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Animals Suffer for Science

Henry Spira

At the American Museum of Natural History, cats are in agony because our tax money is paying for absurd sex experiments. And Museum Director Nicholson stoutly defends the Museum's "freedom to study whatever it chooses, without regard to its demonstrable value" (NY Times, 2-16-76). The cruel and futile experiments are supported by the National Institutes of Health, which yearly hand out two billion dollars of Federal funds, mostly for animal experiments. Generally, the animal researchers cloak themselves in the noble cause of protecting human health and saving lives. A myth, which is a source of their power.

The Museum experiment is not unique. It's the tip of the iceberg. Millions of animals are being driven insane, suffocated, poisoned, battered, radiated, crushed, blinded, scalded. Were it not for Congress appropriating billions for make-work grants, in which animals are cut up alive, these horrors would not take place.

On the Fifth Floor of the Museum's Education Building, cats and kittens are deliberately blinded—both eyes cut out. Their bearing and sense of smell destroyed by slicing into their brains. Their sense of touch deadened by cutting nerves in their sex organs. The Museum's experimenters score the mutilated animals on their sexual performance. Some male cats are subjected to a terminal electro-physiological experiment, forced into a rack where the penis is stimulated with filaments.

The cats scream, and the Museum puts up a "sound retarded" room (M5285 p9). Cats are driven out of their minds by pain and stress and the Museum staff confines them into "special testing pens and transfer cages as a safety device. We expect that certain animals ... will be difficult or impossible to handle in the ordinary manner" (HD00348-14 p4). In freedom, these cats would be naturally playful and affectionate. And the taxpayers have been paying for this "research" during the past 17 years. In the last reported year, 74 cats and kittens were cut up alive. To date, \$437,000 has been appropriated through Grant HD 00348 from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Bethesda, Maryland 20014.

The experimenters say that their research may be relevant to human sexual behavior. And the Museum claims that the purpose is "to increase our knowledge and understanding of nature" (5-25-76). But surely, nothing profound will be revealed through an unnatural hacking experiment, through an environment of fear, terror, confinement and butchering.

Neither cats, nor you, nor I, are sex machines to be mechanically and artificially rearranged. We, like other animals, are intricate symphonies with feelings, interests, and preferences; our love involves compassion, tenderness and caring.

And recent major advances in our knowledge and understanding of sex are due to women asserting themselves as sexual equals and theorists (see NY Times Mag 7-4-76 pp 90-99). The theme is liberation and freedom not manipulation and oppression; not a return to the Dark Ages of clitoridectomies—when women were mutilated to rearrange their sexual behavior.

The Museum's experimenters cite numerous sex and mutilation studies on monkeys, hamsters, rats and mice, often with "contradictory conclusions." The same crude and routine experiments have been

repeated for the past 80 years—J. Langley and H.K. Anderson in 1896 were already into the sexual mutilations of cats to study erections (J Physiol 19: 85-130).

The chief cat experimenter and chairman of the Museum's Animal Behavior Department is 66-year-old Lester R. Aronson. He refers continuously to Frank A. Beach to justify his own grant applications. But once Beach left the laboratory, he admitted that "Some theories that have been proposed on the basis of studies of caged animals under highly artificial conditions aren't particularly illuminating and actually can be misleading. I have been as guilty as anyone else on that score." (Psych Today 3-75).

And H.F. Harlow, for 12 years editor of the Journal of Comparative and Physiological Psychology, reviewed some 2,500 papers, including many painful experiments. He conceded that "most experiments are not worth doing and the data attained are not worth publishing."

What crimes and tortures are committed in the name of science! And still the animals continue to suffer.

And not just the cats at the Museum, but an estimated 60 to 120 million animals a year, from mice to monkeys, and including 700,000 to 2,500,000 cats and dogs. The Museum experiment is only a speck on the tip of the iceberg of animal suffering.

Standard & Poor's reports that Charles River Breeding, producers of lab animals, currently raise more than 16 million specially bred rats, mice, hamsters, rabbits and guinea pigs" a year (5-10-76).

Rutgers University's Lab Animal Fact Sheet, November 1972, gave these figures for animals used in biological medical research: rodents 45,370,000; rabbits 700,000; dogs 500,000; cats 200,000; primates 85,283; birds 1,724,279.

And at hearings of the House of Representatives held in March, 1966, animal breeders stated that they were using 60 million animals in laboratories and projecting an "animal consumption" of 97 million by 1970.

Meanwhile, the May 1976 United Action for Animals Report (205 East 42nd Street, NYC 10017), warns that the Toxic Substances Control Act, if passed as is, will cause the poisoning of more millions of lab animals through "acute, subacute and chronic" tests of hazardous chemicals. Humane, non animal using techniques are available and others could readily be developed. After all, if we can send people to 'the moon, we possess the technological knowhow to test poisons without using live animals. A representative of the Consumer Product Safety Commission said that the animal poisoning tests will "by necessity or lack of interest, continue to be used" (UAA 5-76).

