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Human Existence at the Border – Vulnerability at the beginning of life as a challenge to Theological Ethics

- 1.) Borderline experiences are *the* challenge for the autonomy of human being. They are the moments where human being finds themselves both autonomous and vulnerable at the same time. A moral subject has to take the autonomous decision to escape vulnerability and - at the same time - it is exactly this moment of autonomy that the human being is exposed to its highest level of vulnerability. Due to the development of high tech medicine we are not really used to being vulnerable.

- 2.) There is hardly any other theological discipline which has collected more experience in "operating at the border" than theological ethics. Part of these operations consists in setting normative limits. The ultimate aim of this project is to protect the most vulnerable and to safeguard their recognition, which is the final reason for the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church about the beginning of life. Based on the "Instruction on Respect of Human Life in its origin and on the dignity of procreation" (Donum Vitae/1987) I will outline the fundamental arguments of the Magisterium for the protection of the embryo as the owner of full human dignity. This doctrine entails the rejection of all forms of intervention which put the embryo at stake, including all forms of extracorporeal in-vitro-fertilization (ARTs).

- 3.) In the face of a neoliberal system which is characterized by a more or less unlimited trust in the feasibility of life, the tutorist approach of the Roman Catholic Church and its way to emphasize life as a gift which cannot be made and controlled completely by human being can be called old-fashioned, stubborn, not up to date. However, it entails a realistic anthropology which takes into account the limits of feasibility and the possibility of failure. To protect the beginning of human life from the grasp of others and their autonomous decision making might not be that bad an idea.