

**N**o one ever seems to object to what is done by scientists. Their projects may not be understood but it is certain they will always be endorsed. Indeed, no other activity today receives more moral and financial support than does scientific research, particularly in the field of medical examination. It is not surprising therefore that scientific researchers always proceed with the attitude that the attainment of results is paramount while the humaneness of its methods is inconsequential. Unfortunately this habit of mind will persist unaltered since the voices of the untrained have had little influence to compel a change. However, the wanton and unproductive use of living animals in research experiments makes some questioning, if not protest, necessary. Should the methods of the physiological sciences be forever exempt from humane practices?

An experiment on cats and kittens is currently being undertaken at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. The same experiment using live animals has been carried on in the Museum for at least the last fifteen years. The program is a study on the "physiological correlates of sexual behavior in cats", funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, which is a division of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and assisted by the National Science Foundation, who pay students to help in the research.

The Museum asserts that the research is conducted under 'carefully controlled conditions' and that their staff operates with 'concern and care' for the animals in the experiment. The Museum further states that its facilities and techniques and inspections by government and veterinary authorities, have never been judged adversely.

**T**hese assertions are disconcerting since the experiment entails obliterating the olfactory senses of the felines. In some instances, sections of their brains are intentionally damaged by surgical means. Some of the male cats are subjected to a lethal procedure in which they are put in a rack while their penises are stimulated with hair loops and filaments. While in most of the published accounts, the Museum makes no report as to what happens to the animals after the experimental procedure had been completed, it is understood that when the cats are of no further utility to the experiment, the animals are killed and their brains are preserved for study. There is evidence, however, that some cats have died from urinary blockage, which is an intensely painful condition resulting from an improper diet or insufferable stress. This is no suspicion that anyone is guilty of deliberate attempts to mistreat the animals for sadistic purposes. However, cruelty to animals is a penal offense in all fifty of the United States, and it is difficult to imagine that the Museum's experimenters will always be exempt from court action if they continue to employ such methods.

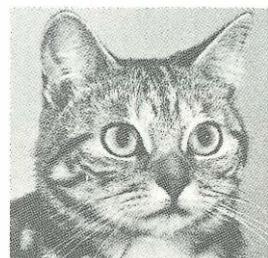
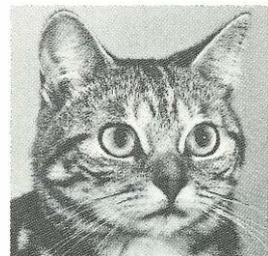
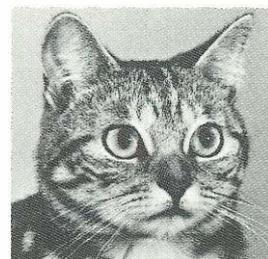
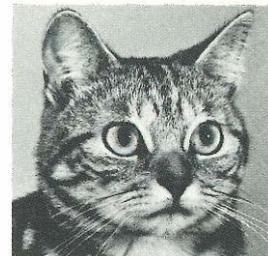
There is an inflexible conviction of many contemporary scientists who use laboratory animals that the design, method and execution of their experiments are either beyond reproach or should not be judged by humane standards, for what they are doing is in the service of a greater good to Society. Their creed is that the goals and not the means are ruling. It is understandable that scientists would resent any effort to curtail their freedom of action, especially when they are convinced that their endeavors are noble; nevertheless, they must be made aware that the sanctioning of animals for painful experimentation is the concern of all humankind, not just a coterie of experts. What is happening at the Museum is the paradox that blameless animals are being inhumanely subjected to revoltingly painful experiments for the humane objective of alleviating human suffering. The objectivity of modern science has isolated scientists from the sensitivity to inflicted cruelty to defenseless animals that is growing in this society outside the scientific profession. To his credit, man has increasing repugnance for the needless imposition of pain and suffering, yet this is a phenomenon which scientific researchers still ignore.

The larger question, however, is whether the experiment is worth the suffering. It is doubtful whether the data obtained could be evaluated with

