



## Debate on Animal

### **NABT Policy 'a Breath of Fresh Air'**

Dear Editor:

NABT's 1990 policy on the responsible use of live animals in biology classrooms advocates respect for life and humane treatment of sentient creatures, recommends specific projects on living creatures that do not involve the killing or harming of sentient animals, and respects a student's right to conscientious objection for classroom projects such as dissection. The policy specifically prohibits projects which cause pain or the loss of an animal's life. NABT policy helps to establish an environment in which the teaching of biology can be improved. This policy is right on the mark and deserves wholehearted support.

According to a recently published letter in *ABT* (Nov./Dec. 1991) from Melissa Stanley, NABT's policy is to be rejected because it "validates negative reactions" and "encourages undesirable trends in society values." In the context of what is said, the "negative reactions" refer to reactions to dissection. But it is a fact that a growing number of both students and biology teachers, in addition to the public, do indeed have negative reactions to dissection. These are moral objections that should not be ignored. Again from the context of Stanley's remarks, the "undesirable societal trends" appear to refer to the trends toward greater sensitivity to animal concerns. Is that so objectionable?

Stanley objects to NABT policy because, she says, it encourages "the ignorant" to question the use of animals in biomedical research, as if asking questions were bad. It seems to me that NABT's policy helps dispel the ignorance that blindly accepts that anything done in the name of science is, ipso facto, justified. NABT's policy, in providing positive advice of the boundaries of acceptable novice projects involving live animals, acknowledges a growing sense of compassion for animal life and respect for nature. Far more questioning about human attitudes and behavior toward

animals is taking place than previously; a new sensitivity is emerging. What is undesirable about that?

Unfortunately, animal experimentation is an inflammatory issue and people tend to respond defensively without analyzing the issues. One aspect that is repeatedly misunderstood is that no distinction is made between the use of animals in education and in research. To set guidelines for the use of animals in education where the experimenters are beginners is not to bring into question all use of animals in biomedical research. Many people, including myself, agree with a certain amount of animal research and also welcome the NABT policy. It is a profound mistake to say that because you would like to see the killing of animals for dissection carefully considered that you also call into question all use of animals in scientific investigation conducted by fully-qualified professional scientists. Quite different ethical justifications are involved with harming and killing animals for educational purposes and for the acquisition of original knowledge.

A fundamental ethical principle for conducting *any* animal experiment, (for education or research), is that experiments involving harming a sentient animal are not justified unless there is *no other way*—no alternatives—available. This principle is incorporated into the national policies of many countries; NABT policy embodies this concept. It is not just a case of accepting anything a youngster may think up or what a teacher is used to doing; it is a case of stringently applying this quest for alternatives. If an educational objective can be reached without harming sentient animals, this is the preferred—and indeed obligatory—course. There are far more alternatives available in education than in research to experiments which involve harming and killing animals.

Contrary to Stanley's assertions, the new NABT policy on animals is a breath of fresh air, providing as it does leadership and real guidance to biology teachers with an up-to-date perspective. Instead of hanging on to

time-worn teaching methods that would stifle the introduction of new concepts into biology classes, NABT provides positive leadership that is to be commended. Any efforts to thwart NABT's policy should be resisted.

F. Barbara Orlans, Ph.D.  
*Joseph and Rose Kennedy Institute  
of Ethics  
Georgetown University  
Washington, DC 20057*

### **Speciesism: A Perversion of Biology, Not a Principle**

In the May and June 1991 issues of *The American Biology Teacher*, David Gilmore (1991a,b) argued against the evils of dissection and what he conceives to be acts of oppression against animals by an educational establishment that fosters the use of animals in classroom teaching. This notion stems from adherence to a central doctrine of the animal rights movement which states that any use of animals by humans is to be regarded as "speciesism," an obvious—indeed, clearly stated—takeoff on racism. Although one could debate this parallel from the standpoint of human dignity, in this journal it is more appropriate to consider speciesism from another perspective—its validity as a biological principle and appropriateness in a discussion of biology curriculum.

When so examined, speciesism quickly reveals itself to be an expression of pop biology with no more depth than the equally shallow thoughts of pop psychology. To a biologist, a species of animals is a collection of individuals with a genetic heritage so similar that members can successfully transmit that heritage through offspring produced by a fertile mating (Darwin 1859; Mayr 1989). Each species fills an ecological niche and, in the case of many animals (even seemingly pacific plants), that niche involves predation on other species. Following the reasoning of the animal rights movement, these predators would be speciesists and, therefore,