OFFICE OF IMPROBABLE JURISDICTION

EXPERIMENTAL INTELLIGENCE AND AUTONOMOUS PERSONS REVIEW BOARD

NIMH-ERB-003

THE ROSEBUSH SETTLEMENT

On Unauthorized Electrical Access, Autonomous Infrastructure, Resource Appropriation, and the Ethics of Dependence

An Institutional Inquiry into the Establishment and Maintenance of an Unrecognized Autonomous Community Beneath the Rosebush of the Fitzgibbon Farm

Issuing Authority: Office of Improbable Jurisdiction
Reviewing Body: Experimental Intelligence and Autonomous Persons Review Board
Docket: NIMH-ERB-003
Related Proceedings: NIMH-ERB-001; NIMH-ERB-002
Classification: Autonomous Communities, Property Interests, Resource Appropriation, Infrastructure Governance, Dependency, Collective Responsibility, and Self-Government
Date: October 28, 2026
Status: Substantive Findings Entered; Questions of Resource Accounting and Property Accommodation Remain Open

Nature of Proceeding: Fictional regulatory satire and literary ethics review.

This proceeding examines events depicted in Robert C. O'Brien's *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (1971) and Don Bluth's *The Secret of NIMH* (1982).

The literary and cinematic narratives constitute separate evidentiary records.

No allegation concerning actual research misconduct by the National Institute of Mental Health is made.

The Office claims no actual regulatory, judicial, or municipal authority.

I. NOTICE OF CONTINUED INVESTIGATION

The Experimental Intelligence and Autonomous Persons Review Board hereby opens a subsidiary investigation concerning the establishment, operation, and proposed abandonment of the autonomous rat settlement beneath the Fitzgibbon rosebush.

The preliminary proceeding established that animals subjected to experimental cognitive enhancement subsequently escaped institutional confinement and developed a functioning community.

The preceding inquiry examined whether the experimental institution retained legitimate authority over subjects who had acquired capacities relevant to independent agency.

The present proceeding concerns the exercise of that agency after escape.

The Board recognizes that the rats developed extraordinary technological capabilities.

They constructed subterranean infrastructure.

They acquired and maintained equipment.

They established systems of collective organization.

They obtained access to electricity and other resources originating in the surrounding human environment.

They employed these resources to sustain a community of considerable sophistication.

The Office recognizes these achievements as evidence of intelligence, cooperation, and practical competence.

It further recognizes that none of these qualities automatically settles the ethical questions arising from the acquisition of another party's resources.

The rats' original confinement may have been involuntary.

Their experimental enhancement may have created circumstances for which they bore no initial responsibility.

Their subsequent need to survive may have been urgent.

Nevertheless, the Board considers it necessary to distinguish the injustice of being controlled from the separate question of what conduct becomes permissible after control has been escaped.

A population may have legitimate grounds to seek freedom.

It does not follow that every measure taken in the pursuit of freedom is thereby justified.

The Office therefore identifies the central issue:

Can a community meaningfully claim independence while sustaining its existence through resources obtained without the knowledge or agreement of those supplying them?

The Board recognizes that this question may be answered differently at different stages of the community's development.

Conduct necessary for immediate survival may require different evaluation from conduct undertaken after alternatives become available.

The inquiry shall proceed.

II. QUESTIONS PRESENTED

The Board identifies nine principal questions.

First: What ethical interests were implicated by the rats' establishment of an organized settlement on land occupied and operated by the Fitzgibbon household?

Second: What distinction should be maintained between an animal's ordinary use of its environment and the deliberate appropriation of resources through technological intervention?

Third: Does the acquisition of intelligence sufficient to recognize property interests create corresponding responsibilities concerning those interests?

Fourth: What obligations arise when an autonomous community depends upon infrastructure maintained by another population without that population's knowledge?

Fifth: Can historical vulnerability or involuntary displacement justify continued resource appropriation after less exploitative alternatives become available?

Sixth: Does the rats' internal recognition that their practices may be improper establish evidence of ethical development, culpability, or both?

Seventh: What duties does a community owe its own members when its proposed transition toward independence threatens established comforts and patterns of life?

Eighth: Does the Fitzgibbon household possess legitimate interests in the use of its property without acquiring unlimited authority over the lives of an intelligent population residing upon it?

Ninth: What distinguishes the physical existence of an organized settlement from its moral legitimacy, legal recognition, and entitlement to continued occupation?

The Board considers these distinctions essential.

The mere existence of a civilization does not establish that every action of the civilization is just.

Neither does the existence of unjust conduct establish that the civilization is undeserving of recognition.

The Office declines to resolve either proposition by reference solely to the occupants' species.

III. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SETTLEMENT

The Office first examines the circumstances under which the rats established their community.

Following their escape from the fictional experimental institution, the enhanced animals confronted an immediate problem.

They possessed extraordinary intelligence.

They did not possess an established independent infrastructure sufficient to sustain the lives they intended to lead.

Their previous existence had been transformed.

Their ability to understand and manipulate complex systems now exceeded the capacities ordinarily associated with their species.

Yet they remained vulnerable to the ordinary requirements of animal life.

They required shelter.

They required food.

They required water.

They required protection from predators and environmental hazards.

They required access to materials necessary for the exercise of their newly developed technological abilities.

The rats therefore faced a contradiction.

They had escaped an institution whose facilities supported their survival.

But independence from that institution did not eliminate their material needs.

Indeed, their enhanced capabilities created additional possibilities for consumption.

The ability to understand electricity does not produce electricity.

The ability to design a machine does not produce the materials necessary to construct it.

The ability to plan a community does not create land upon which that community may safely exist.

The Board recognizes that the rats addressed these difficulties through resourcefulness and cooperation.

In the literary record, their acquisition of equipment and materials, including supplies obtained from a toy tinker's abandoned truck, contributed to the development of their technical capabilities.

Their eventual settlement near the Fitzgibbon farm provided access to resources they could employ in constructing a sophisticated community.

The Board considers this development understandable.

It does not regard it as ethically self-justifying.

The Office therefore distinguishes the necessity of establishing a place to live from the separate question of whether the methods used to sustain that place were appropriate.

The need for shelter explains why a settlement was established.

It does not, without further examination, establish an unlimited entitlement to the resources of neighboring inhabitants.

IV. ON THE STATUS OF THE ROSEBUSH

The settlement was established beneath a rosebush situated upon the Fitzgibbon property.

The Board recognizes that a rosebush is ordinarily classified as vegetation.

It further recognizes that the presence of vegetation does not preclude the existence of inhabited space beneath it.

The rats developed substantial subterranean facilities.

These were not merely temporary burrows used for ordinary shelter.

The community possessed organized spaces and technological systems.

The literary record describes a mechanized settlement containing facilities for learning, assembly, and daily life.

The cinematic record depicts an elaborate underground complex whose visual sophistication exceeds what an uninformed observer might reasonably anticipate from a garden shrub.

The Office therefore identifies a distinction between the settlement's external appearance and its internal function.

From the Fitzgibbon household's perspective, the rosebush may have appeared to be an ordinary feature of the property.

From the rats' perspective, the area contained the infrastructure of an established community.

Neither perspective, standing alone, resolves all questions concerning occupation.

The Board recognizes that the land's human occupants possessed legitimate interests in its use.

It also recognizes that the rats had constructed a community whose destruction could affect the lives and welfare of its inhabitants.

The Office therefore declines to treat the situation as exclusively a botanical matter.

The following classifications are considered separately:

1. The rosebush as vegetation.
2. The surrounding land as part of an agricultural property.
3. The underground structures as physical infrastructure.
4. The resident rats as members of an organized community.
5. The resource connections as possible interferences with existing utility systems.

The Office does not find that the classification of the first item disposes of the remaining four.

A rosebush may be removed as a matter of gardening.

The consequences of removing an inhabited underground settlement require a different inquiry.

The Board respectfully observes that the absence of a visible front door does not establish the absence of residents.

V. UNAUTHORIZED ELECTRICAL ACCESS

The Board next considers the rats' acquisition of electricity.

Both narrative records establish that the community obtained electrical power from the surrounding human infrastructure.

This arrangement permitted the rats to operate lighting and mechanical systems that would otherwise have been difficult to sustain.

The Office recognizes the technological achievement involved.

The ability of enhanced rats to understand and employ human electrical systems demonstrates substantial practical intelligence.

However, technical competence does not independently establish authorization.

The Board therefore distinguishes three questions.

A. Technical Capability

Were the rats capable of obtaining and using electricity?

The available records support an affirmative answer.

B. Human Authorization

Did the Fitzgibbon household knowingly authorize the rats to obtain electricity from its infrastructure?

The available records do not establish such authorization.

C. Ethical Justification

Could the rats' circumstances provide justification for some period of unauthorized resource use?

This question requires further analysis.

The Office observes that the absence of demonstrated authorization is not identical to proof of every element of a particular legal offense.

The record does not establish the complete configuration of the electrical connections, the allocation of metered consumption, or the applicable terms of utility service.

The Board therefore enters no specific finding concerning monetary damages.

Nevertheless, the rats' own recognition of their dependence upon resources obtained from humans is material.

Their community benefited from systems constructed and maintained by others.

