

Christian de Duve (1917–2013)

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Christian de Duve died on May 4, 2013, at his home in Nethen, Belgium.

As a Nobel Prize winning biologist (1974 Biology or Medicine, together with Albert Claude and George E. Palade), his life has been chronicled many times and full accounts have now appeared again in major news media in association with the news of his death.

It would be presumptuous for OLEB to merely echo the already widely publicized details of the career of a famous biologist. Nonetheless, it appeared important for us to mention his passing, given his strong commitment to the study of the origin and early evolution of life

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and the strong friendship ties he developed with many members of our community. ISSOL members will particularly remember the closing lecture which he gave at the ISSOL Congress in Oaxaca, Mexico, on July 2002, entitled “A research proposal on the origin of life” (de Duve 2003).

In his “6th life,” as he wrote in his last book “Sept vies en une, mémoires d’un prix Nobel”, he applied his knowledge of biochemistry to the study of the origins of life. He wrote several books, including “A Guided Tour of the Living Cell” (1984), “Blueprint for a cell: The nature and origin of life” (1991), “Vital dust : Life as a cosmic imperative” (1995), “Singularities : Landmarks on the Pathways of Life” (2005), “Genetics of Original Sin: The Impact of Natural Selection on the Future of Humanity” (2012). Until the very end he remained deeply interested in questions related to the emergence of life, writing to colleagues and engaging himself in scientific exchanges.

Christian de Duve was an outstanding scientist who contributed enormously to our discipline and brought it great credit. He was also a real humanist, always open to enriching discussions but also worrying about the destiny of humanity. Like a true patrician, deciding that his time had come, he wrote elegant and moving farewell messages to several friends, thanking them for the opportunity to enrich his life with a fascinating intellectual endeavour. We will miss a warm friend and a wonderful colleague.

Reference

De Duve C (2003) A research proposal on the origin of life. *Orig Life Evol Biosph* 33:559–574