

ON VULNERABILITY: DISTINGUISHING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE
KNIGHT OF FAITH AND THE KNIGHT OF RESIGNATION IN KIERKEGAARD'S
FEAR AND TREMBLING

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ABSTRACT

CHRISTOPHER G. CROSS: On Vulnerability: Distinguishing Differences Between the Knight of Faith and the Knight of Resignation in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*
(Under the direction of William Lawhead)

In Søren Kierkegaard's work, *Fear and Trembling*, he describes two kinds of individuals, which he calls the knight of faith and the knight of infinite resignation. The purpose of this thesis is to consider the differences between the two. Several scholars of the work identify different characteristics that distinguish the knight of faith and the knight of infinite resignation. These characteristics include care (Mooney), courage (Carlisle), and autonomy (Lippitt). This thesis uses those three notions to suggest that another difference between the knight of faith and knight of infinite resignation is the characteristic of vulnerability.

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1. Introduction

In *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, Søren Kierkegaard prophetically writes, “Once I am dead, *Fear and Trembling* alone will be enough for an imperishable name as an author. Then it will be read, translated into foreign languages as well” (Hong & Hong, 1978 p. 6491). Kierkegaard’s prediction was accurate, and today it is one of the most widely read books in philosophy, particularly in continental philosophy. *Fear and Trembling*, written under the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio, is an existential analysis of the story of Abraham and Isaac, specifically the part where God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

Fear and Trembling is composed of several segments where de Silentio masterfully explains why Abraham is well deserving of the title, *Father of Faith*. Through his absolute duty to God, Abraham resigned himself to give up that in the finite which was most precious to him, Isaac. At the same time, he believed that by virtue of the absurd, God would return Isaac to him. Such action, belief, lifestyle, and faith causes de Silentio to structure the concept of ‘the knight of faith’ after Abraham’s actions. De Silentio’s concepts of the knight of faith and the knight of infinite resignation, one who has resigned one’s self to the infinite, are two of the most provocative concepts in *Fear and Trembling*.

The purpose of this thesis is to consider the differences between the knight of faith and the knight of infinite resignation. Several philosophers have provided commentary on these concepts, giving more insight on how things such as love, care, courage, and

autonomy all differentiate the two knights. I will argue that the concept of vulnerability is an important factor in differentiating the knight of faith from the knight of infinite resignation. To accomplish this task I will first provide background information for the text. This will include information on Kierkegaard as well as the use of the pseudonym, Johannes de Silentio. Following the background information, I will offer a brief overview of philosophical terms in *Fear and Trembling* in which I discuss de Silentio's concepts such as the 'knight of faith' and 'knight of infinite resignation.' The next section of the thesis will consist of a review of how other philosophers differentiate the knight of faith and infinite resignation. I will discuss Edward Mooney's notion of care in *Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, Clare Carlisle's concept of courage in her commentary, *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, and John Lippitt's discussion on autonomy in the *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kierkegaard and Fear and Trembling*. Lastly, I will argue my view of how the notion of vulnerability should be considered as a difference between the knight of faith and infinite resignation.

2. Background

Three years prior to the publishing of *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard obtained his degree in theology and was engaged with a woman by the name of Regine Olson. A year later, he suddenly broke off his relationship with her. Though not specified, it is believed that Kierkegaard broke off the engagement because he felt that his ethical obligations to her as husband and upstanding citizen could not coincide with his higher calling to literary and intellectual obligations. It could be considered that Kierkegaard saw his literary and intellectual obligations as fulfilling the religious ethic. In other words, by fulfilling these obligations, he believed he was obeying what God commanded him to do. Only after the end of his engagement with Olsen did he begin to write pseudonymously. *Fear and Trembling* was published under the pseudonym of Johannes de Silentio.

Johannes de Silentio's views in *Fear and Trembling* are not to be confused with Kierkegaard's own views, especially on matters of faith and God. Kierkegaard is undoubtedly a Christian. In his journals Kierkegaard specifically asks for readers to separate his own views from those of his pseudonymous creations. De Silentio is a self-proclaimed atheist. On faith, de Silentio writes, "For the movement of faith must constantly be made by the virtue of the absurd. . . . For my part, I can very well describe the movements of faith, but I cannot make them" (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 31). He writes about faith as a bard would about a praiseworthy knight (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 13). Just as the typical medieval bard never performed the same actions of the noble

knight he describes in his song, de Silentio lacks faith, and if he did, he does not ever think he could perform an act of faith in the manner that Abraham did.

Several Kierkegaardian scholars suggest that the purpose of de Silentio is understood in the epigraph found in the beginning of *Fear and Trembling*. In English it reads, “What Tarquin the Proud communicated in his garden with the beheaded poppies was understood by the son but not the messenger” (Evans, 2006, p. x). This is a reference to a story from ancient Rome where Tarquin the Proud’s son tactfully conquered the rival city of Gabii. Tarquin’s son sent a messenger to Tarquin requesting advice on the next steps to take with the city. Distrusting the messenger, Tarquin strolled through his field of poppies and cut off the heads of the tallest poppies without speaking. The messenger, though he did not understand the king’s actions, told Tarquin’s son of his father’s actions, and proceeded to eliminate the leaders of the city of Gabii. The moral of the story is that a messenger may not always understand the message that he or she must relay.

Concerning the purpose of the epigraph that opens up the text, Clare Carlisle believes that either Kierkegaard constructs Johannes to be a great hero who communicates a message about the limits of philosophy and the impossibility of faith, or Kierkegaard crafts *Fear and Trembling* as a secret message to his ex-fiancee, Regine Olson, discreetly explaining why he called off the engagement (Carlisle, 2010, pp. 26-27). Many Kierkegaardian scholars understand the purpose of the epigraph to be an analogy to the text as a whole—a complex message about faith.

At the time this book was published, Kierkegaard had finished his doctoral work at the University of Copenhagen and was considering joining the clergy of the Church of Denmark. Kierkegaard would eventually choose not to do this, due to his problems with

the Danish Church. Kierkegaard's problems with the Church of Denmark were rooted in his conviction that Christendom in Denmark, as well as Europe as a whole, was no longer genuinely religious. By religious, Kierkegaard meant unconditional commitment to faith in God. Christendom in Denmark had embraced Hegelianism, meaning that religious scholars and philosophers had come to a point where they examined the Gospels from an alleged higher perspective to show how reason alone can lead to salvation. For Kierkegaard the focus of the Christian faith ought to be on the relationship between God and the individual. This is important because in *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard regards the ethical as identical to Christendom as he currently sees it in Europe. Much of Kierkegaard's writings at the time antagonized the clergy in Denmark. Often he distributed pamphlets lamenting the hypocrisy of the clergy.

