

12th May, 2005

OUTSIDER PHILIP BALL WINS AVENTIS PRIZE

www.aventisprizes.com

Journalist and science writer Philip Ball has won the Aventis Prizes for Science Books General Prize, with his book 'Critical Mass: How One Thing Leads to Another'. The Aventis Prizes are the world's most prestigious awards for popular science writing. Bookmakers William Hill had quoted Ball with the longest odds at 8/1 to win the Prize.

Lord May of Oxford, President of the Royal Society and Dr Dirk Oldenburg, Chairman of the Board of Management of the Aventis Foundation, presented the £10,000 prize to Ball at an awards ceremony at the Royal Society in London.

A judging panel, chaired by Bill Bryson, winner of the 2004 General Prize for his book 'A Short History of Nearly Everything', selected the title from a shortlist of six books which included 'The Human Mind' by popular author, fertility expert and TV presenter Robert Winston and 'The Ancestor's Tale' by Richard Dawkins.

In his book, 'Critical Mass', Philip causes us to examine our own behaviour and shows how much we can understand about human behaviour when we cease to try to predict and analyse the behaviour of individuals and instead look to the impact of hundreds, thousands or millions of individual human decisions.

Bill Bryson, chair of this year's General Prize Judging Panel and winner in 2004, said: "This is a wide-ranging and dazzlingly informed book about the science of interactions. I can promise you'll be amazed."

Lord May of Oxford, President of the Royal Society, said: "The Royal Society is very proud of these inspiring prizes. Aventis Prizes winners excel at bringing complex issues to broad audiences in an exciting and engaging manner. Critical Mass reflects the high calibre of writing that the Aventis Prizes have become synonymous with.

The shortlisted books for the General Prize 2005 were:

Critical Mass: How One Thing Leads to Another – Philip Ball (*William Heinemann*)

The Ancestor's Tale – Richard Dawkins (*Weidenfeld & Nicholson*)

Why Life Speeds Up As You Get Older – Douwe Draaisma (*Cambridge University Press*)

Matters of Substance: Drugs – and why everyone's a user – Griffith Edwards
(*Penguin, Allen Lane*)

The Earth: An Intimate History – Richard Fortey (*HarperCollins*)

The Human Mind – Robert Winston (*Bantam Press/ Transworld Publishers*)

The General Prize judging panel consisted of:

Bill Bryson, author and winner of the General Prize in 2004 (chair)

Lisa Burke, forecaster and Sky News weather presenter

Sian Ede, renowned UK authority on art and science interactions

Mark Lythgoe, broadcaster, neurophysiologist and lecturer

Ruth Padel, scholar, poet and Chair of the UK Poetry Society.

Previous winners of the Aventis Prizes for Science Books General Prize have included Stephen Hawking, Robert Kunzig, Stephen Jay Gould and Chris McManus.

The Prizes are managed by the Royal Society, the UK national academy of science and generously supported by the Aventis Foundation, a German charitable trust established by a predecessor of sanofi-aventis, a world leader in pharmaceuticals.

For more information on the Aventis Prizes for Science Books please visit the website at www.aventisprizes.com.

Notes to Editors

About Philip Ball

Philip Ball is a freelance science writer and a consultant editor for Nature. He worked as editor at Nature for over ten years, where his brief extended from biochemistry to quantum physics and materials science. His writings on science for the popular press have covered topical issues ranging from cosmology to the future of molecular biology. Philip is the author of several books on science.

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, please contact Zoë Harris or Chris Owen at Trimedia on tel: 020 7471 6855 / 851 or email: aventisprizes@trimediauk.com