

Polio vaccines and the origin of AIDS: some key writings

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Overview of the theory

One theory of the origin of AIDS is that it developed from contaminated vaccines used in the world's first mass immunisation for polio. There are a number of reasons why this theory is plausible enough to be worthy of further investigation.

- The location coincides dramatically. The earliest known cases of AIDS occurred in central Africa, in the same regions where Koprowski's polio vaccine was given to over a million people in 1957-1960.
- The timing coincides. There is no documented case of HIV infection or AIDS before 1959. Centuries of the slave trade and European exploitation of Africa exposed Africans and others to all other diseases then known; it is implausible that HIV could have been present and spreading in Africa without being recognised.
- Polio vaccines are grown (cultured) on monkey kidneys which could have been contaminated by SIVs. Polio vaccines could not be screened for SIV contamination before 1985.
- Another monkey virus, SV-40, is known to have been passed to humans through polio vaccines. A specific pool of Koprowski's vaccine was later shown to have been contaminated by an unknown virus.
- In order for a virus to infect a different species, it is helpful to reduce the resistance of the new host's immune system. Koprowski's polio vaccine was given to many children less than one month old, before their immune systems were fully developed. Indeed, in one trial, infants were given 15 times the standard dose in order to ensure effective immunisation.

If this theory is correct, it has serious ethical, health and policy implications. In particular, it points to the danger of interspecies transfer of material through vaccinations, organ

transplants, etc., which could lead to new variants of AIDS as well as other new diseases. As well, studying the theory may lead to insights about responding to AIDS and preventing new diseases.

On several occasions, critics have claimed that the theory has been refuted. The Wistar Committee in 1992 said the death of a British sailor in 1959, whose tissues later tested positive for HIV, made the theory implausible. However, several years later, more sensitive tests showed no HIV in the tissues.

In 2001, reports were published that polio vaccine samples held in Philadelphia from the 1950s showed no immunodeficiency viruses. This was trumpeted as a refutation of the theory. Edward Hooper later produced evidence that US-produced vaccines had been amplified in Africa using chimpanzees as a substrate, thus showing the theory could be correct.

Scientists have spent a lot of effort trying to refute the polio-vaccine theory of the origin of AIDS, but very little trying to refute the conventional view, that blood from an SIV-infected chimpanzee got into humans via hunting or eating. There is very little direct evidence to support the conventional view, which explains neither the timing nor the location of the origin.

Scientific journals have been reluctant to publish articles about the polio-vaccine theory. For example, *Nature* has received substantial submissions about the theory from at least six scholars but has not published any of them. Opponents of the theory have used defamation threats and legal actions to discourage publication. The result is that editorial prerogative and legal action have given the false impression that critics of the theory have been unanswered.

To help rectify this situation, key documents presenting the theory and commenting on it are provided here. Also given is a list of publications about the theory. This material is provided by [Brian Martin](#) who as a social scientist has been following the origins debate since 1991. It is part of a page on [suppression of dissent](#). Comments and additional contributions are welcome.

Some key publications about the theory (in reverse chronological order)

BOOKS

Edward Hooper, *The River: A Journey Back to the Source of HIV and AIDS* (Harmondsworth: Penguin; Boston: Little, Brown, 1999; revised edition, Penguin, 2000). This is an enormous but highly readable scientific blockbuster, providing the most detailed examination of the polio vaccine theory yet available, including many new findings. It has generated widespread discussion and debate and has established the polio-vaccine theory of the origin of AIDS as by far the strongest contender to the cut-hunter orthodoxy.

- [Dozens of articles, reviews, commentaries and responses concerning *The River*.](#)

The River is available in a CD-ROM edition: see <http://www.aidsorigins.com/content/view/206/28/>

Omar Bagasra, *HIV and Molecular Immunity: Prospects for the AIDS Vaccine* (Natick, MA: Biotechniques Books, 1999). This technical scientific book presents a new theory of molecular immunity for the origin and history of HIV-1, which, it is argued, most likely derived from polio vaccinations in Africa.

