

Pity the Poor Porpoise

The current research directed toward establishing communication between man and porpoise is probably familiar to most of us. Interest in and sympathy for the investigators of this most difficult problem is the normal reaction to be expected; indeed, it was the editor's reaction until he read a paragraph in an article devoted to this subject in an issue of *Family Weekly*:

"If man ever does 'talk' to the porpoise, or dolphin as he's often called, it won't be to learn how he gets such a kick out of life; instead, we'll want him to tell us how to fight wars better and how to conquer space."*

If we are ever to communicate with the porpoise, far and away the most important question to ask him is precisely that one which the feature writer has dismissed so casually, "how he gets such a kick out of life." This would be information of value; this we could use. Let's not burden the poor dolphin with questions about "fighting wars better and how to conquer space." He might react as did the elephant in Saki's "Tobermory" when an attempt was made to teach him irregular German verbs.

Is the quoted paragraph a product of the feature writer's overblown imagination, or does this reflect a more serious fault? In an attempt to glorify and publicize the search for knowledge, has our sense of proportion been lost? Has our sense of discrimination been enfeebled through political interference?

The quoted paragraph may reflect a real danger to science and to engineering—the danger of governmental interference with research and the threat of superimposing political motivations on the objectivity which has characterized the search for knowledge for generations. Scientists are concerned with finding the answers to questions, of course, but it is hard to imagine the scientist who would have thought to ask a porpoise how to make war. Such a question, I submit, was formulated by a politician or a bureaucrat. Engineers are concerned with applying the discoveries of science to the uses of man. Such uses were almost universally benign until the politicians embraced technology. Now they have broadened the uses of man to include his extinction.

In times such as these and in the international jungle in which we live, science and engineering must, of course, be devoted in part to military matters. Let us, however, keep our sense of proportion and remember that such uses of knowledge are not the proper ones. We and the porpoises have better purposes than making war.

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