

Fernando Salmerón Roig

PHILOSOPHER AND EDUCATOR

1925-1997

For the last century, philosophy in Mexico has gone through periods of effervescence and creativity and long, dormant periods. The same cannot be said of Fernando Salmerón Roig, a philosopher who left behind him a vast body of creative work and a legacy of untiring dedication to teaching: several generations of aspiring Mexican philosophers.

Salmerón was part of that outstanding generation of Mexican intellectuals who, educated at the beginning of the 1950s, were concerned with a broad spectrum of disciplines and committed thinking. Part of that generation was the Hyperion Group, philosophers immortalized by their attempt to define the status of philosophy in Mexico, delimit its specificity and distinguish it from the currents that existed in the great cultural and philosophical centers of their time, Germany, France and the United States. In a word, they attempted to define the “originality” of Mexican philosophy.

Mexican philosophers like Ricardo Guerra, Luis Villoro, Miguel Portilla and, particularly, Leopoldo Zea, shared with Salmerón this theoretical concern together with the hope of changing philosophy into a tool at the service of our nationality, an instrument capable of reflecting about



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“Mexican-ness” with the noble end of joining thought with the recovery of a culture and a people, the Mexican people, in its search for identity and happiness. They founded the “philosophy of ‘Mexican-ness,’” and with it, influenced the country’s cultural milieu, such as for example, the “indigenouist” writers like Rosario Castellanos, the poets of “Mexican-ness” like Jaime Sabines, or the musicians and dramatists whose work forged a link between art and the emotional heritage of their people, like Pablo Pascual Moncayo and Emilio Carballido. Also devotees of this mystique were cinematographers like director of photography Gabriel Figueroa and director Emilio “Indio” Fernández, and painters like Rufino Tamayo.

The ideas of the Hyperion Group, were basic, foundational ideas, and not only of an aesthetic. They pointed mainly to a system of ethics that permeated Mexican politics and society.

Born in Córdoba, Veracruz, in 1925, Salmerón also had a long career as a leader and director of teaching institutions and of higher education. Therefore, it is not surprising that his theoretical contribution was in the field of the ethics and philosophy of education.

For Salmerón, the language of education was the same as the language of morality. Teaching could not be conceived of without the theoretical-reflexive basis of a philosophical system to base it on.

Salmerón studied law at the Veracruzana University and philosophy at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. He also did graduate studies in philosophy at the Albert Ludwig University in Freiberg, Germany.

He was influenced by the emigre philosopher José Gaos, whom he always considered his teacher and with whom he shared both experiences and illusions in the seminars and courses Gaos taught, attended assiduously by Salmerón until Gaos' death. Salmerón dedicated his life, like Gaos, to universities: at the age of 30 he was a founder and the first director of the School of Philosophy and Letters of the Veracruzana University in his home state. From 1959 to 1963, he was dean of this university.

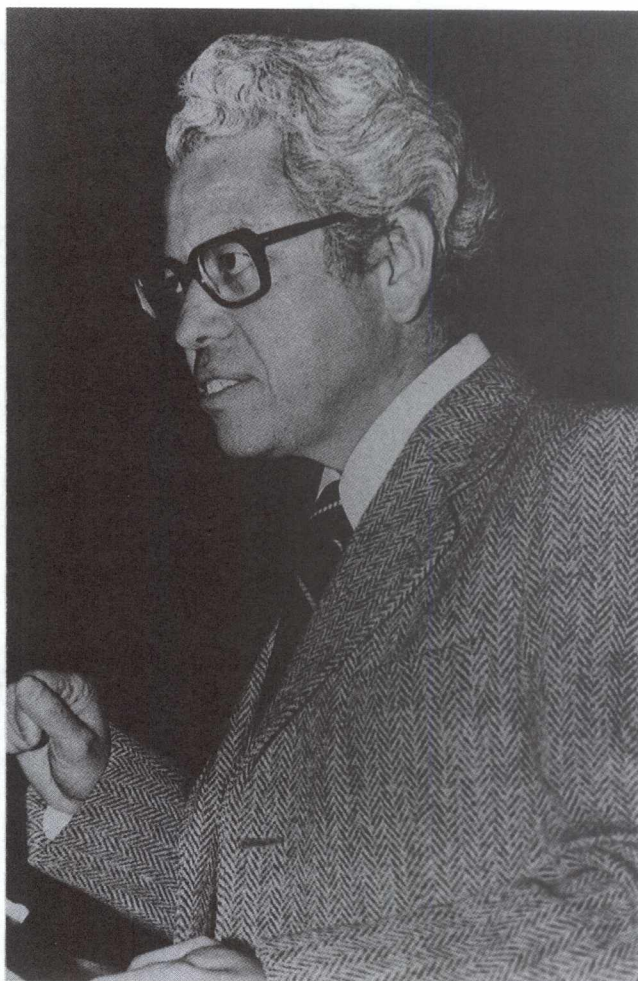
He later returned to the UNAM and in 1965 was appointed General Director of Higher Learning and Scientific Research of Mexico's Public Education Ministry.

After a period as dean of the Iztapalapa campus of the Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAM), he became dean of the entire UAM between 1979 and 1981.

However, it was at the UNAM that he lived out most of his professional life. He was twice the director of the UNAM Institute for Philosophical Research and held the Special Chair for Philosophy of Education, in 1966 and in 1978. From 1983 until his retirement, he was a member of the UNAM Board of Governors.

In 1972 he was made a full member of the National College, an academy of the country's most outstanding scientists and humanists. He was also a distinguished member of the International Institute of Philosophy, the Executive Board of the National System of Researchers¹ and the Board of Governors of the Mexico College, perhaps the country's most prestigious and best known research and graduate center of learning both here and abroad. He also received the National Prize for Science and the Arts for his important contribution to ethics and the philosophy of education.

¹ The National System of Researchers is an institution that evaluates the work of Mexican scientists and researchers to give them financial support to develop their work.



His vast body of work includes *Las mocedades de Ortega y Gasset* (The Youthful Frolics of Ortega and Gasset); *La filosofía y las actitudes morales* (Philosophy and Moral Attitudes); *Enseñanza y filosofía* (Teaching and Philosophy); *Los estudios cervantinos de José Gaos* (Studies on Cervantes by José Gaos); *Ética y análisis* (Ethics and Analysis); *Filosofía y teoría de la historia de México* (Philosophy and the Theory of History of Mexico); and *Concepciones de la ética* (Conceptions of Ethics).

The death of Fernando Salmerón is an irreparable loss to Mexico's cultural and philosophical circles. Mexican society as a whole also suffers for it because he was one of the men who, through his thinking, became the moral conscience of an entire nationality.

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