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## Letters

### Depressions rooted in experience

It is professionally reassuring to read the critical study of the diagnosis of depression ("Depression Gets Doleful Diagnosis," SN: 2/14/98, p. 100). Unfortunately, psychiatry has succumbed not only to the demands of managed care, but to a society that has come to expect instant gratification. It has almost abandoned dynamic psychiatry for the quick fix of pills and brief, superficial psychotherapy.

In an attempt to gain scientific credibility, it has resorted to an elaborate diagnostic system based primarily on symptoms that are about as indicative of a specific diagnosis as a fever is in general medicine.

However effective an antidepressant may be, ignoring a detailed personal history and stress stemming from a patient's lifestyle as contributing causes to depression borders on incompetence. The fact that biological changes found in "depression" may not be genetic or organic, but produced psycholog-

ically by history and stress is rarely considered adequately.

*Warren A. Baker  
Denver, Colo.*

**The healthy debate** over depression as either "a disease-like process" or "the extreme end of a symptom continuum" is based on a rather dubious premise: that depression is a single mental disorder. Some organically based depressions are seriously debilitating. Others are appropriate responses to life situations of loss, trauma, disappointment, or despair.

Thinking inside the medical box (political need notwithstanding) will continue to rob us of the wider view of depressions rooted in individual experiences. Stretching the box to include a wider range of symptoms, and thereby expanding the diagnostic application of "major depression," is even more depressing.

*Eugene J. Webb  
Houston, Texas*

### Sauce for the gander

I question the notion in "Valuable Vices"

**Cover:** Can butterflies learn preferences for flower colors or knacks for finding the nectar in certain flower shapes? Pollination researchers have started to find out.

**Page 233** (Photo: Dave Cavagnaro, Fenton Communications, Washington, D.C.)



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(SN: 2/28/98, p. 142) that longevity might be a consequence of an active sex life rather than being correlated with it. How "the analysis [of the study cited] accounted for the possibility" and still allowed the author to suggest a cause-effect relationship is beyond comprehension.

*Savely Savva  
Carmel, Calif.*

**Your article implies** that the frequency of sexual intercourse was a measure of frequency of orgasm. Was the "trained interviewer" too embarrassed to ask how often the men of Caerphilly masturbated?

Later in the article, the investigator speculates, "One endearing explanation is that pleasure is actually health-giving." Endearing? How about obvious?

*Barry Evans  
Palo Alto, Calif.*

### Why weren't the women of Caerphilly

*Letters continued on p. 232*

studied? There are a lot of us middle-aged, sexually active women out here, and we warrant the attention of epidemiologists, too.

Susan Bury  
Washington, D.C.

I was very disturbed by the cover. A picture of indulgence does not necessarily need to be sexist and demeaning. Who in the picture is indulging? In what? And whose longevity is extended by the implicit assumption that it is the lives and pleasures of men, and not women, that really count?

Christine Morales  
Northfield, Minn.

"Valuable Vices" credits Plato with the phrase "nothing in excess." This phrase is usually attributed not to Plato but to the legislator Chilon of Sparta, a rather shadowy member of the group of "seven sages" from the sixth century B.C.

When Plato quotes this sort of thing, it is hard to feel that he really believes it. The organization of the ideal state in the *Republic* and the education of its guardian class do not tend in the direction of even moderate indulgence, and certainly not indulgence in the amorous and gustatory pleasures that are the subject of the article.

The outstanding proponent of moderation is Aristotle, and the outstanding proponent of pleasure in moderation is Epicurus. Indeed, the whole theme of the article is splendidly Epicurean.

Let's hear it for Epicurus, a most useful and underestimated fellow.

Pierre A. MacKay  
Emeritus Professor of Classics  
University of Washington  
Seattle, Wash.

I showed my wife the article and pointed out that if she wanted me to be my healthiest, she'd have to go along with my increase in sex, which of course would include multiple sex partners.

She replied, "Sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose." Great. I thought, she's already back talking food.

Carl Haeberte  
Surfside, Fla.

### How to boost—or not—uric acid

If uric acid may benefit multiple sclerosis patients ("Uric acid linked to multiple sclerosis," SN: 1/31/98, p. 68), could a diet high in organ meats and other purines prove beneficial?

Terence W. Moran  
Las Vegas, Nev.

Immunologist D. Craig Hooper says any food rich in purines will raise uric acid concentrations and might be beneficial. —M.N. Jensen

Bee sting therapy is sometimes used to treat multiple sclerosis sufferers. Does the injection of bee venom into the human body promote the formation of uric acid?

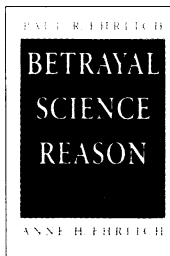
Larry Miles  
Independence, Mo.