Kiley R. Prilliman [reviews the book](#) in the prestigious journal *Cell*. Julian Cribb has provided [insightful comments on the book](#) for nonspecialists. The author, Omar Bagasra, can be contacted at omarb@sc.rr.com. The book is available from [Eaton Publishing](#), 154 East Central Street, Natick MA 01760, USA, phone 508-653 6272, fax 508-653 2706.

Julian Cribb, *The White Death* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1996). An engaging book focussing on both the polio-vaccine-AIDS theory and its reception by the scientific community. [Full text available.](#)

ARTICLES

Edward Hooper has his own website, <http://www.aidsorigins.com/>. See it for his latest contributions. March 2008: [two articles on Michael Worobey's research.](#)

Brian Martin, "[Contested testimony in scientific disputes: the case of the origins of AIDS](#)", *The Skeptic*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2007, pp. 52-58.

Christian Biasco has written a predoctoral thesis analysing the origin-of-AIDS controversy: [The origin of AIDS: an hermeneutical analysis of the scientific publications](#). University of Geneva, July 2006. He has also written a play about the origin of AIDS titled *The Seeds of Doom*. You can read the [text of the play in Italian and](#)

[English](#) and [see the play in Italian with subtitles](#).

Edward Hooper, commentaries, February-August 2006

- [Three warnings about potential future malpractice by members of "the bushmeat group"](#), 13 August 2006
- [Science magazine rejects yet another submission that opposes the bushmeat hypothesis of AIDS origin](#), 27 July 2006
- ["The Hollywooding of Science". Beatrice Hahn's latest SIV sequences from Cameroonian chimps: an alternative interpretation](#), 5 August 2006
- [How to View the "Origins of AIDS" Documentary](#), 30 June 2006
- [The Emperor's New Clothes: Beatrice Hahn and The Latest Mumbo Jumbo](#), 26 May 2006
- [New claims from Paul Sharp - but has the source of HIV-1 really been located?](#) February 2006.

[New material about the origin of AIDS](#) published in November 2005 in *Narrow Roads of Gene Land: The Collected Papers of W. D. Hamilton, Volume 3: Last Words*, edited by Mark Ridley, Oxford University Press.

Brian Martin, ["The Politics of a Scientific Meeting: the Origin-of-AIDS Debate at the Royal Society"](#), *Politics and the Life Sciences*, Vol. 20, No. 2, September 2001, pp. 119-130 [published 2005]. [Also available in pdf](#).

Edward Hooper, commentaries, October-November 2004

- [The annexing of the Stanleyville samples: potential 'fossil evidence' of ancient HIV-1 falls into the wrong hands](#)
- [Untruths, misrepresentations and spin: the dubious methods and tactics used by Stanley Plotkin's group in the "Origins of AIDS" debate](#)
- [Dr Hilary Koprowski - The Man of Many Ideas](#)
- [The allegation that The River has damaged modern attempts to eradicate polio: more fabrications by doctors Koprowski and Plotkin](#)
- [The new round of legal threats by doctors Koprowski and Plotkin](#)
- [Plotkin's chums \(1\): Eminent scientists sign their names to falsehoods, in a bid to protect Stanley Plotkin and Hilary Koprowski](#)

April 2004: Is the contaminated polio vaccine theory refuted?

Yes: Michael Worobey et al., ["Contaminated polio](#)

[vaccine theory refuted](#)", *Nature*, Vol. 428, 22 April 2004, p. 820.

No: a reply by **Edward Hooper**, "[Contaminated polio vaccine theory not refuted](#)", April 2004.

Worobey et al. [supplementary information](#) and [map](#).

Hooper's [comments](#).

Hooper gives [further comments](#), and a [short version of further comments](#).

Edward Hooper, "[The dirty side of the origin-of-AIDS debate](#)": a series of commentaries, February-March 2004.