In spite of his disparaging remarks concerning Hegel, one of the main influences on Kierkegaard's writings was, in fact, G.W.F. Hegel. One popular conception of Hegel's philosophy is that it was often written using a process where the thesis and the antithesis could be resolved in a synthesis, which then becomes one half of a new thesis/antithesis pair. This is known as the dialectic. Many scholars question whether this is an accurate characterization of Hegel's method. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard seems to think of Hegel's philosophy in this way. Hegel believed that his method would eventually lead to final truth. As hinted to before, Hegel believed that the ethical was the universal. In the context of the ethical, de Silentio believes Hegel to be signifying the community in which the individual or particular takes part (Carlisle, 2010, p. 100). Therefore, the ultimate goal of the individual is to become assimilated wholly to the universal. In this way, the individual is only motivated by the best interest of all. To be more exact, Hegel believed, "It is an

ethical life that sees the highest life as one that is devoted to the furtherance of social institutions and socially sanctioned values...This ethical life sees itself in religious terms as providing salvation” (Evans, 2006, p. 2016).

The relationship between philosophy and religion was another point of contention between Kierkegaard and his Hegelian contemporaries. Hegelians saw philosophy and religion as being concerned with the same concepts and material, but “whereas religion reaches its conclusions by appeal to faith, authority, and revelation, philosophy occupies a ‘higher’ standpoint. It is able to ‘go further’ than the pictorial representations and figurative, symbolic language of religion, and deal with the same subject matter in the form of thoughts and concepts” (Lippitt, 2003, p. 39). Hegel put philosophy as higher than religion because he believed that philosophical analysis could make sense of what was being expressed in religion. On the other hand, he did not view religion as having the ability to do likewise. However, Kierkegaard disagrees with Hegel because he believes that Hegel misunderstands concepts such as faith and grace. Through the use of Johannes de Silentio, Kierkegaard challenges Hegelians on their view about philosophy being ‘higher’ than religion by asking them to make sense of Abraham’s faith. To help articulate this further, John Lippitt in his commentary on *Fear and Trembling* writes, “Any attempted account of faith which tries to proceed in a manner entirely accessible to ‘universal’ reason and expressible in publicly available language will give us a picture not of faith, but of something very different” (Lippitt, 2003, p. 39). Thus, one of the main purposes of *Fear and Trembling* is to prove that the Hegelian viewpoint of philosophy cannot make sense of Abraham’s faith. The work actively resists the idea that faith is inferior to philosophy for the reason that faith cannot be universalized. Faith cannot be

something that everyone can access through pure reason and intellect. The purpose of *Fear and Trembling* is best expressed in Evans's *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, where he writes:

The point of the book is not to help us get clearer about ethics, but to help us get clearer about faith. De Silentio appears to think that the gravest danger on this score is the confusion of faith with the ethical life in precisely the Hegelian sense. The error he fears most is that of thinking a person who is 'nice' or 'good' in a conventional sense, who fulfills the social responsibilities assigned to him or her, therefore possesses faith. This is the attitude of 'Christendom', the attitude that assumes that we all have faith and that faith is something easy, natural, and immediate. (Evans, 2004, p. 75).

3. Summary of Fear and Trembling

Johannes de Silentio composes the dialectic, *Fear and Trembling*, in several parts. The beginning of the dialectal lyric begins with a preface by the author, Johannes de Silentio, where he discusses his discontent with Christendom and its concepts of faith and religion during his time. He also mentions here that he is no philosopher and does not claim to understand faith, but he does in fact wish to use this book to explain what faith is not. The Exordium is next in the book. It tells a story of a man who is obsessed with the story of Abraham and Isaac, also known as the Akedah. As he tries to become more familiar with the text, it becomes increasingly more incomprehensible to him. The man imagines four possible scenarios of the story of Abraham and Isaac along with corresponding analogies for each scenario involving a mother weaning her child.

Following the Exordium, de Silentio writes an interesting section entitled, “Eulogy on Abraham” where he explains how he sees Abraham as the father of faith because of how he handled God’s test of him. After this comes the bulk of the text, which he splits into three problems. Problema One, considers whether there is actually a teleological suspension of the ethical. Problema Two, asks the question, is there an absolute duty to God? The last Problema discusses the ethics of Abraham willfully concealing the test of his faith from Sarah, Eliezer, and Isaac. In the Epilogue, De Silentio finishes *Fear and Trembling* by dismissing, once again, the view that faith is not enough, and that humans must strive to go further than faith. He discusses how faith is

the highest essential human passion. Therefore, he ends the epilogue by saying that faith is something that believers cannot surpass regardless of their most valiant efforts.

4. Key Concepts in *Fear and Trembling*

Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* discusses several philosophical themes and concepts that are crucial to Kierkegaard's philosophy even outside of *Fear and Trembling*. Essential to understanding the philosophical issues in *Fear and Trembling* is to understand that the book is a dialectic. Several of his concepts involve the Hegelian use of the dialectic of synthesizing the truth through reasoning between the antithesis and thesis.

Hegel's system of ethics plays a major role in understanding concepts in the book as well. Kierkegaard later incorporates them in his "stages of life's way." There are three different stages of life. The first is the aesthetic, which primarily concerns the responses of the individual dealing with basic sensory experience. The next stage is the ethical. The ethical is defined as the expression of actions that uphold societal and cultural values. Understanding the ethical stage lays the foundation for understanding Kierkegaard's concepts of the teleological suspension of the ethical, the knight of faith, and the knight of infinite resignation. It is important to note that the ethical is the last stage for Hegel. For Kierkegaard, the highest level is the religious. In *Fear and Trembling*, the religious is defined as the state of being of the individual when he or she is in absolute relation to the divine, or absolute. For Abraham, adhering to the religious ethic consisted of his obedience to the divine command to sacrifice Isaac. The knight of faith adheres to the religious ethic at all times. The authentic life, a life completely devoted to God, is only capable through the religious ethic.

