

PRODUCTIVITY THEORY

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A. Optimum Efficiency-Output Power Principle Applied to Photosynthesis

In previous reports, the principle has been stated that open steady state systems tend to be adjusted at an optimum but low efficiency that corresponds to the maximum power output. (Odum and Pinkerton, American Scientist, in press) That this principle is valid for photosynthetic systems seems indicated in Figure 15 below:

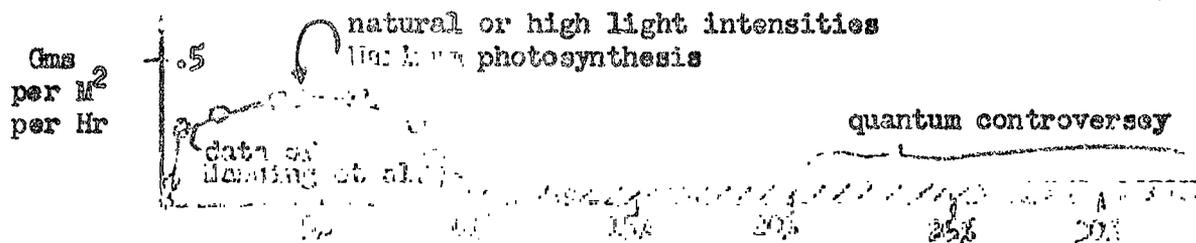


Figure 15. Photosynthesis versus efficiency indicating low but optimum efficiency associated with maximum output

This graph shows that high efficiencies such as have been achieved in all the work associated with the quantum controversy have all been at low light intensities so that the power output of glucose has been very small. On the other hand the natural populations of algae adjusted to high natural light intensities run at low efficiencies and high light intensities but so that a much greater output of glucose results. If plants are evolutionarily adapted to maximum output they must sacrifice efficiency for power by this hypothesis. This is a way of stating that attempts to increase world food by raising chlorella at high efficiencies must necessarily flop. A second part of this hypothesis may be stated that the optimum efficiency for maximum power output decreases as the light intensity increases. Plants adapted in nature to deep water achieve the optimum adjustment at a higher efficiency than at the surface. However, a plant adjusted for one light intensity can not be moved immediately to another light intensity and achieve the optimum adjustment without internal modification. A car climbing a hill in second gear at optimum efficiency cannot achieve the optimum efficiency for a steeper hill away without changing gears. In the plant gears may be the concentration gradients. The efficiencies in Figure 15 are of the same magnitude at optimum adjustment as those found in Silver Springs and the Coral Reef.

B. Organismal Size versus Metabolic Rate in Phototrophs in Optimum Adjustment

It is now well known that metabolism of heterotrophic organisms is inverse to body size roughly in a $2/3$ power function that is presumed to be related to the surface/volume ratio to diffusion processes. From the above section it was concluded that photosynthetic systems in open steady state tend to all become adjusted to a similar state of running at maximum power output because of the survival value in ecological competition both in an environmental and evolutionary sense. With similar light intensities, similar steady state plant systems should be adjusted to similar efficiencies and thus similar total photosynthetic power output of glucose on an AREA basis.