

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH.
DOCTORATE HONORIS CAUSA
UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA METROPOLITANA
MARZO 12, 2018

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NEW SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH

It is a great distinction to be awarded the degree *Doctorate Honoris Causa*. I want to thank the Chancellor, the distinguished members of Colegio Académico de la Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, and especially, my dear friend, Professor María Pía Lara. I have had strong intellectual and personal connections with Mexico and with this university. I began my academic career writing about John Dewey. John Dewey himself had a deep affection for, and influence in Mexico. Before and after the Mexican revolution, Dewey's educational philosophy helped shaped Mexican education—especially in rural schools. After the infamous Moscow purges, when Trotsky was accused of being a traitor and banned from the Soviet Union, Mexico granted him asylum. Dewey, as the outstanding international democratic philosopher of his time, agreed to chair the Commission of Inquiry concerning the charges that Stalin had brought against Trotsky and his son. Dewey's life had been threatened when he decided to travel to Mexico City in 1937. Dewey, who was seventy-eight years old, decided that it was his responsibility to accept the position of chair of the Commission. I have always found Dewey's opening remarks of the Commission, which was held in the home of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo inspiring.

Speaking [...] not for the commission but for myself, I had hoped that a chairman might be found for these preliminary investigations whose experiences better fitted the difficult and delicate task to be performed. But I have given my life to the work of education which I have conceived to be that of public enlightenment in the interests of society. If I finally accepted the responsible post I now occupy, it was because I realized that to act otherwise would be false to my life work. (Dewey, 1987: 309)

Soon after the inquiry, where Trotsky himself testified, the Commission offered its judgment: *Not Guilty*. Dewey has always been the exemplar of the public intellectual who sought to combine theory and practice —to live a life that was consistent with his most deeply held convictions. In a much more modest way I have tried to live my life in this manner.

The life of a philosopher can be a lonely one, but it has never been lonely for me. I have been blessed with engaging intellectual friends and with a supportive wife and family. I have always thought of myself as a teacher/scholar. I have always loved teaching —and I still do, even after more than sixty years in the classroom. Writing for me has always been a process of self-discovery. As a United States citizen, I am deeply ashamed and appalled by the stupidity, ignorance and viciousness directed to Mexico by my government. We need to bond together in order to resist and fight against outrageous lying and humiliating prejudices.

There are three characterizations of a philosopher that have always appealed to me. The first was given by one of my own teachers, Paul Weiss. He said that a philosopher is like a six year old child who keeps asking his parents all sorts of impossible questions but is not satisfied by the answers that he is normally given —and spends the rest of his life in pursuit of these questions. The second characterization is given by Wilfrid Sellars when he writes: “The aim of philosophy, abstracted formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term”. The third

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characterization is given by Plato in his portrait of Socrates in the *Symposium*. The *Symposium*, you may recall, is a drunken party in which each of the participants gives a speech about Eros, love. An enormous amount of wine is consumed. By the end of the party, most of the participants have fallen asleep, but Socrates is still alert, talking and arguing. This is how Plato ends the dialogue:

But after getting them off to sleep Socrates got up and left, and Aristodemus [who was half asleep] followed him as always. He said that Socrates went directly to the Lyceum washed up, spent the rest of the day just as he always did, and only then as evening was falling went home to rest. (Plato, 1997: 223d)

So what then is a philosopher? It is someone like Socrates, who can drink with his buddies under the table, keep talking and arguing. When everyone else falls off in a drunken stupor, he is able to start the day afresh —thinking and talking.

On a more serious note I have always had an insatiable curiosity. Like Hannah Arendt, my passion has always been to understand —to comprehend— the world around me. The books that I have written have been journeys of the self —discovery, trying to grasp some problem, issue or theme that strikes me as important. It is always almost a surprise and a great joy when I discover that there are readers who find that my books speak to them —that somehow what I have written has touched and moved them. I am pleased that virtually all my books have been translated into Spanish —so that they can reach a larger audience. Hegel tells us that the deepest human desire is the desire for recognition. What he means by this is neither praise nor fame, but to be understood and taken to be what we take ourselves to be as free independent thinking beings. In being awarded the degree *Doctorate Honoris Causa* by this distinguished university, I take it to be a gesture of recognition in Hegel's sense. I am deeply honored to be conferred this degree by this respected institution.

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