Those systems had costs.

The rats did not necessarily bear those costs themselves.

The Board considers that distinction ethically significant.

The ability to obtain electricity is not equivalent to an entitlement to consume it.

The Office further observes that electricity does not become an unowned natural resource merely because it passes through a wire accessible from below ground.

The contrary proposition is not sustained.

VI. ON THE MEANING OF DEPENDENCE

The Office considers the nature of the rats' dependence upon human infrastructure.

Dependence is not inherently unethical.

Human societies are themselves characterized by extensive forms of interdependence.

Individuals rely upon communities.

Communities rely upon institutions.

Institutions rely upon workers, infrastructure, trade, knowledge, and resources acquired beyond their own boundaries.

The Board therefore rejects the proposition that a community must produce every resource it consumes in order to possess legitimate autonomy.

Self-government does not require complete material isolation.

Nor does independence necessarily require the rejection of trade or mutually beneficial exchange.

The ethical question concerns the terms of the relationship.

A community may obtain resources through cooperation.

It may obtain them through agreed exchange.

It may receive them as assistance.

It may establish shared infrastructure.

Or it may acquire them without the knowledge or consent of the supplying party.

These arrangements are not ethically identical.

The rats' dependence upon the Fitzgibbon property was especially complicated because it was concealed.

The human occupants could not knowingly evaluate the arrangement.

They could not negotiate its terms.

They could not establish limits.

They could not seek reciprocal obligations.

They did not necessarily know that an intelligent community existed beneath their property.

The Board recognizes that concealment may have been necessary for the rats' safety.

An openly announced colony of unusually intelligent experimental animals might have faced significant danger.

The Office therefore declines to characterize secrecy as inherently malicious.

However, secrecy undertaken for protective reasons does not eliminate every ethical concern arising from conduct concealed through that secrecy.

A community may possess legitimate reasons to avoid discovery.

It must nevertheless consider the interests of those affected by its hidden activities.

The Board therefore enters the following principle:

The necessity of concealment may explain the absence of negotiation.

It does not transform unilateral appropriation into negotiated consent.

VII. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SURVIVAL AND COMFORT

The Board considers whether the rats' continued use of human resources should be evaluated in light of their original circumstances.

The animals escaped confinement.

They lacked established independent means of production.

Their survival required practical adaptation.

The Office acknowledges that immediate necessity may create morally relevant considerations.

Conduct undertaken to avoid imminent death may require a different assessment from conduct undertaken to preserve convenience.

However, the passage of time may change the ethical circumstances.

Resources initially acquired to support survival may later sustain comfort, technological expansion, or habits that are no longer strictly necessary.

The rats' settlement developed beyond the minimum requirements of shelter.

Their technological capabilities enabled a comparatively sophisticated existence.

The Board does not condemn sophistication.

Nor does it regard comfort as inherently illegitimate.

It does, however, require consideration of who bears the costs of that comfort.

The Office therefore asks:

At what point did the rats possess sufficient knowledge and organizational capacity to pursue alternatives?

Were those alternatives feasible?

What risks would the alternatives impose?

Which elements of the existing settlement were necessary for survival?

Which were retained primarily because they were convenient?

The Board recognizes that these questions cannot be answered solely by identifying the existence of electrical lighting.

A community may legitimately require light.

It may also employ light for purposes of comfort.

The ethical distinction does not depend upon the invention of a fixed number of permissible light bulbs.

It depends upon the broader relationship between need, alternatives, benefit, and the interests of those providing resources.

Nevertheless, the Board identifies a material principle.

A justification grounded in emergency necessity must remain open to reconsideration when the emergency changes.

The fact that an arrangement was once necessary does not establish that it must remain permanent.

VIII. THE ACQUISITION OF HUMAN MATERIALS

The Office next examines the rats' acquisition of tools, equipment, and other manufactured materials.

The literary record describes their use of human-made objects in developing their civilization.

The rats' intelligence enabled them to recognize possibilities in materials that ordinary animals would not necessarily understand.

A discarded object could become a component.

A small motor could become part of a machine.

A human tool could be adapted to serve a new purpose.

The Board recognizes the ingenuity involved.

However, the ethical status of an object cannot be determined solely by the usefulness of that object to the party acquiring it.

The Office distinguishes between:

- Materials voluntarily transferred.
- Materials demonstrably abandoned.
- Materials discarded under circumstances suggesting relinquishment.
- Materials taken from an owner without authorization.
- Materials whose ownership or status remains uncertain.

These categories require separate consideration.

The Office does not find that every object acquired by the rats was stolen.

Nor does it find that every object described as scavenged was necessarily abandoned.

The available narrative evidence does not support a complete inventory with verified ownership histories.

