



The cuttlefish was among many creatures that Aristotle observed.

BLOOMSBURY

Aristotle's empirical emphasis on investigation and demonstration. Leroi shows how masters of comparative anatomy including Georges Cuvier (1769–1832) took inspiration from Aristotle in describing and comparing the parts of animals in light of their function as well as of their shape. He compares Aristotle's theories with the thinking of taxonomists such as Linnaeus, of Darwin on evolution, and of the twentieth-century fathers of systems theory and cybernetics such as Walter Cannon and Norbert Wiener.

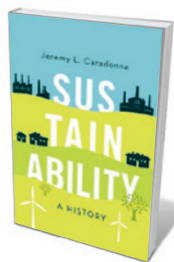
Leroi is careful not to represent Aristotle as a precursor in crude terms, or to read him through inappropriate contemporary lenses. Instead, he highlights aspects of Aristotle's doctrines that still 'speak' to contemporary scientists, and that have been illuminated by modern scientific understanding — for example, Aristotle's emphasis on direct observation and dissection. The philosopher argued, Leroi explains, "that 'knowing' in the sense of 'perceiving' is the foundation of 'knowing' in the sense of 'understanding'".

As Leroi acknowledges, decades of scholarly effort by philosophers and historians such as Allan Gotthelf and James Lennox have gone into the reassessment of Aristotelian biology and its effect on the history of Western science. In this respect, the book broaches no new questions, and brings no new perspective to the heated debates among Aristotelian scholars.

But that is to miss its point. *The Lagoon* is a wonderful introduction to Aristotle's biology, which specialists will also enjoy. Every page is a reminder of the great beauty that we can experience by seeing the world through Aristotelian eyes. ■

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Books in brief



Sustainability: A History

Jeremy L. Caradonna OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (2014)

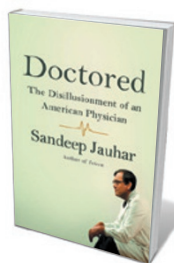
As a concept, sustainability is now near-ubiquitous. But is it a "buzzless buzzword", as environmentalist Bill McKibben has opined? Historian Jeremy Caradonna writes that, on the contrary, this dynamic ethos has plenty of buzz. Predicated on joined-up thinking (such as the idea that society, economy and environment are linked), it emerged with seventeenth-century concerns over European deforestation and is now, Caradonna posits, the keystone of solutions to looming global crises. An exemplary study of an idea's long march through domains from urbanism to social justice.



The Marketplace of Attention: How Audiences Take Shape in a Digital Age

James G. Webster MIT PRESS (2014)

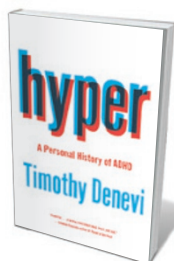
The legions of social networks, news outlets and other digital media all jostle for a limited resource — human attention. As James G. Webster notes in this uneven but fascinating study, "It's a zero sum game that dooms most offerings to obscurity". His investigation of what pulls audiences in trounces prevailing thinking, such as the theory that audiences are zombies herded into "filter bubbles" by data-driven choices. Instead, he reveals a "massively overlapping culture" in which commonality remains surprisingly high.



Doctored: The Disillusionment of an American Physician

Sandeep Jauhar FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX (2014)

In this absorbing memoir-cum-analysis, Sandeep Jauhar traces his years as a fledgling cardiologist against the backdrop of a health-care system in peril. US medicine emerges as an arena in which the physicians suffer as much as the patients: out of 12,000 doctors surveyed in 2008, Jauhar notes, just 6% reported positive morale in their colleagues. Factors such as vast medical-school debts, grinding overwork and the rise of autonomy-eroding health-maintenance organizations are leaving many medics reeling and many potential wannabes seeking other fields. An impassioned call to action.



Hyper: A Personal History of ADHD

Timothy Denevi SIMON AND SCHUSTER (2014)

It began with screaming in a world reduced to a colourless blur. Writer Timothy Denevi was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) at the age of six, and in this haunting narrative he explores the world's most scrutinized childhood condition from the inside out — a litany of school conflicts and rounds of evolving treatments. Through it, Denevi interweaves ADHD's historical trajectory and recent findings, from difficulties with diagnosis (the symptoms are easily conflated with 'normal' childhood behaviour) to the brain regions implicated. Denevi has survived, but at a cost.



Veiled Warriors: Allied Nurses of the First World War

Christine E. Hallett OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (2014)

Professional nursing during the Great War is often seen through the gauze of romantic myth-making, notes historian Christine E. Hallett in this stinging chronicle. In fact, the trained nurses of the Allied forces were less noble young helpmeets than a heterogeneous group of tough-minded women. Eager for formal social and political recognition, they were also faced with grisly new medical challenges such as gas gangrene. As Hallett writes, they fought "a multi-layered battle: for lives, for recognition, and for equality". **Barbara Kiser**