

Dear Madam, distinguished professor Tamara Lah Turnšek, director of the National Institute of Biology, distinguished professor Andrej Čokl and other distinguished awarded guests, distinguished minister Dejan Židan, ladies and gentlemen,

My best thanks to the madam director for her friendly invitation for spending today's solemn evening with you. I regret that I had to excuse myself. Madam director knows very well how highly I value biology and other life sciences. Among them is also my narrow professional expertise. These sciences will increasingly mark our century more than any other. This is predicted by people who know and understand science.

It is not only about the sciences. Personally I am an enthusiastic admirer of life as a phenomenon. Despite the progress in astronomy we still not know today if life in space is an exception or rule. For now we believe that at least in our part of space we are most likely alone, as far as we can say based on our senses and reach of our instruments. Everything alive lies in only a few kilometres thin layer around the surface of our small planet. In space dimensions insignificant, miniature speck of matter. But the matter is arranged in a unique way. This matter arranges itself. It has arranged its living space: oxygen in the planetary atmosphere, fertile soil for growth, cycling of matter, a climate. And it behaves as if it possesses an unconquerable will for self-preservation, development, and reproduction. It is using unbelievable tricks to cheat moment after moment the laws that govern the non-living nature and tend to even out and tame the differences. The life is often using them in a way that seems to be acting contradictory to itself.

This is something that even incredibly small specks seem to know, those for which the conventional standards for status of living not even count. The HIV virus is one of them, and it has invented the ways to switch off the normally destroying weapons of the immune system in humans. And then there are the bacteria, the first real beings in which almost all inventions necessary for development of multi-cellular beings already existed for billions of years. They are not only the first but will also be the last beings long after when the planet will be approaching its astronomical death and will deny his hospitality to other forms of life. At the top of today's blossoming life is the human brain, the most complicated known object in space capable of learning, emotions, decision making, and looking to the future. Consciousness is the top function of the working brain that we cannot define nor explain although it is an every day subjective experience of every one among us.

Knowledge of life is accumulating fast and it is fascinating to be here. To be here – that marks a human in a special way. It influences the way of thinking, the relationship toward the nature, conveys respect toward living beings that are our food and were since long time ago critical to the survival of the human species. The dependence for survival from the far past of course never ended, it is only the modern way of living that changed people in a way where they are not asking anymore where the bread and milk come from, and where do some ten or twenty food components that build every day breakfast, lunch and dinner come from. But the awareness from the long past is coming back. And this is good. It will help us change our behaviour. Let's hope that it will happen on time, before we wreck our planet too much.

Dear Miroslav Zei award winners, in the name of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Art and in my own name I am sincerely congratulating you . You also are among those who curiously pull the curtain that is still hiding numerous ingenious mechanisms of the living world. Your work is a privilege that is worth dedicating your professional life to. It is a privilege worth scarifying numerous hours of time beyond the frames of professional duties. Also the time that is normally dedicated to personal life, rest, relaxation. This time is not paid by money and cannot be. The currency is different but the amount is worthy. Good luck for your future!

Yours, Jože Trontelj