

Yoram Barzel Retirement Speech November 2014

Thanks to everyone for coming here to celebrate with me. I arrived here from Chicago, where it was asserted that there is no free lunch. The conclusive evidence favoring this proposition is in that you have to listen to me give my retirement speech.

This is how my career started. When I was thinking about college, a friend told me that his sister was studying political economy at the Sorbonne, and I decided that this is what I wanted to study. But I had to settle for plain economics because the Hebrew University, at the time the only university in Israel, didn't offer political economy.

In the course of study, I realized that plain economics was fine with me. Chicago seemed a better fit in that Political Economy was in its title, but in spite of the name, all that was done there was strictly economics. This still was fine with me. It was only late in the game that I got re-interested with political economy, starting with a paper on the governance of condos, and then expanding it to the governance of nations, and spending much of the 1990's in that area.

When I was writing my Master Thesis at the Hebrew University I discovered how rewarding research was, and it has remained so ever since. My dissertation was about welfare loss due to taxation; as if I divined that later I was going to have Al Harberger, the world's greatest authority on welfare triangles, as my dissertation adviser. It is a pity he is not here today; unfortunately, he is more disabled than I am.

I got married while I was in Chicago, and that tenured position has lasted even longer than the one at the University of Waashington, and with no sign of retirement.

I arrived here in 1961. At the time the university had about half as many students and half as many buildings as it has today. The old Meany Hall was barn-like, and when it was only slightly damaged by an earthquake, the university was quick to declare it dangerous, and replace it with a much superior building, throwing the Odegaard Library and Kane Hall into the bargain. There have been other changes in university