

CORRESPONDENCE

Unscientific Issues

SIR,—It is easy to sympathize with the editor of *Nature* (239, 182; 1972) because it is obviously very difficult to define precisely the limits of discussion in a general scientific journal. Certainly the criterion that "scientists are more affected than other groups of people" seems reasonably satisfactory, much more so than the original definition on the basis of the official or unofficial nature of the decision (*Nature*, 238, 57; 1972). Unfortunately, in practice, this does not seem to be the criterion.

Under this criterion, a comment on the murder of Professor Aharon Katchalsky is obviously valid, but a more general condemnation of terrorism seems not to be. And letters such as that of Dr Pryor (*Nature*, 239, 179; 1972) are clearly invalid, if it were not already invalid on the grounds of simple logic. What, after all, is the use of anti-personnel weapons on "military" targets if not "carefully-planned, purposeful, braggartly and wanton murder of random civilians"?

Moreover we are unable to understand how, using this criterion, *Nature* has refused to publish the statement of the Varenna Summer School on the History of Physics. This statement by a body of scientists concerns the use of modern scientific techniques in Vietnam, and clearly poses to scientists their responsibilities in carrying out research which may improve these weapons. Clearly this is an issue which concerns scientists more than others.

Nature cannot squirm out of this by asking if it can be seriously held that the innovations of military technology are in themselves a cogent reason why the United States should now withdraw from its involvement in Vietnam. This is not the claim, as the editor knows well. What is important is that scientists are responsible for the uses to which their research is put. They are also responsible for the applications of the research of other scientists. From this point of view, scientists who are opposed to the war in

Vietnam can only support the action of those who have demanded explanations from Gellmann, Drell and Wheeler of their participation in the Jason Division of the Institute for Defence Analysis. And certainly discussion of these issues is important in a general scientific journal.

Yours faithfully,

IAN G. MORGAN
C. GORIDIS
G. GOMBOS

*Centre de Neurochimie du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique,
11 rue Humann,
67085 Strasbourg Cedex*

Porphyria

SIR,—Recently McDonagh (*Nature*, 237, 297; 1972) pointed out that Matthews-Roth and associates demonstrated the effectiveness of β -carotene in protecting patients with erythropoietic protoporphyria (EPP) against the photosensitizing action of protoporphyrin-IX. In the interest of assigning proper credit and priority, it should be mentioned that, as noted by Matthews¹, Kesten² reported the successful therapeutic use of carotene on a photosensitive patient in 1951. Kesten selected carotene because its absorption spectrum was similar to the action spectrum which elicited the patient's symptoms. It is of interest that Kesten's description of the patient enumerated several of the classic symptoms of EPP, ten years before the disease entity was clearly defined³.

Yours faithfully,

JOHN A. JOHNSON
RAMON M. FUSARO

*Department of Dermatology,
University of Nebraska Medical Center,
Omaha, Nebraska 68105*

¹ Matthews, M. M., *Nature*, 203, 1092 (1964).

² Kesten, B. M., *Arch. Derm.*, 64, 221 (1951).

³ Magnus, I. A., Jarrett, A., Prankerd, T. A. J., and Rimington, C., *Lancet*, ii, 448 (1961).

Madness or Badness?

SIR,—Unfortunately, I have been unable to read all the correspondence dealing with the murder of Professor Katchalsky at Tel Aviv airport, but a few of the points raised by Dr. William A. Pryor in his letter (*Nature*, 239, 179; 1972) require comment.

As regards the Vietnam war, the argument that American soldiers who kill civilians do so either by mistake or because of some mental derangement is too much of a simplification (in the case of the My Lai massacre I find it totally unacceptable).

And how does one distinguish between the pardonable crimes of American soldiers, who, we are told, act as a result of a "sick aberration", and the unpardonable crimes of "demented" though "true-believing" Palestinian guerrillas?

Finally, although Vietnam is a country in the turmoil of civil war and in that sense the scene of a military conflict, the Palestinian terrorists regard the whole world as a battlefield as long as their aims are unachievable.

Yours faithfully,

DAVID R. JENKINS

*1000 Berlin 51,
Genfer Strasse 63,
West Berlin*

Dingle Jingle

SIR,—

There was a Professor called Dingle
Who made physicists' nerve endings
tingle.

His travelling clocks
Caused grave mental blocks

In those who thought time should
stay single.

Yours faithfully,

JOHN LETTS

*83 West Side,
Clapham Common,
London SW4*

Obituary

Professor James Norman Davidson

PROFESSOR NORMAN DAVIDSON, Gardiner Professor of Biochemistry in the University of Glasgow since 1948, died on September 11 at the age of 61. Dux

of George Watson's College in Edinburgh, he won a scholarship in medicine to the University of Edinburgh where he took a BSc with 1st Class Honours in Chemistry in 1934 and an MB ChB with Honours in 1937. Even by this time his interests had come to lie in the labora-

tory and in 1937 he was awarded a Carnegie Fellowship to work at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institut für Zellphysiologie in Berlin under the direction of Otto Warburg. On his return to Britain in 1938 he was appointed to a lectureship in Biochemistry at the University of St



Andrews, at University College, Dundee, and in 1939 he received the degree of MD, from Edinburgh University, for a thesis on the enzyme uricase. At the outbreak of war he became interested in the so-called "wound hormones" and this led him to learn the techniques of tissue culture and to his first investigations of the nucleic acids. In 1940 he moved to the University of Aberdeen where he continued his work on tissue culture and nucleic acids and it was during the period 1940 to 1945 that he demonstrated that deoxyribonucleic acid and ribonucleic acid were normal constituents of both plant and animal cells.

