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An Autopsy of the Origins of HIV/AIDS

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Abstract

This note introduces to a wider audience the hypothesis that global HIV infection is, on an inference to the best explanation model, a result of mistakes made in the production of the Hilary Koprowski (CHAT) Oral Polio Vaccine that was given to nearly a million Africans in the region then known as the Belgium Congo in the mid 1950s. The larger issues this hypothesis, and its significant evidence, press upon social epistemology should not be ignored and are identified and discussed in a preliminary manner.

Imagine a crime beyond the reach of ordinary minds: 40 to 100 million people killed in a race between two scientists to be the historic hero; the pioneer of a safe, effective Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV). The top contenders were Albert B. Sabin and Hilary Koprowski. Many of us reading this have taken some version of Sabin's safe OPV, in some manner of its original form. Sabin's vaccine was welcome, but with some reasonable hesitation at the time. In 1955 there was a mass mispreparation of the Salk injection vaccine (not Sabin's OPV): The Cutter Laboratories event showed that vaccines can, even if rarely, go tragically wrong,

In April 1955 more than 200,000 children in five Western and mid-Western USA states received a polio vaccine in which the process of inactivating the live virus proved to be defective. Within days there were reports of paralysis and within a month the first mass vaccination programme against polio had to be abandoned. Subsequent investigations revealed that the vaccine, manufactured by the California-based family firm of Cutter Laboratories, had caused 40, 000 cases of polio, leaving 200 children with varying degrees of paralysis and killing 13.¹

Here there were no significant denials. However, it is Koprowski's experimental vaccine that has come under powerful and intelligent scrutiny, skepticism and profound criticism. We may have and still be witnessing of the results of an inadvertently imposed Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection via a defective vaccine, accidentally infected with HIV and its resultant Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).² Most deaths have likely been unreported; 40 million is a conservative estimate. Given a stunning projected death rate of one million a year, a rate that is for the moment stubbornly stable but held in check by heroic medical and behavior changing efforts, we are certainly confronting a morally imponderable, since 1985, of between 40 and 100 million slow deaths.³ New therapeutics have been devised, but how did the catastrophe occur? How did this

¹ *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 2006, 99 (3): 156.

² For a conservative estimate see, <https://ourworldindata.org/hiv-aids> (retrieved 9/07/2021) and <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/number-of-deaths-due-to-hiv-aids> (retrieved 10/05/2021).

³ <https://ourworldindata.org/hiv-aids> (retrieved 9/07/2021) and <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/number-of-deaths-due-to-hiv-aids> (retrieved 10/05/2021).

extraordinary, and for each of the dead, mostly young and their mothers, horribly intimate catastrophe so quickly, from an historical perspective, suddenly happen to us? A sudden, highly punctuated 20th century event that powerfully lingers.

Epistemologists long avoided the institutional reality and normality of conspiracy and its vast epistemic and so, political implications. But an intellectual redirection began, ironically, with Brian Keeley's "On Conspiracy Theory" in the prestigious, *The Journal of Philosophy*.⁴ Here Keeley, in an important and influential article, tried to identify and apply rational mechanisms for the criticism and rejection of conspiracy theories. Unfortunately, these relied on a false analogy to physical science and mass media, and the misguided if idealistic idea that the number of people participating were doing so knowingly.⁵ But on examination the questions and arguments Keeley explored presented us a door, and beyond that door appeared an epistemic, not a psychological or sociologically pathological rebellion. This took the form of a defense of conspiracy theory from an epistemic perspective. The history of AIDS and its colossal harm is relevant to a realistic understanding.

The history of traditional epistemology's political piety and its concomitant conspiracy theory phobia has recently been detailed by a number of contemporary epistemologists; a new realistic attitude and approach has emerged.⁶ This is critical to the proper evolution of epistemology. Epistemology is not rarified theoretics. Application is its forte, its force. It certainly ought not be a cover-story for a long ongoing political project of mass-manipulation, it is a matter of an effective, truth-apt interface to reality. By truth, I mean the correspondence of our representational structures to empirical facts. When discussing social epistemology, we might characterize it as "critically consequential knowledge"; it has important consequences to us, as complex social primates. Which turns us to the group form of individual deception, conspiracy and its attendant and only antidote, conspiracy theory.