The teleological suspension of the ethical is essentially when a person of faith obeys a command of God that goes against societal ethical norms. When God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham performed the teleological suspension of the ethical. As mentioned before, de Silentio dedicates the first Problem of *Fear and Trembling* to this concept, asking the question, “Is there truly a teleological suspension of the ethical?” He concludes that there is in fact a teleological suspension of the ethical in the story of Abraham and Isaac. He comes to this conclusion because he argues that obeying a command from God puts Abraham in relation to the absolute, which is God. Thus, a command from God of this nature, specifically to him as the particular, would mean that Abraham would be asserting his particularity over that of the universal. Again, the audience that de Silentio intends this book for believes that the ethical is the universal and one is ethically obligated to negate one’s singularity to assimilate into the universal. So they would understand Abraham’s actions to be going against the ethical (Hannay, Marino, 1998, p. 263). Johannes states, “Defined immediately as a sensuous and physical being, the single individual is the particular that has its telos in the universal, and it is his ethical task constantly to express himself in this, to annul his particularity in order to become the universal” (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 46). So Abraham has no choice but to suspend the ethical. Once being in relation to God, his new telos is *God* and no longer the universal. One Kierkegaardian scholar puts it this way, “In suspending the ethical, Abraham moves entirely outside the sphere of ethics” (Hannay, Marino, 1998, p. 263). Another asserts, “In the infamous teleological suspension of the ethical, the religious is seen to trump the ethical, not to abolish it but to relativize it” (Martens, Evans, 2016, p. 18).

Abraham performs the teleological suspension of the ethical, because of his faith in God. Johannes believes that faith consists of a “double movement.” The double movement consists of the first step, “infinite resignation” and the second, a movement of faith. Infinite resignation is the relinquishing of the finite to gain “eternal consciousness.” Eternal consciousness, is what is obtained when one has conceded one’s earthly attachments, possessions, and desires to God, so that only a love for God remains. Concerning eternal consciousness, Mooney (1991) portrays it as a new life view unconcerned and free from the petty things that shape our temporal and finite existence (p. 49). De Silentio understands the act of resignation to be a “purely philosophical move” made possible by nothing more than one’s mental and physical faculties (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. , p. 41).

The double movement is that of both embracing infinite resignation and making the movement of faith. For de Silentio, the movement of faith is when the knight of faith joyfully accepts the finite that was given up in infinite resignation. De Silentio says that this occurs by “virtue of the absurd.” De Silentio does not state what the virtue of the absurd is exactly. Different scholars have different interpretations of what he means by it. Edward Mooney (1991) writes on this elusive matter, “ Because the poet-narrator lacks the conceptual-experience repertoire available to the marvelous figure he venerates, the knight of faith appears, to the poet, to have acquired faith ‘on strength of the absurd’” (p. 56). Clare Carlisle (2010) interprets the virtue of the absurd in *Fear and Trembling* to be the paradox of “living a contradiction between finite and infinite, between impossibility and possibility, that is irreconcilable in human terms” (p. 93). Johannes believes that it is by the virtue of the absurd because he believes there is no other explainable way in which

Abraham could still receive Isaac back. This is the faith that Johannes himself cannot imitate or emulate. He writes, “For the movement of faith must constantly be made by virtue of the absurd . . . I make the movements of infinity, whereas faith does the opposite; after having made the movements of infinity, it makes those of finitude” (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 31). The knight of faith is one who does what de Silentio cannot do, and that is embracing that which was given up in resignation.

5. Differences Between the Knight of Faith and the Knight of Infinite Resignation

De Silentio describes Abraham as the knight of faith in the following way:

During all this time he believed; he believed that God would not demand Isaac of him, while he still was willing to sacrifice him if it was demanded. He believed by virtue of the absurd, for human calculation was out of the question, and it was indeed absurd that God, who demanded it of him, in the next instant would revoke the demand. He climbed the mountain, and even at the moment when the knife gleamed he believed — that God would not demand Isaac. He was no doubt surprised then at the outcome, but by a double movement, he had regained his original condition and therefore received Isaac more joyfully than the first time.

(Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 29)

This passage describes the actions of Abraham that makes de Silentio deem him a knight of faith. The first movement Abraham makes is a movement of resignation. The movement of resignation manifests itself in the decision to be at peace with the command that God requires of him. To give up the finite completely for the infinite is how the move is executed. De Silentio writes, “The act of resigning does not require faith, for what I gain in resignation is eternal consciousness. . . . For whenever something finite gets beyond my control, I starve myself until I make the movement, for my eternal

consciousness is my love for God...I renounce everything; this movement I make by myself “ (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 41). The next movement that is made, is one of faith. Concerning the movement of faith, de Silentio writes:

By faith, I do not renounce anything; on the contrary, by faith I receive everything . . . A purely human courage is required to renounce the whole of temporality in order to gain the eternal, but this I gain and never in all eternity can renounce without self-contradiction. But it takes a paradoxical and humble courage next to grasp the whole of temporality by virtue of the absurd, and that is the courage of faith (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 41).

These double movements create a paradox. The first movement requires one to give up all of the finite and the temporal and accept that what will be, will be, and yet the other is a movement of hope, believing by the virtue of the absurd that one will receive that which was given up in resignation. Again, the most distinguishing difference between the knight of faith and the knight of infinite resignation is that the knight of infinite resignation has only made the first half of the paradoxical double movement. Abraham’s movement of resignation was obeying the command to sacrifice Isaac. If he had never had any hope and faith to have Isaac returned to him, then he would have been a knight of infinite resignation, regardless if God stopped him from sacrificing Isaac or not. This is what Johannes means when he mentions, “for whoever has made the infinite move with all the infinity of his soul, of his own accord and on his own responsibility, and cannot do more, only keeps Isaac with pain” (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 29). Again, one of the major differences between the two is the knight of infinite resignation can be thought of

as prerequisite or a step on the way to becoming the knight of faith. In this section, I will discuss how several Kierkegaardian scholars argue how notions of care, courage, and autonomy differentiate the knight of faith from the knight of infinite resignation.

Dr. Edward Mooney, in his book entitled, *Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, says a defining difference between the knight of faith and the knight of infinite resignation, is the notion of care. He does this through explaining the difference between resignation and faith, exploring how the notion of selfless concern factors into this, and explaining the relationship between faith and care.

Mooney uses de Silentio's illustration of the knight and the princess as he talks about the notion of care. Mooney writes, "For the knight of resignation, to gain 'eternal consciousness' would be to gain a vantage point free from the constricting push and pull of the many petty things that shape the ordinary flow of time. . . . In making the movement of infinity, the knight of resignation wins some freedom from the push and pull of worldly things. In touch with 'absolutes' like God or spirit" (Mooney, 1991, p. 49). For the knight, the princess represents the focus of his identity and through renouncing her, she simply becomes another petty attachment to the world for him. Through renouncing her, the knight gains a new life perspective, meaning, "His life is no longer focused by concern for a finite individual. His standpoint is now outside the flux of petty, worldly things. It represents the possibility of surviving the crushing loss of the princess . . . The knight discovers peace and repose and consolation in the pain" (Mooney, 1991, p. 49). Essentially, what Mooney is saying is that through resignation, or renouncing the finite, one disables the power of the finite to provoke a reaction of care,

such as passion or pain. Gaining an ‘eternal consciousness’ allows for the knight of infinite resignation’s only care to be that of the infinite—God. Because his whole existence is now rooted in the infinite, the finite no longer affects him. Therefore, losing the princess no longer has a hold on him. Mooney concludes this segment on the knight of infinite resignation by honing in on the complete embrace of the infinite by the knight. He writes:

The God or absolute he embraces is a God of love, a love “totally incommensurate with the finite.” Through resignation, then, the knight wins a threefold transfiguration of existence. Transfigured first is the tie between the knight and his princess: An earthly, finite love becomes an idealized, eternal love. Then, the object of love is transfigured: A love of the princess becomes a love of God. And finally, the lover himself becomes transfigured: His integrity now is based not on a finite tie to another, but on his “eternal consciousness,” on his grasp of a point of leverage on the finite (Mooney, 1991, p. 50).

