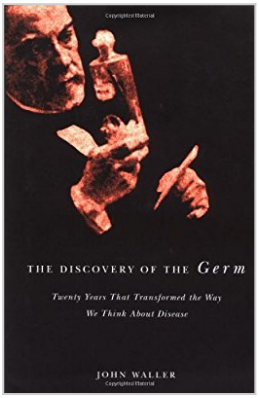


# The Discovery of the Germ: Twenty Years That Transformed the Way We Think About Disease (Revolutions in Science)

*By John Waller*



**The Discovery of the Germ: Twenty Years That Transformed the Way We Think About Disease (Revolutions in Science)** By John Waller

From the time of Hippocrates to that of Louis Pasteur, the medical profession relied on plausible but almost wholly mistaken ideas about the causes of and best treatments for infectious illness. Bleeding, purging, and mysterious nostrums remained staple remedies, and surgeons, often wearing filthy butcher's aprons, blithely spread infection from patient to patient. Then between 1879 and 1900 came the germ revolution. After two decades of scientific virtuosity, outstanding feats of intellectual courage, bitter personal rivalries, and a large dose of good fortune, doctors came to realize infectious diseases are caused by microscopic organisms. The discovery of the germ led to safe surgery, large-scale vaccination programs, dramatic improvements in hygiene and sanitation, and the pasteurization of dairy products. Above all, it set the stage for the emergence of antibiotic medicine.

John Waller provides insight into twenty years in the history of medicine that profoundly changed the way we view disease. He shows how the germ revolution was made possible not only by the risk taking and raw ambition of several brilliant late-century pioneers, but also by the groundwork?including mistakes and near misses?of earlier generations of scientists. Rich in human drama, *The Discovery of the Germ* charts how, why, and by whom germ theory was transformed from a hotly disputed speculation to a central tenet of modern medicine. It examines the ideas and experiments of the giants of microbiology, Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch, as well as less well known figures such as Casimir-Joseph Davaine, Waldemar Haffkine, and Almroth Wright.

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**The Discovery of the Germ: Twenty Years That Transformed the Way We Think About Disease (Revolutions in Science) By John Waller Bibliography**

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- 200 pages

## Editorial Review

From Booklist
*Starred Review* Waller makes sighting the common germ seem as dramatic as man landing on the moon, and rightly so. Prior to 1879, doctors were hard put to ascertain just exactly how people contracted various diseases. Theories ran the gamut from the concept that certain individuals were predisposed to contract a specific disorder to the notion that body fluid imbalances triggered illness, and each physician had a favorite hypothesis. Meanwhile, even the idea that a doctor might fully examine a patient--nonpublic parts of female patients' bodies were off-limits to male practitioners--was viewed as radical. As late as the 1850s, the thought of a laboratory for the study of contagious disease had occurred to only a handful. In short, medical practice was an art unrelated to science. The wealthy supported pet doctors, who were reluctant to displease their patrons with unappealing diagnoses. The poor went to hospitals, the very names of which were equated with death. Then came such scientists as Robert Koch and Louis Pasteur, whose competition to prove emerging theories about the existence of germs catapulted medical knowledge into the twentieth century. Waller skillfully tells the tale of mankind surfacing to scientific and medical enlightenment after millennia spent in a cave: little book, big story. *Donna Chavez*


Review

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(*Booklist*)

Waller presents a new telling of an old tale.... The development of the germ theory was hardly linear; fields as diverse as agriculture, sericulture, or surgery contributed necessary pieces. Walter handles these diverse threads and weaves a coherent narrative out of them.... Highly recommended.

(*Choice*)

[A]n excellent read for a general audience and packs a lot of information on the beginnings of the microbiology of disease.

(*Science Books and Films*)

large in human drama...It is a history book that reads like a novel. Highly recommended for all academic libraries

(Jitka Hurych *E-Streams*)

This engaging book reads as a success story of scientific progress.

(Marjorie C. Malley *ISIS*)

About the Author

John Waller is a research fellow at University College London's Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine. He is the author of *Fabulous Science: Fact and Fiction in the History of Scientific Discovery.*

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