

A Need for Dialogue

During the past several weeks, numerous articles have appeared throughout the news media describing research currently being conducted by the American Museum of Natural History in New York City involving cats and kittens. The study, entitled, "Behavioral Effects of Selected Denervation", has been taking place at the Museum for at least the last fifteen years. The animal subjects are reportedly deprived of the sense of smell and otherwise surgically injured.

According to a National Society for Medical Research Bulletin, "The experiments hope to clarify the problems of hypo- and hypersexuality that affect humans. Changes in human sexual behavior have been reported following accidental or neurosurgical injury to the area of the brain called the amygdala. It is believed that small lesions on the amygdala cause this abnormal behavior. Cats are being studied because of similarities between the brain and nervous system of the cat and humans. Also, an extensive body of research knowledge already exists on detailed structure and function of the cat brain."

In an article appearing in this issue of The HSUS News, free-lance writer Jack Ben-Rubin discusses the moral and ethical aspects of such research and questions the "rational" by which scientists seem to isolate themselves from humane considerations and values normative at other levels.

The HSUS has joined with several other animal welfare organizations in protesting these experiments. We have communicated our protest to officials at the American Museum and received their response. It is as follows:

"Our research on reproductive behavior has been supported continuously since 1935 by substantial grants from a variety of sources, including the National Research Council of the National Academy of Science, the National Institutes of Health, the National Institute of Mental Health, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. In the grant review process, leading scientists have been called upon frequently to evaluate the work and the facilities and procedures used in carrying it out. Numerous and invariably favorable reports by review panels over all these years are our best assurance of the quality and relevance of the research."

If this is true, and we have little reason to doubt it, then the larger question is how to modify the standards and regulations that govern research involving animals in order to prevent this kind of activity from continuing at the American Museum of Natural History and elsewhere.

I believe it is imperative that scientists and nonscientists establish opportunities for dialogue in which the ethical and moral views of a wide segment of society can be heard and considered. Such opportunities are few and far between. Indeed, the medical research community is generally quite unwilling to engage in such dialogue, presumably for the reason that their own views on the matter are regarded as inviolable. Indeed, it was only after much persistence that Dr. Michael Fox of our staff and I were able to arrange an opportunity to discuss such issues with an official of the American Museum of Natural History, a meeting yet to be held.

Unless the medical research community is willing to openly and sincerely exchange views with those who question and challenge many of their standards and values, yet acknowledge the necessity and value of much research involving animals, they will have succeeded in further polarizing those who hold differing views on these very important issues. And increasing, they will have obliged many more of us to object in principle to *all* research involving the use of animals.

Persons wishing to express their views of this issue should write:

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John A. Hoyt

president's
perspective