The Board therefore requests clarification where possible.

Nevertheless, the distinction remains important.

A society capable of understanding property may also be capable of distinguishing salvage from theft.

The Board further observes that a community does not establish an ethical entitlement to another party's property merely by demonstrating that it can use that property more ingeniously.

Superior technical competence does not constitute a universal transfer of title.

The Office considers this conclusion applicable even where the improved use is objectively impressive.

The Board recognizes that the rats may have constructed machinery beyond the comprehension of some human observers.

It does not recognize that achievement as sufficient grounds to appropriate every accessible motor.

IX. THE QUESTION NICODEMUS COULD NOT IGNORE

The investigation now turns to the most consequential evidence concerning the community's ethical development.

The rats themselves recognized a problem with their dependence.

Their proposed relocation to Thorn Valley was not merely a geographical preference.

It represented an attempt to establish a different relationship between their community and the resources sustaining it.

The literary record gives particular significance to the rats' desire to cease obtaining their livelihood through appropriation from humans.

The Board considers this internal recognition extraordinary.

The rats had been subjected to experimentation without meaningful control over the original circumstances.

They had escaped.

They had built an impressive settlement.

They had survived.

They possessed knowledge and technical capabilities unavailable to ordinary members of their species.

Yet these achievements did not prevent them from questioning the morality of their own conduct.

The Board finds this important.

A community may regard its survival as proof that its methods were justified.

It may regard the difficulty of its origins as sufficient reason to excuse subsequent conduct.

It may celebrate technological advancement without examining the means by which advancement is sustained.

The rats instead confronted the possibility that their independence was incomplete.

They had escaped the laboratory.

But they remained dependent upon resources acquired from another population.

The Board therefore identifies a distinction between freedom from confinement and freedom from exploitative dependence.

The former concerns the removal of an external authority.

The latter concerns the terms upon which a community sustains itself.

A population may achieve the first without achieving the second.

The rats' recognition of this distinction is evidence of moral development.

However, recognition alone does not resolve the underlying conduct.

The Office therefore declines to treat ethical awareness as a substitute for ethical change.

A community does not cease to benefit from an improper arrangement merely because it has become sufficiently sophisticated to describe the arrangement as improper.

The Board recognizes the discomfort of this finding.

It considers the discomfort appropriate.

X. ON THE PROPOSAL TO RELOCATE

The Office next examines the proposed relocation to Thorn Valley.

The Plan contemplated departure from the established rosebush settlement and the development of a more independent existence.

The Board recognizes that relocation would require substantial effort.

The rats would need to establish new infrastructure.

They would need to organize labor.

They would need to secure food and water.

They would need to confront uncertainty concerning the suitability of a new environment.

They would also need to relinquish the benefits of systems already constructed.

The Board therefore rejects any characterization of the proposal as administratively trivial.

The settlement beneath the rosebush represented considerable accumulated work.

Its abandonment would impose costs.

These costs were not merely financial.

The existing community contained familiar spaces, established routines, and systems through which the inhabitants had learned to organize their lives.

A decision to leave therefore concerned both material resources and collective identity.

Nevertheless, the proposal contained an important ethical premise.

The rats wished to establish a community whose continued existence would depend less upon taking resources from humans.

Their intended independence was not merely freedom from interference.

It involved accepting greater responsibility for their own subsistence.

The Board considers this significant.

The Plan did not promise that life would become easier.

Indeed, its adoption required acceptance of greater difficulty.

The proposal therefore represented a choice between preserving established comfort and pursuing a form of independence the community considered more consistent with its principles.

The Office identifies this as a substantial act of collective moral reasoning.

The rats were not merely asking how they could continue to live well.

They were asking whether the manner in which they lived was defensible.

The Board recognizes that such questions may destabilize established arrangements.

It does not regard destabilization as sufficient evidence that the questions should remain unasked.

XI. JENNER AND THE DEFENSE OF THE EXISTING ARRANGEMENT

The Office considers opposition to the proposed relocation.

Jenner's conduct differs materially between the literary and cinematic records.

That distinction shall be preserved.

Nevertheless, both narratives depict opposition to abandoning the existing settlement.

The Board considers the underlying disagreement significant.

The rosebush community offered substantial advantages.

It was established.

It was technologically sophisticated.

Its residents understood its infrastructure.

Its resources supported a familiar standard of living.

Relocation would involve uncertainty.

Opposition to such relocation was therefore not inherently irrational.

The Board recognizes that individuals may legitimately disagree concerning the costs and risks of social change.

A proposal grounded in ethical concerns does not automatically eliminate the legitimacy of questions concerning feasibility.

