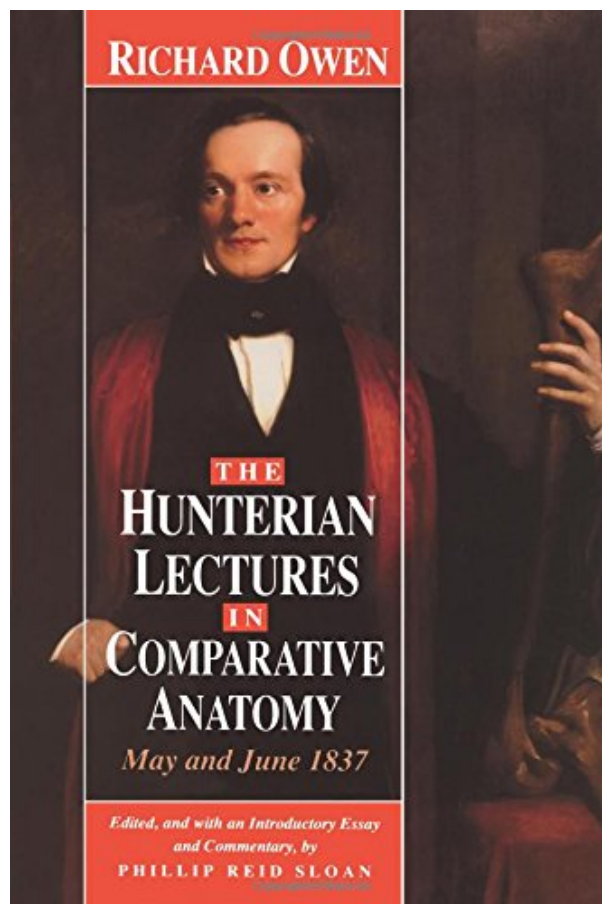
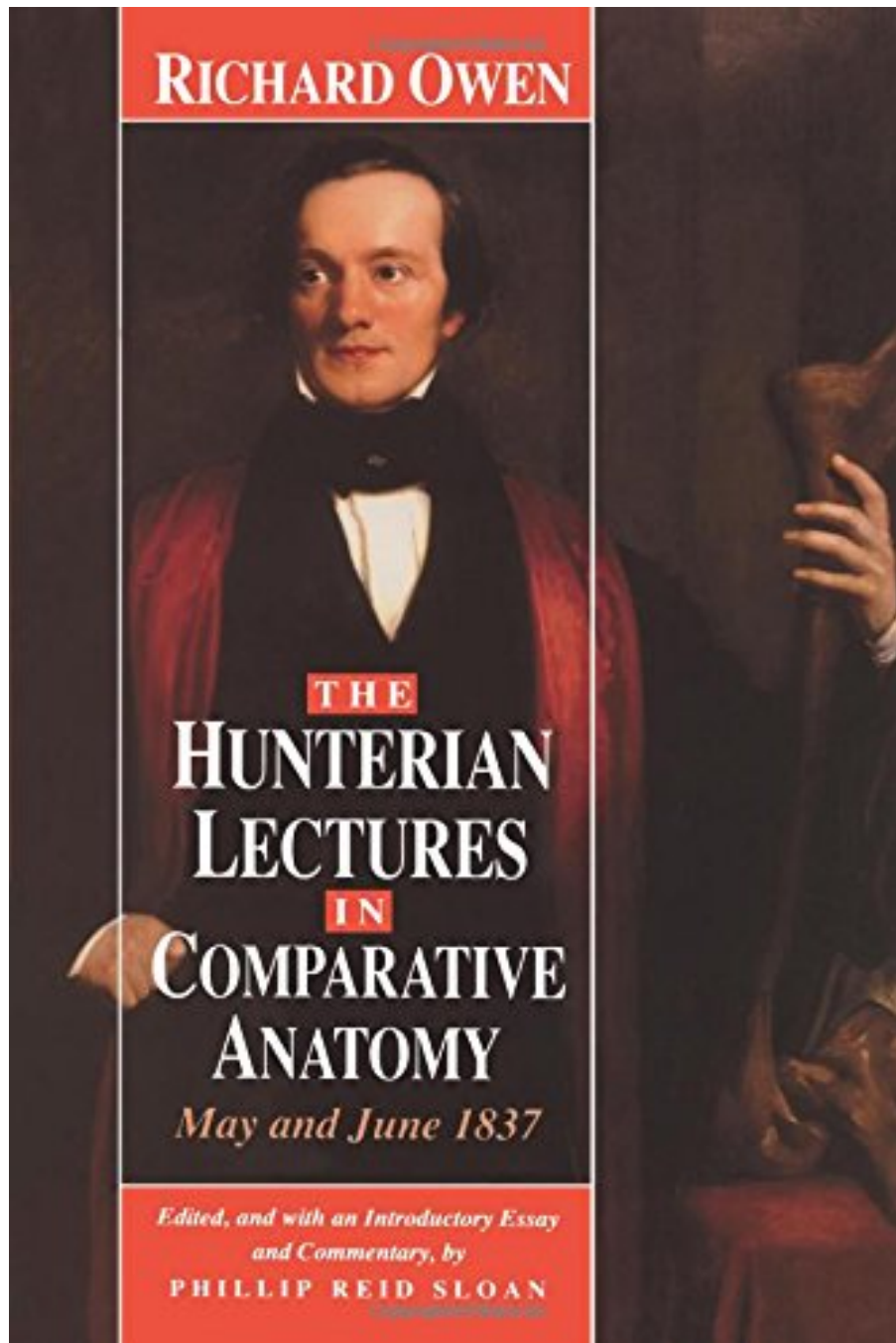