In 1945 he was awarded the degree of DSc by Edinburgh University for work on cellular proliferation, and in the same year he was appointed to the scientific staff of the Medical Research Council in London. After only one year he was appointed Professor of Bio-

chemistry at St Thomas's Hospital Medical School.

Norman Davidson always felt very strongly about the effect on Scotland of the drain of trained personnel to the south and overseas, and it is not surprising that in 1947 he accepted the offer of appointment to the Gardiner Chair of Physiological Chemistry in the University of Glasgow. Under his influence the department in Glasgow flourished and grew to an independent department of biochemistry second to none in Britain and with an international reputation for research, particularly in the fields of nucleic acids and cell culture. Work in Glasgow led to the demonstration that deoxyribonucleic acid was largely confined to the cell nucleus while ribonucleic acid occurred both in the nucleus and cytoplasm. Major contributions were also made to the demonstration of the constancy in the amount of deoxyribonucleic acid per average cell in the somatic cells of any given species and to our present understanding of the mechanisms of biosynthesis of both deoxyribonucleic acid and ribonucleic acid in normal, malignant and virus infected cells.

An outstanding teacher and research worker himself, Norman Davidson held very strong views on the importance of teaching and research in university departments and of the place of biochemistry in relation to medicine and science. He took a keen interest in other areas of science and medicine and was active in the affairs of many medical and scientific societies. In 1960 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society and he served two terms as President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He was for a time Secretary and

later Chairman of the Committee of the Biochemical Society and amongst other societies in which he took a particular interest were the Association of Clinical Biochemists, the European Molecular Biology Organization, the Institute of Biology and the Nutrition Society.

In addition to his own contributions in the field of nucleic acids, he was the author of a monograph (*The Biochemistry of the Nucleic Acids*) which has run to seven editions and is to be found on the bookshelves of all workers in this field throughout the world. With Erwin Chargaff he edited three volumes on the nucleic acids which for many years served as one of the most important reference works in the field and with Waldo Cohn he has been editor of the series *Progress in Nucleic Acid Research and Molecular Biology*. His writings, however, were not restricted to the nucleic acid field and he was joint author of a textbook of physiology and biochemistry intended principally for medical students. He was a guest lecturer at many European and American universities and was at various times examiner in biochemistry in the Universities of St Andrews, Oxford, Cambridge, London, Leeds, Liverpool, Aberdeen, Birmingham, Singapore and Bristol.

Norman Davidson will be remembered by his friends not only for his energy, his powers of organization, his grasp of his subject, his clarity and incisiveness in the lecture theatre or in debate, but also as a man who was courteous, kindly, warm hearted and generous. His death is a serious loss to the scientific community in general and more particularly to biochemistry, the field of nucleic acids, his university and his department.

HOW TO BUY NATURE

Volumes start in January, March, May, July, September and November, but subscriptions may begin at any time.

The direct postal price per subscription is:

12 MONTHS* (52 issues per title)

	Surface mail UK and worldwide	U.S.A. and Canada
Nature (Friday)	£14	\$48
Nature + Nature Physical Science	£24	\$83
Nature + Nature New Biology	£24	\$83
All three editions	£29.50	\$108
Annual Index	£1	\$3

*Rates for shorter periods *pro rata* (minimum three months)
(Charge for delivery by air mail on application)

Editorial, Advertising and Publishing Offices of NATURE

MACMILLAN JOURNALS LIMITED
4 LITTLE ESSEX STREET, LONDON WC2R 3LF
Telephone Number: 01-836 6633. Telegrams: Phusis London WC2R 3LF
Telex 262024

MACMILLAN JOURNALS LIMITED
711 NATIONAL PRESS BUILDING
WASHINGTON DC 20004
Telephone Number: 202-737 2355. Telex 64280

International Advertisement Manager
PETER R. KAVANAGH
MACMILLAN JOURNALS LIMITED
4 LITTLE ESSEX STREET, LONDON WC2R 3LF
Telephone Numbers: UK 01-836 6633. USA 202-737 2355

Subscription Department
MACMILLAN JOURNALS LIMITED
BRUNEL ROAD, BASINGSTOKE, HANTS
Telephone Number: Basingstoke 29242

Classified advertisements
T. G. SCOTT & SON, LIMITED
1 CLEMENT'S INN, LONDON WC2A 2ED
Telephone Number: 01-242 6264/01-405 4743
Telegrams: Textualist London WC2A 2ED

Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office

Copyright © Macmillan Journals Limited, November 3 1972