

## Preface

By the end of 2000, an estimated 58 million people had become infected by human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), among whom 22 million had already died of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), according to UNAIDS (<http://www.unaids.org/hivaidsinfo/>). While the major research effort on HIV and AIDS must be to secure better prevention and treatment, the recent origin of HIV and the AIDS epidemic remains an important field of investigation. When, where and how HIV-1 and HIV-2 crossed over from chimpanzees and sooty mangabey monkeys, respectively, and took off as human epidemics was the topic of the Discussion Meeting held in September 2000, and reported and updated here.

We are grateful to all the speakers and discussants who have provided the papers in this issue. The discussion was at times heated and controversial, in the best tradition of scientific debate. We particularly thank the chairmen of sessions, Walter Fitch, Neal Nathanson, Sir John Skehel and Hilton Whittle, for keeping the debate lively, focused and good humoured.

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