Next Mooney spells out the difference between the concepts of resignation and faith. Concerning this, he writes, “Resignation is but a halfway house, not a destination. Something is surely wrong with the wholesale renunciation of the finite, a defect promptly corrected by the knight of faith . . . He gains an eternal love, but temporal loves are his as well. He is at home in the eternal, but happy also in the midst of the world” (Mooney, 1991, p. 50). The idea that resignation is “not a destination” emphasizes the earlier stated claim that de Silentio makes where he states that one must first become a knight of resignation in the process of becoming a knight of faith.

Moreover, the knight of faith and the knight of resignation are almost indistinguishable (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, pp. 32-33). Mooney retells de Silentio's example of the knight of faith shopkeeper returning home from work, expecting a great meal by his wife. De Silentio writes, "Towards evening he goes home, his steps tireless as a postman's. On the way, it occurs to him that this wife will surely have some special little warm dish for his return . . . As it happens he hasn't a penny, and yet he firmly believes his wife has that delicacy waiting for him . . . If his wife doesn't have the dish, curiously enough, he is exactly the same" (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 33). Mooney goes on to comment on this, saying, "He is not unsettled or disappointed when his dish is 'impossible.' This is the sign of his renouncing the finite. But he also shows a delightful anticipation of his meal, even if it should be taken away. And this is the sign of his harmony with the finite . . . He is unperturbed by the change. Yet unlike the knight of resignation, he has in no way diminished his care for even the least particularity of his existence" (Mooney, 1991, p. 52). In Mooney's opinion, if the shopkeeper was a knight of infinite resignation, then he would be unable to have the joy of coming home to find that there was, in fact, a meal prepared for him. Mooney would argue that the only way to have that joy would be to still have some type of care for the finite, however, the knight of infinite resignation has "written the finite off completely" (Mooney, 1991, p. 50). Mooney adds that the knight of faith, because of his faith, still has cared for the finite and the temporal. Because of this, the knight of faith can "move back into the world, finding the taste of the finite good" (Mooney, 1991, p. 50). This is only possible through faith which achieves things "on strength of the absurd." Mooney believes that in no way can resignation alone allow for the joy that comes with gaining

that which was given up—only faith can. Therefore, with Abraham, Mooney argues that Abraham never gave up his love and care for Isaac. Not once did he stop being a loving father or envisioned his life without Isaac. That is why faith allowed him to receive him back more joyfully a second time.

After laying out the difference between faith and resignation, Mooney discusses the concepts of proprietary claim and selfless concern. To Mooney, care is linked to proprietary rights. By proprietary rights, I take Mooney to mean rights that are linked to things one may exclusively own and which possesses value of some sort. He says, “Care gets entwined with possessiveness and a capacity for hurt, should possession-related rights be violated. One way to cancel this capacity for hurt is to renounce our proprietary claims...Much of the stoic hardening of the self to disappointment and change can be interpreted as narrowing the area of proprietary claim” (Mooney, 1991, p 53). Mooney suggests that when the knight renounces his princess, he also renounces his claims of her. In doing so he shields himself from any pain that may come because of her such as her marrying another man. Giving up the proprietary claim saves the knight from the hurt of losing the finite.

Next Mooney says, “But not all cases of love or care are tied up with a proprietary claim. A concern that foregoes proprietary claim one could call a selfless concern. Such concern or love would be care entirely distinct from the assertion of rights—unless one wanted to speak of the right of the object cared for to its own independence” (Mooney, 1991, p. 54). To understand what Mooney says here, consider a man enjoying and anticipating a deer coming to feed on the corn in his garden. The man would not claim to have any rights over this scene even if anything in it becomes the object of his

enjoyment. He would be angered and hurt if someone tried to harm the deer or bring an end to his enjoyable scene, but the scene always ends because the deer will eventually leave. The man would just have to “adjust himself to its going and comings” (Mooney, 1991, p. 54). The joy of the man at the return of the deer “need be no less for my lacking proprietary claim over it, and his care need be no less for his lacking bitterness or indignation, should it be lost forever” (Mooney, 1991, p. 54). With this illustration, it is now comprehensible how the knight of faith can renounce and enjoy the finite. Mooney writes, “He sees or knows in his bones that renouncing all claims on the finite is not renouncing all care for it. . . . The knight of resignation . . . cannot distinguish, blurs together, these sorts of concern . . . To him, it seems impossible that one might renounce all claim and yet in a worldly sense still love” (Mooney, 1991, p. 54). Of course, the knight of faith can both resign and preserve his love by the strength of the absurd.

When discussing faith and the absurd, Mooney constantly mentions the fact that de Silentio is not someone of Christian faith. De Silentio admires faith the same way in which a poet admires the hero which is the subject of the writer’s poem. Mooney writes, “Because the poet-narrator lacks the conceptual-experiential repertoire available to the marvelous figure he venerates, the knight of faith appears, to the poet, to have acquired faith ‘on strength of the absurd’” (Mooney pg 56). Mooney believes that de Silentio misunderstands the concept of faith. He concedes that de Silentio understands that faith believes the impossible, both the belief that the knight’s princess is lost and the belief that he will have her returned to him. Mooney believes that de Silentio fails to understand that what appears to be a contradiction, is in fact not always the case. Mooney writes:

What now appears to Johannes as wild hope or an unintelligible contradiction in beliefs can be understood as a complex test of care. A surface absurdity remains: Love is and is not possible; the princess will and will not be returned. But these conflicting beliefs do not simply cancel each other out. A kind of deep structure opens up to ease the logical offense. They function as separate measures of commitment and care. Care is measured as a person's capacity for grief and dread, and as a person's capacity for joy, welcome, and delight (Mooney, 1991, p. 56).

What Mooney is arguing is that the knight of faith's care is seen in both resignation and faith. Resignation brings the feelings of deep grief and dread through the loss of the finite. Through faith, receiving the finite back brings joy, welcome, and delight. Again, Mooney stresses that the difference between the knight of faith and the knight of infinite resignation is that the knight of faith does not relinquish care of the finite.