Animal experiments are not being undertaken as a last resort, but simply as a matter of routine, habit and inertia. It's not a question of giant medical breakthroughs; nor balancing whether animals should suffer or people; but a way of getting government grants in exchange for the animals' agony and blood. Congress should be forced to choose between the greed of the vivisectors and the real needs of our society.

Aronson's last major paper, "Olfactory Deprivation and Mating Behavior ... " includes learned tables with standard deviations for "mean frequency of mounts." Is this worth the agony of hundreds of cats? Of one cat?

And these experiments are self perpetuating. Undergraduate students, funded by the National Science Foundation, participated. What will they learn? That it is acceptable to force animals into solitary confinement, slice their brains, mate and kill them—in order to cash in on a government grant and publish a paper about sex and smell? Is there a mixup of values?

Now the pressure is on the Museum. There's NBC-TV; Ed and Pegeen Fitzgerald on WOR-radio; national and local weeklies; a two-page discussion in the Congressional Record; an investigation by the Department of Health, Education & Welfare; demonstrations by up to 100 people from the Society for Animal Rights, Animals Need You, Mercy for Animals, Fund for Animals; and interest is escalating.

The Museum's non-spokeswoman, Carol Patterson in the Office of Public Affairs, would offer no comment beyond a one-page general statement which does not refer to any specific experiment. They note that the Museum has "never been questioned or challenged by peers and colleagues," which indicates that useless, painful experiments, are routine. The peer review is a form of cronyism currently being investigated by the General Accounting Office. I left messages for Aronson, but he refused to return my calls. Last year, when I came across Aronson in the Museum's Great Hall, I asked his feelings about confining and inflicting pain on innocent beings for curiosity's sake. He preferred not to comment. Aronson can walk away; the cats and kittens imprisoned in his lab don't have that option.

Stonewalling doesn't work, a conditioned reflex can be predicted. They won't defend their right to cause suffering through sex mutilation experiments. No. They'll proclaim the doom of the human race if animals don't continue to be tormented in laboratories. People will suffer and die, the health of the nation will be in jeopardy—all due to the interference of anti-science critics.

These scare tactics have worked in the past. A myth has been pushed that animal torture equals human health. And the politicians in Congress have fallen for it. Thus Congressman Thomas S. Foley, chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture which handles legislation affecting animals in research, said: "We do not feel that there is any substitute for the continuation of experimentation with live animals and that the authority of laboratories must be given a great deal of attention and regard in order not to interfere with the necessary advancement of medical science."

But Dr. Edward J. Burger, Jr., a science advisor to the president, admitted: "There's a great deal of concern for the large national expenditures made each year in behalf of health ... A number of thoughtful observers have remarked that the relationship between national health expenditures and health is a poor one at best. Some have claimed that there is no longer any relationship" (House Committee on Science and Technology, Nov. 1975).

And Dr. Irving Ladimer told a National Academy of Sciences Symposium: "The National Institutes of Health, which is not a regulatory agency, has effectively instituted prior animals studies through its system of review and approval of applications for biomedical support" (10-22-75).

Through its funding priorities and testing requirements, Congress, brainwashed by the animal-using establishment, promotes animal agony. And yet, despite all the dull politicians, the tide is running towards accountability and against tyranny—witness the leisurely fall from sacred heights of the FBI and to a lesser extent of the CIA.

National security did not require burglarizing by the FBI anymore than national health requires tormenting animals. There are a vast number of non-animal alternatives, including cell, tissue and organ cultures, computers, dummies, chromatography, spectrometry. There's a simple, rapid, inexpensive test for checking the cancer-producing potential of man-made chemicals using the bacteria salmonella typhimurium (McCahn J. & Ames B. 1976 Annals NY Acad Sci. via Dallas Prall MD).

Aronson and Nicholson can rightly complain that they've been singled out. A similar case could be made against just about any other federally funded animal experiment or testing facility. And that's true. In addition, the Museum material here presented comes from the Museum's signed grant applications—that's what they proposed to do and that's what they got grant dollars for. Now, whether they actually

carried these plans through, there's no way of knowing. The Museum labs and the experimenters' mouths are shut tight to press and public.

I'd like to reassure Nicholson-Aronson that this is not a vendetta. There's nothing personal, though I'm responsible for getting the file through the Freedom of Information Act and spreading it around. It's just that the human mind cannot focus on 100 million of our fellow beings being cut up and poisoned alive, but we can identify with a single experiment.

The ethical case against experiments on living animals is that it is cowardly and immoral to attempt to derive some advantage through inflicting pain on defenseless animals. That it is wrong for the strong to exploit and dominate the weak. But in the year 1976, it is also unnecessary and counterproductive. Alternatives are available or could be developed. Federal funds need to be taken away from senseless animal experiments and used for needed health research and development, replacing the testing of live animals. It all depends on our priorities. We are the species capable of moral choice. It's time we used that option.

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