

From The Perth Group

<http://www.theperthgroup.com>

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Comments on Martin Barnes Vers Pont du Gard Conference Report

de Harven and Crowe must be congratulated. It's not easy, especially for de Harven, to admit that their scientific claims, which might have had relevance to the wellbeing of millions, are erroneous. Till now they both insisted, despite our repeatedly expressed doubts, that both exogenous and endogenous retroviruses exist and may be causally involved in a myriad of pathologies.

When in 1993 for the first time we hinted retroviruses (specifically the Rous sarcoma virus, the gold standard of retrovirology) may not have been proven to exist as a unique, autonomous "viral" entity, only Stefan Lanka appears to have realised what we were suggesting, and until now nothing has changed. In fact commenting on one of our recent claims, de Harven said that Rous would turn in his grave. He expressed a similar view, although not so colourful, when we commented on Ludwig Gross's work.

In our commentary "The HIV Puzzle – what is being measured" (http://www.tig.org.za/PG_The_HIV_Puzzle.html) we presented more evidence questioning the nature of both "endogenous" and "exogenous" retroviruses. Since in "The Puzzle" we challenged de Harven's scientific views, mindful that Howard Temin, the father of modern retrovirology stressed that, "even the most senior professor, if challenged by the lowliest technician or graduate student, is required to treat them seriously and consider their criticisms", we expected him to respond. Once again he did not. However, in Martin Barnes' recent commentary "Vers Pont du Gard Conference Report, he does not consider our claims (regarding exogenous retroviruses) ridiculous but, to our surprise, he writes: "Exogenous retroviruses? Do they exist???" That's the key question that should be open for debate. Personally, I have serious doubts about their existence, as 'exogenous'. This debate is urgent. It should be open only to people with solid background in microbiology. Not open to anybody with 'interest in HIV' !!! The problem is whether exogenous retroviruses exist or not?"

Martin Barnes writes: "One signal [single] accomplishment of his career [de Harven's] was isolating and imaging the murine Friend retrovirus. When I recently visited Etienne in his home outside of Cannes he told me that he originally thought that Friend was an exogenous retrovirus, but now believes it to be endogenous, i.e., originating from inside the body, inside the cell. The reason is that they never were able to demonstrate infectivity."

Since the 1960s and until recently, de Harven was claiming, and many, including Crowe were accepting, that de Harven isolated and thus has proven the existence of one of the best known exogenous retroviruses, the Friend Leukaemia virus.

After we had shown that de Harven and Friend did not have any evidence much less proof for the existence of any retrovirus entities (http://www.tig.org.za/EPE_SEP14.pdf) de Harven began claiming that his evidence

actually may have proved the existence of an endogenous retrovirus, (better to have a virus than no virus at all?) but at that time nothing was known about endogenous retroviruses. Now he says that actually this was not entirely true. "Bendich told me, Etienne, can you exclude that these viruses are not inside your cells? May be, when these cells feel some kind of an indigestion with some undesirable RNA molecules, they decide to spit them out (his words !), and to do that the cells use this budding process you....so elegantly demonstrate by EM !!!! Obviously, the idea of endogenous viruses was germinating in our minds, at that time....I remember Charlotte Friend telling me: 'Oh ! I hope Aaron B. is not right, and that my virus is not....endogenous'."

In the last 5-6 years we have repeatedly presented evidence to de Harven, Maniotis and others, including Crowe, that all microbiologists/retrovirologists agree there is no evidence which proves the existence of endogenous retroviruses. In fact there is no evidence for the existence of a unique biological entity, "endogenous retrovirus" either infectious or non-infectious.

Now Crowe not only agrees with our long standing arguments regarding endogenous retroviruses but he uses some of them to educate others. "I think the term endogenous is extremely unwise. To call something a virus is to imply that it is infectious if not pathogenic, and internally generated particles are not necessarily either of those. It all just helps keep the virus theory alive and diverts attention from what the real function or cause of these particles might be (or whether they are simply artefacts of the artificial systems used to study 'viruses')." See also www.theperthgroup.com/OTHER/ENVCommentary.pdf

There are at least two scientific reasons why de Harven does not have any choice but to accept that endogenous retroviruses have not been proven to exist.

1. All retrovirologists, including those he repeatedly claimed to prove otherwise, agree no endogenous retrovirus exists. No-one to date has proven their existence;
2. de Harven writes: "Personally, I had to wait until R. Lower's paper, in PNAS 1996, to discover the reality of human endogenous retroviruses (HERVs)". However, according to Lower and Kurth, "the reality of human endogenous retrovirus" has been proven by "Screening human genomic libraries under low-stringency conditions with probes derived from animal retroviruses [exogenous retroviruses] has allowed the isolation and characterisation of multiple, albeit defective, proviruses, representing different families [e.g. HERV-E, HERV-R, HTDV/HERV-K]".

In other words, HERVs, are not even retrovirus-like particles either transmittable or non-transmittable. Instead they are DNA sequences with low homology with the DNA of exogenous retroviruses, whose existence de Harven doubts.

Since the existence of endogenous retrovirus has been proven by using the DNA of "exogenous" retroviruses and since de Harven now has "serious doubts" regarding the existence of exogenous retroviruses he has no

choice but to also accept there is no proof for the existence of endogenous retrovirus or even human endogenous retroviral sequences.

As we have already mentioned, de Harven has shown great courage in accepting that he did not discover an exogenous retrovirus and, in fact, such viruses may not even exist. It will be to his credit if at last he stops claiming that:

- a) he proved the existence of the "Friend Leukaemia virus" either as exogenous or endogenous virus;
- b) Duesberg is wrong, HIV is not an exogenous retrovirus; the Perth Group is also wrong because HIV does exist but it is endogenous retrovirus;
- c) what is being measured with the "HIV" PCR is the DNA of HERVs or endogenous retroviral sequences. (This is because in addition to the fact that HERVs and endogenous retroviral sequences have not been proven to exist, the "HIV" PCR measures RNA and not DNA, as we have repeatedly pointed out to him);
- d) only microbiologists can solve the problem of the existence or non existence of exogenous retroviruses. That is, they have scientific monopoly of retrovirology. He seems to ignore the fact that:
 - (i) microbiologists created retrovirology;
 - (ii) scientific problems can often be easier seen and solved by outsiders;
- e) people can be biased;
- f) there is evidence which proves the existence of endogenous retrovirus or even endogenous retroviral DNA sequences.

This may well be de Harven's major contribution to the dissident movement in general and in healing its present disunity.