

Gerald Holton, awardee in the Humanities and Social Sciences category (13th edition)

First of all I wish to express my deep gratitude for receiving this extraordinary Frontiers of Knowledge Award in the Humanities from the BBVA Foundation, a family of awards which embraces a broad spectrum of disciplines, from the Basic Sciences to the Arts and the Humanities. Its action intends to throw light on two different but related aspects in our culture.

One aspect is attention to my work as scientist and historian of science over many years. I must acknowledge that I had the amazing luck that my Ph.D. in my thesis research at Harvard University I was supervised by the science-philosopher and Nobelist, P. W. Bridgman. His advice helped me for the following 30 years to run my high pressure researches.

Eventually my interests also moved into the history and philosophy of science, especially the analysis of the humanistic thought processes that animated the original scientific work. This focused especially on the most productive and transformative scientists, such as Johannes Kepler and Isaac Newton, but above all Albert Einstein. It turned out that those, and many other scientists, operated in their research not only with the usual tools and intuitions, but also, powerfully, with a certain type of fundamentally philosophical conceptions, quietly assumed by them, which I have called Thematic ideas. The findings in my work on them led me also to incorporate in my books and in my activities as teacher and mentor the humanistic elements animating all true advance and insight.

My research and publications have also sought to analyze how society at large regards the place of science in our culture, and to understand the cultural contributions of science as a central civilizing force, fostering rationality and objectivity, and the many challenges it has confronted from early modernity to the present day.

I mentioned at the beginning that there is another, vital aspect behind the Frontiers of Knowledge Award in the Humanities. That refers to the unique and deeply moving concern of the BBVA Foundation, an institution supported by a global financial group, with the pursuit of knowledge, encompassing as a continuum science and the humanities. In our time the prevalent separation and splintering of the different parts of our culture are all too often taken for granted. In opposition I have followed the advice of Alfred North Whitehead: "In the condition of modern life, the rule is absolute, the race which does not value trained intelligence is doomed". Therefore the unique



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actions on behalf of mending across the gaps by the Foundation are to be especially honored.

With a thousand thanks for the Award as well as its larger meaning, coming toward the end of my long life, I give you my heartiest embrace.