

# Editorials

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## The Issue of Science and The Issue of Care

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Dr. Edward Taub, Director of the Behavioral Biology Center of the Institute for Behavioral Research was, on November 23, 1981, found guilty of 6 counts of cruelty to animals. Dr. Taub has cried "victimization" and has attempted (with some success) to rally researchers to his defense. However, scientists should beware of taking up this case as a cause *celebré*. Taub was *not* being tried because his research was cruel (and hence unjustified); he was being tried because his laboratory was grossly unsanitary and because he did not provide adequate veterinary care. According to one respected laboratory animal veterinarian, the conditions were "atrocious," and the cages depicted in the police photographs looked as though they had not been cleaned properly for 3 months or more.

Dr. Taub and his supporters do their cause no good when they argue that the primate facilities at IBR are no worse than the primate facilities at other institutions. The facilities at all the institutions I have seen do not have rodent feces lying in moldy piles on the floor, nor is there extensive caking of fecal material on the cages, and there is no broken cage wiring protruding into the living area of the animal.

In the final analysis, the case turned on whether or not the monkeys received adequate veterinary care. Dr. Taub argued that deafferentated monkeys have very special needs and that only he and a handful of other specialists in the field know how to take care of them. Perhaps this is why no veterinarian saw the monkeys during the 2 years preceding their

confiscation. Dr. Taub, who has no veterinary training, was forced to admit in court that he could not have diagnosed the osteomyelitis found in one animal, which later forced NIH veterinarians to amputate the limb to prevent the condition from spreading.

The question of whether or not the deafferentated limbs should be bandaged if they develop lesions was also a matter of controversy. Dr. Taub, according to his own published work, used to advocate bandaging but, within the last few years, had apparently decided that it was better to let wounds and the stumps of bitten-off fingers heal by themselves. However, he would still use bandages, as the photograph of one filthy and rotting bandage on an IBR monkey limb indicated. In this case, was there some special reason for breaking with his new-found belief that bandaging deafferentated limbs was bad, or was he still so ambivalent about the practice that he would sometimes apply bandages and sometimes not?

In addition, Dr. Taub does not appear to have been very creative in attempting to deal with the problem of care for deafferentated monkeys. Some researchers have used Elizabethan collars to prevent the animals from placing their arms in their mouths. However, such collars need to be properly padded and fitted to prevent the development of pressure sores, and the cages have to be large enough to accommodate them.

Another possible preventive measure is padding of the cages. Several of Taub's monkeys either had broken bones or showed evidence of earlier fractures. These do not occur because the animal

bites its arm; they happen because the animal catches the arm in some part of the cage. Cages could be modified to prevent this without too much trouble. The IBR cages had no such modifications—instead many had broken wires, some of which protruded into the living area of the cage.

Dr. Taub could also have considered the possibility of pulling the canines of the monkeys (and perhaps even the incisors) as a possible means of preventing serious self-mutilation. Of course, such a course of action in itself raises new questions about animal welfare but, in this case, it may have been better for the overall welfare of the animals to perform the operation.

In the final analysis, we have no doubt that the conditions under which the animals were kept, conditions that had been documented in 1977 (by the USDA and the NIH) and then again in 1981, were totally unacceptable. The scientist's responsibility to provide the best possible care for the animals that

are used in biomedical research was definitely not met.

Other scientists who perceive this case as a threat to the whole process of laboratory experimentation will not help the growing debate over ethical issues in animal research if they rush to defend the conditions at IBR. In the final analysis, the intentions or affiliation of Pacheco, the whistle blower, are irrelevant. Even without his testimony and his photographs, evidence given by the police and other witnesses clearly demonstrates that the care and sanitation were well below professionally accepted standards. And it is not only animal welfare supporters who feel this way. One practicing research scientist, with extensive experience in research on primates, has stated to me that: if this, in fact, represents the current standard of medical research in this country, then it should be stopped.

*(The details of the case, with relevant background material, are given elsewhere in this issue of the Journal).*