



## BOOK REVIEWS

**Psychological Aspects of Nuclear War** by James Thompson, 1985; The British Psychological Society and John Wiley. Pp 127 ISBN 0 471 90747 2.

This initiative by the British Psychological Society to draw up a report on the psychological aspects of nuclear war must be congratulated. The author, James Thompson, consulted a large number of psychologists with relevant expertise who have aided him in presenting the current state of knowledge concerning five major issues.

He begins by analysing the nature of the nuclear threat (which includes a resumé of the physical effects of nuclear damage and gives a count of weapon stockpiles, plus a brief outline of likely British targets), and proceeds by examining people's reactions to disaster, looking at data from previously occurring nuclear and non-nuclear catastrophes, all of which as he points out have depended on outside help to reduce the extent of the suffering. Such an assumption cannot be made in the aftermath of a global nuclear war.

The third section assesses current civil defence policy and gives an outline of the more probable reactions of citizens under the threat of a nuclear crisis. These clearly illustrate the inadequacy of the official "Protect and Survive" propaganda.

By the fourth section, having weathered the storm of formal declarations of warfare, we have perhaps the most frightening scenario. This looks at the various human fallibility factors which could promote a nuclear holocaust. Drawing on knowledge from the psychology of accidents, the complex nature of vigilance tasks and the nature of performance deficits under a range of physical and psychological stresses, this section leaves me wondering, on actuarial grounds, that we have still not been mistakenly blown-up, or that more nuclear material has not been "lost" or otherwise misappropriated.

Finally, there is a short section on psychological contributions to the skills of negotiation and conflict resolution, with suggestions made for the urgent need to set up certain tension-reducing processes which would be made use of during international crises. As before, it appears that the level of psychological sophistication of those professionally involved leaves a great deal to be desired.

James Thompson has presented this evidence in a clear, readable and chillingly neutral manner. His short sentences and comparatively jargon-free prose may mean that even the dimmest politician, military personnel or arms negotiator, were she or he to pick up this book, could understand and digest the information.

As a complete survey of relevant psychological factors there are, however, some important omissions. Whilst covering cognitive, ergonomic, social and organisational factors, there is no consideration given to the important intrapsychic determinants in responding to the nuclear threat. Why, for example, have so many courageous women been organising protests at Greenham Common and elsewhere in order to mobilise public concern for the escalation of nuclear arsenals, whilst others can dismiss such action as scaremongering or a disturbance of public order? The reasons are partly social but largely psychodynamic in origin, being concerned with the nature of people's habitual defensive reactions to life-threatening situations.

These same psychodynamic factors affect current levels of anxiety and depression (or, of course, manic denial) and will determine individual reactions in a crisis. They are also of particular importance in considering the psychological stability of decision-makers and the nature of their judgements. Psychologists, and those they hope to influence, can only ignore such important knowledge at their peril.

**Kate Osborne**

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**MALE SEXUALITY - THE ATLANTIS POSITION** by Jenny James. Caliban Books, 1985. £7.95

Jenny James' latest Atlantis book - 'Male Sexuality: The Atlantis Position' - had the rare privilege of being considered as one of the oddest titles on display at the 1985 Frankfurt Book Fair; only odd, however, if you don't get the joke, as the (male) adjudicator who wanted it not to be considered 'on the grounds that it was an attack on men' obviously didn't.

And that's the point about this wonderful book - if you don't see the funny side, you won't understand why such a book should exist. If this is the case, you should go and see the nearest primal therapist immediately, and if all else fails, you should take the next boat to Ireland and seek out a mythical community on an island off the Donegal coast, where the inmates have a trick or two up their sleeves specially designed for you.

The book starts off with Jenny's incisive insights into the varieties of men she has encountered in her twenty-odd years as a therapist and liver of life. The men she has most to do with then have the opportunity to say something about themselves in relation to sex, Jenny, and the other Atlantis women. Then follows what is for me the core of the book - a pair of interviews with

Jenny James where she sets out clearly and with her usual wit and bravado the 'General Atlantis Theory of Energy Blocks', and how and why any energy, even if it's labelled 'anger', 'frustration', or 'disgust', is a lot healthier felt and out in the open than sat on.

