

## Mathematical Methods

### in Science

George Pólya

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### George Pólya

In these lectures we will discuss:

- 1.- Very simple physical or pre-physical problems; problems that could be discussed at the high school level.
- 2.- The relation of mathematics to science and of science to mathematics. This relation is a two-way street. Though more usual, it is not always the case that mathematics is applied to science; also there is traffic in the opposite direction. Good driving takes note of the oncoming traffic.

- 3.- Elementary calculus, for without some calculus one's idea of how mathematics is applied to science is necessarily inadequate.

First we discussed measurement, especially in astronomy; then simple but pervasive topics culled from the history of statics, and finally, great discoveries from the history of dynamics.

We have seen something of the role played by mathematics in the development of science; that the aim of physics is to condense its knowledge into mathematical formulae; that, as Galileo so delightfully expressed it, the book of Nature is written in mathematical characters.

## MATHEMATICAL METHODS IN SCIENCE

GEORGE PÓLYA

The great book of Nature lies ever open before our eyes and the true philosophy is written in it... But we cannot read it unless we have first learned the language and the characters in which it is written... This is written in mathematical language and the characters are triangles, circles and other geometrical figures...

Galileo : Saggiatore,  
Opere vi, p. 252

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## Sueños

He advertido que en los últimos años la acción disminuye en mis sueños; lo que les imprime el carácter de pesadilla es saber que sueño y no logro volver a la vigilia. Mis esfuerzos se repiten, pero son baldíos, no salgo del pozo, aunque no haya nada de extraordinariamente horrible en él es atroz no poder evadirse.

La monotonía deforma la realidad y crea una incertidumbre que no es sino la puerta del terror.

En ese penar estoy cuando una voz conocida me despierta y anuncia que el jugo de naranja y el café están ya servidos. Todos los sufrimientos, el pavor y la angustia vividos desaparecen como por arte de magia ante la cotidianidad con que se anuncia el día. ¿No es eso como para volverse loco?

**Sergio Pitol**

The book is organized into four content-rich chapters separated by one single-page chapter marking what Pólya terms the "tidal flow" between mathematics and physics. It is not an easy read -the reader has to do the mathematics along with Pólya- but his explanations are clear and his dry wit lightens the work along the way. Topics are arranged historically and one follows developments with a sense of a time traveler watching the concepts as they unfold.

The volume will appeal to a broad audience.

The close link between physics and mathematics makes this text a tool that can be used by teachers in either discipline.

**Katherine Safford-Ramus**

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