

# Banquet Speech

Sir John Eccles' Address to the University Students on the Evening of  
December 10, 1963

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Fellow students, Mr. Drakenberg.

I have the great honour to reply on behalf of the Laureates on this magnificent occasion. We have greatly enjoyed your festive display and the fine style of your dancing and singing. As an old folk-dancer I particularly appreciated the grace and precision of your dancing. But it is to your thoughtful and sincere speech of welcome and congratulation that I wish especially to reply. This is the greatest day of our lives - the climax of long years of creative work. We feel a great expansion of personality. And now as I speak to you I feel elevated, as on some high platform. Let me then speak to you as an old student of some 60 years and give you young students two thoughts that have come to me with special vividness in these last years.

Firstly, I think we must realize the full negative impact of the new knowledge derived from the study of the moon, Venus and Mars and of the problems of space travel. As physiologists we can now predict with complete assurance that "Man is forever earth-bound". There is absolutely no possible place for man to live other than on this earth. We and our fellow men of all countries must realize that we share this wonderful, beautiful, salubrious earth as brothers and that there never will be anywhere else to go. This revelation should strongly reinforce the plea of Mr. Drakenberg for a world Government by [United Nations](#).

My second thought is that in this present age we have tremendously underestimated the importance of biology. Possibly life is only in this planet, and even here only in an infinitesimally small fraction of the matter of this earth; yet it is of transcendent importance to us. We are of it, we are in the evolutionary story. The origin of each of us stems from codes of genetic inheritance. For us the most significant questions we can ask scientifically concern the working of our nervous systems - the marvellous reception, communication and storage devices that subserve all our perception, our thoughts, our memories, our actions, our creative imaginations, our ideals. To the brains of our predecessors we owe all of our inheritance of civilization and culture. And now we have the power of progress with great success in this study of nervous systems though of course we are still at a primitive level of understanding. This work needs the concentrated efforts of great intellects in the scientific disciplines of physics, chemistry, mathematics, as well as in biology. But as yet these great opportunities are relatively neglected as our scientific vision turns outwards from ourselves to the immensities of space and time and to the ultimate structure of matter. I am passionately devoted to the study of life, and particularly to the higher forms of life. For me the one great question that has dominated my life is: "What am I?" What is the meaning of this marvellous gift of life? The more we know, the more the mystery grows.

If you ask me: "What would I do if I were to begin my life's work now?" I would reply: "I would start where I have left off." I do hope that some of you young students accept this great challenge of trying to understand man scientifically, and that you devote yourselves with passion and joy to your chosen work, as Alfred Nobel would so much have desired. I finish by saying to you all: May God bless you!

From [\*Les Prix Nobel en 1963\*](#), Editor Göran Liljestrand, [Nobel Foundation], Stockholm, 1964

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