

as quoted earlier) as 'a system of education in which the pupil is trained to find out things for himself'. How apposite as a recommendation to read this book! An aphorism of the late Professor Eric Bywaters, doyen of rheumatologists, is that one consults textbooks to find out the things that no one knows.

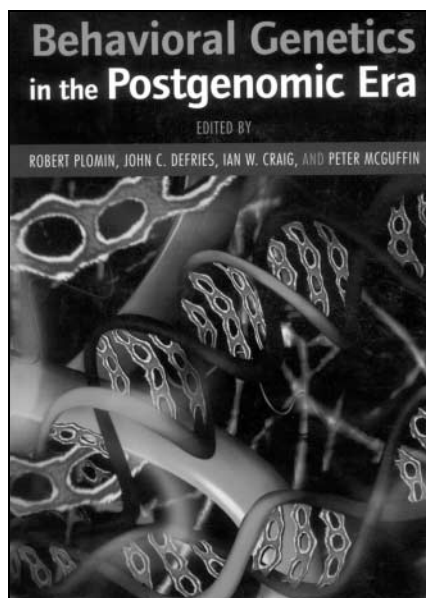
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Behavioral Genetics in the Postgenomic Era

Edited by Robert Plomin, John C. DeFries,
Ian W. Craig & Peter McGuffin.

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(members), \$59.95 (non-members) (hb).
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The closing years of the 20th century saw molecular genetic approaches prove successful in identifying genes involved in a large number of rare disorders and traits that show a simple, Mendelian pattern of inheritance. In the opening years of the new millennium human geneticists are applying the powerful approaches and knowledge emanating from the human genome project to tackle the more challenging problem of genetically complex disorders and traits – common (or universal) characteristics that show substantial variation within human populations, and that do not have a simple pattern of inheritance; these are disorders and traits that are likely to follow some form of multifactorial model in which a combination of susceptibility genes and environmental factors act and interact to determine the expression of the trait. Most clinical psychiatrists will immediately recognise that many psychiatric disorders fall into this category; furthermore, so do most normal behavioural traits (including general and specific cognitive abilities and personality variables). As the media frequently remind us, the human genome project continues to deliver increasingly powerful resources and tools that can be used to investigate such disorders – including a working draft of the sequence of DNA in the human genome, detailed catalogues of the common variants in the DNA sequence and increasing numbers of annotated genes (i.e. identified DNA sequences



that code for genes for which the expression profile and protein product are known and characterised). This will make the coming years an exciting time for all researchers and clinicians interested in psychiatric and behavioural disorders, because application of this knowledge will lead to the identification of genes and environmental factors influencing these traits.

The publication of *Behavioral Genetics in the Postgenomic Era* is therefore timely. This nicely presented, edited volume arose from a meeting coordinated by the Wellcome Trust: the authors include many of the leading clinical and basic scientists within the field of behavioural genetics, and its scope appropriately represents current research within this area. According to the flyleaf, this book sets itself the goal of assessing the current status and likely future directions in genetic research on behaviour. This goal is met within its 600 pages, and a broad range of theoretical and trait-specific topics are covered. The book focuses on behavioural traits rather than on psychiatric disorders. It is arranged in 26 chapters, divided into nine sections. The first six chapters provide orientation and theoretical background information regarding molecular, statistical and design aspects relevant to behavioural genetics. This is followed by sections on learning and memory in mice, human cognitive abilities, cognitive disabilities, psychopharmacology, personality, and a limited coverage of psychopathologic topics – chapters on attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, schizophrenia, mood disorders and dementia. A helpful glossary is included for the non-specialist.

A minor criticism is that the style and degree of specialisation of chapters are variable; consequently it will be easier to use the book for reference to individual topics rather than to read it sequentially as an overview. Undoubtedly, it would be an excellent addition to any psychiatric library. Consistent with the title, the coverage of the main psychiatric disorders is relatively limited, and readers mainly interested in psychiatric genetics will find more extensive coverage and focus on disorders in *Psychiatric Genetics and Genomics* (McGuffin *et al*, 2002).

McGuffin, P., Owen, M. J. & Gottesman, I. I. (eds)
(2002) *Psychiatric Genetics and Genomics*. Oxford:
Oxford University Press.

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Pharmacogenetics of Psychotropic Drugs

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Cambridge University Press. 2002. 446 pp.
£95 (hb). ISBN 0 521 80617 8

Students and teachers of psychopharmacology have a sense that the most difficult topic to teach and to remember is that of pharmacokinetics. Since many aspects of pharmacokinetics are genetically determined, I approached this book with hope of enlightenment. New discoveries and techniques in molecular genetics should eventually cast light on such questions as why individual patients respond (or do not respond) to drugs, and why some experience more side-effects than others.

The editor's introduction gives a compelling account of the potential importance of pharmacogenetics, but also sounds an ominous note of caution about the complexity of the subject. More than a million single-nucleotide polymorphisms have been discovered that might be relevant. Many of the claimed associations of allelic variations with drug responses have failed attempts at replication. Psychopharmacology is likely to be more difficult than other branches of therapeutics to disentangle through molecular genetics because of the difficulty in identifying drug responders from placebo