The last part of 'Male Sexuality' is an Atlantis ABC - "not of sex, but of thoughts and pranks to fill in the spaces when you're not getting it", from 'antics' to 'zen', my favourites (and sometimes I had to put the book down I was laughing so much) being 'games', 'revenge' and 'squatting'. This little poem by Jenny's sister Snowy will give you a taste:

#### CONTRACEPTION

Er - excuse me!  
Have you had a vasectomy then?  
No?  
Sorry to be so technical just now . . .  
But where are your Durex?  
You have none?  
I see  
You thought that I . . .  
Being liberated . . .  
Well I think it's time  
For you  
Man in the moon  
Conqueror  
Explorer  
Scientist  
Chemist  
Time you got  
Liberated yourself.

(Excuse me  
While I leave the bed  
Nothing personal of course.  
Just one of those  
Angry young women)

'Male Sexuality' is a breath of sanity and common sense in an area where heavy self-righteousness, boring academic analysis and anonymous preaching are too often the rule. Not that I always agree with Jenny - for example, I think some of her ideas about astrology and yin and yang are a bit deterministic and limiting. I do sometimes wonder whether Jenny, Snowy et al occasionally get locked into an 'all men have problems and we'll never be able to deal with them' mode, making it hard to imagine what the end result of all this therapy might be. And I wonder whether they sometimes collude with the destructive patterns of their menfolk by always being there for them, then wondering why men appear to be so dependent. Having

your therapist on hand twenty-four hours a day doesn't always make for a will to be powerful and independent, so though I'm sure Jenny wouldn't support male apologetics in theory, I get a hint of a vested interest on her part in not expecting more of her men.

Occasionally too there is a gratuitous swipe which is so far below the belt as to be questionable in its effectiveness. I thought certain remarks about homosexuals, lesbians and radical feminists were a bit over the top, but she's absolutely right in not letting them get away with indulgent cant any more than anybody else, and in many instances people who would place themselves within these categories have hardly given Atlantis a fair hearing.

But these are minor carps, and hardly detract at all from what I consider to be the best book about that dreaded subject 'relationships' I've read for a long time. Buy it immediately, read it from cover to cover, laugh a lot, then add some of the practical suggestions to your repertoire of behaviour. The world will be a much more interesting place for it. And if you don't get the joke . . . but you will.

**John Button**

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**Human Sexuality: Current controversies** by Harold Feldman & Andrea Parrot (eds). Sage Publications 1984.

At first this looks like a very interesting book. It takes ten controversial issues in the field of sexuality, and presents one essay on each side of the argument. For example, McDowell maintains that "Heterosexuality is the only natural form of sexual expression" while Kirsh argues that "There are many natural forms of sexual expression". The book comes from an academically respectable publisher, and the editors are academics - Feldman a Professor Emeritus at Cornell, and Parrot a lecturer at the same university. Many of the essays have the usual display of academic references and footnotes., so expectations are aroused that this will be a thorough examination of the territory in a well thought-out manner.

What we actually get, however, is a series of loosely-written and rather informal chats around the subject topics, totally dominated by Christian assumptions and positions. Most of the essays adopting what one might call the challenging or unorthodox end of the argument make it clear that the authors are Christian and accept the Christian belief system, I suppose in the current climate in the USA this is playing it safe, hoping that the book will be acceptable for course work in the average university. But if the average university in the States is this low in the level of argument and general academic discourse, then it does not seem to matter very much whether this book is adopted or some other.

We also get some quite weird statements being made with all the seriousness of academic authority. Here is one statement about the Equal Rights Amendment, made by W. Peter Blitchington of the Florida Hospital:

*Many of the supposed results of the ERA have been ridiculed, but one result is fairly well accepted among legal scholars: The Equal Rights Amendment, had it been passed, would have forced the government to draft women alongside men and to place women in combat positions on a par with men. More than any other factor, this contributed to the downfall of the ERA - and it's a good thing because other countries that have drafted women and used them in combat roles have quickly had to abandon the process.*

One of the essays in this book - "Certain forms of sexuality should be illegal to protect individuals and society" - is actually written by Jerry Falwell, the well-known TV preacher and bigot. This is a very good book to stay away from, shun and avoid.

**Brian Rainbow**