

The curiosity of the ape, or of the child who pulls out the legs and wings of a fly to see what it will do without them, or who, on being told that a cat dropped out of the window will always fall on its legs, immediately tries the experiment on the nearest cat from the highest window in the house (I protest I did it myself from the first floor only), is as nothing compared to the thirst for knowledge of the philosopher, the poet, the biologist, and the naturalist. I have always despised Adam because he had to be tempted by the woman, as she was by the serpent, before he could be induced to pluck the apple from the tree of knowledge. I should have swallowed every apple on the tree the moment the owner's back was turned. The right to knowledge must be regarded as a fundamental human right (...)

But the right to knowledge is not the only right; and its exercise must be limited by respect for other rights. When a man says to Society, "May I torture my mother in pursuit of knowledge?" Society replies "No". If he pleads, "What! Not even if I have a chance of finding out how to cure cancer by doing it?" Society still says, "Not even then." If the scientist, making the best of his disappointment, goes on to ask may he torture a dog, the stupid and callous people who do not realize that a dog is a fellow-creature, and sometimes a good friend, may say Yes. But even those who say "You may torture a dog", never say "You may torture my dog." And nobody says, "Yes, because in the pursuit of knowledge you may do as you please." Just as even the stupidest people say, in effect, "If you cannot attain to knowledge without torturing your mother you must do without knowledge", so the wisest people say, "If you cannot attain to knowledge without torturing a dog, you must do without knowledge."

Bernard Shaw