

Letter of A. Grothendieck to C. Ganelius¹

Montpellier, 19 April 1988

Dear Professor Ganelius,

I thank you for your letter of the 13th of April which I received today, and for your telegram. I am touched by the honor given to me by the Royal Academy of Sciences of Sweden awarding this year's Crafoord prize, together with a significant sum of money, jointly to Pierre Deligne (who was my student) and myself. Nevertheless, I regret to inform you that I do not wish to accept this (or any other) prize for the following reasons.

- 1) My salary as professor, even my pension starting next October, is more than sufficient for my own material needs as well as those of my dependants; hence I have no need for money. As for the distinction given to some of my work on foundations, I am convinced that time is the only decisive test for the fertility of new ideas or views. Fertility is measured by offspring, not by honors.
- 2) I note moreover that all researchers of high level, to which a prestigious award such as the Crafoord prize addresses itself, have a social standing that provides them with more enough material wealth and scientific prestige, with all the power and privileges these entail. But is it not clear that superabundance for some is only possible at the cost of the needs of others?
- 3) The work that brought me to the kind attention of the Academy was done twenty-five years ago at a time when I was part of the scientific community

¹This text had been transcribed by Mateo Carmona

and essentially shared its spirit and its values. I left that environment in 1970, and, while keeping my passion for scientific research, inwardly I have retreated more and more from the scientific “milieu”. Meanwhile, the ethics of the scientific community (at least among mathematicians) have declined to the point that outright theft among colleagues (especially at the expense of those who are in no position to defend themselves) has nearly become the general rule, and is in any case tolerant by all, even in the most obvious and iniquitous cases. Under these conditions, agreeing to participate in the game of “prizes” and “rewards” would also mean giving my approval to a spirit and trend in the scientific world that I view as being fundamentally unhealthy, and moreover condemned to disappear soon, so suicidal are this spirit and trend, spiritually and even intellectually and materially.

This third reason is to me by far the most imperative one. Stating it is in no way meant as a criticism of the Royal Academy’s aims in the administration of its funds. I do not doubt that before the end of the century, totally unforeseen events will completely change our notions about “science” and its goals and the spirit in which scientific work is done. No doubt the Royal Academy will then be among the institutions and the people who will have an important role to play in this unprecedented renovation, after an equally unprecedented civilisation collapse.

I regret the inconvenience that my refusal to accept the Crafoord prize may have caused you and the Royal Academy, especially because a certain amount of publicity was already given to the award prior to the acceptance by the chosen laureates. Yet, I have never failed to make my views about the scientific community and the “official science” of today known to this same community and specially to my old friends and young students in the mathematical world. They can be found in a long reflection *Récoltes et Semailles (Reaping and Sowing)* on my life as a mathematician, on creativity in general, and on scientific creativity in particular; this essay unexpectedly became a portrait of the morals of the mathematical world from 1950 up to today. While awaiting its publication in book form, a provisional edition of 200 preprints has been sent to mathematical colleagues, especially algebraic geometers (who now do me the honor of remembering me). Under separate cover, I send you the two introductory parts for your personal information.

Again I thank you and the Royal Academy of Sciences of Sweden and apologise for the unwanted inconvenience. Please accept my best regards.

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