

Jagdish Bhagwati's Response
5th August 2005

My Dear Friends:

I am overwhelmed. The sentiments you have expressed, and the hands of friendship that you have extended, are precious; I will treasure this enchanting evening. Thank you so much.

I want to thank you personally, each and all. But if I were to do that, we should not be able to leave this magnificent Rotunda until the hours of dawn. There are too many of you to thank individually; that will have to await next week, when I sit in my study with my AC and my PC to write to you my letters of gratitude.

Having spent a lifetime teaching in the academe, I must first say that it has been my fortune to have had extraordinary teachers and exceptional pupils. And while my great MIT teacher and later colleague Paul Samuelson, who is 90, cannot be here but has sent a lovely message which you heard, I am happy that some of the best among them are here tonight. Bob Solow taught me not just Economics; but as the wittiest economist today, he reinforced my sense that style and substance are a powerful combination in assaulting the economic follies of our times. And, most loved by his innumerable students, he also taught me that students are our most precious charge.

I also see my gifted pupils, among them Paul Krugman, whom we now breakfast with twice a week (though I must say that he does not believe in giving us sugar-frosted cornflakes), Gene Grossman who holds the Viner Chair at Princeton, and several others of very great distinction. Two of them, Robert Feenstra and Doug Irwin, both among today's best and brightest, have worked for this event; I owe them thanks. I also see several of today's best international economists, some of them my co-authors over the years, many of whom came up for the Festschrift conference. Among them, I must include V.N. Balasubramanyam, whom I taught in Delhi, and Elias Dinopoulos, my Columbia student: they organized festschrift conferences in England last December and in Florida in January, making tonight the third and crowning event to celebrate my 70th.

For tonight's event, my special thanks go to Arvind Panagariya, who, though not my student, has been a friend and has reached world-class standing today in both international trade theory and on the Indian economy where his eminence is unparalleled. Without his tireless efforts, this event would not have been possible.

But if science and scholarship have been central to my preoccupations, equally important has been my conviction that no economist is complete unless the creation of Knowledge is accompanied by the pursuit of Virtue through the use of Knowledge to advance the public good. I have therefore worked tirelessly with international organizations such as the UN and the WTO, and with NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, debated issues in public fora with Ralph Nader and Naomi Klein, and written extensively in magazines and newspapers.

And so I have made several new friends. The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, one of the great men of our time, is one of them. How can I thank him, and his wife Nane, enough for coming tonight? Ibrahim Gambari, the Special Adviser to Africa at the UN, who is in the audience with his wife, is another. Dr. Supachai, the Director General of the WTO, who is busy trying to advance the Doha Round and has sent a generous message, is yet another. I add them to a lot of my old friends: among them the Indian Prime Minister who has sent a most generous and gracious letter that another old friend, Sir James Murray, whose wife Jill is also in the audience, kindly read from tonight.

My writings in the media have also produced several new friends. Among them are arguably the best economic journalist today, Martin Wolf of The Financial Times, and Sebastian Mallaby of The Economist who now works for The Washington Post. They are on holiday. Most Europeans take August off. Edna O'Brien has this wonderful novel titled August is a Wicked Month; I doubt however that Martin and Sebastian are proving her right! I am also happy to see here several other media friends, among them Sylvia Nasar, who turned Russell Crowe into an intellectual, and Tunku Varadarajan, the Features Editor of The Wall Street Journal, who published me yesterday and himself writes gloriously, with sparkle and sense, a most unusual combination.

In conclusion, I must thank Padma. An economist of great distinction, and the leading scholar on the Russian economy today, she has been a wonderful intellectual companion over almost half a century. She has managed to combine a hectic career with affection and indulgence towards me. Ever generous, she has celebrated the successes of our friends and my students with countless dinners, cooking through the night to give them a real treat. And there have been so many book parties: the first at MIT when Bobby Solow, a distinguished economic historian, wrote her first book on Ireland, the last at Columbia when Doug Irwin published his first book on free trade. Sylvia Hewlett has written of A Lesser Life, of women overwhelmed by many demands on them. Padma has managed instead a full life.

That has included looking after our daughter, Anuradha, who cannot be here tonight as she is in Palestine with a Peace Group. She has kept us intrigued and involved, as she has gone from Yale in English Lit, studying with Harold Bloom, playing flute on the Yale Symphony, to five years in the Marine Corps, and then to Harvard at the Kennedy School where she is into Human Rights. She has kept Padma busy, as you can see. But she is our joy; and, while I miss her tonight, I am delighted that it is in a good cause. After all, that is what counts.

Once again, thank you all.