Conspiracy Theory

Our definition: The near consensus, accepted and carefully examined definitions "Conspiracy", is when two or more people intentionally cooperate to deceive others. So "Conspiracy theory" is any explanation that refers to a conspiracy as a causal element in the explanation of that event, be it past, present or in the case of prediction, future. The minor

⁴ Keeley, Brian L. 1999. "Of Conspiracy Theories." *Journal of Philosophy*, 96 (3): 109-126 (hereafter "OCT"). Also see, Basham, Lee. 2001. "Living with the Conspiracy." *Philosophical Forum* 32 (3): 265-280; Husting, Ginna and Martin Orr. 2007. "Dangerous Machinery: 'Conspiracy Theorist' as Transpersonal Strategy of Exclusion." *Symbolic Interaction* 30 (2): 127-50; Basham, Lee. 2003. "Malevolent Global Conspiracy." *Journal of Social Philosophy* 34 (1): 91-103; Hagen, Kurtis. 2011. "Conspiracy Theories and Stylized Facts." *Peace and Justice Studies* 21 (2):3-22; Basham, Lee and M.R.X. Dentith. 2016. "Social Science's Conspiracy Theory Panic, Now They Want to Cure Everyone." *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* (hereafter, "SERRC") 5 (10): 12-19; Basham, Lee. 2018. "Joining the Conspiracy." Juha Räikkä, ed., *Argumenta* 3 (2): 271-290. Aside—SERRC is a first-tier source for a fast paced but insightful, professional analysis of the epistemic theory of conspiracy theories from a variety of diverse and often respectfully disagreeing perspectives.

⁵ Basham, Lee. 2001. "Living with the Conspiracy." *Philosophical Forum* 32 (3): 265-280.

⁶ Räikkä, Juha and Lee Basham. 2018 "Conspiracy Theory Phobia." In *Conspiracy Theories and People Who Believe Them* edited by Joseph Uscinski, 178-186. New York: Oxford University Press; Räikkä, Juha. 2009. "On Political Conspiracy Theories." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 17 (2): 185-201; and, Räikkä, Juha. 2014. *Social Justice in Practice: Questions in Ethics and Political Philosophy*. Dordrecht: Springer, 64-72.

diversity concerning this has no impact on our discussion.⁷ Here we will focus on Edward Hooper's 1070 page research masterpiece, *The River: A Journey to the Source of HIV and AIDS* (hereafter *The River*).⁸

The River: A Journey to the Source of HIV and AIDS

Edward Hooper's *The River* is well-studied and among virologists, epidemiologists and immunologists. It is also a well-known source of anxiety in these communities. We will review the antecedents for this. Brian Martin introduces Louis Pascal (nom de plume):

In June 1990, I received a bundle of material from Richard Sylvan, a colleague at the Australian National University who is a leading philosopher and social critic. The bundle contained an article about the origin of AIDS by Louis Pascal, plus copies of correspondence concerning this article with various individuals and journals. I wrote Pascal and so began a correspondence which has led to the publication of this Science and Technology Analysis Working Paper. In my studies of the suppression of dissent, I have come across many cases similar to Pascal's, in which an unorthodox idea is prevented from being heard, especially if it is threatening to a powerful interest group. Pascal argues that AIDS originated from contaminated live polio vaccines used in Africa in the 1950s, an idea very threatening to immunologists and to the medical profession generally. there are a number of theories about AIDS that challenge orthodoxy.