- [The latest scientific evidence supports the OPV theory](#)
- [As far as is known, modern polio vaccines are safe](#)
- [Robin Weiss, professor of virology, doctor of spin](#)
- [Could an ancient sample of HIV-1 be faked?](#)

Stanley A. Plotkin, "[Chimpanzees and journalists](#)" (editorial), *Vaccine*, Vol. 22, 2004, pp. 1829-1830. Introduction to Osterrieth's article.

Paul Osterrieth, "[Oral polio vaccine: fact versus fiction](#)", *Vaccine*, Vol. 22, 2004, pp. 1831-1835. Denial of Hooper's claims about production of polio vaccine in Africa.

Lincei meeting papers
Origin of HIV and Emerging Persistent Viruses,
Rome, 28-29 September 2001
Published as *Atti dei Convegni Lincei*, 2003,
Vol. 187, ISBN 88-218-0885-8

Maria Luisa Bozzi, "[Truth and science: Bill Hamilton's legacy](#)", pp. 21-26.

Edward Hooper, "Dephlogistication, Imperial Display, Apes, Angels, and the Return of Monsieur Émile Zola", pp. 27-230. This massive paper is a response to criticisms of *The River*, plus new evidence.

- [Full paper in pdf](#)
- Paper in 4 pdf files: [part a](#); [part b](#); [part c](#); [part d](#)
- [Figures 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 in pdf](#)
- [Review of Hooper's paper by Lawrence Hammar](#) in *Papua New Guinea Medical Journal*, 2004

Mikkel H. Schierup and Roald Forsberg, "[Recombination and phylogenetic analysis of HIV-1](#)" (in pdf), pp. 231-245.

R A Weiss, "[Concluding remarks: emerging persistent infections, family heirlooms and new acquisitions](#)" (in pdf),

pp. 305-314.

Brian Martin, [Investigating the origin of AIDS: some ethical dimensions](#), *Journal of Medical Ethics*, Vol. 29, No. 4, August 2003, pp. 253-256.

Edward Hooper, ["The Story of a Man-Made Disease"](#), April 2003. A [shortened version](#) appeared in the *London Review of Books*, followed by a [series of letters to the editor](#).

Edward Hooper deals with "Opposition to the OPV theory"

- 1. [The odd case of Professor John P. Moore](#)
- 2. [The Marx/Drucker theory](#) of iatrogenic spread through unsterile needles, and the recent intervention by Professor David Gisselquist, who claims that most HIV infections in Africa are caused through this same route
- 3. [The papers by Stanley Plotkin and Hilary Koprowski](#) presented at the Royal Society meeting on "Origins of HIV and the AIDS Epidemic" in September 2000

Robin Weiss, ["Reflections on the origin of human immunodeficiency viruses"](#), *AIDS & Hepatitis Digest*, January 2002. Critical commentary on the polio-vaccine theory. Robin Weiss can be contacted at [<r.weiss@ucl.ac.uk>](mailto:r.weiss@ucl.ac.uk).

[Royal Society Discussion Meeting \(and subsequent events\)](#)
Origins of HIV and the AIDS Epidemic,
London, 11-12 September 2000
Papers, press releases, media stories and responses

Stanley A. Plotkin, ["CHAT oral polio vaccine was not the source of Human Immunodeficiency Virus Type 1 Group M for humans"](#), *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, Vol. 32, 2001, pp. 1068-1084. A detailed rebuttal of the claims in Edward Hooper's *The River*. This is almost the same paper as published in the Royal Society meeting proceedings.

Billi Goldberg and Raphael B. Stricker, ["Bridging the gap: human diploid cell strains and the origin of AIDS"](#), *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, Vol. 204, 2000, pp. 497-503. The hypothesis that polio vaccine produced using human cells was responsible for AIDS.

Brian Martin, ["Political refutation of a scientific theory: the case of polio vaccines and the origin of AIDS"](#), *Health Care Analysis*, Vol. 6, 1998, pp. 175-179. How legal action and editorial decisions mean that the published record gives the misleading impression that the polio-vaccine-AIDS theory has been refuted.

