

Workshop on Functional Analysis Valencia 2015 on the occasion of the 60th birthday of José Bonet

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by Pepe Bonet

Thank you very much to all of you, and especially to the organizing committee and to those kind enough to have said some words about me. Muchísimas gracias. Now it is my turn. Ahora he de hablar yo; es inevitable

Today I will have to try to combine English and Spanish as well as I can. It may happen that at the end nobody understands anything. Who knows?

Anyway, here we go. Vamos allá:

I owe much to many people who helped me in my mathematical career. Teachers and friends without whom I would have been another person and another mathematician. Unfortunately, many of them are not here today for different reasons. I want to express my gratitude to Manuel Valdivia, Klaus Bierstedt, Susanne Dierolf, Klaus Floret, and also to Reinhold Meise, Jean Schmets, Pawel Domanski, Jari Taskinen and Angela Albanese among many others.

Once this is said, let us pass to less serious matters.

It is good to celebrate a birthday with a research meeting. In words of David Lodge "The modern conference resembles the

pilgrimage of medieval Christendom: There are certain penitential exercises to be performed - the presentation of a paper, perhaps, and certainly listening to the papers of others. But with this excuse you journey to new and interesting places, meet new and interesting people, and form new and interesting relationships with them; exchange gossip and confidences; eat, drink and make merry in their company every evening; and yet, at the end of it all, return home with an enhanced reputation for seriousness of mind.”

I have heard during the meeting and this evening many nice (and some not so nice) things about me and my work. I feel a bit ashamed. After so many positive statements about me, here are my three worse weaknesses: I am leftwing (soy de izquierdas como mi padre), I am a supporter of Barça (soy del Barça como mi hijo), and I am a functional analysts (y trabajo en análisis funcional como muchos de ustedes). Any of these there “awful flaws” heard by certain people in the wrong context could make them reach for their guns. Remember “When I hear the word culture, I reach for my gun” (Wenn ich Kultur höre...entsichere ich meinen Browning), que traducido al castellano de nuestro gobierno conservador sería “Cuando oigo la palabra cultura, subo el impuesto del IVA”. Fortunately, we are among friends today, aren’t we?

The statements we heard about me are exaggerations or simply not true. They remind me the following story: On the occasion celebration of his 50th birthday Felix Klein, after hearing several statements about him, turned to one of his colleagues and told him “When everyone speaks well of you, you are on the downward road”. O sea, “Cuando todos hablan bien de ti, es que

estás en la cuesta abajo”. Perhaps I am already at the bottom... Who knows?

There are three aspects I want to talk about briefly: Age, work and friendship. Voy a comentar brevemente tres aspectos: edad, trabajo y amistad.

AGE: Well, well,... As Mark Twain said, “age is a question of mind over matter. If you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter.” In 1990 we celebrated in Peñíscola the meeting on the occasion of Valdivia’s 60th birthday. I have great memories of that meeting. Manolo Maestre and I were 35, and I must confess that I had the feeling that Don Manuel was very old at that time. Well: we are already there Manolo. To tell you the truth, I do not feel old. Proceeding as a good mathematician, I have defined that an old person is one who is 10 years older than me. According to this definition, I might not be young, but I am certainly not old.

I deeply believe that the slogan “Mathematics is a young man’s game,” is misleading, perhaps even harmful. It may discourage people from mathematics when they are no longer young, it is not justified and is destructive. Many mathematicians were very productive till older age, and our boss Valdivia was one of them. The breakthrough about the bounded gaps between the primes was obtained by Yitang Zhang one year ago at the age of 57 when he was working in a Subway sandwich shop. I am not saying that we are as good as Zhang. Certainly not. What I mean is that older mathematicians enrich the field and are very helpful to young mathematicians. I remember that Valdivia once told me that he asked Choquet, who was already over 80, if he still did research. Choquet replied: “Yes, very much. I do a lot of

mathematical research, but I am wise enough not to publish anything.”

WORK: As some of you know, I am (or I was when I was younger) a very hardworking person. Perhaps I was even a workaholic for some time of my life. I believe, as Pasteur said in 1854, that “Fortune favours only the prepared mind”. It is simply false, and very harmful for young people, to believe that mathematical research is a sequence of “Poincaré moments” without great effort and continuous work. Success in mathematical research, whatever some people tell you, is “*one percent inspiration, ninety nine percent perspiration.*” (T.A. Edison).

At the time when I was working like crazy in Mathematics (really years ago) I had the feeling that I did not work a single day, it was all fun. I loved doing mathematics, and would not have changed it for anything else. This is probably what makes hedonists so angry: that we, enthusiasts of work, without drugs or orgies, who achieve our goals and objectives have much more fun. Mathematics has been for me, not only science and work, but adventure and passion. This is why I still want to do it: just for fun and to help young researchers.

FRIENDSHIP. Although many of my friends consider me correctly as a stoic, one of my favorite quotes comes from Epicurus: “Of all the things which wisdom provides to make us entirely happy, much the greatest is the possession of friendship.” O sea, ““De todos los bienes que la sabiduría procura para la felicidad de la vida entera, el mayor con mucho es la adquisición de la amistad.” I have been very, very fortunate to have many Friends, some of them very good. It would have been impossible to accomplish what I have done without collaborating with people who were, in many cases, better than me. I would not be here without their help, encouragement and friendship.

As Andreas Defant told us in a similar occasion two years ago, this is a birthday that I will never forget in my life, I am extremely thankful. You have made me extremely happy. However, as it was written in the ring that the wise men gave to the King in the old tale, when he asked for a suggestion which worked in every situation, in every circumstances, in every place and in every time, in every joy, every sorrow, every defeat and every victory: THIS TOO SHALL PASS. Todo esto también pasará. It is important to remember it in good and in bad times. Hay que recordarlo en los malos y en los buenos tiempos.

Anyway, let us enjoy the moment today. Today we celebrate my birthday. We are here today NOT because I have great merits, which is not the case as I know very well. We are here because I have great friends. And this is my privilege. Thank you very much.