

Few concepts played a more important role in twentieth-century life sciences than that of the gene. Yet at this moment, the field of genetics is undergoing radical conceptual transformation, and some scientists are questioning the very usefulness of the concept of the gene, arguing instead for more systemic perspectives.

The time could not be better, therefore, for Hans-Jörg Rheinberger and Staffan Müller-Wille's magisterial history of the concept of the gene. Though the gene has long been the central organizing theme of biology, both conceptually and as an object of study, Rheinberger and Müller-Wille conclude that we have never had a universally accepted, stable definition of it. Rather, the concept has been in continual flux—a state that, they contend, is typical of historically important and productive scientific concepts. It is that very openness to change and manipulation, the authors argue, that made it so useful: its very mutability enabled it to be useful while the technologies and approaches used to study and theorize about it changed dramatically.

"As authors of the definitive history of heredity, Hans-Jörg Rheinberger and Staffan Müller-Wille's account of the gene has been eagerly awaited. It will not disappoint. For anyone who wants to understand the various subtly intertwined meanings of the word 'gene' and where these came from, this is the book to read."

—John Dupré, University of Exeter

"*The Gene* is an erudite and elegant history of a [perhaps the] central concept of twentieth-century biology. Rheinberger and Müller-Wille show that the gene's success lay in its plasticity in different experimental registers and its pluralism in connecting divergent theories and scientists. This book is now the definitive synthesis and point of departure for new scholarship."

—Angela N. H. Creager, Princeton University

"Rheinberger and Müller-Wille's insightful historical exploration of the many and changing meanings of the gene concept brings much needed clarification to the ongoing debate about the continuing usefulness of the term."

—Soraya de Chadarevian, University of California, Los Angeles

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