

Hamburg, den 08. September 2022

Dear participants in the annual meeting of the Deutscher Hochschulverband:

My name is Lawrence Krauss and it is my great privilege to represent Professor Noam Chomsky here, virtually on the day of his officially being awarded the Reinhard Hesse Prize for Academic Freedom. We both want to thank the Foundation, its trustees, and all those involved with the Prize for this great honor.

Earlier this year Professor Chomsky and I recorded a dialogue on the present challenges to academic freedom in response to the notice of the award. It now is available both on the Hesse foundation web site as well on as my own Youtube channel.

Nothing is more important for the advancement of human knowledge and with it the advancement of human civilization than free and unfettered investigation of anything. This means that there must be no sacred truths that are not subject to inquiry and questioning and that we must not censor the results of investigations if the results of these investigations do not coincide with our a priori wishes or expectations.

Throughout his career Noam Chomsky has devoted himself not merely to the study of human language and cognition, but to being a public intellectual - a citizen of the world. and in so doing he has spoken out against injustice and oppression and tried to expose fallacies and hypocrisies wherever they occur, in both the political and scientific arenas. This has not made him popular, and he was often 'canceled' long before academic cancellation became fashionable. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that many media outlets were closed to him, Professor Chomsky has continued to write and speak out, without concern for his own standing or even his own security. As a result, while revolutionizing the field of linguistics, at the same time he has become known worldwide as a voice for the displaced and dispossessed and a critical of the foreign policies of his own country, the US, and that of others. Early on, in the Vietnam war, he was among the first in the academic community to openly speak out against this war, and for many Americans he became an important face representing the anti-Vietnam-war movement. From that time onward Professor Chomsky has been a consistent source of important information that has often countered 'official wisdom'. This is also the case with the present war in Ukraine where his analyses diverge from those presented in most mass media and from what normally is being said by scholars when they are asked for comments. His advocating free speech in Academia is just one side of the coin; on the other side stands the old Roman postulate of justice: "Audiatur et altera pars!" - "Listen also to the other side!" The postulate of free speech for him is meaningless if it doesn't mean the free speech of the adversary.

I can also speak first hand of his influence, not just on the general public, but on a younger generation of scholars. When I was a graduate student at MIT, I would often attend his public lectures (as well as a class he offered on US Foreign Policy, which he taught without any additional compensation at MIT). I was struck throughout by his calm yet devastatingly powerful knowledge, his reliance on empirical evidence, and his unflinching willingness to speak truth to power. More than that, his example of personal generosity struck me. As a lowly graduate student, in physics no less, his office door was always open to me when I came to ask questions or seek advice. More important, I saw how after each of his public lectures he would remain behind and answer questions until the last questioner left, sometimes hours after the formal proceedings had ended. I decided then and there that if I was ever fortunate enough to be in a similar position, I would emulate his example in my own academic career, and have thus devoted a significant fraction of my own time to defending the freedom of speech in the fields of science, whether the attacks come from ideology or religion. I also tried to educate the public on policy issues related to science. The example Professor Chomsky set during the Vietnam war demonstrates that governments can respond to the will of the public, and also that the public, when they are provided access to real and honest information, can be mobilized for the greater good.

The award you have established today here is extremely important. Indeed, I can think of few more important issues for the academic community in general than the need to preserve academic freedom, and freedom of inquiry more generally, and to protect it from attacks both from the inside and from the outside.

For this reason, I know Professor Chomsky and I are immensely grateful to the foundation, and more generally to the Deutscher Hochschulverband for the recognition you have given to Professor Chomsky today for his life and for his work. Thank you very much!