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Sir Richard Owen (1804-1892), comparative anatomist, colleague and later antagonist of Darwin, and head of the British Museum (Natural History), was a major figure in Victorian science, and one of the least well known. Historians of science have found Owen a difficult subject, partly because he seldom wrote at length about his theories of the nature of life. However, his contemporaries--Darwin, Lyell, Grant, Huxley, and others--certainly knew his ideas and agreed or argued with him while developing their own views.

Now, for the first time, modern readers may consult the single sustained exposition of his views that Owen ever provided: his Hunterian Lectures. Phillip Reid Sloan has transcribed and edited the seven surviving lectures and has written an introduction and commentary that situate this work in the context of Owen's life and the scientific life of the time. The lectures survey some of the history of comparative anatomy since Aristotle and draw on work by some of Owen's contemporaries. Their chief value, however, lies in Owen's elucidation of his own view on the relationships among various groups of living things.

"Owen is one of the linchpin figures of Victorian science. The publication of these lectures is important, and Sloan is to be commended for a fine transcription."--Adrian Desmond, University College, London

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Worth the read even just to gain an understanding of ...

By Dave

Worth the read even just to gain an understanding of the philosophical influences of the key players in Victorian biology. It helps to understand the "why " behind what people thought (and still think).

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OWEN'S EARLY LECTURES, PRESENTING SOME OF HIS IDEAS WHICH HE LATER GREATLY EXPANDED

By Steven H Propp

Richard Owen (1804-1892) was an English biologist, anatomist and paleontologist, nowadays most known for his coining of the word "Dinosauria" ("Terrible Reptile") as well as his opposition to Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. However, his work in paleontology was an important step in convincing many in the 19th century that "change" had indeed taken place in biological earth history. He also wrote *Paleontology or a Systematic Summary of Extinct Animals and Their Geological Relations*.

This book contains the opening series of Owen's 1837 lectures, in which he set out the larger framework of the theoretical reflections that occupied him during the next nineteen years. They were given two months before Darwin began his first notebook on the species question.

He praises Aristotle in the first lecture: "It is wonderful, considering that the Nervous System, the true key to the primary divisions of the Animal Kingdom was wholly unknown to Aristotle, that he should have approximated so nearly in propounding these Classes, to our modern Systems. For his arrangement, though not irreproachable, is more accordant with Nature than that of Linnaeus." (Pg. 95)

He observes, "Besides the application of Comparative Anatomy to the discovery of the uses of parts, the numerous and striking instances it affords of the adaptation of means to an end in the different organs, and of their relations of coexistence, had not escaped the notice of some enlightened Philosophers thus early engaged in the investigation of the Structure of Animals." (Pg. 155)

But he wonders, "But what is really gained by propositions such as we have adduced? Or by stating that all animal organization is reducible to one primitive form or plan? What would be thought of the Geometrician, who, because all figures are modifications of the simple mathematical line, should gravely advocate their unity of composition, and put forth the observation as one of high philosophical importance?... The general laws of Animal Organization can never be developed from a consideration of the perfect or matured structure alone: and such WAS the general character of the knowledge from which Cuvier deduced his inferences." (Pg. 191)

He points out, "Thus we have seen that Animals and vegetables not only differ from common matter in their active properties ... but also in their general physical qualities and constitution. The form of the organized Being is determinate, and its outline rounded or undulating; its size is limited; its duration of temporary." (Pg. 232)

He notes, "It has been objected that a nervous system has not been detected in all animals—but as in every Species in which nerves have been indubitably detected, sensation has been found to depend exclusively on them, we are hence led to assume that all animals in which Sensation is observable, must have it depending on a nervous system." (Pg. 254-255)

This book will interest persons studying the development of anatomical (and evolutionary) thought.

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