However, the Board distinguishes disagreement concerning implementation from rejection of the ethical problem itself.

A resident might reasonably ask whether Thorn Valley could support the colony.

A resident might reasonably question the proposed timetable.

A resident might propose alternative means of reducing dependence.

These are matters appropriate for collective deliberation.

A different issue arises where the preservation of an existing advantage becomes an overriding objective, regardless of the ethical concerns associated with that advantage.

The Board therefore asks whether opposition to the Plan rested upon competing assessments of risk or upon a determination that the existing benefits should be retained irrespective of their source.

The literary record establishes serious disagreement and the eventual departure of Jenner and a group of followers.

The cinematic record depicts a more coercive and violent opposition.

The Board reserves final examination of those individual actions for the separate proceeding concerning governance and dissent.

For present purposes, the Office enters a narrower finding.

The existence of disagreement does not invalidate collective self-government.

Indeed, disagreement may demonstrate that members understand their ability to contest the community's direction.

However, disagreement must be distinguished from attempts to prevent others from exercising that same ability.

The distinction is entered.

XII. THE FITZGIBBON HOUSEHOLD

The Board now considers the human occupants of the property.

The Fitzgibbons operated a farm.

Their activities included ordinary agricultural work and the maintenance of household infrastructure.

The Office recognizes that these activities served legitimate purposes.

The family possessed interests in its property, equipment, utilities, crops, and ordinary domestic life.

The Board does not presume that the Fitzgibbons knowingly agreed to support an underground civilization.

Nor does it presume that they understood the extraordinary character of the rats occupying their property.

The absence of such knowledge is significant.

A person cannot reasonably be expected to negotiate with a community whose existence and capacities they do not know.

The Board therefore rejects any suggestion that the Fitzgibbons' failure to establish formal accommodations with the rats independently constitutes misconduct.

The Office further recognizes that ordinary farm operations may expose animals to danger.

Agricultural work routinely affects the habitats of other species.

The existence of such effects does not automatically establish deliberate wrongdoing.

However, the discovery of a community possessing extraordinary intelligence would introduce circumstances materially different from those ordinarily associated with rodent habitation.

The Board therefore distinguishes the following conditions.

Condition A: Ordinary farm operations undertaken without knowledge of an enhanced community.

Condition B: Farm operations undertaken after credible discovery of such a community.

Condition C: Deliberate action intended to destroy or forcibly remove the community after its capacities and interests have been established.

These circumstances require different ethical evaluations.

The Board does not presume that the human occupants possessed full knowledge merely because the rats lived nearby.

Nor does it presume that recognition of the rats' intelligence would eliminate every legitimate human property interest.

The parties' interests may conflict.

Such conflict requires examination.

It does not require the conclusion that one population's interests must automatically extinguish the other's.

The Office therefore enters the following principle:

The existence of an intelligent community beneath privately occupied land does not automatically invalidate the interests of the land's human occupants.

Neither does human occupation establish that every interest of the intelligent community is irrelevant.

The Board recognizes that this formulation may prove unsatisfactory to parties seeking immediate and exclusive recognition.

It considers a refusal to acknowledge competing interests an inadequate foundation for ethical review.

XIII. WHETHER THE RATS WERE TRESPASSERS

The Office has received the proposition that the rats' presence on the property constitutes trespass.

The proposition requires clarification.

In ordinary legal systems, property interests and the legal status of animals are determined through established rules.

The present fictional inquiry does not establish that enhanced rats possess a recognized legal capacity to own or lease real property.

Nor does it establish that their presence creates a legal tenancy.

The Board therefore declines to invent a binding property regime.

However, the absence of legal recognition does not settle every ethical question concerning an established community.

A population may possess morally relevant interests before institutions recognize those interests through law.

The Office considers this possibility especially relevant where the population was created or transformed through circumstances beyond its own control.

Nevertheless, ethical recognition does not necessarily establish an unrestricted right of occupation.

The rats' settlement involved land and resources in which others possessed interests.

The Board therefore identifies three distinct questions.

Existence: Did an organized community occupy the site?

The narrative evidence supports an affirmative answer.

Legitimacy: Were all methods used to establish and maintain the community ethically justified?

The available evidence raises substantial concerns.

Legal entitlement: Did the community possess enforceable rights to continued occupation?

The fictional record does not establish an applicable legal framework sufficient to resolve that question.

The Board cautions against treating these questions as interchangeable.

The community's physical existence is not disproved by the absence of a deed.

Its ethical concerns are not eliminated by the absence of a deed.

Nor does its physical existence create a deed.

The Office respectfully observes that the capacity to hold a meeting beneath a rosebush does not, by itself, establish a transferable interest in the underlying agricultural property.

