

Banquet Speech

George Wald's speech at the Nobel Banquet in Stockholm, December 10, 1967

Your Majesty, Royal Highnesses, Excellencies, Ladies, Gentlemen, and fellow students:

A scientist should be the happiest of men. Not that science isn't serious; but as everyone knows, being serious is one way of being happy, just as being gay is one way of being unhappy.

A scientist lives with all reality. There is nothing better. To know reality is to accept it, and eventually to love it.

I tell my students to try early in life to find an unattainable objective. The trouble with most of the things that people want is that they get them. No scientist needs to worry on that score. For him there is always the further horizon. Science goes from question to question; big questions, and little, tentative answers. The questions as they age grow ever broader, the answers are seen to be more limited.

A scientist is in a sense a learned small boy. There is something of the scientist in every small boy. Others must outgrow it. Scientists can stay that way all their lives.

I have lived much of my life among molecules. They are good company. I tell my students to try to know molecules, so well that when they have some question involving molecules, they can ask themselves, What would I do if I were that molecule? I tell them, Try to feel like a molecule; and if you work hard, who knows? Some day you may get to feel like a *big* molecule!

So we have much to be thankful for. With this great honor you cast a radiance upon our science. We who work in vision are happy to have it made so visible.

I am glad to be able to bring this offering to the memory of my teacher, Selig Hecht, whose widow Gelia is here with us tonight; to my wife, who is also my closest co-worker; and to my co-workers at home, particularly Paul Brown, who for twenty years has done so much himself, and with us all.

But there is something more. The grocer, the butcher, the taxi man, all seem delighted to share in our pleasure. The Nobel Prize is an honor unique in the world in having found its way into the hearts and minds of simple people everywhere. It casts a light of peace and reason upon us all; and for that I am especially grateful.

From [Les Prix Nobel en 1967](#), Editor Ragnar Granit, [Nobel Foundation], Stockholm, 1968