Of these, I find Pascal's case particularly well documented and persuasive. To my knowledge, his arguments have not been refuted. Pascal presents his case very clearly and with many references, and he deals with a topic of the greatest social significance. But there is more than this to recommend it to those engaged in the social analysis of science. Pascal embeds his arguments about AIDS within an argument about science. His argument about the responsibilities of scientists and editors is impassioned. some readers may prefer a more sociologically nuanced account of "rejected knowledge," but it should not be difficult to make use of Pascal's account for that purpose.⁹

The River may have been inspired by Pascal's detailed research, as well as the concerns of journalist Tom Curtis. Hooper remarks:

⁷ Juha Räikkä, M R.X. Dentith, David Coady, Brian Keeley, Lee Basham, Brian Martin, Kurtis Hagen, for instance.

⁸ Hooper, Edward. 1999. *The River: A Journey to The Source of HIV and AIDS*, 1999. New York: Little Brown and Company (Penguin). All references in what follows will be to the original 1999 work unless otherwise specified. A full copy of the revised *The River: A Journey to the Origin of HIV and AIDS*, 2021, is available at Hooper's Aidsorigins.com (retrieved 11/20/2021) without cost.

⁹ Pascal, Louis 1991. "What Happens When Science Goes Bad. The Corruption of Science and the Origin of AIDS: A Study in Spontaneous Generation." University of Wollengong, Working Paper No. 9; with an introduction by Brian Martin.

Tom [Curtis]'s article "The Origin of AIDS. A startling new theory attempts to answer the question, 'Was it an act of God or an act of Man?'" appeared in Rolling Stone issue 626, with a cover date of March 19th, 1992, and it was this article that set me on the path to investigating what came to be known as the Oral Polio Vaccine theory (or "OPV theory") of AIDS origin. It focused on an OPV called CHAT which had been developed by Hilary Koprowski, a Polish-American virologist, and administered to hundreds of thousands of Africans in the late 1950s.

I was impressed by Tom [Curtis]'s article, but especially by these two aspects, which prompted further thoughts based on my own research. My first reaction was that clearly there were close geographical and temporal correlations between the places where Koprowski's vaccine had been administered, and the earliest examples of HIV and AIDS in the world, which came to light in the years immediately following. (This became even more apparent in years to come, when I gathered evidence of over 900,000 CHAT vaccinations in Africa, which had taken place in 28 different campaigns. A statistician has analysed the results, finding a "highly significant" [$> 95\%$ or $.05$] correlation between the places where CHAT was given and the places where HIV first emerged in central Africa.)

At the back end of 1992 Koprowski threatened legal action against Tom Curtis and Rolling Stone. The magazine contested the action, but in December 1993, having already spent half a million dollars defending the case, it published a "Clarification" on the AIDS story, pointing out that Tom [Curtis] had merely proposed a hypothesis.¹⁰

Informed suspicions were converging on Koprowski's activities as early as 1990. Tom Curtis was a well-known journalist who researched and wrote for the Houston Chronicle and other prominent publishers. A new church of science appeared, perhaps, as a political entity, impervious to the empirical if politically necessary. At least Pascal alleges. Pascal's background thesis is even more important and far more general,

Papers reaching hopeful conclusions are printed despite awesome errors: Papers reaching the most pessimistic conclusions are rejected despite overwhelming evidence....I have now presented two examples of the former; these pieces do not discuss some minor technical point, they discuss what may well turn out to be the most important question scientists ever investigated. On matters of the utmost importance due care is not taken, glaring errors that should never have been made in the first place abound and then no one steps in to correct them. I could list many more examples.¹¹

¹⁰ See Hooper's remarks upon the death of Tom Curtis: Hooper, web archive, (retrieved 7/2/2018), also http://www.aidsorigins.com/#es_form_f1-n1 (retrieved 12/07/2021). Bracketed clarification provided by the present author.

¹¹ Pascal, Louis 1991. "What Happens When Science Goes Bad. The Corruption of Science and the Origin of AIDS: A Study in Spontaneous Generation." University of Wollengong, Working Paper No. 9., page 38; with an introduction by Brian Martin.

