



Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

NATIONAL BIOETHICS COMMITTEE

BIOETHICS WITH CHILDHOOD

(22nd January 1994)

abstract

The opinion introduces a range of issues to stimulate thought on the culture of childhood, which, given the complex relationship between the adult world and the world of children and adolescents, is undoubtedly of bioethical significance. The text is divided into four key parts; the first part provides a cultural, epistemological, and anthropological background on the complexity and limits of knowledge, the sense of otherness, and the consciousness of the meaning of responsibility. This first part develops a reflection on the respect and understanding that must be reserved to childhood and how to promote health and education.

The second part thematizes childhood as a phase of personal development, in its individual and relational dimension. The Committee recognizes that the birth of individuality of a human being occurs at the time of conception; however, it emphasizes the importance of family protection and education for the full development of subjectivity, which needs a suitable environment to be achieved. The family is a fundamental place for the formation of subjectivity in children, even if, this role does not authorise parents to consider their child as an object on whom to reflect their own expectations, desires and projects.

The third part relates specifically to the education and health care of the child. It emphasizes the importance of the child's welfare, which is achieved by the necessary recognition and protection of his/her subjectivity, and through involvement and accountability in the making of personal choices. The opinion, therefore, urges health care professionals to personalize treatment for the children and adolescents they need to establish a relationship with. In this perspective, consent to treatment, contributes to the therapeutic alliance between the doctor and the child, and should be pursued giving due consideration to the actual degree of maturity of the child, assessing the importance of the requested intervention and without prejudice to the prerogatives of the legal representatives.

The fourth part analyses the consequences that bioethical thought on childhood has had in legal terms. It reiterates the importance of protection and promotion of children's rights, which are now recognised by numerous sources of national and international law, not only in terms of fundamental principles, but also within the discipline of the sectors in which this issue is divided, such as, family, school, work, health and information.

The opinion concludes with a summary and several recommendations aimed at establishing observatories on the needs of children and the promotion of a culture attentive to child related issues.