Dr. Clare Carlisle offers a different claim concerning the difference between the knight of infinite resignation and the knight of faith. In her book, *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, she makes the argument that the features that distinguish between the knight of faith and knight of infinite resignation are the notions of courage and autonomy.

Carlisle (2010) says:

The difference between resignation and faith turns on the question of courage: in order to make the movement of resignation, the individual has to face, come to terms with, and accept her suffering—but the courage of faith is something more. In clarifying what this 'something more' consists in, the true difficulty and value of faith's courage become evident (p. 80).

Carlisle starts her argument by stating that Johannes, like the knight of infinite resignation, accepts the suffering of resignation, but the courage of faith is something more. De Silentio's courage is only that of taking the move of infinite resignation, which is a feat within itself. De Silentio writes, "I have looked frightful in the eye: I do not timidly flee from it but know very well that even if I approach it very bravely my courage is not the courage of faith . . . I am not cowardly enough to whine and wail, but neither am I perfidious enough to deny that faith is something much higher. I can well endure living in my own fashion" (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 28). Carlisle argues that which Johannes lacks the courage to do is to have faith and believe that God loves him. In choosing to believe that God loves him, it would require a personal relationship with God in which God cared for the particulars of his life. If God cared for the particulars in the knight's life, then Carlisle believes Johannes would understand why God would allow for the princess to be lost. Carlisle writes, "For Johannes, God's love is a 'thought', an idea that is sometimes present for him and sometimes absent; and it is impersonal insofar as it is an idea about the nature of God. The proposition that 'God is love', however fervently it is believed, is different from the belief that 'God loves me'" (Carlisle, 2010, p. 81). The pain that the loss has caused his existence is incompatible with his idea of having belief in a loving God. In regard to the pain that is caused by the command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Carlisle would argue that the Johannes would fail to see how a God that cares would cause such a thing. Carlisle writes, "Resignation requires the courage to accept suffering, instead of trying to deny it or avoid it; faith requires the courage to be loved by God—and this is a paradoxical and humble courage" (Carlisle, 2010, p. 81).

Carlisle believes the courage the knight of faith possesses is paradoxical, and the paradoxical nature of it can be seen in the concept of expectancy. In resignation, which Carlisle argues is continually made at every moment, the knight of infinite resignation has expectations linked to his resignation to the infinite. Because God is the infinite, the knight expects only that which is spiritual, meaning he does not expect to receive anything in this life. Since the act of resignation is a constant activity throughout his life, he essentially determines what happens in his life, but more importantly how he feels about his life, which is a stoic approach. This is all dependent upon the knight.

The knight of faith differs, according to Carlisle, because the knight of faith in making the movement of faith, is expecting to gain the finite which was given up. Gaining the finite back would mean that it happened not by his own activity, but of God. Carlisle explains it by saying, “Having faith means receptivity rather than productive activity. Having faith means receiving Isaac—and, in more general terms, receiving one’s finite existence—as a gift from God, that is to say, a sign or manifestation of God’s love for me as a particular, existing individual” (Carlisle, 2010, p. 83). Therefore, Carlisle establishes how the concept of autonomy distinguishes the difference between the two knights. Resignation is, in fact, a human movement. The movement of faith involves being vulnerable to God’s power so that the whole of the finite world is taken to rest upon it being a gift from God. Carlisle (2010) writes:

Before resignation, a person is under the illusion that her life is her own, and more generally that the finite world is complete and self-sufficient; for the faith that follows after resignation, her life, and the whole of finitude in which is lived, is grounded in God and only belongs to her insofar as it is given as a gift. From a

subjective point of view, this means that the person's relationship to her life is not just an aspect of her being but its very core, life is itself transfigured (p. 87).

In the *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kierkegaard and Fear and Trembling*, philosopher John Lippitt gives an extraordinary commentary on *Fear and Trembling*. In it he discusses at length both the knight of faith and infinite resignation. For Lippitt, since resignation can be achieved completely by one's own self and power, and the act of resignation can be understood, he asserts that the difference between the knight of faith and knight of infinite resignation is the knight of infinite resignation is self-sufficient or autonomous.

Lippitt looks to Johannes' story of the lad and his princess to illustrate the self-sufficiency of the knight of infinite resignation. Johannes tells a story of a young lad that falls in love with a princess. The young knight madly loves the princess though he will never be with her. Concerning the young lad, de Silentio writes, "the whole content of his life consists in this love, and yet the relation is such that it cannot be realized, cannot possibly be translated from ideality into reality" (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 35). However, he still persists in his love for the princess even when others discourage him. The others, according to both de Silentio and Lippitt are those who see the lad's love for the princess as a bad risk. However, the lad understands his love and commitment to the princess not as a risk, but the content of his life—the finite. Lippitt writes, "His love for her is unconditional, and to a large extent his sense of self is determined by it; it is an identity-conferring commitment. Such an unconditional commitment is a necessary prerequisite to the movement of infinite resignation" (Lippitt, 2003 p. 47). This quote may go against the idea of the knight of infinite resignation being autonomous over his

life because it mentions his sense of self being determined by his love for the princess. However, his choosing to love her in the first place and allowing his love for her to have such an effect on his life, is an autonomous decision.

As the story goes, the lad does not get the princess, despite his vast amounts of love for her. However, this is where Lippitt sees the movement of infinite resignation to be made. Lippitt writes, “Despite the fact that this love is central to the lad’s sense of self, he renounces it in resignation. In other words, he renounces that which is most precious to him in the finite world. In this way, a vital part of his identity is lost. Yet in doing so, an important change takes place . . . in renouncing something finite, he gains something infinite” (Lippitt. 2003. p. 46). The love for the finite— becomes the love for the infinite. In the text, de Silentio describes this as gaining an ‘eternal consciousness.’ De Silentio writes:

The love for the princess became for him the expression of eternal love, assumed a religious character, was transfigured into a love of the eternal being, which to be sure denied the fulfillment of the love but still reconciled him once again in the eternal consciousness of its validity in an eternal form that no actuality can take from him (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, pp. 36-37).

