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# Heredity and Deviation in the Life Sciences around 1800

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## Abstract

Session: Degeneration: Rethinking Teleological Conceptions of Living Organisms (Joan Steigerwald, Staffan M'uller-Wille, Tarquin Holmes) "Around 1800" is a magical date in the history of the life sciences. Everything seems to change, and fundamental biological concepts like organisation, reproduction, heredity come into being. In this paper, I will look at these conceptual innovations from a *longue durée* perspective. On the one hand, I will trace back these concepts to late medieval and early modern fascinations with hereditary diseases and racial diversity. On the other hand, I will demonstrate their implications for "modern" biology, especially Darwinian evolution. In a nutshell, I will argue that the life sciences "around 1800" became occupied with what seems to be an oxymoron: the perpetuation of deviation. This both unsettled teleological conceptions of the living world and provided an entry point for the "experimentalisation" of biology.

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