

Henri Orland Biography

October 7, 2021. Patrick Charbonneau

Henri Orland (December 31, 1952-) was born in Suresnes (a Paris suburb), France, son of Léon Orland, tailor, and Geneviève Brener.

Orland attended Ecole Normale Supérieure de Saint-Cloud (1972-1976), obtaining a Maîtrise de Physique (1974), the Agrégation de physique (1975) and a Diplôme d'études approfondies de physique (1976) from Université de Paris XI as well as a Maîtrise de mathématiques (1976) from Université de Paris VI. He then joined the Service de Physique Théorique (now, Institut de Physique Théorique, IPhT), of the Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique of Saclay for graduate studies. He obtained a Doctorat d'état in theoretical physics (with highest honors, 1981) for a thesis entitled "Développement des théories de champ moyen en physique nucléaire et dans les milieux désordonnés" [Beyond mean-field theories in Nuclear Physics and in Disordered Media] under the supervision of first Richard Schaeffer and later Cirano De Dominicis. He then joined IPhT as a senior physicist, where he served as head (2004-2011) and is now Directeur de Recherches. Over the years, he has held a number of visiting positions, notably as assistant professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) (1981-1983), visiting professor at the Weizmann Institute (1987) as well as visitor at the Institute of Theoretical Physics in Santa Barbara (1983, 1994, 2000-2001) and at Tel Aviv University (2009-2010). Since 2011, he is also Sackler Professor by special appointment at Tel Aviv University (Israel), and since 2012 chair Professor at the Beijing Computational Science Research Center (China).

Orland started his research career in quantum many-body physics, but migrated to the statistical physics of spin glasses as his then advisor himself moved on to astrophysics. Although, he largely left the field of spin glasses after his thesis work, he brought some of the underlying ideas to a number of optimization as well as soft matter problems, including random heteropolymers and proteins. He also taught one of the first courses on the topic while at MIT.

Orland received the Médaille de Bronze du CNRS (1981), was a Distinguished Harris Lecturer at MIT (1995) and a Sackler Scholar at Tel-Aviv University (2009-2010). He has held various leadership roles within the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics, notably as its vice-president and as chairman of the C3 commission (Statistical Physics) from 2008-2011. He was also Editor at The European Physical Journal B (1997-2004), at Physics Reports (2003—today), and at Frontiers in Molecular Biosciences (2014—today).