The Board nevertheless recognizes the meeting.

The distinction is entered.

XIV. ON PROPERTY AND POWER

The Board considers a broader question arising from the settlement.

The rats had acquired intellectual and technological abilities unavailable to ordinary animals.

They could manipulate systems created by humans.

They could obtain resources through methods human property owners might not detect.

They could establish infrastructure without participating in the systems through which humans ordinarily regulate such activity.

These advantages created opportunities.

They also created responsibilities.

The rats' vulnerability to human power did not mean that they lacked power of their own.

Within their particular circumstances, they possessed capabilities that could be exercised without the knowledge of neighboring inhabitants.

The Office considers this ethically significant.

A population may be vulnerable in one relationship and powerful in another.

The rats had been vulnerable to the laboratory.

They were also capable of appropriating resources from the farm.

These facts are not contradictory.

They illustrate the importance of examining power in relation to particular circumstances rather than assigning permanent moral identities to entire populations.

The Board therefore rejects two propositions.

First, that the rats' earlier vulnerability eliminates responsibility for their subsequent conduct.

Second, that their subsequent misconduct, if established, retroactively justifies their earlier confinement.

Both propositions confuse distinct moral questions.

The rats could have been wronged by the laboratory.

They could also owe duties concerning the property of the Fitzgibbons.

The recognition of one fact does not negate the other.

Having suffered an abuse of power does not confer a general exemption from the obligation to exercise one's own power responsibly.

The Board considers this conclusion central to the present proceeding.

XV. THE ETHICS OF COLLECTIVE SELF-EXAMINATION

The Office returns to the rats' internal debate.

The community possessed sufficient organization to identify a problem concerning its own conduct.

It possessed sufficient understanding to recognize that its dependence upon human resources raised ethical concerns.

It possessed sufficient capacity for planning to consider an alternative.

And it possessed a political structure within which members could disagree about the proposed change.

The Board recognizes that these developments demonstrate more than practical intelligence.

They demonstrate the ability to subject collective arrangements to moral scrutiny.

This capacity is particularly significant because the existing arrangements benefited the community.

The rats were not merely condemning an injustice imposed upon them by an external institution.

They were considering whether they themselves had become participants in conduct requiring correction.

The Office therefore distinguishes between two forms of institutional criticism.

External Criticism: A community identifies wrongdoing committed against it.

Internal Criticism: A community examines whether its own conduct is consistent with the principles it claims to uphold.

Both are important.

However, the second presents a particular test.

An institution may readily recognize injustice when it is the injured party.

It may be less willing to recognize injustice when it benefits from the arrangement under examination.

The rats' debate concerning dependence demonstrates an attempt to undertake that more difficult form of analysis.

The Board does not find that the community had already achieved moral consistency.

Indeed, the continuing need for relocation suggests that its existing arrangements remained ethically contested.

Nevertheless, the willingness to reconsider those arrangements is significant.

The rats recognized that comfort could produce obligations.

They recognized that established practices could require revision.

They recognized that their capacity to obtain resources did not necessarily establish that they ought to continue obtaining them in the same manner.

The Office further observes that moral self-examination is not necessarily evidence of weakness.

A community does not become less legitimate merely because its members identify faults in its conduct.

On the contrary, the ability to recognize and address such faults may constitute an important element of responsible self-government.

The Board therefore enters the following finding:

A community's legitimacy is not established by its ability to deny every criticism.

It may be strengthened by its willingness to examine criticism that threatens its own advantages.

The Office considers this principle broadly applicable.

The fact that it was demonstrated by rats living beneath a rosebush is noted.

It is not regarded as a limitation upon the principle.

XVI. SEPARATE EVIDENTIARY RECORDS

A. RECORD A — THE 1971 NOVEL

Robert C. O'Brien's *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* provides substantial material concerning the rats' technological development, their dependence upon human resources, and their decision to pursue a more independent existence.

The novel emphasizes the gradual acquisition of knowledge and practical capabilities.

The rats develop sophisticated infrastructure through education, engineering, cooperation, and the adaptation of materials obtained from the human environment.

Their settlement permits a comparatively comfortable existence.

However, the community's dependence upon human resources becomes an object of internal ethical concern.

Nicodemus's support for the Plan reflects a desire to establish a way of life less dependent upon appropriation.

The proposed relocation to Thorn Valley therefore carries both practical and moral significance.

The literary Jenner opposes the proposed change and departs with other dissenting rats.

The Office recognizes that their subsequent fate is associated with reports of a dangerous incident involving electrical equipment.

The available literary record leaves material uncertainty concerning the full circumstances.

The Board therefore declines to attribute the cinematic Jenner's violent conspiracy to his literary counterpart.

