Sehr geehrter Herr Rektor,
sehr geehrter Herr Professor Folkers,
sehr geehrter Herr Professor Fehr,
sehr geehrte Damen und Herren

Ich bitte Sie um Entschuldigung und Verständnis dafür, dass ich auf Englisch zu Ihnen sprechen werde. Vor sechzig Jahren sprach ich flüssig Deutsch. Ich konnte die Sprache auch lesen, sogar die gotische Schrift, aber heute geht das nicht mehr. Mir fehlt dafür die Praxis.

Englisch habe ich nicht als Sprache studiert. Ich lernte es während meiner Forschungsaufenthalte in den USA und Grossbritannien durch die Zusammenarbeit mit meinen Forschungskollegen.

Meine Muttersprache ist Polnisch.

It is not only a great honour to be invited to the inauguration of the Ludwik Fleck Zentrum, it is an enormous pleasure for me. The Collegium Helveticum developed this project in a remarkably short time. In my experience of scientific and academic institutions, it is exceptional that such a Zentrum should be inaugurated only a year after the idea to establish it was proposed. This is all the more remarkable when one takes into consideration the fact that the Collegium is a venture of two Universities – the ETH Zurich and the University of Zurich – so setting up the Ludwik Fleck Zentrum needed the approval of two Rectors.

It is with great satisfaction that I congratulate the Collegium's Director, Professor Gerd Folkers and his deputy, the new Director of the Ludwik Fleck Zentrum, Professor Johannes Fehr. I would like also to thank the two distinguished Rectors for giving their assent to the project. I would also like to mention that the Fleck Zentrum has already signed an agreement for close cooperation with the Ludwik Fleck Kreis: members of the Kreis organized the Fleck Exhibition and the Workshop of Fleck's ideas at the Collegium Helveticum, the Proceedings of which appeared last week and will be presented later this evening by its Editor, Mr. Rainer Egloff. In particular, we are indebted to Dr. Thomas Schnelle, the first and the most
competent of all Fleck's biographers, who provided his very rich and extensive archive on Ludwik Fleck to the newly established Zentrum.

In a few words, I shall try to describe my encounter with Ludwik Fleck, which began a few weeks after his immigration to Israel, in 1957. Fleck did not leave his native Poland for Israel for ideological or political reasons. The only motive for Fleck and his wife leaving Poland – where he was one of the most distinguished scientists, a professor and director of a microbiological institute in Lublin and Warsaw and a member of the Polish Academy of Science as well as the member of its Presidium responsible for medical and life sciences – was that they wanted to live near to their only son.

I was privileged to become Fleck's close friend, and without false modesty, I will say that I was perhaps his closest friend during the last five years of his stay in Israel. I met him daily, six times a week, for a coffee and for a quite long and very interesting talk. At the beginning of our friendship, Fleck wanted to hear my biography – personal and professional – my experience during war in the Soviet Union and the fate of my family. After detailed information about myself (I have to stress that Fleck was a very good listener, and that I’m not a bad story teller), Fleck described briefly his family background and his medical education at the University of Lwow. He told me many times about his professional work as a microbiologist, from the beginning of the twenties until the German invasion of Lwow in 1941; about his transfer, with his family, to the Lwow Ghetto; his imprisonment, and his experience in the Nazi concentration camps of Auschwitz and Buchenwald. He described in detail his professional-scientific work in the Ghetto and in KZ Buchenwald in developing and producing a vaccine against Epidemic Typhus (Fleckfieber - in German), as well as the well known sabotage in producing an ineffective vaccine for the Waffen SS. He frequently spoke about the Buchenwald period and stressed, with great empathy, the illegal underground organization of the political prisoners, mostly Germans in the KZ: Communists and Socialists. These political inmates not only saved the life of his son more than once; they saved his life too. Later, in 1959, Fleck started speaking to me about his philosophical ideas and thoughts. I feel very fortunate to have been Fleck’s close friend right up to his death in June 1961, holding his hand during the last moments of his life (his testament nominated me as the executor of his last will).

I am happy that, about 16 years after his death, there was a revival of interest in the philosophical ideas Fleck first published in 1935, by Schwabe Verlag in Basel, here in
Switzerland. This led to Fleck’s thinking and ideas becoming more widely known, and they were recognized and republished in Germany. His writings were also translated into English, Italian, Spanish and Polish. And today we are at a new peak of recognition of his thoughts and ideas. I do hope that the Ludwik Fleck Zentrum at the Collegium Helveticum will become not only a Swiss or European centre, but an international one. Once more I thank the distinguished Rectors and congratulate the Collegium's Director, Professor Gerd Folkers and the Director of the Ludwik Fleck Zentrum, Professor Johannes Fehr. Under your leadership I am convinced that the Zentrum will flourish and fulfil all our expectations.

Zurich, 7 July 2005

Marcus A. Klingberg