

Book Reviews

Nicolaas Rupke, *Richard Owen: Victorian naturalist*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1994, pp. xviii, 462, illus., £35.00 (0-300-05820-9).

Among the visitors who throng the British Museum of Natural History, to stand in awe before its spectacular displays, or marvel at its architecture, few give a thought to Richard Owen, the man who inspired the establishment of the greatest Victorian “cathedral of science”. Some will notice Owen’s statue and perhaps wonder what it is doing there. For surely this noble building must have been a tribute to Charles Darwin, whose statue, also on view, everyone recognizes!

As historians of science know, after his death Owen came to be largely excluded from the halls of fame as a result of the successful “push” of the Darwinian party led by Thomas Henry Huxley. It was only in the 1960s, starting with the work of Roy MacLeod, that Owen attracted serious historical scrutiny.

Owen’s relative neglect suggests that historians of science, who like to inveigh against Whiggery when perpetrated by scientist/historians, can themselves be Whiggish, according to the amount of attention they devote to their subjects—as deemed “winners” or “losers” by posterity. However, in Nicolaas Rupke’s text, Owen, a “loser” in the eyes of the twentieth century, receives at last a major intellectual biography. It has been long overdue.

With his diverse cultural background, Rupke is admirably qualified to serve as Owen’s biographer. Of Dutch origin, with full command of English and German (and as far as I know French), and with extended periods of residence in Britain and Australia, Rupke has been able to capture major themes in British social history of science in the nineteenth century; analyse the influence—real or imagined—of Continental transcendentalism on Owen’s thinking; and recognize the important role of materials sent

to Owen for examination from the southern hemisphere and other parts of the globe.

To map the terrain of the British scientific community in the early Victorian period, Rupke uses the geological metaphor of a fault-line, dividing Oxbridge functionalists from metropolitan transcendentalists. The comparison is admitted to be an oversimplification, but is useful none the less. Its line of strike is somewhat different from that of Adrian Desmond, who sees the principal division as running between the Oxbridge ruling establishment and medical radicals associated with the likes of Robert Grant.

In support of his case, Rupke deftly shows how Owen succeeded in manoeuvring between the London medical community, the Oxbridge Paleyite tradition, the functionalism of Georges Cuvier, and eventually the transcendental anatomy emerging from Germany and France. All this intellectual and social/political effort ultimately found its physical embodiment in the establishment of a great museum as a major research site, where the results of comparative (transcendental/archetypal, not Cuvierian/functional) anatomy could be displayed. For this purpose, the transcendental approach was particularly well-suited. It was not necessary, from this perspective, to produce displays where animals were represented in their habitats, suitably adapted thereto: the skeletal “architecture” was necessary and sufficient.

Through Rupke’s analysis, certain canards about Owen are effectively destroyed. Owen was not a Platonist. He was not a biblical fundamentalist. He did have his own version of evolutionary theory (involving what Rupke, p. 250. calls a “combined orthogenetic-mutational mechanism” with resort to “Lamarckian atrophy” in some instances). Owen was not thrashed in the famous “hippocampus minor” debate. (It was closer to a draw perhaps.) His theory of anatomical

archetypes did have empirical virtues. And, of course, Owen achieved remarkable scientific successes, as with his work on the New Zealand moas, the Madagascar aye-aye, and the great apes.

Was it a defect in Huxley's opportunistic character that caused him to turn against Owen, initially his patron? By Rupke's account, it may seem that, from a psychological perspective, it was Huxley who was the malevolent, malicious, scheming, character; whereas Owen has traditionally been regarded thus. Or should we see the contest as "structural" rather than "personal"? Rupke does not quite answer this question. As is often the case with biographers, he begins to identify with his subject. Or at any rate, he appears to make every effort to represent Owen in the best possible light. This is a valuable counterweight to "Darwinian" historiography; but the reader may be left uncertain as to really what was at the bottom of the Huxley-Owen feud.

The lack of a definite answer to this question notwithstanding, we have in *Richard Owen* a major contribution to the history of nineteenth-century biology, written with a stylistic felicity that many a scholar whose first language is English should envy. I am delighted that the author has been appropriately acknowledged by his recent appointment to a chair at Göttingen. I am truly saddened that we have lost him from the community of historians of science in Australia.

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Mark S Micale (ed.), *Beyond the unconscious: essays of Henri F. Ellenberger in the history of psychiatry*, transl. by Françoise Dubor and Mark S Micale, Princeton University Press, 1993, pp. xii, 416, £32.50, \$49.50 (0-691-08550-1).

It became one of the commonplaces of the new professional history of medicine in the 1970s and 80s that in-house historical

scholarship was Whiggish, judgmental, triumphalist and unscholarly. In truth, such judgments were often wide of the mark (saying little for the ability of historians to assess the history of historiography dispassionately). Surveying the history of psychiatry, a vast amount of first-rate research and interpretation was being carried out at that time by those whose primary allegiance was to psychiatry itself. In Britain, Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter stand out, as, in a French-language tradition, does Henri Ellenberger. Perhaps Anglo-American scholars might feel that they had some excuse for not being too familiar with Ellenberger's work, since most (with the exception of *The discovery of the unconscious: the history and evolution of dynamic psychiatry* (New York, Basic Books, 1971)) was long available only in French. This excuse no longer applies, thanks to Mark Micale's admirable collection of Ellenberger's essays, extremely competently translated into English with a lengthy introduction by the editor that addresses Ellenberger's complete historical *oeuvre*.

Ellenberger was a fascinating individual. Born in 1905 in Africa, the son of Swiss Protestant missionaries, he obtained most of his training and early psychiatric practice in France. But he felt a distaste for the dominant French intellectual milieu—it somewhat snubbed him as an outsider—and a characteristic allegiance to Swiss culture, while being unable to live in his native country. His subsequent removal to the Menninger Clinic in Kansas set up theoretical tensions (as a dynamic psychiatrist, Ellenberger was eclectic in his learnings). Eventually he successfully squared the circle by migrating to Montreal, where he could have the best of both worlds, the Old and the New.

Not surprisingly, Ellenberger's historical explorations also avoid any single unambiguous fealty. *The discovery of the unconscious* was in a sense a homage to Freud, since it traced the prehistory of Freud's key concept. Yet by showing that ideas of the unconscious long predated the master, and