The love essentially becomes internalized and transformed into a love for God. Lippitt notes that this is how this particular ‘eternalization’ actually occurs (Lippitt, 2003, p. 47). The lad can take peace in this. Essentially the lad makes himself believe that this love for God is the only thing that should concern him. His existence becomes linked to this new love for God. Lippitt states that though he is has not given up complete care for the finite, but that the care for the finite has been drastically diminished. Lippitt writes on this

matter, “This is not to say that his viewpoint is indistinguishable from the kind of view that preaches total non-attachment. There is a certain kind of ‘stoic hardening of the self to disappointment.’”(Lippitt, 2003, p. 47). Throughout all of this, every action that the lad does, is done on his own accord. Choosing to love the princess, resignation, and the ‘eternalization’ have all been self-willed. Lippitt understands resignation to be achievable as a function of one’s own will. Because of this, resignation can be done if one disciplines himself. This also makes it understandable. Lippitt writes, “Though resignation is no mean achievement, requiring ‘strength and energy and freedom of spirit,’ all of this can be understood as something that human being can achieve under their own lights” (Lippitt, 2003, p. 48).

6. On Vulnerability

In this section, I discuss my view that vulnerability is the defining difference between the knight of faith and the knight of infinite resignation. Recent literature on the concept of vulnerability defines it in relation to care ethics, bioethics, sociology, and political philosophy. None of the literature I have surveyed mentions a connection between vulnerability and faith. However, for this thesis, I will use the literature's more broad and general definitions for the term.

Vulnerability can be defined in many different ways. In an article entitled, "Vulnerability and Resilience: A Critical Nexus," the author describes vulnerability as a "universal, inevitable, enduring aspect of our humanity" (Lotz, 2016, p. 47). In her book, *Wounded Heroes: Vulnerability as a Virtue in Ancient Greek Literature and Philosophy*, M.B. McCoy (2014) has the following to say on vulnerability:

Etymologically, 'being vulnerable' means capable of being wounded (from its Latin root, *vulnus* or wound). Thus vulnerability, as the capacity to be hurt, is distinct from the state of actually being harmed or suffering pain. Instead of communicating the actual experience of pain or harm, the term communicates the possibility of such experience, and self-awareness of its possibility. One can know of one's own capacity to be wounded directly, by experiencing suffering, but may also know it in significant ways in the anticipation of harm, in its likelihood. To this extent, vulnerability concerns not only the present moment, but also the future. Vulnerability is a part of the human condition that is concerned with living as temporal creatures who undergo change and transformations of various sorts

and who live with an awareness of the likelihood of change. At times these changes are joyful or satisfying, at times painful or needful. A self-conscious and aware person understands the meaning of his or her life in terms of a larger temporal whole, of which vulnerability forms one part. (p. vii)

McCoy understands vulnerability as being indicative of important aspects of human existence, such as change, human finitude, and temporality. It seems that she believes that an important part of our self-knowledge is knowing what affects us or transforms us. Essentially, this means knowing one's own vulnerability. One thing that affects and transforms a person, especially their existence, is faith. In *Fear and Trembling*, faith is considered to be "the highest passion in a human being," and undoubtedly, one's passions can determine what one is vulnerable to in life (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 108).

Furthermore, faith is something which de Silentio believes is just like love, in the sense that one's interactions with it can shape and mold one's existence. He writes, "But the one who has come to faith does not come to a standstill in faith. Indeed he would be shocked if someone said this to him, just as the lover would feel indignant if one said he had come to a standstill in love, for he would answer, 'I am not standing still at all since I have my life in it'" (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 109). The young lover is continuously changed as he grows more in love. He allows himself to be vulnerable to it. In the same way one is vulnerable to love and changed by it, being vulnerable to faith causes one to change in the same fashion.

Erin Gilson in his article "Vulnerability, Ignorance, and Oppression," defines vulnerability in multiple ways, one being "a basic kind of openness to being affected and affecting in both positive and negative ways" (Gilson, 2011, p. 310). This definition of

vulnerability is similar to the definition that McCoy gives. Concerning vulnerability, Gilson writes, “Vulnerability is an unavoidable feature of human existence . . . the notion of vulnerability carries with it some normative force; vulnerability is something that demands our attention and calls for repose” (Gilson, 2011, p. 309). Also, Gilson cautions against defining vulnerability in a purely negative light because it should not be “construed as a generalizable weakness.” One of the main points he wishes for readers to understand about vulnerability is that it is not always a weakness. He stresses that vulnerability is about openness to change. He writes:

Thus, vulnerability is understood to be a more general term encompassing conceptions of passivity, affectivity, openness to change, dispossession, and exposure, which are the basis for certain fundamental structures of subjectivity, language and sociality. Taken in this way, a fundamental state, vulnerability is a condition of potential that makes possible other conditions. Being vulnerable makes it possible to suffer, to fall prey to violence and be harmed, but also to fall in love, to learn, to take pleasure and find comfort in the presence of others, and to experience the simultaneity of these feelings. Vulnerability is not just a condition that limits us but one that can enable us. As potential, vulnerability is a condition to openness, openness to being affected and affecting in turn (Gilson, 2011, p. 310).

Again, Gilson’s definition is quite similar to that of McCoy’s definition. However, Gilson’s definition states that the condition of being vulnerable is an enabling condition. This means that vulnerability gives power of some sort, affirming it as a possible

strength. Thus, if being vulnerable is a strength, then this means that it is something good, something desirable in the same sense as a virtue is desirable.

McCoy's and Gilson's definitions of vulnerability offer various insights on the notion of vulnerability. It is these definitions which will be used when using the term vulnerability.

An initial, superficial reading of *Fear and Trembling* does not lead one to perceive the theme of vulnerability throughout the text. Only through rigorous analysis can one see how vulnerability is a crucial theme throughout this text. If vulnerability is defined as stated above, then *Fear and Trembling* is in fact a text about vulnerability. De Silentio opens the Preface with a bold assertion that the Christendom of his day needs a drastic change in what it values; he perceives Europe as spiraling towards a spiritual decline (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006,, p. 3). In the Epilogue, de Silentio mentions the story of a Dutch merchant company that dumped some of its product in the sea to inflate the price of the remaining stock, and suggests that something similar should be done to reverse the spiritual decline he sees in Europe (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006,, p. 107). In *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, Clare Carlisle writes, "*Fear and Trembling* represents precisely an attempt to arrest and reverse a perceived spiritual decline, comparable to the merchants sinking their spices in the sea" (Carlisle, 2010, p. 30). This would mean that de Silentio wants Christendom to let go of anything that was not faith, or devalued faith such as their embrace of Hegelian views on faith. It seems that de Silentio believes that the action that must be needed to be taken is for European Christendom to embrace true faith—becoming vulnerable to God.