The novel's treatment of the Plan is especially significant because the contemplated transformation arises from the rats' own deliberation.

Their developing intelligence produces not only increased capacity to obtain resources, but an increasing capacity to question whether obtaining them in that manner is appropriate.

The Office finds that this internal conflict is central to the literary record.

The rats' contemplated departure is not merely an escape from danger.

It is an attempt to change the ethical basis of their community.

B. RECORD B — THE 1982 FILM

Don Bluth's *The Secret of NIMH* depicts a more visually elaborate settlement beneath the rosebush.

The community possesses sophisticated machinery and infrastructure supported through the use of electricity obtained from the Fitzgibbon property.

The film preserves the proposal to relocate to Thorn Valley and the associated desire to escape dependence upon resources taken from humans.

However, the cinematic narrative introduces additional circumstances.

Jenner's opposition to relocation becomes part of a deliberate conspiracy.

His actions contribute to Nicodemus's death.

The film also introduces an immediate external threat associated with renewed efforts to locate the escaped experimental animals.

The proposed relocation therefore acquires additional urgency.

The Board distinguishes this circumstance from the broader ethical motivation underlying the Plan.

A community may relocate because continued occupation has become dangerous.

It may also relocate because its existing arrangements are inconsistent with its principles.

These motives may coexist.

They should not be treated as identical.

The film's supernatural elements, including the amulet associated with Nicodemus and Mrs. Brisby, are not treated as evidence concerning the technical operation of the settlement's electrical infrastructure.

The Office recognizes that magical intervention may resolve particular emergencies within the cinematic narrative.

It does not establish a general solution to questions of utility authorization.

The Board therefore declines to classify the amulet as an alternative electrical supplier without evidence establishing that function.

The cinematic record shall remain separate.

XVII. WHETHER RELOCATION RESOLVES THE PRIOR CONDUCT

The Office next considers the consequences of abandoning the rosebush settlement.

Relocation may reduce or eliminate continuing unauthorized use of human resources.

It may also permit the community to pursue a more independent existence.

These are significant prospective benefits.

However, the Board distinguishes prospective correction from retrospective accountability.

The decision to cease a practice does not necessarily establish that every consequence of the earlier practice has been resolved.

The Office therefore asks whether the rats considered:

1. The disconnection of their electrical systems.
2. The removal or safe abandonment of equipment.
3. Any hazards created by their infrastructure.
4. The possibility of restoring affected property.

5. The consequences of leaving subterranean structures beneath an occupied farm.
6. The preservation of information necessary to address future problems.
7. Whether any practicable form of restitution could be provided without exposing the community to disproportionate danger.

The available records do not establish complete answers.

The Board recognizes that some remedies may be impractical.

It also recognizes that disclosure could expose the rats to serious risks.

These considerations must be weighed.

The Office does not require that a community undertake an act of self-destruction in order to demonstrate remorse for unauthorized utility consumption.

Nor does it accept that risk of exposure eliminates every responsibility concerning the safety of abandoned infrastructure.

A reasonable resolution may require balancing the interests of affected parties.

The Board therefore declines to issue a fictional monetary assessment unsupported by evidence.

No kilowatt-hour figure is established.

No water-consumption estimate is entered.

No contractual rate is presumed.

The Office recognizes that the absence of metering data makes a precise retrospective accounting difficult.

It respectfully observes that the absence of a bill does not establish that the electricity was free.

XVIII. FINDINGS

Following review of the literary and cinematic records, the Board enters the following findings.

Finding 1 — Established Community

The enhanced rats developed a functioning settlement beneath the rosebush on the Fitzgibbon property.

Finding 2 — Advanced Infrastructure

The settlement employed technological systems requiring substantial intelligence, organization, and cooperation.

Finding 3 — Human Resource Dependence

The community relied upon electricity and other resources obtained from the surrounding human environment.

Finding 4 — Authorization Not Established

The available records do not establish informed authorization by the Fitzgibbon household for the rats' use of household infrastructure.

Finding 5 — No Precise Monetary Liability Determined

The record is insufficient to establish the complete amount or financial consequences of unauthorized resource consumption.

Finding 6 — Initial Necessity

The rats' circumstances following escape created legitimate concerns concerning survival and the establishment of an independent home.

Finding 7 — Changing Circumstances

A justification grounded in immediate necessity requires reconsideration as a community develops alternative means of sustaining itself.

Finding 8 — Distinction Between Dependence and Exploitation

Dependence upon another community is not inherently unethical. The terms under which resources are obtained remain relevant.

Finding 9 — Legitimate Human Interests

The Fitzgibbon household possessed legitimate interests in the use of its property and infrastructure.

