The History, Discovery, and Impact of Prion Diseases  
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In 18th Century Britain the wool and mutton industry dominated and sustained the British economy. This high demand for products and the pressure for higher yields placed on sheep farmers would lead to selective breeding and immense interbreeding. Slowly the sheep industry would be forever changed, sheep would now contain more favorable traits for meat and wool productions, but they would also harbor a completely new and deadly infectious disease. This disease known as Scrapies was deadly to sheep, but harmless to humans. Thus the popularity and dangers of Scrapies would fall into obscurity for decades. Until 1959 when scientists saw a parallel to Scrapies in humans call Kuru. The devastation and destruction of Kuru on the native people of Papua New Guinea would lead chemists, biologists, and anthropologists to study the emergence of this new unclassifiable disease. Later Scientist would see connections of Kuru and Scrapies to other unclassified diseases such as Fatal Familial Insomnia and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. Further research would lead to the shocking 1982 hypothesis of Prions, protein only infectious agents. This hypothesis would threaten some of the central dogmas of molecular biology and is at this moment leading science into new, exciting, uncharted territory.

Scientific research on prions is extremely import due to the medical, social, and economic impact prions have on the world. There is no cure for prion diseases and most don't have any type of treatments available, making them not only medically difficult to deal with, but also socially terrifying. There is great fear and hysteria when contraction of a prion disease can be placed back to a food supply or a blood transfusion. This fear can then directly impact the economy, for example the extreme hit taken by the US beef industry every time there is a reported case of Mad Cow disease. Even if one is not directly effected by a Prion disease the social and economic repercussions can be felt by all.