

EULER TO LAGRANGE¹

Berlin, May 3, 1766

My Dear Sir and Colleague,

I must begin by asking a thousand pardons for so long deferring to reply to the kind letter with which you wished to honor me. I am charmed that your illustrious Society has so well received the thesis which I had taken the liberty to send to you, and am impatiently awaiting the third volume of your works, in order to see the continuation of your profound research on this new aspect of Analysis, of which even the first principles were unknown before you undertook their development with the happiest of success. I am flattered that the Leipzig fair will obtain this precious gift for me. But, in order to justify my long silence, I must inform you, Sir, that for quite some time I have found myself in the greatest of difficulties, which has almost entirely prevented me for conducting any research, and I was ashamed to write you a letter devoid of any research into Geometry; and yet, neither at this time am I in such a state; but great arguments have determined to end my holiday in order that I return to St. Petersburg, where the most attractive work of the Empress calls me. You are surely aware that for some time the Russian Academy has fallen in reputation; but, now that her Majesty the Empress plans to reestablish the former glory of this academy and then add to its splendor, notice that she has allocated me 60,000 rubles in yearly funds. In view of this, her Majesty wishes to honor me with her highest confidence in calling upon me to supervise and execute this great plan, which is principally to enlist the great men in all of the Sciences to come establish themselves in St. Petersburg and work together for the advancement of Science.

You easily understand, Sir, that you were the first that I proposed to her Majesty the Empress, and I would be infinitely happy if I were able to persuade to accept this work, which will always be as attractive as honorable for you. I fully understand that the great distance and severe weather [of St. Petersburg] might initially shock you; but, as I know this place perfectly having stayed there for fourteen years, and am eagerly returning, I can assure you that the city of St. Petersburg simultaneously incorporates all of the charms that one can find but separately elsewhere, and that over there one has the means to guarantee against the cold, of a sort which is considerably less uncomfortable than in the warmer countries.

I therefore pray you, sir, to reflect upon this proposition and to make me aware of your feelings as soon as possible, before I depart from here, which could well be a in few months.

¹Translation from original French by Benjamin Linowitz, Dartmouth College

I am honored to be, with the most careful consideration and the most invaluable attachment, Sir,

Your humble and obedient servant,
L. Euler.