the persistent long-term effects of selective monoamine oxidase inhibitors, and interesting studies on the possibility of producing a reversible MAO inhibitor with high affinity for the type A enzyme. A series of papers follows dealing with the effectiveness of established monoamine oxidase inhibitors in the treatment of depression where, in general, the drugs were superior to placebo and as effective as tricyclic antidepressants, although questions of efficacy in some forms of depression remain unanswered. In contrast Lader and Savage found in a large group of patients that tricyclic antidepressants were consistently superior to monoamine oxidase inhibitor therapy or to combined tricyclic-monoamine oxidase inhibitor treatment. However, Tyrer and colleagues emphasise the need for adequate dosage taking into account pharmacokinetic factors as a critical factor in achieving clinical effect. The later chapters deal with the emergence of selective monoamine oxidase inhibitors. The chapters by Mendis and colleagues and by Mendlewicz and Youdim suggest that deprenyl itself, at least, is not useful in the treatment of depression although it may have a place in combination with L-5-hydroxytryptophan. In contrast, Murphy and colleagues working with the selective monoamine oxidase A inhibitor, chlorgyline, and B inhibitor pargyline, find antidepressant efficacy clearly associated with type A enzyme. The book is concluded by a contribution from Merton Sandler who rightly states that selective inhibitors, at least, do not yet have an established place in antidepressant therapy, although compounds such as deprenyl may be of value in the treatment of Parkinson's disease. This is a wide-ranging book containing much useful information and is recommended to those working in this area.

PG JENNER

Pain: A Spike-Interval Coded Message in the Brain. By Raimond Emmers. (Pp 144; \$34.00.) New York: Raven Press, 1981.

This is a very idiosyncratic book. It contains the equivalent of three papers in Brain Research. The author somehow persuaded the publishers to produce this book and thereby to bypass the tedium of argument with referees. I sympathise with him but it has had the effect of insulating him from the normal criticism and I suspect from the normal readership. The scientific results are straightforward. In anaesthetised rats, there are cells in the

posterior part of the VPL nucleus in the thalamus which fire with a characteristic repetitive burst if an intense shock is given to the sciatic nerve. The repetitive burst is generated by interaction with the nuclei CM-Pf. Lastly he shows that if anaesthesia is increased or narcotics are given or the periaqueductal grey is stimulated or dorsal columns are stimulated, the characteristic repetitive response of the cells declines. This is good standard stuff already mainly published by the author who reasonably points out that the repetitive discharge of these cells increases and decreases under conditions where one might expect pain to increase or decrease. Unfortunately the book then turns to a series of excited shouts of "Eureka, I have discovered the code for pain". With only 46 references, the work of others in the past 20 years is largely ignored. The simplest of checks to challenge his own conviction even for an anaesthetised rat are not carried out. For example, all but some experimental pain is produced by asynchronous afferent barrages and yet it seems from his own data that this would not produce the "spike interval coded message in the brain" which is part of his title. Almost everyone has abandoned the classical view that pain is to be explained by the presence or absence of activity in modality specific cells. In that sense, Dr Emmers joins the majority but for the majority to join Dr Emmers in his intuitive conviction that he knows the code will require much more evidence which I am sure he is investigating.

PD WALL

The Effects of Taurine on Excitable Tissues. Edited by SW Schaffer, Steven I Baskin and James J Kocsis. (Pp 446; £35.50.) Lancaster: MTP Press Ltd, 1981.

This volume presents the proceedings of the 21st AN Richards Symposium held in Valley Forge Pennsylvania in April 1979. It contains 29 research reports, mostly of a rather fragmentary nature, grouped under four headings ("Metabolism and Function of Taurine Analogues", "Actions of Taurine—in the Central Nervous System",—"in the Cardiovascular System", "Clinical Implications of Taurine"). A brief edited Discussion of each section is included.

The section on the Central Nervous System includes one contribution on platelets, one on the pineal gland and three on the retina. Among the latter

the review by Mary Voaden and colleagues is informative and a pleasure to read.

The overall quality of the contributions to this volume is regrettably low. This is only partly a reflection of the state of the art in taurine research. The editors may not have been able to exercise the selection and control they would have wished. However, they could have noticed that the list of references at the end of Chapter 4 does not correspond with those quoted in the text.

What taurine does in excitable membranes and why the retina degenerates in taurine deficient cats remain intriguing mysteries. Will research on taurine provide the key to spino-cerebellar degenerative disorders or to epilepsy? The answers to these problems are certainly not evident in this volume. Some of the footnotes might provide vital clues to the research worker. However, readers seeking a general guide to the uncertain territory of taurine and its role in cerebral function in health and disease are likely to prefer the 1978 volume edited by Barbeau and Huxtable.

BRIAN MELDRUM

Modern Practical Neurology: An Introduction to Diagnosis and Management of Common Neurologic Disorders—2nd ed. By Peritz Scheinberg. (Pp 360; \$39.44.) New York: Raven Press, 1981.

This is one more short textbook to join the hosts of others that fill the libraries. Most of these are very adequate, all of them reflect the author's particular interests, foibles and biases; the reviewer suspects that the principal aim in most of them is to satisfy the author's ego rather than to instruct. This generalisation is really to explain why it is absolutely necessary to demand what it is that a fresh textbook offers that separates it from the rest and justifies the labour that has gone into its compilation. Dr Scheinberg's claim is that it is disease orientated and that a special effort has been made to explain symptoms and signs in the context of the mechanism of their causation. While it is true that this is what he has done in many of the chapters the reviewer finds it difficult to accept that this is the only textbook of neurology that sets out to do this, and while many have done it less effectively with a greater number of errors, there are others that do it as well, so that it is not a text that one reads and feels is a welcome addition to an already