## What Price Suffering?

*by Jack Ben-Rubin*

exactitude as to its importance in understanding 'human problems'. To conduct a scientific investigation of the emotional responses of acutely distressed laboratory animals and believe that it is a forward step in the understanding of human sexual behavior reveals a profound ignorance of reality. Most researchers have a strong tendency for self-deception concerning the importance of their work, and in the case of this experiment the deception exposes the quixotism of the scientists and the nugacity of the experiment. In subjecting lower animals to extreme torture in highly artificial environments, the scientists can only be deluding themselves that they are understanding real human behaviour. Many respected scholars in the scientific community have argued that most animal experiments are not worth doing and the data obtained are not worth publishing. One important reason is that numerous such experiments are designed not to increase scientific knowledge, but to enhance the prestige of the research and the researchers. There are many painful experiments carried on routinely without any conception as to what ends are sought. These programs raise, or should raise, questions of conscience. One does not have to be a trained scientist to doubt the feasibility of devising a study to understand human behaviour by experimenting on cats. A cat is not the animal





most similar to humans in physical and emotional characteristics by which to draw conclusions on mutual sexual behavioural pathologies. When a researcher blinds a cat, then deafens it, and finally eliminates its sense of smell, what could he be sure to have learned about human behaviour? Why indeed is there a need to use animals at all in experiments of this kind? Even if the animals have been carefully 'trained and nurtured', this gives no assurance of the applicability of the result. Living animals are not reliable subjects for testing sexual behaviour. More properly, the questions could be answered by harmless clinical trials on human beings. In our time of sexual revolution, the number of available sex studies is legion.

**A**lthough some physiological data from this experiment could be useful in categorizing complex behavioural patterns, it is doubtful that they could establish unalterable universal principles. No matter how many responses one receives of what appears to be a predictive outcome, there is no certainty that the next response will behave in accordance with a universal principle. Besides, predicting animal sexual behaviour is no guarantee of similar behaviour in humans, and obviously in some human sexual disorders there are no similar disorders in animals.

The key to the experiment at the Museum is the measurement of the 'correlation' (a favorite word among scientists). It is common practice in research, in the fervor to find a correlation, to record everything and match things up every which way looking for a relationship. By the time the data have been filtered through layers of statistical manipulation and reduced to decimal-pointed intergers, the result conveys a pictorial impression of scholastic truth. But most often it is simply an expression of probability, wrapped in obscure statistics, which is more trivial than erroneous. Perhaps some conclusions may prove useful in the limited sense of giving indications of patterns of general behaviour. Yet is this usefulness commensurate with the torture inflicted on the innocent animals? The traditional concepts and methods applied to this experiment at this point in time are inadequate to decipher significantly the complex phenomena of living creatures.

It is characteristic of valid scientific research that the discovery of significant insights is followed within a reasonable period of time by their practical application. How much credit to progress then does this experiment deserve? Apparently none. Who is aware of any important facts discovered by the data obtained?

**C**onsidering that the experiment is supported by taxpayers' moneys, it is proper that the Museum should be made to justify its appropriation. Much of HEW-supported experimentation is a duplication of research work already performed or in progress. Many researchers are not inclined to investigate

whether the experiments that they are doing have already been performed. When animals are abundant and funds plentiful, it is easier to repeat the experiment than to make a tedious search of the literature to see if it has already been performed and abstracted—and proven worthwhile. This means that they may inflict the same suffering on animals that other researchers have already inflicted, often repeatedly.

The animal experiments at the Museum have been going on for at least fifteen years—and so has the suffering. The fact that the experiments have never been criticized by colleagues does not mitigate the indictment. Scientists are notorious for sharing the prejudices of their professional associates. Scientists should not be the sole judges of their actions any more than any other group with a vested interest.

It is thus with skepticism that one must view the need for the animal experiment which is presently being done at the American Museum of Natural History. If the experiment cannot be justified on the basis of the contribution to human problems, then it is unnecessary. It becomes not an activity for enhancing scientific knowledge, but simply an odious example of cruelty to animals that degrades the humaneness of those who designed and administered it. Any scientific research involving animal experimentation which produces no significant result does not lead to an improvement of man's state; on the contrary, it leads to its direct retrogression.

**I**t is unjust to be critical of scientific experimentation when it is governed by rational direction and humane conduct, but one must demur when its methods and approaches are devoid of important human values. Any feeling individual must believe that one who reaps parochial benefits through means which involve suffering and fear in defenseless living creatures would carry within him a heavy burden of guilt. Restrictive legislation can prevent animal suffering, but it can never make anyone more humane. The scientists must base animal experimentation not only upon the hoped-for discovery of new intellectual truths, but also upon humane considerations. He must set limits to the amount of suffering which may be caused by any technique. What is required is to diminish the exaggerated prestige of animal experimentation and to enlarge the humane responsibilities of its application. Above all, scientists must be mindful always that the principal purpose of scientific research is the enhancement not only of the health of mankind, but its civilizing potential as well.

It is a sad testimony to the American Museum of Natural History that in their obsession to understand life, its scientists are losing respect for it.

*Jack Ben-Rubin is a free-lance writer residing in Arlington, Virginia.*