Brian Martin, ["Sticking a needle into science: the case of polio vaccines and the origin of AIDS"](#), *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 26, No. 2, May 1996, pp. 245-276. A personal account of how the author as a social scientist intervened in the debate over the polio-vaccine-AIDS theory.

Blaine F. Elswood and Raphael B. Stricker, ["Polio vaccines and the origins of AIDS"](#), *Medical Hypotheses*, vol. 42, 1994, pp. 347-354 and Correspondence, vol. 44, 1995, p. 226. This is the first major paper in the scientific literature presenting the theory. Blaine Elswood can be contacted at Blaine.Elswood@snow.edu.

W. D. Hamilton, [unpublished letter to *Science*](#), 27 January 1994. Hamilton attempted to publish a letter in *Science* responding to Koprowski's 1992 letter. Included here is both the letter itself and Hamilton's correspondence with *Science*.

Brian Martin, ["Polio vaccines and the origin of AIDS: the career of a threatening idea"](#), *Townsend Letter for Doctors*, #126, January 1994, pp. 97-100. An account of the theory and its implications.

Rolling Stone, ["Origin of AIDS' update"](#), 9 December 1993, p. 39. Publication of this "Clarification" was part of the settlement of Koprowski's defamation action against *Rolling Stone* and Tom Curtis.

Brian Martin, ["Peer review and the origin of AIDS -- a case study in rejected ideas"](#), *BioScience*, vol. 43, no. 9, October 1993, pp. 624-627. An account of the theory and the response to it.

B. F. Elswood and R. B. Stricker, ["Polio vaccines and the origin of AIDS"](#), *Research in Virology*, vol. 144, 1993, pp. 175-177. A letter to the editor presenting the theory plus a critical reply from the editorial board. Blaine Elswood can be contacted at Blaine.Elswood@snow.edu.

Louis Pascal, ["Preliminary notes concerning shortcomings of a correspondence by Y. Ohta, et al."](#), 8 May 1993 (previously unpublished). A critique of a scientific paper cited by Koprowski and by Basilico et al. in the case against the polio-vaccine theory.

Tom Curtis, [unpublished letter to *Science*](#), 30 September 1992. This letter rejected by *Science* was a response to

Koprowski's letter in *Science* attacking the polio-vaccine theory.

Claudio Basilico et al., [Report from the AIDS/Poliovirus Advisory Committee](#), 18 September 1992. Stimulated by Curtis's article in *Rolling Stone*, the Wistar Institute set up an independent committee to examine the theory. This is its report, which was never formally published.

Hilary Koprowski, ["AIDS and the polio vaccine"](#) (letter), *Science*, vol. 257, 21 August 1992, pp. 1024, 1026-1027; correction, 11 September 1992, p. 1463. This is a reply to Tom Curtis's article in *Rolling Stone* and is one of the few published critiques of the theory.

Raanan Gillon, ["A startling 19,000-word thesis on the origin of AIDS: should the JME have published it?"](#), *Journal of Medical Ethics*, vol. 18, 1992, pp. 3-4. The editor of the *Journal of Medical Ethics* summarises Pascal's argument, explains why *JME* rejected it, and notes its importance and availability.

Tom Curtis, ["The origin of AIDS"](#), *Rolling Stone*, Issue 626, 19 March 1992, pp. 54-59, 61, 106, 108. This article gave the theory its first wide visibility. Based on a version of the theory developed independently by Blaine Elswood, it was investigated and reported on by Tom Curtis. Tom Curtis can be contacted at tcurtis@utmb.edu.

Louis Pascal, ["What happens when science goes bad"](#), Science and Technology Analysis Working Paper #9, University of Wollongong, December 1991. This was the first major published account of the theory. Hard copies are available free from Brian Martin, bmartin@uow.edu.au, on request. Please include your postal address.

[List of references](#)

This material is located on the [website on suppression of dissent](#).

Go to [Brian Martin's website](#)

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