

pivotal position of vision in the relationship between man and the external world. The interpretation and understanding of vision has attracted metaphysical and aesthetic, as well as scientific, epistemological and medical interest. Commentators quoted on a particular topic thus range widely: the section on colour contrast, for example, includes extracts from Ptolemy, Ibn al-Haytham, Leonardo da Vinci, Robert Boyle, Goethe, Johannes Müller and Michel-Eugène Chevreul.

Wade's coverage of binocularity is particularly interesting, drawing on discussions of the nature of the pathways from the eye to the brain, single and double vision, eye dominance and contour rivalry. Despite the early appreciation of retinal disparity and binocular single vision, the theoretical link came only with Charles Wheatstone in the mid-nineteenth century, with the insight that singleness of vision did not preclude depth perception on the basis of retinal disparity. Wade presents an accessible account of the various theoretical positions, and the survey of binocularity is enlivened by the inclusion of some of the delightful Rubens frontispieces from Aguilonius' *Opticorum libri sex* (1613).

The juxtaposition of diverse perspectives and presentation of a broad chronological range can be stimulating, but has some limitations for historical interpretation. Wade acknowledges that his commentators were not necessarily aware of their predecessors in the field, and in a work of this scale it is not practicable to present the background and concerns of each author. However, the book's thematic ordering does result in mixing very different discourses and contexts, and a sometimes "whiggish" sense of the development of scientific understanding.

A natural history of vision offers a wide range of fascinating material on sight and optics, both textual and illustrative. As Wade acknowledges, the texts are necessarily selective and in many cases are given in translation, though with sources clearly cited. In some places diagrams are separated from their associated text by a few pages, and would benefit from a cross-reference. Wade includes

an extensive bibliography and comprehensive subject and name indices. These, together with the clear thematic overviews and the richness of the quoted texts, make *A natural history of vision* a valuable source book for anybody with an interest in vision and its interpretative history, whether from a medical, philosophical or psychological perspective.

Helen P B Corlett, Salisbury

Paul Dijkstra and Leo Noordegraaf (compilers), *Plague and print in the Netherlands: a short-title catalogue of publications in the University Library of Amsterdam*, Rotterdam, Erasmus Publishing, 1997, pp. 360, illus., Hfl. 120.00 (90-5235-126-0).

This catalogue covers works published before 1800, printed in the Low Countries or written by Dutch authors, primarily concerning the plague or substantially referring to it. A bibliography of later works dealing with the history of the plague in the area during that period is also included.

The published version grew out of a cataloguing project at the Library of the University of Amsterdam, and only works from that library are listed, although the compilers say in the preface that they are hoping to expand it to a "full-fledged bibliography" in the future. Whether or not this happens, the library's holdings are clearly important and comprehensive enough to make the catalogue an excellent bibliographical overview of the subject in its own right. The collection is rich in general medical works covering the plague, as well as in specialized texts on its aetiology and treatment. There are numerous editions of treatises such as those of Paul Barbette, Johan van Beverwijck, IJsbrand van Diemerbroeck, and Jean Baptiste van Helmont. Literary works invoking the disease, such as Boccaccio's *Decameron*, are also covered.

The book is attractively produced, with a generous number of full-page reproductions of

Book Reviews

title pages and woodcuts. Detailed indices are supplied: one to names, titles, and geographical subjects, and one to printers, publishers and places of printing. Bibliographic descriptions in the entries themselves are very detailed, including full collations and STCN fingerprints, as well as contents, bibliographic references and the shelfmark of the library's copy. Each entry includes references to the other editions of the same work listed elsewhere in the catalogue, since the strict chronological arrangement of the whole means that editions are separated.

This method of ordering is very enlightening, as it gives a panoramic overview of the historical development of the subject.

Not surprisingly, the seventeenth century predominates: the Low Countries, like other parts of Europe, suffered repeated waves of the plague during that century, and barely a decade went by without a major outbreak in one of the principal cities. However, there is also a significant number of works from earlier periods. The earliest is a Dutch translation of Joannes de Ketham's *Fasciculus medicinae*, published in Antwerp in 1512, and a striking illustration from it is reproduced, showing a plague sufferer being examined by a doctor.

The only drawback to the chronological approach is the confusing proliferation of separately-listed editions. For example, the entry for the 1539 Antwerp edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* on the first page boasts no less than forty-six references to other editions. Since the entire catalogue contains around 750 or 800 entries, this means that roughly one in seventeen of them is for a passage of half a dozen pages ("Juno causes a pestilence") in Ovid. It could be a little too much of a good thing.

The book has a pleasantly leisurely feel: one senses that great care has been spent on writing and indexing, as well as on the designing of text and illustrations. The result is well worth the effort. It is a most enjoyable catalogue to handle and to browse through.

For anyone concerned with the history of the plague in general or with the medical history of the Low Countries, or for historians of the

book, this is an indispensable new addition to the bookshelf.

Sarah Bakewell,

Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine

Jaap Harskamp (compiler), *Dissertatio medica inauguralis . . . Leyden medical dissertations in the British Library 1593–1746: catalogue of a Sloane-inspired collection*, London, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1997, pp. 270, £9.00. Orders to: Tracy Tillotson, The Wellcome Trust, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE.

In the preface to this *Dissertatio medica inauguralis . . .*, the keeper of the Western printed books in the University Library of Leyden expresses his satisfaction with this publication. Indeed, the catalogue of 1709 titles, dating from 1593 to 1746, is most impressive and the information a welcome addition to the collection of dissertations, kept in the Leyden University Library. (There is a "black hole" in the collection of Leyden disputations and dissertations between 1610 and 1654.) Sir Hans Sloane's collection, containing a large number of medical dissertations, submitted at Dutch universities between 1593 and 1746, is kept in the British Library. The catalogue is published in this work with excellent attention to the important aspects of the publications, such as the different ways of presenting a *disputatio* or *dissertatio*, an index of the authors, an index of the printers and a geographical index.

There is a lot to learn from this work. The indices are very informative, especially the index of subjects made by Vivian Nutton. The geographical index gives information on the astonishing number of German students, often migrants during the Thirty Years' War, who presented a *disputatio* in this period.

As far as the subject matter is concerned, one could expect the theme of circulation of the blood. Roger Drake's *Disputatio medica inauguralis de circulatione naturali* (1640) introducing Harvey's theory to Leyden