



Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

NATIONAL BIOETHICS COMMITTEE

THE DESTINY OF EMBRYOS RESULTING FROM MEDICALLY ASSISTED PROCREATION (MAP) AND NOT COMPLYING WITH THE CONDITIONS FOR IMPLANTATION

(26th of October 2007)

abstract

The Italian National Bioethics Committee (NBC) examined the destiny of embryos created for procreative purposes by the means of extracorporeal Medically Assisted Procreation (MAP) techniques presenting serious irreversible anomalies and for which implantation is not considered suitable. This particular issue is disciplined by the guidelines related to art. 3 of Act No. 40/2004 stating that in the event of tests carried out showing serious irreversible abnormalities in embryo development, such embryos will not be cryoconserved and will be left in culture until their end. The presence of embryos in such conditions constitutes a bioethical and legal problem of considerable importance. On the one hand, the research carried out on embryonic cells could be important for knowledge and therapeutic purposes. On the other hand the collecting of pluripotent stem cells requires an embryo that is still vital, and has as a consequence the suppression of the embryo.

The problem of the destiny of such embryos not complying with the conditions for implantation was examined by the NBC and resulted in two opinions on Bioethical considerations concerning the so-called “ootide”, 15th July 2005, and on Adoption for the birth of cryoconserved embryos deriving from Medically Assisted Procreation (MAP), 18th November 2005.

This topic has been examined by the NBC since 2005 but the work was not concluded under the previous Committee. This is the reason for which the new Committee established a new working group which drew up the document that was finally approved on the 26th of October 2007. The idea mainly being discussed is to determine whether it is possible to assess embryo death in a situation in which the embryo is still vital, in such a way as to make embryonic cell donation to research possible on the grounds of the analogy with organ donation ex mortuo. Some members considered such an analogy tenable and were in support of the definition of embryo death criteria by the scientific community (organismic death). Based on the analogy with organ and tissue donation from an individual, the taking and utilization of living blastomers from an embryo which is declared dead would be ethically correct. Other members did not agree with the above-mentioned analogy as they did not consider that the total cerebral death of an individual (for transplantation

purposes) can be deemed equivalent to embryo death due to the interruption and degeneration of its development (for the purpose of taking one or more vital blastomers). Some of the CNB members gave the reasons for their disagreement in an additional note.