

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

KONRAD E. BLOCH

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

James J. Bohring

at

Harvard University

on

22 March 1993

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

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## KONRAD E. BLOCH

1912 Born in Neisse, Germany on 21 January

### Education

1934 Chemical engineering, Technisches Hochschule, Munich  
1938 Ph.D., biochemistry, Columbia University

### Professional Experience

1934-1935 Research assistant, Schweizerisches Höhenforschung's Institute, Davos,  
Switzerland  
1939-1946 Instructor, Department of Biochemistry, Columbia University  
University of Chicago, Department of Biochemistry  
1946-1950 Assistant Professor  
1950-1954 Professor  
Harvard University  
1954-1982 Higgins Professor of Biochemistry  
1968-1971 Chairman, Department of Chemistry  
1979-1984 Professor of Science, School of Public Health  
1982- Higgins Professor of Biochemistry, Emeritus  
1982 Newton-Abraham Visiting Professor, Oxford University

### Honors

1953 Guggenheim Fellow, Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, Zürich,  
Switzerland  
1956 Member, National Academy of Sciences  
1958 Medal, Société de Chimie Biologique  
1961 Guggenheim Fellow, Imperial College, London, England  
1964 Fritzsche Award, American Chemical Society  
1964 Nobel Prize in Medicine and Physiology  
1964 Distinguished Service Award, University of Chicago School of Medicine

1965 Centennial Science Award, University of Notre Dame  
1965 Cardano Medal, Lombardy Academy of Sciences  
1966 Honorary Member, Lombardy Academy of Sciences  
1966 Honorary Degree, University of Uruguay  
1966 Honorary Degree, University of Brazil  
1966 Honorary Degree, University of Nancy  
1966 Member, American Philosophical Society  
1967 Honorary Degree, Columbia University  
1968 William Lloyd Evans Award, Ohio State University  
1968 Honorary Degree, Technische Hochschule, Muenchen  
1968 Guggenheim Fellow, Harvard University  
1970 Honorary Degree, Brandeis University  
1971 Honorary Member, Phi Lambda Upsilon  
1976 Honorary Member, Japanese Biochemical Society  
1976 Corresponding Member, Bavarian Academy of Sciences  
1976 Honorary Degree, Hokkaido University  
1977 Foreign Member, Accademia Pattaviana  
1985 Foreign Member, Royal Society, London  
1987 Award for Excellence, Columbia University  
1988 National Medal of Science

## ABSTRACT

The interview begins with Konrad E. Bloch describing his childhood in Neisse, Germany, and his undergraduate education at *Technische Hochschule* in Munich. During a research assistantship in Davos, Switzerland, Bloch became aware of the cholesterol molecule for the first time. He also produced and published three papers that Columbia University later accepted as partial fulfillment for a Ph.D. in biochemistry, earned in 1938. Bloch describes his teaching and research in biochemistry at Columbia and later the University of Chicago, where he developed an interest in the mechanism of protein synthesis from amino acids. Throughout his career, Bloch's primary research interest was the biosynthesis of cholesterol. In 1954, he became Higgins Professor of Biochemistry at Harvard University and served as Chemistry Department Chairman for three years. He won the Nobel Prize in Medicine and Physiology with Feodor Lynen in 1964 for his work on cholesterol and fatty acid metabolism. Shortly before his retirement, he was appointed Professor of Science at the Harvard School of Public Health. Bloch closes the interview with some comments on nutrition research, blondes in Venetian Renaissance Art, the difference between biochemistry and molecular biology, and the Human Genome Project.

## INTERVIEWER

James J. Bohning is Professor of Chemistry Emeritus at Wilkes University, where he was a faculty member from 1959 to 1990. He served there as chemistry department chair from 1970 to 1986 and environmental science department chair from 1987 to 1990. He was chair of the American Chemical Society's Division of the History of Chemistry in 1986, received the Division's outstanding paper award in 1989, and presented more than twenty-five papers before the Division at national meetings of the Society. He has been on the advisory committee of the Society's National Historic Chemical Landmarks committee since its inception in 1992. He developed the oral history program of the Chemical Heritage Foundation beginning in 1985, and was the Foundation's Director of Oral History from 1990 to 1995. He currently writes for the American Chemical Society News Service.

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