We turn to Hooper's *The River: A Journey to the Source of HIV and AIDS*. The meticulousness, thoroughness and intelligence of this book and its research is undeniable. However, it is viewed as threatening a crisis to the social status for the practice of vaccination and its attendant industry. Hooper's thesis is dramatic, tragic and given the evidence, perhaps true. If Hooper is right, an experimental vaccine, force "fed" (administered) to hundreds of Africans, killed hundreds of millions, in a slow, horrible, lingering way.¹² Africans were infected with HIV, not because of highways, not by "bush meat" markets. But by SIV/HIV infected chimpanzee kidneys the vaccine was grown on. The "Bush meat" account for the uncanny, precise correspondence in time and place between HIV's appearance and Koprowski's experiments on Africans (> 95% or .05 confidence level, the gold standard in statistics). This strongly contradicts the bush meat hypothesis. Instead, HIV appeared because local governors enticed and ordered these poor Africans to submit to and ingest the Koprowski OPV on this hypothesis. This remarkable time and place correspondence is relevant to any discussion, as uncomfortable as it might be for us all. Then the "skinny sickness" began, as termed in the Congo, where Koprowski's massive human experiment was conducted. The numbers of vaccine "feedings" were indeed massive, ~900,000. And there, at that moment, the global AIDS epidemic began.

The Kaprowski (CHAT) vaccine, in what appears to be a rather desperate evasion, is often relegated to one among so many millions of coincidental irrelevancies. Generally, the "bush-meat" hypothesis, it covers a multitude of sins, including the recent COVID 19 epidemic, but does not account for the pattern of the appearance of "skinnies". Yet the bush-meat hypothesis is the position of Koprowski's supporters. It appears this is because they fear the terrified blow back against vaccination in general. But in a rational polis, and I contend in large measure we are, as partisans of democracy, this terror of terror is misplaced.

A sample was later claimed, at a meeting of the Royal Society (that Hooper appeared at, offering his arguments) to be found of the suspect vaccine and found free of HIV after publication of *The River*. The issues with this claim, and relevant to our understanding, focus squarely on the issues of organized deception, including fabrication. The sample was then said to have been destroyed and so not supplied to independent virology researchers. Hooper correctly notes the HIV/OPV hypothesis does not require universal contamination. He studiously avoids suggesting the claim is a mere statement, a false one, but this has occurred to him as it should to any reasonable person: It is implicit in everything he says and at the conclusion of his book he asks an almost child-like question in its innocence: If you have nothing to hide, can I get the keys to a few of the filing cabinets at the Wistar Institute? The extension of trust and kindness is impressive. Yet scientists lie. It's a human trait. That said, Hooper is seen in *The River* to be a quite intellectually cautious and moral man. But keys or none, it is not sufficient to the task of resolving the OPV/HIV issue. And we should not be shocked that even if the keys were handed over, those well-guarded largely private files would be found largely empty of any relevant material. And of course, suddenly discovered "samples" can easily be faked or simply fabricated out of thin air. The motives for deceit, for falsified evidence, are immense considering the death toll and scientific prestige, as well as

¹² See images in *The River*, page 686, and following.

questions of racism and reckless ambition of the part of Hillary Koprowski.¹³ Suffice to say such evidence provided to a court by the defendants would be entirely ineffectual in the presence of any intelligent, sentient jury.

So: Do scientists lie? On rare and socially/political critical cases, or at least so perceived, they may. Recall the US, Nevada nuclear tests and the cancer disaster that followed. Yet collective denial prevailed until it was too late. Today, one can only gain access to the Nevada test site once a year, on a government bus, clutching a berserk Geiger counter.

