

BOOK REVIEWS

After Kinsey

The Female Orgasm: Psychology, Physiology, Fantasy. By Seymour Fisher. Pp. x+544. (Allen Lane: London, April 1973.) £5.

PROFESSOR FISHER'S book, which deals primarily with the psychology, fantasy and partly with the physiology of the female orgasm, is complementary to the earlier works of Masters and Johnson^{1,2} and Kinsey^{3,4}. Although a significant book by any standards it is not as innovative as its predecessors. The first one-third of the book is divided into five chapters which comprehensively review a commendably large and diverse selection of the literature on the "female sexual response". This is a valuable source of reference for the many workers, medical and non-medical, working in the field.

The remaining ten chapters of the volume contain data that Professor Fisher accumulated prospectively on some two hundred and eighty female volunteers recruited as seven samples. To satisfy different criteria they were studied over differing lengths of time and with somewhat differing procedures. In summary, however, virtually all were subjected to interviews galore, a battery of standard psychological tests, numerous self-rating questionnaires and in most cases physiological measurements, including galvanic skin response (finger, breast, labia, ankle), temperature, heart rate and so on. The sheer volume of data collected was enormous by any standards and allowed diverse statistical analyses.

I am sure Professor Fisher will not take issue with me if I say that the majority of his findings, which are negative correlations, provide more questions than answers, although in general the data accord well with Kinsey's earlier sociological information and the more recent physiological correlates of Masters and Johnson^{1,2}.

What, then, are Fisher's positive findings? Perhaps the most important, since it tends to contradict Masters's insistence of the pre-eminence of the quality of physical stimulation in orgasmic response in the female, is that "a feeling of emotional security and of being loved were more important to the female than were stimulative techniques, prowess of the male, length of foreplay, variation in coital positions, frequency of coitus, and so on". Fisher speculates that this might have psychological roots in childhood when a "demanding and definite (as contrasted with a

casual and permissive) father" made an immutable (sexual) impact. (An implicit plea for an increase in parental discipline?) Unfortunately, Fisher's boldness deserts him less than half a page further on when, winding up the discussion on the genesis of sexual responsiveness, he states "because of the imperfect techniques available for measuring the variables involved, one cannot begin to define realistically how influential these early (parental) transactions are. They could be enormously important and even the prime determinant of orgasmic potential". He clearly believes this even if he does not assert it. In common with those from more recent contributors, Fisher's data surely destroy the old but pernicious psychoanalytical chestnut that vaginal orgasm is better and more mature than clitoral orgasm, which was represented as being neurotic. Fisher provides abundant psychometric data which indicate unequivocally that mental health is not associated either with the "allegedly" differing types of orgasm, or indeed with sexual responsiveness at all. This must be somewhat of a kick in the teeth for the classical psychoanalyst who, in spite of all, continues to maintain that clitoral orgasm is infantile and frigidity is sick.

The book concludes with some practical implications, sub-sectioned under the headings "Pathways to Sexual Adequacy", "Sex Education", "Sexual Adequacy", "Sex and Mental Health", "Treatment of Orgasm Difficulties", "Non Sexual Functions of Sex", "Education", "Sexual Practice Affects"; and pregnancy and priority problems in the study of female sexuality.

A. J. COOPER

¹ Masters, W. H., and Johnson, V. E., *Human Sexual Response* (Little Brown, Boston, 1966).

² Masters, W. H., and Johnson, V. E., *Human Sexual Inadequacy* (Little Brown, Boston, 1970).

³ Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W., and Martin, C., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Saunders, Philadelphia, 1948).

⁴ Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W., and Gebhard, P., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Saunders, Philadelphia, 1953).

Calorific Homeostasis

Regulation in Metabolism. By E. A. Newsholme and C. Start. Pp. xiii+349. (Wiley: New York and London, April 1973.) £6.

THE ability of an organism to adjust selectively the chemical processes taking place in some of its cells in response to the environmental change is of great fascination. This book describes how

the activities of certain enzymes associated with the provision of fuel for oxidation are controlled, or in the words of the authors' preface, the maintenance of "calorific homeostasis". The scope is therefore limited to control of carbohydrate and fat metabolism in, for the most part, mammalian tissues. Control of amino acid, nucleotide and amine metabolism is excluded, as is the role of protein biosynthesis and degradation in those pathways which are covered in this book and the title *Regulation in Metabolism* is thus possibly misleading. One can, however, appreciate the authors' dilemma in attempting to produce a book which deals in depth with the mechanisms by which certain enzymes and hence pathways may be controlled, whilst keeping the scale, and hence price, down sufficiently for students to be able to afford to buy it. A soft-back version would surely be welcome.

The first two chapters cover the theoretical basis of regulation of enzyme activity and metabolite levels (allostery, substrate cycling, enzyme interconversions) and the identification of control points in a pathway. The remaining five chapters deal in detail with the control of carbohydrate metabolism in muscle and liver, and control of fat metabolism in liver and adipose tissue. Although the factual content is high, the text is very readable with a liberal use of tables and diagrams, and more than 400 references are cited. The complexities of intermediary metabolism often bewilder the student but Newsholme and Start have successfully integrated not only those parts of carbohydrate and fat metabolism which overlap, but also some areas of physiology and biochemistry. For example the control during starvation of plasma glucose and fatty acid levels is explained in terms of the action of ketone bodies on (i) lipolysis in adipose tissue, (ii) glucose oxidation in brain and muscle, and (iii) release of insulin from the pancreas. A useful final section covers many of the known biochemical effects of a restricted number of hormones (insulin, growth hormone, adrenaline and glucagon). It would also have been useful if the same treatment had been given to cyclic AMP.

Errors are few and mostly trivial, although the suggestions that (i) the result of donkey spleen deoxycytidine monophosphate deaminase action on dCMP is dAMP, and (ii) valine and isoleucine are degraded to glutamate, should have been spotted. It is also misleading of the authors to state that fatty acid oxidation is the only