

**BILL BRYSON WINS NEW PRIZE FOR
'A SHORT HISTORY OF NEARLY EVERYTHING'**

- Bill Bryson wins the 2005 EU Descartes Prize for Science Communication -

2 December 2005: Bill Bryson today won the 2005 EU Descartes Prize for Science Communication and the €50,000 prize money associated with the prestigious laureate title for his book 'A Short History of Nearly Everything' (which won the Aventis Prizes for Science Books General Prize in 2004). Bill was presented with the award by the European Commissioner for Science and Research Janez Pitočnik at a ceremony held at the Royal Society.

The Descartes Prizes are the European Union's highest awards for outstanding transnational scientific research and outstanding science communication. The latter is a "prize of prizes" that is only open to winners of other European award schemes – Bill Bryson was nominated for winning the Royal Society's Aventis Prizes for Science Books in 2004.

Receiving his award Bill Bryson said: "Never has someone been more generously awarded for his ignorance. I'm very grateful to all the scientists who, without exception, helped me to discover the wonder of their science.

I'm especially grateful to the Royal Society for nominating me for this award and in recognition of that, plan to return a small portion of the prize to the Society, in the hope they'll be able to buy the staff a seasonal drink"

Director of Communications for the Royal Society, Dr. David Stewart Boak, said: "We are delighted that Bill Bryson's achievements continue to be recognised and rewarded, following his success at the Royal Society's Aventis Prizes for Science Books in 2004. 'A Short History of Nearly Everything' has helped to inspire, engage and enthral a whole generation about the excitement and wonder of scientific discovery. Our congratulations also go to previous Aventis Prize-winner Frances Balkwill for being a finalist."

Nick Arnold, 2004 Junior Prize winner for 'Really Rotten Experiments', was also shortlisted for the 2005 Descartes Prize for Science Communication.

Now in their 18th year, the Royal Society's Aventis Prizes for Science Books, encourage the reading, writing and publication of high quality, accessible science books for adults and children. Each year a General Prize is awarded to the author of the best science book for adults, while a Junior Prize goes to the author of the best children's science book. The 2006 winners will be announced at a prestigious awards ceremony at the Royal Society in London on 16 May 2006.

In 2005 the General Prize went to Philip Ball for 'Critical Mass', the Junior Prize was awarded to Lord Robert Winston for his book 'What Makes Me, Me?', his first book for children. More information on the awards is available at www.aventisprizes.com.

Notes to Editors

About the EU Descartes Prizes

The Descartes Prize for Science Communication was launched two years ago to reward outstanding achievements in bringing science and technology to wider audiences in Europe.

From 63 submissions, 23 nominees were shortlisted, including Nick Arnold and Bill Bryson, both winners of the Royal Society's 2004 Aventis Prizes for Science Books. Out of these 23 nominees, five winners and five finalists share the € 275,000 EU Descartes Prize for Science Communication. Winners receive €50,000 each and finalists €5,000 each.

The Descartes Prize for Science Communication compliments the Descartes Prize for Research, initiated in 2000, which recognises teams of EU researchers for outstanding scientific and technological results obtained through transnational research.

The winners of both Descartes Prizes were celebrated at the Descartes Prize award ceremony hosted by the Royal Society in London on 1 and 2 December 2005.

Main media contact for the Descartes Prizes:

Patrick Vittet-Philippe

Press Officer

Research DG

European Commission

Tel.: +32.2.296.90.56

Mobile: +32 477 274663

E-mail: Patrick.Vittet-Philippe@cec.eu.int

About The Royal Society

The Royal Society is an independent academy promoting the natural and applied sciences. Founded in 1660, the Society has three roles, as the UK academy of science, as a learned Society and as a funding agency. It responds to individual demand with selection by merit not by field. The Society's aims are to:

- strengthen UK science by providing support to excellent individuals
- fund excellent research to push back the frontiers of knowledge
- attract and retain the best scientists
- ensure the UK engages with the best science around the world
- support science communication and education; and communicate and encourage dialogue with the public
- provide the best independent advice nationally and internationally
- promote scholarship and encourage research into the history of science

For more information, visit the web site at www.royalsoc.ac.uk

About The Aventis Foundation

The Aventis Foundation is generously supporting the Aventis Prizes for Science Books.

The Aventis Foundation is a German charitable trust established by a predecessor of sanofi-aventis, a world leader in pharmaceuticals. The Aventis Foundation serves to promote music, theatre, art and literature,

projects in the social and political arena with a focus on healthcare, as well as science, research and higher education. For more information visit the website at www.aventis-foundation.org

About sanofi-aventis

The sanofi-aventis Group is the world's 3rd largest pharmaceutical company, ranking number 1 in Europe. Backed by a world-class R&D organization, sanofi-aventis is developing leading positions in seven major therapeutic areas: cardiovascular disease, thrombosis, oncology, diabetes, central nervous system, internal medicine, vaccines. The sanofi-aventis Group is listed in Paris (EURONEXT : SAN) and in New York (NYSE : SNY).

For further information on the **Royal Society Aventis Prizes for Science Books**, please contact Zoë Harris or Chris Owen at Trimedia on tel: 020 7471 6855 / 851 or email: aventisprizes@trimediauk.com