



OPINION n°2001-07

« ETHICAL ASPECTS OF RESEARCH AND CREATION »

Approved at plenary session of may 2001



SUMMARY

This new report by the Ethics Committee for Science (COMETS) — "Ethical aspects of research and creation" (May 2001) — has not yet been published in print.

Ethical aspects of research and creation

COMETS, the CNRS Ethics Committee for Science, was set up in 1994 and renewed in 1998 for another three years. During these three years, COMETS undertook general deliberations on subjects which appeared to committee members to merit clarification. The texts presented below are the initial results of these deliberations, and address the whole scientific community, from novice researchers to those responsible for science policy.

Two main themes were discussed :

The first is the acknowledgement of the relationship between researchers and their work. A researcher's legitimate desire to have his or her contribution to a discovery acknowledged can take several forms, ranging from a request for peer recognition of what we have called "scientific authorship" to a request for legal recognition of "intellectual property". Issues of this kind can be found in all disciplines. They are often intense, and conflicts over such matters can profoundly disrupt the activity of a laboratory or the relationship between colleagues. Conflicts like this often develop within a relatively unclear ethical framework: behaviour that appears "unethical" to us is often not perceived as such by those who adopt it, thus increasing the frustration of those who consider themselves wronged. Our considerations have led us to propose a general text on scientific authorship accompanied by more specific developments on signatures and the legal aspects of intellectual property.

The second theme we addressed is the relationship between science and society. The social responsibility of researchers and the role of politicians in research activities are undeniable, but often regarded in vague terms. As an ethics committee, we felt it would be worthwhile to attempt to take stock of this subject and examine in particular the responsibilities of scientific personalities solicited by the media but also those of the administrative and political leaders in charge of research.

A text is currently being drawn up on the ethical issues raised by assessment procedures, and we have initiated deliberations on expert appraisal, which is a function increasingly exercised by researchers. We have also been asked to address other issues, including three that the next COMETS members could no doubt usefully consider.