It is not that the modern philosophers and Christians of de Silentio's day were atheists, but they believed they had to 'go further' than faith. Using Cartesian Doubt and

being students of Hegelian philosophy, Johannes's contemporaries believed that philosophy should be used as a tool to conceptualize faith (Lippitt, 2003, p. 14). Thus to 'go further' than faith meant to view faith and doubt as things of lesser quality and value than reason and intellect. To 'go further' than faith meant that identification as a Christian meant nothing more than being a part of the state church, not an identity marked by an individual who has a relationship with God predicated on faith "being the things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."¹ On the meaning of going further, one Kierkegaardian scholar writes that the meaning of "going further" means that:

. . . one can *outgrow* religion, that one can easily proceed to a spiritual position *well beyond faith*. . . . The pervasive struggle for personal advance is thereby obscured. Doubts or uncertainties are nicely smoothed over or erased through clever intellectual 'solutions' to life's deep-set conflicts or oppositions. And this good fortune is as *accessible* as the daily paper (Mooney, 1991, p. 22).

Central to the Danish Church belief at the time, the 'telos of life' was absolute knowledge which could only be acquired through reason and intellect, rather than faith. Essential to this way of thinking is the preference for objectivity and collectivism over subjectivity and individuality. This is problematic for Johannes because not only does he see faith as extremely valuable but also as a life-long task. When he states, "Even if one were able to convert the whole content of faith into conceptual form, it does not follow that one has comprehended faith, comprehended how one entered into it or how it entered into one," he is implying that there is something personal, subjective, and individualistic about faith. He is implying that faith is something that changes a person, or at least has

¹ Hebrews 11:1

some type of effect on a person. And if a person can be changed or affected by faith, then there must be some level of susceptibility to change or some connection to vulnerability. So when de Silentio says that “Faith is the highest passion in a human being. There are perhaps many in every generation who do not even come to it, but nobody goes further,” he means that faith is a passion that changes people (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 108). Furthermore, I believe Johannes would argue that even if one could ‘go further’ than faith, it would not be because of reason and intellect, but something outside of human ability.

Besides being a major theme of the work, the notion of vulnerability is seen throughout *Fear and Trembling* in other ways. It is best shown in the way in which it differentiates the knight of faith from the knight of infinite resignation. In this section I will argue that the teleological suspension of the ethical is an act of vulnerability. This requires a thorough analysis of Problem I where de Silentio considers the question of whether or not there is a teleological suspension of the ethical.

When we mention vulnerability and being vulnerable, it is usually in relation to something. As mentioned earlier, to be vulnerable can be being susceptible, or being in a state to be positively or negatively affected. Vulnerability can manifest itself in many ways. A newborn is vulnerable to many aspects of its environment. Having a sickness such as an autoimmune deficiency disease puts one in a state of vulnerability. The reason why many organisms live together in communities is to minimize vulnerability to the environment and predators. As humans, we construct laws, customs, and norms to minimize the negative effects that can come with being vulnerable, and at the same time to create a structure for protection. For example, there are laws mandating parents to

protect, educate, and nurture their children so that they can survive. In doing so, it not only minimizes them being susceptible to danger, but also maximizes their susceptibility to factors that will increase their potential for survival. Choosing to step out or go against these societal norms, laws, and customs can cause one to be vulnerable as well. De Silentio would consider this to be going against the 'ethical.' This is just what de Silentio would refer to as the particular asserting itself above the universal (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 47).

De Silentio's audience would understand the 'ethical' in the Hegelian sense of the term. Setting out the Hegelian view, Johannes writes:

The ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone, which may be expressed from another angle by saying that it is in force at every moment. It rests immanently in itself, has nothing outside itself that is its telos, but is itself the telos for everything outside itself, and when the ethical has assimilated this into itself it goes further. Defined immediately as a sensuous and psychological being, the single individual is the particular that has its telos in the universal, and it is his ethical task constantly to express himself in this, to annul his particularity in order to become the universal. (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 47).

Johannes's audience in his age believed that there is no higher stage of life than to be completely assimilated into the ethical. This means that every aspect of their lives are aligned with the customs, beliefs, and laws that make them a collective body, free from the vulnerabilities of subjectivity and individualism. Defying this system, in their opinion, would make one vulnerable to temptation and sin. Believing in the Hegelian idea

of the ethical would mean that one's salvation is one and the same as the ethical, because there exists no other higher telos than the goal of the ethical. *Fear and Trembling* states, "Whenever the single individual feels an urge to assert himself as the particular after having entered into the universal, he is in a state of temptation from which he can extricate himself only by repentantly surrendering himself as the particular to the universal" (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006., p. 47). Therefore, when Abraham follows God's command to travel to Mt. Moriah and sacrifice Isaac, he is defying the ethical. He asserts his particularity over the universal. He makes this action out of faith and obedience to God. This action is what de Silentio identifies as the teleological suspension of the ethical.

The teleological suspension of the ethical is essentially a situation in which the ethical and the universal is suspended for a higher telos or goal. The higher telos for Abraham is fulfilling God's command. C. Stephen Evans states it eloquently in his introduction to Sylvia Walsh's translation of *Fear and Trembling* by saying, "If Abraham's faith is to make any sense, God must be a transcendent, personal reality. A relationship with God must be 'the highest good' for the sake of which the socially assigned roles that make up 'the ethical' are relativized (teleologically suspended). There can be duties to such a God that are not reducible to the duties given by one's human social relations" (Evans, 2006, p. xxiv). To suspend the ethical, and to enter into absolute relation to God, means that one cedes autonomy over one's life to God. Going from the ethical to the religious means entering a state of vulnerability because one is no longer in charge of his or her life. The suspension of the ethical completely exposes oneself to the other, in this context, God.

This makes more sense when considering that faith for de Silentio is a paradox. The paradox is that the individual becomes higher than the universal in such a way that the particular is superior to the universal; the particular becomes in absolute relationship with the absolute which is God (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 48). Through entering in relationship with the absolute, a person, the particular, becomes vulnerable to God and God only. This vulnerability to God changes the person in such a way that he or she are no longer confined by the universal. This also eliminates the need for Abraham to justify his actions in accordance with the ethical, because being vulnerable before God makes him only liable to God. Therefore, Abraham had no other choice but to perform the teleological suspension of the ethical. Performing the teleological suspension of the ethical is one of the things that makes Abraham a knight of faith as opposed to a knight of infinite resignation.

Because the knight of faith is one who performs the teleological suspension of the ethical, then the knight of faith is one who sees himself as higher than the universal, is one who understands that the paradox of faith makes all ethical duties relative to the absolute duty towards God, and is one who is vulnerable to God. However, there is more to what constitutes a knight of faith. To understand what a knight of faith is, then one must know of the knight of infinite resignation. One should not assume that the knight of infinite resignation is the opposite of the knight of faith. In fact, there are similarities between the two. Furthermore, it can be argued that to even become a knight of faith, one must at first be a knight of infinite resignation. The major difference between the two is that the knight of faith has faith and a relationship that allows him to be vulnerable with God, while the knight of infinite resignation does not embrace such vulnerability. The

knight of infinite resignation, through resignation, chooses not to be vulnerable. The knight of faith allows himself to become vulnerable with the absolute—God. Giving up the finite, that which he loves, and at the same time, having faith that it would be returned to him, makes him vulnerable—the ability to be hurt, to be uncertain, alone.

