

Transcript of Jerome Lejeune

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If medicine is different from biology, from biochemistry, it's only because medicine is founded on the respect of the human being, of the human life. And if it is not, it is not any longer medicine. It is a kind of veterinary science, to a particular biped species that we call man and that's it. Medicine is nothing any longer. The Hippocratic as well is a danger.

The danger is not at all in the technology. People are afraid of genetic manipulation. They say is not good to know how the genes are working. That it is very wrong. But it's very important we know it, because if we can understand how a bad gene is doing a bad job we can repair it. We can repair that gene itself.

But the danger is that people will use a human being, will exploit a human being for the own particular interests, or the own particular research. That is against Hippocratic medicine. That it is totally against medicine as we know it. But it is a new age. Biology applied to men.

No doubt it is cheaper for society to kill the patient than to cure the patient. It looks cheaper and maybe, if you are counting dollars, maybe it's a little cheaper. But what's not that obvious is if you do this, you will lose the civilization. What measures the amount of civilization, is the amount of respect given to the smallest. We know that we'd cure the disabled, and if we cannot cure them, to take care of them, it costs a lot of money, of dedication, of suffering of the parent, of the disturbance of the society, it's very true. But we know that exact price you have to pay to remain humane and if society refuses to pay that price, which is high, society is not humane any longer. And that will cost enormously.

My personal impression, which is just the professional line, is that we are at the service of the patient. We are not at the service of disease. So, the people who propose to kill a Down Syndrome baby, because they have rejected who he or she was, are making the enormous mistake of fighting for the disease and against a patient. And medicine is a contributor. Medicine is a very simple application of knowledge. It is the hate of a disease, and the love of a patient. You cannot change these two terms

In the fourth year of Medicine I became acquainted with Down syndrome persons because the professor of pediatrics was interested in that disease. And I tried, I proposed when I began my research, at this point in my career to find what was the cause of that very rare disease. First, I studied their palm prints. Because the palm prints are a snapshot of the first month's embryonic life-- as the palms begin to develop. When the hands begin to develop at two months of age in the tiny baby who is two centimeters big from the crown to the rump. You could with the microscope see the palm prints there. Already printed there, very tiny. That gives you the impression of rapid is the demonstration of the human, the humanness. But this is very typical of Down Syndrome. That special crease, that special feature. And that brought me to the conclusion because those traits, are made by many genes that obviously no one gene could produce that change. But a change occurring in the action of many genes. There is one trick to change the effect of many genes with one mutation. It is to change a whole chromosome. Then I proposed there that they had a chromosomal disease no one was known at that time. I found that they had 47 chromosomes. I was expecting they would have one chromosome less. But I found that they had one extra. For the moment we cannot silence this extra chromosome. But we can already understand what it does.

At Dr. LeJeune's hospital:

They have some 6,000 files of Down Syndrome babies that we know. I know 2,000 of them personally, by their Christian name. And we consult with around 2,000 a year because we follow them. You have to realize that the geneticists trying to help Down Syndrome persons, that we are family doctors.

When the parents ask me what are the Down babies, my answer is that they are charming little babies. They are very delightful little ones. That isn't that the disease is a good disease, it is a bad disease. I hate it. But those babies have some language, some tenderness, some absence of frugality in love. They have their own character and they are very lovable. That's a fact. It's not a fancy.

Indeed it's a terrible distress to the parents to know the baby will not have the blossoming of reason like they expected in any human being. But they will discover that reasoning, calculating is one part only of mankind and probably not the most precious. But they have a perfectly normal taste for art and for love. They normal artistically, really. It's a sizable portion of humanity to which they can give us lessons.

If I had the power to suppress a disease, that is to prevent a chromosome number 21 from going the wrong way, and to have all the babies conceived with only 2 instead of 3 chromosomes on 21 as in Down Syndrome, surely, I would apply that to protect all the babies now. Now, I would say that surely the cost for a special school will be reduced if there were no Down syndrome babies alive. But the damage made to the heart of the society would be that great. That maybe it will be very close to what happened in Germany 50 years ago.

People do not realize it, but as a doctor I see it is very possible to predict that a child has a disease. You can make mistakes, but the techno-system in utero can be rather efficient. But you cannot predict what would be the importance in that particular person to his parents and to society.

To make you understand that I will tell you a true story. It's an American doctor, Professor Vakani who told me that in the days of Jewish history his father was a doctor in Austria. And one day Vakani took me apart and he told me to you I will tell you a story. On the same night in the little hospital in which my father was doctor, were born a little boy and a little girl, to two different families. The little boy was very strong and crying normally, the little girl had Down Syndrome and she had a feeble little cry. Now the story is that the little girl, when she was 30 years of age helped her mother who had a stroke. And she was the only home keeper and they were very poor people. People said she was the home keeper for her mother for three years and this woman was treated very kindly by her retarded Down Syndrome child. And that old doctor could not remember the name of the little girl, but he had never forgotten the name of the boy. It was Adolf Hitler. This story is true.

All the doctors who are Hippocratic, we try to help the children. We fight against the disease, against death, but on the same side as patients. They know that otherwise, I would not come here. I tried to map the chromosomes to see if there is an anomaly. Then we don't diagnose life before the birth because at this moment, now we can't cure them. So when we don't diagnose them before birth, it leads to killing them. It's very important work here. It has implications for other areas of medicine, not just Down Syndrome. Professor Lejeune says here, "You want to fight against disease but love and carry on caring for the people who are here." That's the ethos at the clinic I think.

Someday we will have a treatment in utero that is efficient for Down syndrome. It will be the very first. We don't use in utero detection for the moment because we have no use of that knowledge for the help of the baby. Then we don't do it.

Part of the doctors of MDs those who have the diploma are not any longer exercising or practicing medicine. They are selectionists, they are abortionists and they have taken responsibility that is beyond them. Man is not that wise that he can give matters of health and death in balance together. It is beyond their wisdom. And what is the foolishness of biologist pretending to reject mankind is that they believe that God does not exist but that they are God. It's very ridiculous, because if God does not exist than they cannot be God.