



SOLEMNE INVESTIDURA COMO DOCTOR HONORIS CAUSA DE BLAKE S. WILSON

DISCURSO DE DANIEL HERNÁNDEZ RUIPÉREZ, RECTOR DE LA UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA

Universidad de Salamanca, 11 de mayo de 2015.

Dr. Blake Wilson,  
Authorities present here today,  
Vice-Chancellors, Secretary General of the University of Salamanca and of other Universities, and in their name the Academic Authorities present,  
Dr. Poveda, Benefactor of the Candidate,  
Colleagues at the University,  
Distinguished Representatives of the Institutions and Companies working in collaboration with the University,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I wish to begin these words of welcome to Dr. Wilson with some images that alone are sufficient to explain the reason why we are embracing Dr. Wilson in our Doctors' Senate today.

It was the American journalist Arthur Brisbane who is attributed to have said

*Use a picture. It's worth a thousand words; in Spanish, we say "an image is worth more than a thousand words" (Una imagen vale más que mil palabras).*

Those who truly believe this can even fall back on the powerful argument of authority assumed by Aristotle, who at the beginning of *Metafísica* says: "*All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight*".

I believe, however, that just for once, although I cannot quite bring myself to totally contradict the Greek philosopher I feel must at least question this.

The images we see in this video show the enormous value that hearing the words of his mother has for this boy. Do you think that anybody might be able to convince him that *an*

*image is worth more than a thousand words?* I have said on some other occasion that one sentence that represents one of the starting points of what we know as Western culture is “*In the beginning was the Word*”. The Word is the beginning in many senses because if we do not have a symbolic communication system, without a language, individual intellectual development and the cultural development of collectives are impossible. And language is *par excellence* the spoken word.

The word is the raw material out of which teaching, i.e., the universities, is built and hence there is no better or more appropriate acknowledgement from the perspective of our own task than the one that today we offer our new Doctor, Blake Wilson. In his work, Dr. Wilson has given the gift of hearing to some of the unfortunate people who have not had this previously (+or have at some time lost it?). Thus, he has opened to door to language for them.

If you will allow me to return to my “controversy” with Aristotle, Dr. Wilson’s work has certainly achieved an unquestionable primacy for audition in the field of the senses. The cochlear implant is the first human invention that allows an improperly functioning sense organ to be replaced.

I am aware that there is some debate regarding the use of hearing aids and I believe that the best answer to this can be found in one of the most beautiful political texts ever written. The second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America reads:

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*

I believe that faithful to the traditions of his country Dr. Blake Wilson has cleared the way to that pursuit of happiness for many, many people and I certainly do not wish to enter discussions about whether we can really say whether it is better to be able to hear or not. What we can say, like the Founding Fathers, is that an evident truth is that the crucial component of that right to the pursuit of happiness is the possibility of choice. Since the right to happiness is the most subjective of all those proclaimed in any political declaration, it is clear that it will not have the same meaning for everybody, although precisely with the exception of the possibility of choosing between different options. I think that Jonathan, the boy in our video, has made his choice and I believe that giving him this possibility more than justifies a lifetime’s work.

*Doctor Wilson, this old university, which is also yours from this day on, would like to thank you for giving Jonathan and many others that freedom to choose to hear, the capacity to fully enjoy music, the possibility of communicating with others through sophisticated and deep oral language.*

Thank you very much, Dr. Wilson, and my thanks too to all of you who are here today for your presence and attention.