

Jacques Poirier: *Petit dictionnaire du charlatanisme médical* (*Small dictionary of medical fraud*)

Collection « Histoire des sciences », Éditions Hermann, Paris, 2011, 196 pages.

Professor Jacques Poirier's book, published in 2011 at "Hermann – Histoire des sciences" Publishing House, opens with a motto, as suggestive as subtle, practically synthesizing its essence: "Does being reasonable mean living?" Brothers Goncourt's words express a question involving not only the author, but mainly the lecturer, who will find lots of answers within the pages of the Dictionary.

Jacques Poirier has an impressive visit card: neurologist, neuropathologist, medicine historian, Professor within the Faculty of Medicine of Pitié-Salpêtrière, former Head of Department within the Salpêtrière Hospital, former manager of the Research Group in Epistemology and History of Medicine of the University of Paris XII, member of the French Society of Medicine History, author of various papers on the history of medicine, etc.

The idea of debating the problem of medical fraud may seem strange at first sight and, definitely, a genuine one. This comes from the simple reason that one cannot have the chance to read such books quite frequently. The explanation is given by the author himself: "This small dictionary proposes to give a general, non-exhaustive image of this captivating world of healthcare, of health and disease. Additionally, we will find a constant of the human nature, the dialectic opposition between Rational (of knowledge, science, thinking) and Irrational (of faith, religion, magic, supernaturalism)".

Even from the prologue, Professor Jacques Poirier, MD, PhD, brings to our attention the complexity of the relation between medicine and fraud, which "have been present forever and everywhere", stating that "it would be too simple" to establish a radical opposition between popular and scientific medicine, especially since the latter is closely related to the former one. The argumentation continues pertinently and explains us that "official medicine" was born and developed in the Western countries. Besides this, Professor Jacques Poirier speaks about the existence of parallel medical sciences, which we call today "unconventional therapies". This "alternative or complementary medicine" is used today by more and more patients, instead of or in addition for "orthodox medical practices", various doctors of homeopath practice, acupuncture or hypnosis. The development of integrated medicine plays the role of "associating certain unconventional therapies with conventional treatments".

Conventional medicine and fraud are not two opposite terms. The latter manifests, according to the author's opinion, in the case of the so-called healers, the ones practicing homeopathy, against cancer or anti-aging therapies.

Because it is difficult to establish some exact limits between health and disease, the doctor Jacques Poirier concludes: "regarding health, a fraudman is the one who places himself above the law, science or moral".

One of the ideas found at the basis of this Dictionary is formulated in quite exact and practical terms: "any human being that walks with two feet, the Rational and the Irrational, following more on one or the other, according to the age, place on the planet, individuals, life vicissitudes. The absurdity of the human condition justifies by not renegating the second one for the exclusive benefit of the first one".

Apart from the terminological explanations, thoroughly and professionally performed about traditional Chinese medicine, quantum medicine, transcendental mediation, psychotherapy, etc., there may also be found definitions that go way beyond the medical area, completing it: white magic, animal magnetism, black magic, medium, praying, spirituality, yoga, water memory, etc.

Jacques Poirier

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The text of the paper is not a simple alphabetical sequence of definitions and terms. In order to better understand the meaning, the role and the theoretical and practical importance of the Dictionary, one should provide it with a special reading: from an interdisciplinary and uniform perspective. Only in this manner, we will discover the intrinsic significance and the connections establishing between the components of the book as a whole. Professor Jacques Poirier's book is a complex and complete paper that should be read more with the mind and the soul. With no constant and sincere emotional involvement, implying the curiosity of discovering, without any strict concentration, doubled by the patience and perseverance of a jeweler, it is impossible to ingest the ideas of the text, often showing not only scientific virtues but true literary ones, as well.

Names of personalities that do not require any additional presentation, such as Claude Bernard, Jacques Benveniste, Freud, Eric Berne, Edward Badi, Zola, etc. found their place within the pages of the Dictionary. In order to complete the medical, sociological, theological, cultural and moral dimensions, the author brings forward phrases like: "innocent fraud, comicotherapy, impostors of immorality, human credulity, secrete cures, echinotherapy, hope, zootherapy, efficiency of phytotherapy, absurd, etc."

Doctor Jacques Poirier's paper has a reduced dimension only regarding its title. In fact, it is a reference, balanced, diverse, extensive book – through its points of view and approached subject – very well written, based on a thorough documentation and impeccably structured.

Reaching the last page of the Dictionary, one realizes a rediscovering of the self and senses an intellectual and emotional joy, rare pleasures owed to a special man, who detaches from the common people and who, by intelligence, elegance and refinement, gracefully defies banality, mediocrity and every day routine that sometimes mark our existence. Beyond the immediate significance of the title, Professor Jacques Poirier discreetly proposes us a Dictionary of Ideas. The feeling one is left with after reading its pages is that she/he is spiritually richer inside. Moreover, one has the joy of becoming aware of such interesting, unknown sides of the author himself.

Undoubtedly, we find ourselves in front of a synthesis paper, suggesting a live, creative and inspired soul and we can state that if it had not existed, medical science would have been a different, fortuneless one.

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