

**ADDRESS BY PROF SANTIAGO SIA  
ON THE CONFERRING OF THE  
NUI DLitt DEGREE**

Thank you very much, Prof Nolan, for conferring this degree, the Senate of the National University of Ireland for awarding it and the Registrar, Dr. Halpin, and her staff for overseeing the entire process. My thanks, too, to all of you here present for the occasion. It is indeed an honour which I appreciate most sincerely.

The award of this degree marks the culmination of a long but fulfilling academic and scholarly journey. Over the years the support throughout the world of various academic institutions, grant bodies, scholarly societies, professional associations, scholars, colleagues, editors, publishers and students facilitated that journey and made it truly rewarding. The welcome personal dimension provided by families and friends made it also more enjoyable and uplifting. I have put on record my sincere gratitude to them all. My scholarly output would definitely not have been possible without them. Tonight's conferring of the DLitt provides me with yet another opportunity to express my sincere appreciation. I should like to do that now. I would like to think, too, that somehow this award also validates their support for my work and illustrates the importance of nurturing and nourishing scholarship with institutional, professional and personal support.

At the end of my teaching career I had mapped out a different direction: having heeded Confucius in my youthful days to play an active part in society as an educator in various aspects, I was now ready to take on Lao Tzu's advice to focus on one's inner self away from the distractions of social living. But A.N. Whitehead, who together with Charles Hartshorne shaped and nurtured my philosophical thinking, made me re-examine that intended route. He described

speculative thinking—his description of metaphysics—as comparable to the flight of an airplane: it starts on the ground of concrete experiences, takes off into the rarefied atmosphere of abstractions, but lands back on other concrete experiences to illuminate them. The challenge ahead of me was to show how the years of such thinking, which had preoccupied my earlier writings and scholarly output, could be utilised to address the challenges confronting society and religious belief. Such a strategy would show thereby that philosophical thinking occurs not merely in the ivory towers of academia but also in the hustle and bustle of the agora where Socrates had carried out his philosophical quests. I have endeavoured to do that in my later writings.

The award of a DLitt in the context of my published work in philosophy and related areas provides me, hopefully, with the justification not just for philosophy as an academic subject but also in its interaction with other disciplines. I therefore welcome its wider designation—the Latin version, *Doctor Litterarum*, is much more accurate—insofar as it avoids the narrow interpretation of what is entailed in the study of philosophy. Of course, one would not wish to detract from the significance of the rigour demanded in the pursuit of philosophy as an academic subject. But one is reminded nonetheless that depth does not have to be, nor should it be, isolated from breadth. Significant explorations, including in one's own field, can be helped by also turning to other academic areas.

In this context I do wish to publicly acknowledge once more my indebtedness to my wife, Marian. Not only has she been my companion and co-traveller in life but she has also been an active collaborator in my thinking and published work. She has played an important part in shaping and transforming my thoughts as well as in enriching and enlivening my written words. My scholarly journey has been nourished by our complementary academic interests; namely, philosophy and literature, and by our respective inclinations towards

reason and the imagination. There is some truth—we would like to believe—in what is often attributed to Albert Einstein that while logic can take one from A to B, imagination can take us everywhere. (*Marian constantly reminds me of what Hamlet said to Horatio that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in his philosophy!*) Hopefully, what comes through in my own work as well as in the collaborated ones is that philosophical thinking can indeed be enriched, and not just broadened, by literary insights.

Market forces have dictated how we should prepare for living in today's society: education is being shaped by a model in terms of how we impart knowledge, develop competence and train skills in those entrusted to our care. This is an important consideration, and we would be remiss if we did not take these into account. On the other hand, we need to remind ourselves constantly that education is about the human person and not just the worker, the professional, the business woman/man, the technocrat and so on. It should be concerned with the human person in all aspects. Education is about enabling human persons *as* human persons to take their rightful place in society and the world and to contribute positively to these. This award in “letters” (that is to say, in the humanities) is somehow a strong reminder of that point. In my view, it is close to what the recently canonised John Newman, who is closely associated with one of the colleges of the NUI, had advocated when he set about the task of establishing a university in Dublin.

But where does philosophy fit into this context? I have often made references in my publications to the act of philosophising and to the pursuit of philosophy. These two are distinct but related activities. As human beings, we are the kind of creatures who do philosophise, that is to say, ask fundamental questions. Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, because of our nature we enquire, we seek answers, and we search for the truth. It would be rash to conclude that we do this all the time—there are other tasks to be done, other

interests to be followed, and other commitments to be fulfilled. But in different and uneven ways we do wonder—because and precisely because of our make-up as human beings. Scholarly pursuits and academic journeys are rooted in this. A point, which I have argued and defended in my publications, is that philosophising is a human activity. To lose sight of this because of the demands and expectations of the society we live in today is to neglect a fundamental consideration in academia and in daily life.

How does the pursuit, that is to say the study, of philosophy fit in? Regrettably, what at times comes across is that it is about irrelevant abstractions and outdated discussions. There is some truth in that observation, unfortunately. But philosophy as an academic discipline is an ally as well as a resource in our quest as human beings for truth, right living and wisdom. This has been an overriding concern throughout my academic and scholarly journey. The study of philosophy can come to our aid, in our search as human beings, for what truly and fundamentally matters by dispelling falsehood, rooting out misleading claims and eliminating questionable values. There is a need to investigate profoundly and thoroughly as best we can what underpins our viewpoints and conduct. False or superficial ones have a way of leading us astray even in the face of so-called factual evidence.

This is, of course, a claim which requires elaboration and defence on another occasion. Tonight is a time instead for expressing one's gratitude to the NUI for acknowledging the value of such a journey with the award of a DLitt and to all of you here for being present. *Gratias ago vobis. Go raibh maith agaibh. Maraming salamat sa inyong lahat.*