Collective denial is an ancient human practice. Consider why they call, in the US, funeral homes “homes”. No one lives there. Why not properly label them death zones, where you can view the dead albeit made, through the camouflage of makeup, and denial this reality, to appear to have some semblance of life? Hooper et al. alleges a global death zone. We are a species saturated with self-deception and studied avoidance, as has been long established, but this becomes especially dangerous on the corporate and governmental levels of our hierarchies. Information is a fundamental commodity in democracy. Yet, as some have opined, “democracy dies in darkness”. So why would human scientists sometimes deceive? For the same reason we all do, professional and financial advantage and avoidance of negative outcomes. Unfortunately, it is a well-established pattern within the scientific community.¹⁴ In epistemology, this reality matters. Which returns us to the blanket claim, often contrary to statistical evaluation, of mere if vast coincidence.

Conclusion

So why would human scientists sometimes deceive? For the same reason we all do, professional and financial advantage and avoidance of negative outcomes. Unfortunately, it is a well-established pattern within the scientific community.¹⁵ In epistemology, this reality matters. Which returns us to the blanket claim, often contrary to statistical evaluation, of mere if vast coincidence.

Recalling the attacks of 9/11 against the US capitol and New York City, epistemologist Charles Pigden remarks on this sort of intellectual maneuver and potentially, evasion,

Nobody half-way sane supposes that the events of 9/11 were not due to some conspiracy or other. (To think that you would have to suppose that the perpetrators assembled in the planes quite by chance and that on a sudden,

¹³ See Jain, Lochlann S. 2020. “The WetNet: What the Oral Polio Vaccine Hypothesis Exposes about Globalized Interspecies Fluid Bonds.” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 34 (4): 504–524; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRDsYqvrYgI> (retrieved 10/8/2021) and Hooper’s remarks, <http://www.aidsorigins.com/an-introduction-to-lochlann-jains-article-about-the-opv-aids-hypothesis-and-its-treatment-at-the-royal-society-meeting-on-the-origins-of-hiv-and-the-aids-epidemic/> (retrieved 10/15/2020).

¹⁴ Bright, Liam Kofi. 2021. “Why Do Scientists Lie?” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements*, Volume 89: *How Do We Know? The Social Dimension of Knowledge*, 117-129. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246121000102>. See, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/royal-institute-of-philosophy-supplements/article/abs/why-do-scientists-lie/7873B4DFB81C33C7556CF22465B4B224> (retrieved 12/07/2021).

¹⁵ Bright, Liam Kofi. 2021. “Why Do Scientists Lie?” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements*, Volume 89: *How Do We Know? The Social Dimension of Knowledge*, 117-129. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246121000102>. See, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/royal-institute-of-philosophy-supplements/article/abs/why-do-scientists-lie/7873B4DFB81C33C7556CF22465B4B224> (retrieved 12/07/2021).

by coincidence, it struck them as a neat idea to hijack the planes and ram them into the Twin Towers, the Whitehouse and the Pentagon, with the aid of other perpetrators who, presumably, they had never met before.)¹⁶

But epistemically the “coincidence theory” evasions Pigden points to backfire and self-defeat.¹⁷ One coincidence claim, another contrary to it and now we are where we started. We must also, and most fundamentally, face the “elephant in the room”: The politically toxic nature of the Hooper et al hypothesis that AIDS was a self-infliction, cannot be overestimated, no matter the evidence in its favor.

Truth is not a superstition. Conspiracy theory phobia is. The truth is many conspiracies, on a very personal level as well as a political level, are true. The Koprowski HIV hypothesis of Curtis, Pascal and Hooper is credible on the evidence, yet is aggressively suppressed by some. This is Social Epistemology. For now, this concludes our autopsy of AIDS.¹⁸

¹⁶ Pigden, Charles. 2006. “Complots of Mischief.” In *Conspiracy Theories: The Philosophical Debate* edited by David Coady, 139-166. New York: Routledge, Ashgate.

¹⁷ See Coady, David. 2012. *What to Believe Now: Applying Epistemology to Contemporary Issues* (Wiley-Blackwell) for an extended discussion of the epistemic flaws of “coincidence theory” in contrast to often more evidenced conspiracy explanations

¹⁸ This note has, for reasons of space, omitted a great many relevant facts and arguments. Full article forthcoming.