



# The Biology of Death: Origins of Mortality (Comstock Books)

*Andre Klarsfeld, Frederic Revah*

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Why do we die? Do all living creatures share this fate? Is the body's slow degradation with the passage of time unavoidable, or can the secrets of longevity be unlocked? Over the past two decades, scientists studying the workings of genes and cells have uncovered some of the clues necessary to solve these mysteries. In this fascinating and accessible book, two neurobiologists share the often-surprising findings from that research, including the possibility that aging and natural death may not be forever a certainty for most living beings. André Klarsfeld and Frédéric Revah discuss in detail the latest scientific findings and views on death and longevity. They challenge many popular assumptions, such as the idea that the death of individual organisms serves to rejuvenate species or that death and sexual reproduction are necessarily linked. Finally, they describe current experimental approaches to postpone natural death in lower organisms as well as in mammals. Are all organisms that survive until late in life condemned to a "natural" death, as a consequence of aging, even if they live in a well-protected, supportive environment? The variability of the adult life span—from a few hours for some insects to more than a millennium for the sequoia and thirteen times that for certain wild berry bushes—challenges the notion that death is unavoidable. Evolutionary theory helps explain why and how some species have achieved biological mechanisms that seemingly allow them to resist time. Death cannot be understood without looking into cells—the essential building blocks of life. Intriguingly, at the level of cells, death is not always an accident; it is often programmed as an indispensable aspect of life, which benefits the organism as a whole.

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