

No way to treat a friend

This year in Ontario about 7,000 dogs and cats will be taken from various animal shelters and delivered over to medical research laboratories. Almost without exception, these animals were once pets who either strayed or were abandoned by their owners.

Brought up to trust humans, to be gentle and loving, the former pets are sent to modern versions of Dr. Moreau's "House of Pain." There, they are locked into cages or strapped into racks or harnesses. They are poisoned, burned, maimed, electrocuted or infected with lethal germs. Such nightmare experiments are done in the name of science and mankind.

Incredibly, Ontario law requires animal shelters to deliver up unclaimed animals on demand. Each shelter is given an open-ended order for dogs and cats by medical institutions that must be filled. The victims of medical experiments are taken from the 20% of dogs and 50% of cats held in pounds that are marked for gassing.

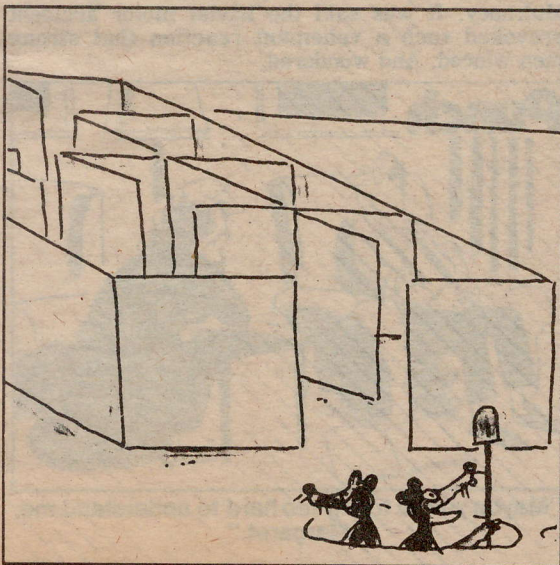
They would, insist researchers, have died anyway. One could also justify torture by using the same argument.

The Toronto Humane Society is leading a campaign to change this shameful law, the Animals for Research Act. It is urging adoption of Bill 21 that ends the requirement of municipal pounds and humane societies to surrender their wards to medical research.

As one way of getting around the present law, the Humane Society has even been trying to buy unclaimed pets from shelters that normally give up these animals to laboratories. But even this good deed is enmeshed in legal red tape. Meanwhile, as politicians dither, animals are being tortured.

I wish that the doctors, scientists and lawmakers who support medical experimentation on animals could see one of their own pets being burned with

Punch



"There, we made it! That wasn't so tough to figure out."

ERIC MARGOLIS



acid or horribly maimed. I also wish the heartless scientists who perform such cruelty would be put in the animals' places.

Anyone who has had the good fortune of having a pet knows that animals have minds and hearts. Animals know right and wrong; they reason and they can feel joy, pain, fear — and love. Recent research shows that many animals possess surprisingly "human" thought processes.

I, for one, would no sooner experiment on a dog or cat than on a 4-year-old child. Yes, I know all the arguments put forward about saving lives and advancing science. Fine. Use specially bred rodents, if absolutely necessary, but not dogs, cats or simians.

For those who insist that science must take precedence over a few lowly animals, I say, if science is so almighty important, then use humans instead for such experiments. Perhaps some researchers might like to volunteer their older relatives, or themselves — in the interest of science, of course.

Silly, maudlin sentimentalism? We should recall that only 40 years ago blacks in the American South were unknowingly injected with syphilis and monitored as they slowly died. In the thinking of the time, blacks were a subspecies that could be readily sacrificed. And recall also the German and Japanese doctors who experimented on "inferior" humans — not out of innate fiendishness or sadism, but in a quest for scientific knowledge.

I don't think that smashing a baboon's skull in order to study human head injuries is any more justified than letting a man freeze to death in ice water in order to make better aviators' flight suits. Neither end justifies the means.

Of course, there are all sorts of counter-arguments about our eating meat, wearing leather, etc. But even if we still must eat and use animals at least we don't have to torture them — and particularly not the trusting pets who so enrich our lives.

For once people can do something about this great injustice. We can speak loudly for our mute animal friends. Here is how:

(1) Write to Premier David Peterson at Queen's Park and tell him you oppose pound seizure. Urge him to enact legislation banning the use of cats, dogs or simians in medical experiments.

(2) Call Peterson's special representative Jan Whitelaw at 416-965-7796 and tell her such barbarism must stop — now.

(3) Support the Toronto Humane Society's campaign to enact Bill 21 — as a minimum protection for our pets. Adopt a homeless animal, if you can.

Finally, don't give a penny to any of our universities that conduct animal experiments. Demand that they stop at once. And, above all, tag and guard your pet. Don't let it fall into the hands of the little Dr. Mengeles of medical research.