"There's no data to suggest that bee sting therapy is useful in MS," says Stephen Reingold of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

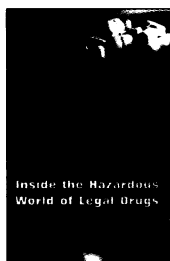
—M.N. Jensen

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**Betrayal of Science and Reason: How Anti-Environmental Rhetoric Threatens Our Future**—Paul R. Ehrlich and Anne H. Ehrlich. "Brownlash" is a term coined by the authors to describe the response of several well-known writers and commentators, such as Rush Limbaugh and Gregg Easterbrook, to environmental issues. The authors argue that these promulgators of brownlash are uninformed and show little regard for valid scientific study. The Ehrlichs summarize scientific evidence indicating that the ozone layer is indeed vanishing, population growth is not beneficial, and biodiversity is critical to the well-being of humanity. They also discuss how misinformation has come to permeate the news media. Originally published in hardcover in 1996. Island Pr, 1998, 335 p., paperback, \$16.95.



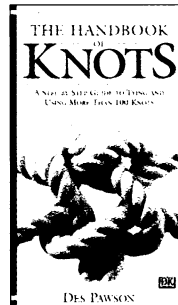
**Bitter Pills: Inside the Hazardous World of Legal Drugs**—Stephen Fried. Motivated by the neurological disturbance his wife experienced after taking a relatively new prescription antibiotic called Floxin, Fried launched an exhaustive investigation into how drugs make their way from laboratory to medicine chest. He soon realized that more people die from legal drugs each year than from all illegal drugs combined and that the path of government approval for new drugs is littered with potholes. Fried reveals the dynamics of the pharmaceutical industry and the Food and Drug Administration that is expected to control it. The methods of pharmaceutical companies marketing both to physicians and, increasingly, to patients directly are questionable. Neither audience, he notes, is always well versed in pharmacology. Bantam, 1998, 417 p., hardcover, \$24.95.



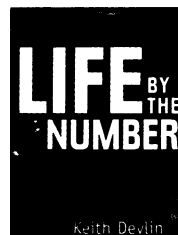
**Black Holes: A Traveler's Guide**—Clifford A. Pickover. Recent confirmation of the existence of black holes only increases speculation about time travel, wormholes, and the like. Pickover provides an amusing tour of the known and unknown regions of black holes, exploring their composition and the possibilities of parallel universes. As befits someone with a background in computer science, Pickover provides a wealth of experiments and computer applications that further the reader's understanding of event horizons, tidal forces, warps, and so on. Originally published in hardcover in 1996. Wiley, 1998, 210 p., color plates/b&w illus., paperback, \$14.95.

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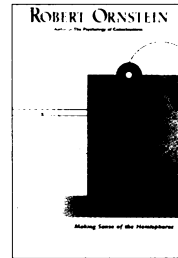
**The Handbook of Knots: A Step-by-Step Guide to Tying and Using More Than 100 Knots**—Des Pawson. For those whose scouting skills are a little rusty, this handbook generously illustrates each step necessary for the knot at hand. The properties of different types of rope and details about what knots work best for hitches, tying objects, sailing, climbing, or decorative purposes are covered, as are the Turquoise Turtle, Thief Knot, and Chain Sennet. DK, 1998, 160 p., color photos/illus., paperback, \$16.95.



**Life by the Numbers**—Keith Devlin. Clearly, Devlin's exuberance for his profession is captured both in the PBS series to which he contributed and in this companion volume to that program. Math is everywhere—in movies, the heavens, animals, and even golf balls. Avoiding equations but loading up on illustrations, Devlin delves into the various aspects of mathematics by touring the depths of the ocean, casinos, medical laboratories, and ice skating rinks, to name a few. Wiley, 1998, 214 p., color photos/illus., hardcover, \$29.95.



**Pocket Guide to the Birds of Britain and North-West Europe**—Chris Kightley, Steve Madge, and Dave Nurney. Anyone planning a European holiday will find this compact guide invaluable. Full descriptions of 385 species of birds that occur regularly, including breeding species, migrants, and rare birds, are listed in alphabetical order. Double-page spreads enable the reader to compare similar species and thus aid in identifying the birds. Maps detailing the prevalence of each bird in that area complement the more than 288 color plates of the specimens. Yale U Pr, 1998, 299 p., color illus., paperback, \$20.00.



**The Right Mind: Making Sense of the Hemispheres**—Robert Ornstein. The idea that there are "right-brained" and "left-brained" people, the former creative and the latter analytical, is an exaggeration, according to Ornstein. Although the left side of the brain stores and processes facts, it is the right side that puts them into context and makes sense of them. The two hemispheres must cooperate to avoid having one take precedence over the other. Ornstein shows that asymmetry is not unique to humans: it existed in the earliest forms of life and is present in species other than ours today. However, the function and evolution of this division remain elusive and misunderstood. Ornstein explains current theories and his own speculations, illustrating them with case studies. Harbrace, 1997, 200 p., hardcover, \$22.00.