If by choosing to suspend the ethical to obey a higher duty isolates Abraham, and if Abraham only makes a movement of resignation, then he would have embraced vulnerability of some sort as the knight of infinite resignation. Abraham, as the knight of infinite resignation, is bold in going against the ethical, such as societal laws against murder and laws to protect one's child. However, it does not mean that the knight of infinite resignation has faith, nor that every knight of infinite resignation embraces vulnerability.

Johannes describes the knight of infinite resignation as someone like himself. Concerning resignation, C. Stephen Evans says, "Resignation gives up the finite and the temporal for the sake of the infinite and the eternal . . . Resignation is fully rational, requires no leap of faith by virtue of the absurd. . . . Resignation involves the discovery that not everything in life can be understood using the categories of a rational, social ethic" (Evans, 2006, p. 216). Though the knight of infinite resignation goes against the ethical, Johannes argues that it is not the same as faith. Infinite resignation is purely a 'philosophical move.' Johannes illustrates this by saying:

Infinite resignation is the last stage before faith, so that whoever has not made this movement does not have faith. For only in infinite resignation do I become transparent to myself in my eternal validity, and only then can there be talk of laying hold of existence by virtue of faith. . . . The act of resigning does not

require faith, for what I gain in resignation is my eternal consciousness, and that is a purely philosophical movement which I take comfort in making when required and which I can discipline myself to do. For whenever something finite gets beyond my control, I starve myself until I make the movement, for my eternal consciousness is my love for God, and for me that is higher than anything. The act of resigning does not require faith, but to get the least bit more than my eternal consciousness does require faith... By resignation I renounce everything; this movement I make by myself, and if I do not make it, then it is because I am cowardly soft . . . This movement I make by myself, and what I gain as a result is myself in my eternal consciousness in blessed harmony with my love for the eternal being. By faith I do not renounce anything; on the contrary by faith I receive everything . . . A purely human courage is required to renounce the whole of temporality in order to gain the eternal, but this I gain and never in all eternity can renounce without self-contradiction. But it takes a paradoxical and humble courage next to grasp the whole of temporality by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 39-40).

Johannes mentions the courage of faith in the aforementioned section. Some describe this as a leap of faith. It is essentially a hope that faith will work. For something or someone to have courage, means for one to stand strong in the face of danger, uncertainty, or to proceed into a situation knowing that one's vulnerabilities may jeopardize one's existence. Courage is such an important concept in this philosophical work that Dr. Clare Carlisle believes that *Fear and Trembling* is more about courage than it is faith. Yes, Johannes says infinite resignation requires a human courage, but he

admits that faith is coupled with a ‘paradoxical and humble courage.’ This courage is only accessible with faith. It has an effect on the knight of faith that changes him. Like faith, this courage is a product of a relationship with God based on vulnerability.

Making the move of resignation gives one a sense of autonomy. The movement of faith and entering into a relationship with God, entails relinquishing autonomy over one’s own life. By making only the movement of infinite resignation, the knight of faith maintains autonomy over his or her life. With complete submission, obedience, and faith in God, the knight of faith believes that when he resigns himself to the infinite, he at the same time, by virtue of the absurd, believes he will in fact regain the finite. It is the virtue of the absurd that shows the vulnerability of the knight of faith. The absurd is unexplainable, irrational, incommensurable, and illogical. There are no grounds to understand it. The knight of faith puts his full hope, faith, desires, and life in something that “does not belong to the distinctions that lie within the proper compass of the understanding. It is not identical with the improbable, the unforeseen, the unexpected” (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 39). When discussing Abraham as the knight of faith, de Silentio writes:

During all this time he believed; he believed that God would not demand Isaac of him, while he still was willing to sacrifice him if it was demanded. He believed by virtue of the absurd, for human calculation was out of the question, and it was indeed absurd that God, who demanded it of him, in the next instant would revoke the demand. He climbed the mountain, and even at the moment when the knife gleamed he believed — that God would not demand Isaac. He was no doubt surprised then at the outcome, but by a double movement he had regained his

original condition. . . . Let us go further. We let Isaac actually be sacrificed.

Abraham believed. He did not believe that he would be blessed one day in the hereafter but that he would become blissfully happy here in this world. God could give him a new Isaac, call the sacrificed back to life. He believed by virtue of the absurd, for all human calculation had long since ceased (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p. 30).

What de Silentio sees as the virtue of the absurd, is actually God. Abraham receiving Isaac back is due to God's goodness and grace which faith makes one vulnerable to. Again, this level of vulnerability requires relinquishing one's whole life to God. This depth of vulnerability is not possible for the knight of infinite resignation because the person retains his autonomy over his life. This is what de Silentio means when he says, "for whoever loves God without faith considers himself, but whoever loves God with faith considers God" (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006,, p. 30).

8. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have analyzed the contrasting notions of the knight of faith and the knight of infinite resignation, which are two of the most important concepts in Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. The most important difference between the knight of faith and the knight of infinite resignation is that the knight of faith resigns his or her self to the finite, but maintains the belief that the finite will be returned in his or her lifetime. Moreover, there are those like Mooney who maintain that the knight of faith's belief is rooted in his care for the finite. The knight of faith has resigned the whole of the finite except for his care for the finite. Others like Carlisle claim that another important difference is that the knight of infinite resignation lacks the virtue of courage. On the other hand, some Kierkegaardian scholars propose that the difference between the two is that the knight of faith relinquishes self-autonomy to God. In this thesis, I have attempted to argue that the difference between the two can be seen by analyzing the two knights in light of the notion of vulnerability.

To conclude, let's reconsider the notion of vulnerability as constructed with McCoy's and Gilson's definition of vulnerability. First, it is a condition or a state of being that is fundamental to human existence. It is indicative of other aspects of human existence such as finitude and temporality. Vulnerability should not always be viewed as a weakness though it originates from the idea that 'to be vulnerable' means to be 'wounded.' Because of the enabling factor of vulnerability, allowing one to be changed and transformed, it can be viewed as a strength. For de Silentio, faith is the highest human passion and changes a person. De Silentio's knight of faith, or one who has faith,

is one who, after having resigned the finite, joyfully receives it back by virtue of the absurd— God. Thus, the knight of faith is one who is not only possesses faith but is vulnerable to faith, and in turn vulnerable to God. Therefore, the difference between the knight of faith and the knight of infinite resignation is vulnerability.

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