

## REVIEW ESSAYS

### HIV, As Told by Its Discoverers

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**Virus Hunting: AIDS, Cancer, and the Human Retrovirus: A Story of Scientific Discovery** by Robert Gallo, BasicBooks, 1991.

**Virus: The Co-Discoverer of HIV Tracks Its Rampage and Charts the Future** by Luc Montagnier, W. W. Norton, 2000 (translated by Stephen Sartarelli from the French *Des virus et des hommes*, Editions Odile Jacob, 1994; parts of the text updated to 1998).

Since these books are by the co-discoverers of HIV, they are an important part of the HIV/AIDS story. Both are self-laudatory and distinctly self-serving. Each reads much like a pompous soap opera: the characters are black-or-white, either the best (those who side with the author) or the worst. From the viewpoint of the continuing controversy, whether HIV causes AIDS, their greatest interest is that—mostly implicitly but sometimes even explicitly—they afford evidence for the still-unorthodox view that HIV *does not* cause AIDS.

Most observers believe Gallo to be guilty of incompetence or misconduct. The “HTLV-III” he discovered is the “LAV” that Montagnier had sent him, and the now universal, compromise term “HIV” resulted from international litigation. Gallo’s book does not enhance his credibility, for example in his explanation (especially pp. 210–211) of how LAV turned into HTLV-III in his lab; as another reviewer commented, the book “will add more heat, but little light, to the controversy” (Shelton, 1991). Part of Gallo’s defense, eschewing false modesty, is to point to others who have been similarly accused of fudging—Mendel, Newton, and Kepler (p. 330).

Much of what Gallo says is blatantly wrong, and perhaps that is why the book lacks supporting citations or a bibliography. There are many assertions for which no support is offered, for example, references to “a country doctor” who overreacted to AIDS (p. 219), or to the notion that AIDS could be carried by mosquitoes, for which Gallo blames an unnamed collaborator though the media attributed it to Gallo (pp. 222–223). No citations are given for Gallo’s











