

# Letters

## Policy on TV Violence

The report and conclusions of the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior (News and Comment, 11 Feb., p. 608) point to some recurring themes in the development of policy recommendations based upon scientific evidence. While the translation of research findings into policy recommendations is difficult, the degree to which an issue becomes embroiled in and subjected to economic, socio-political, and related pressures undoubtedly compounds the problem.

In such situations, perhaps the research results could be placed somewhere between the poles of "Clear Substantiation" and "Clear Rejection" of the stated hypotheses. It seems understandable that individuals and groups will tend to be somewhat more or somewhat less convinced by the available evidence. The degree of support for, rejection of, or expressed uncertainty about the results will not be a function only of the scientific rigor of the research and the conclusiveness of the findings. Reactions will also tend to be influenced by the particular theoretical, ideological, economic, or other preferences and commitments of the persons making such judgments.

I am not suggesting that acceptance or rejection of research findings are based largely on considerations of theoretical, ideological, or other biases, but rather that we need to recognize that such factors seem to play a part in the process. One way to approach this problem would be to determine how we would wish to hedge our bets with regard to the suspected causal relationship between viewing televised violence and its effects on behavior, given the nature of the available evidence. In arriving at a decision we should certainly consider the kinds of harm we would like to avoid, and thus the kinds of errors we should try to avoid—assuming that such errors could be demonstrated. Would we wish to

err on the side of trying to prevent what appear to be harmful effects on children exposed to violent television fare? Should we be equally concerned about avoiding economic or other complications for the television industry? What kind of balance or compromise might have to be arrived at with regard to competing interests? (A similar problem is presented by the issue of stricter regulation and control of firearms, especially handguns.)

Since most decisions pertaining to the findings and implications of scientific research tend ultimately to become matters of social policy, they are inevitably pushed into the socio-political arena. It seems both desirable and essential to expect, indeed to demand, that greater consideration be given to the larger societal interests, rather than to the more parochial and vested interests. If we insist on delaying important policy decisions until the evidence is absolutely conclusive and glaringly obvious, we will most likely have limited our opportunities and options for dealing with the problems. Our belated efforts at remediation might be far less effective, and the harm done to the health and welfare of many persons might well be difficult to reverse.

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## Aharon Katzir-Katchalsky

The senseless murder of Aharon Katzir-Katchalsky at Lod Airport in Tel Aviv has deeply shocked the world. Many scientists and nonscientists have conveyed their outrage and sorrow to the people of Israel and to the Weizmann Institute of Science. We have received a flood of letters and cables, all expressing a profound sense of loss at the tragic death of a scientist whose personality and impact were, literally, unique.

Many of these letters and cables have indicated a desire to participate in

the creation of a memorial worthy of Aharon Katzir. We are all most deeply moved by this response. While we have not yet been able to make any detailed plans for a suitable way of commemorating Katzir, we are clear on one point: the wish, at one and the same time, to perpetuate his memory on this campus and to further those fields of endeavor that were closest to his heart.

In order to make possible some kind of coordinated action, an international committee is being formed, and a Katzir Memorial Fund has been established at the Weizmann Institute of Science. Ideas and offers of help will be gratefully received.

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Many scientists from around the world had the privilege of knowing Aharon Katchalsky, his brilliant scientific work, his extraordinary faculty to communicate science, and his warm personality. Those who worked with him, were his students, or merely heard him lecture will carry equally the intellectual excitement which Aharon Katchalsky could invoke.

On 30 May, Aharon Katchalsky, returning to Israel from one of his frequent trips abroad devoted to international scientific cooperation, was gunned down at the Tel Aviv airport, along with Puerto Rican pilgrims and other innocent bystanders, in a vicious and senseless terrorist attack.

We have requested that a suitable memorial symposium be held at the forthcoming Fourth International Congress of Biophysics sponsored by the International Union of Pure and Applied Biophysics. Katchalsky was a past president of this organization and an honorary vice-president at the time of his demise. Because so many of his friends, students, and scientific colleagues will gather in Moscow for this meeting, we feel that it is a unique opportunity to honor Katchalsky's scientific and intellectual accomplishments. Such a symposium would be an especially significant and fitting tribute to this outstanding international scientist, whose leadership and example in international scientific cooperation played a major part in making such international meetings possible.

Although we realize the difficulty of making late changes in a carefully prepared program, we hope the organizing committee of the Fourth International Congress of Biophysics will see fit to