

by  
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J. L.

November 15, 1961

Dr. Henry Platt  
The Devereux Foundation  
Devon, Pennsylvania

Dear Henry:

I was very happy to hear from you and bemused that our paths should cross again in so unpredictable a fashion. I would suspect that Dr. Hobbs' acquaintanceship with you and your work would be the most effective entree for consideration by the Kennedy Foundation, but I would, of course, be glad to submit my own personal evaluation as well at any appropriate occasion.

In that connection, I would be as deeply concerned about some matters of basic philosophy and policy as for personal and technical qualifications. Surely, my own role in this area must be to represent the participation of basic research. In discussions with many members of the panel, I have sensed that there may be a sensitive problem in conveying a full understanding of the significance of basic research and the most effective way in which new discoveries can be made and put to effective use in such an important problem area as mental retardation. For example, in the awards program - and I have agreed to serve on the review committee - I would try to show how Leloir's work on the metabolism of galactose by yeast, despite its seeming total irrelevance to the problem of mental retardation, has furnished the indispensable basis for our understanding of galactosemia and for the subsequent development of diagnostic methods for this disease and for its amelioration. If I did not feel that the Foundation could be responsive to the need for the balanced program in such basic as well as in more applied research, I could not see how I could personally make an effective contribution to the Foundation's program. It is, of course, very difficult, to spell out in advance the specific findings in basic medical research that will be most useful for later application in mental retardation. This is, of course, the trenchant dilemma in the application of research tools towards such subtle practical problems. In this area, perhaps the most that can be accomplished is to generate an active interest and alertness to opportunities in the attack on mental retardation among the professional scientific community and 2) to lend further support to those institutions and research groups that are doing the best basic work in almost any field of scientific research but whose members are committed to an essential concern for the human problem.

Platt, H.

Rather than try to guess your personal convictions with regard to this issue, I would prefer to ask you for your own clear statement of them. I do not anticipate that it will be easy to steer a proper course that will reflect the concerns I have expressed in this letter, as well as the highly understandable appeals of research directly on retarded children and their care.

Mrs. Shriver's address is Edson Lane, Rockville, Maryland.

With best regards,

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics