounding the meaning of flourishing life on the other that, within mainstream culture, tend toward a *denial* in the recognition of vulnerability as a universal human condition and a flourishing life as a vision peculiar to all despite life context and circumstances. However, my aim in this brief reflection on vulnerability and flourishing which include perspectives from academic discourses,

life context, and life circumstances stressed attention upon the notions of vulnerability and flourishing in such a way that they could be understood in relation to each other. Besides conventional agreements on the meaning of vulnerability as a condition of being easily wounded and flourishing as human desire for growth and happiness both concepts has been overtheorized and from such a reason requires a pragmatic approach, one where human experience is in the midst of such reflection. Vulnerability and flourishing, in my view, are unique, complex, and ambiguous concepts. First, the notion of vulnerability, on the one hand, is not merely the universal natural capacity to be wounded as most contemporary dictionaries demonstrated but rather a complex and controversial term that does not hinder one from flourishing. It is a human condition accompanied by a degree of recognition or denial depending on the approach undertaken. Flourishing, on the other hand, when associated with quality of life, material and economic benefits, or happiness is an inconsistent and uncertain endeavor. Even the wealthiest and luckiest among humans are threatened by the vulnerability of the human condition expressed through anxiety, periods of darkness, despair, and grief (Gilson 2011; Gandolfo 2015; MacIntyre 1999; Volf and Crisp 2015).

Going beyond its merely conceptual meaning, the correlation between vulnerability and flourishing as correlational notions within a lifespan intersects with a person's life circumstances and social relationships. This character of vulnerability and flourishing applied to life circumstances and social relationships demonstrates every person in his or her own particular way of flourishing and vulnerability and binds together vulnerable and non-vulnerable individuals within such life circumstances. In other words, human flourishing concerning the context of life experience and circumstances indicates that flourishing is not only for autonomous self-dependent individuals; rather, it is inclusive of all humans including the "more than vulnerable" (e.g. people with disabilities, women, migrants). This outlines a framework where flourishing is not a sign of a perfectly lived life or life without suffering. Joy and vulnerability are, rather, indications of life *because of suffering* and *life despite suffering* (Volf and Crisp 2015). Reaching towards a more realistic vision of vulnerability and flourishing as correlational depicts flourishing life not as utopian liberation of life from strivings, suffering,

and oppression but rather as including a person's earthly existence and the reality of life circumstances which, certainly, (besides the search for basic needs) are realities of one's strivings for personal relationships (interdependency) in settings where these are not to be found. Flourishing is not insulated from vulnerability that often involves sad feelings, anxiety, etc. regarding life circumstances. Central to this vision of flourishing and vulnerability is a push to transcend the frame in which basic needs and the goodness of ordinary life, though absolutely necessary, are also not sufficient for a flourishing life. Neither can the concept of vulnerability as an existential and contextual notion, as we have seen, impede true flourishing.

Notes

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Dr Martina Vuk

Postdoctoral Researcher & SNF Fellow
Interdisciplinary Institute of Ethics and Human Rights
University of Fribourg
Avenue Beauregard 13
CH-1700 Fribourg, Switzerland
martina.vuk@unifr.ch
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6829-3864