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Editorial and Business Offices
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Letters

The real issue

The article entitled "Verdict: Researchers 16, anti-vivisectionists 1" (SN: 7/17/82, p. 37) was completely wrong in stating that the issue at stake in the Taub trial was "antivivisection" versus "research." Taub, a psychologist, still stands convicted of criminal animal cruelty. The most damning witnesses for the prosecution were themselves experimentalists: two military veterinarians actively involved in primate experimentation, an NIH veterinarian, a zoo veterinarian who had worked at a federal primate center, and a psychologist who had experimented on monkeys for 16 years.

The issue would seem better described as "Reverence for Life" versus "Contempt for Life." This was evident in the way the defense witnesses constantly poked fun at the crippled monkeys. A New York psychologist mockingly commented that monkeys in zoos will urinate on spectators' heads if given a chance. A University of Pennsylvania Vet School professor described monkeys as "defecating machines"

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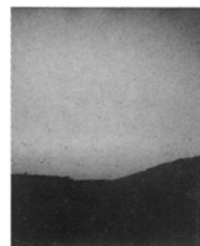
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Cover: As volcanic ash and gas from El Chichón hover in the upper atmosphere, one result can be spectacular twilights, like this "primary" glow over Tucson soon after sunset. Researchers are studying the cloud to learn its effect on climate, ozone, and atmospheric chemistry. Page 120. (Photo: Marjorie and Aden Meinel.)



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who like nothing better than to play with and eat feces. This same character swore under oath that cockroaches are not a health problem but a source of "protein" for monkeys, in spite of the fact that a Smithsonian monograph on these pests involves them in the transmission of hundreds of diseases, many fatal.

This constant demeaning of monkeys is similar to the tactic frequently employed in rape cases where efforts are made to demean the victim in order to make the offense seem less worthy of serious consideration. What went unsaid is that monkeys in the wild are never observed handling their own feces: they have more interesting things to do. Cramped into tiny cages as at the Institute for Behavioral Research, isolated from physical contact with other animals, monkeys can, and do, develop neurotic, stress-related behavior, and they can only be as clean as their human captors permit them to be. When one sees cages filled with 6 inches of feces, with mold growing on it, one cannot blame the monkeys. There is nothing "scientific" about filth. The jury, contrary to Taub's arrogant attitude, were not too stupid to know what filth is. They were also aware that

Taub is a mere psychologist, with no training in either veterinary or human medicine, and that he should have called in a vet to treat his monkeys' wounds.

For Taub to try to portray himself as a victim of "antivivisection" is ludicrously self-serving, since Maryland permits any experiment, however gruesome, to proceed. All it requires is proper veterinary care of the animals. Taub failed to provide such care. If there are any martyrs in this case, it is not Edward Taub, but the 17 wretched monkeys (survivors of hundreds killed in Taub's laboratory) caught in the jungles of Southeast Asia to face misery and death in Maryland.

Shirley McGreal
International Primate Protection League
Summerville, S.C.

Address communications to
Editor, Science News,
1719 N Street, N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20036
Please limit letters to 250 words.

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