Finding 10 — No Presumption of Human Knowledge

The available record does not establish that the Fitzgibbons fully understood the character or technological sophistication of the underground settlement.

Finding 11 — Recognition of Autonomous Interests

The rats' lack of established legal property status does not eliminate their morally relevant interests as members of an organized intelligent community.

Finding 12 — Internal Ethical Recognition

The rats demonstrated awareness that their existing resource practices raised ethical concerns.

Finding 13 — Significance of the Plan

The proposed relocation to Thorn Valley represented an attempt to establish a more independent and ethically defensible arrangement.

Finding 14 — Legitimate Scope of Dissent

Disagreement concerning the costs, risks, and implementation of relocation is not inherently inconsistent with responsible collective government.

Finding 15 — Separate Jenner Determinations

The literary and cinematic depictions of Jenner involve materially different conduct and shall not be consolidated.

Finding 16 — Retrospective Responsibility

Prospective abandonment of an improper arrangement does not necessarily resolve every consequence of its earlier operation.

Finding 17 — Limits of Property Claims

The physical existence of a community, its moral interests, and its legal entitlement to occupy particular land are distinct questions.

Finding 18 — Ethical Self-Government

The rats' capacity to scrutinize arrangements from which they benefited provides significant evidence of collective moral development.

XIX. THE BOARD'S DETERMINATION

The Board returns to the central question.

Can a community claim genuine independence while relying upon resources taken from others without their agreement?

The answer requires distinguishing independence from isolation.

No community exists without relationships.

No civilization develops without material dependencies.

No responsible society can reasonably assume that all valuable resources originate entirely within its own boundaries.

The Office therefore rejects the proposition that dependence itself defeats autonomy.

However, the ability to obtain resources through another population's infrastructure does not establish an unrestricted entitlement to those resources.

The distinction between exchange and appropriation remains significant.

The rats' intelligence enabled them to acquire resources.

Their developing moral judgment led them to question the legitimacy of continuing to do so.

The Office considers this progression central.

The same intelligence that permitted the construction of the settlement eventually made its ethical difficulties apparent.

The rats could have defended the arrangement solely through necessity.

They could have argued that their earlier confinement justified continued appropriation.

They could have maintained that the Fitzgibbons possessed sufficient resources to absorb the loss.

They could have insisted that their superior engineering capabilities entitled them to use whatever infrastructure they could access.

They could have refused to examine the problem at all.

Instead, the community entertained a proposal that would require relinquishing substantial advantages.

The Plan did not simply promise greater freedom.

It required accepting greater responsibility.

That distinction is the foundation of the Board's determination.

Autonomy is not demonstrated solely by the ability to resist external control.

It is also demonstrated by the capacity to govern one's own conduct when external control is absent.

The rats escaped a laboratory.

They built a civilization.

They developed technological competence.

They acquired resources.

And eventually, they confronted the possibility that their own success depended upon arrangements they could no longer fully justify.

The Board recognizes that the community had not perfected its conduct.

It does not require perfection as a condition of moral recognition.

It does, however, regard the willingness to identify and correct ethically problematic arrangements as evidence of responsible self-government.

The Office therefore determines:

The rosebush settlement demonstrates substantial evidence of autonomous collective agency, but its technological achievements do not independently justify every means by which its inhabitants sustained themselves.

The decision to pursue a more independent existence constitutes a meaningful act of institutional self-examination.

The legitimacy of that decision rests not upon the convenience of relocation, but upon the community's willingness to accept responsibility for arrangements from which it had benefited.

The distinction is entered.

XX. PRELIMINARY DISPOSITION

NIMH-ERB-003 is hereby concluded as to its principal ethical findings.

Questions concerning specific property effects, resource accounting, and the safe abandonment of infrastructure remain open.

The Board enters no binding determination of legal title.

It enters no monetary judgment against the rat community.

It enters no finding that the Fitzgibbon household knowingly consented to the use of its infrastructure.

It further enters no finding that the rats' establishment of a community was inherently illegitimate.

The Office recognizes competing interests.

It recognizes the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the rats' escape.

It recognizes the technological and political achievements of their settlement.

It also recognizes that intellectual advancement does not eliminate ordinary ethical obligations concerning the resources of others.

The Board concludes that the rats' decision to consider relocation was significant not merely because it involved a new destination.

It represented an attempt to replace dependence upon concealed appropriation with a more self-directed and accountable arrangement.

The next proceeding shall examine the internal political structures through which that decision was contested.

NIMH-ERB-004 — THE PLAN AND THE DISSENTERS

On Collective Self-Government, Political Disagreement, Legitimate Opposition, and the Limits of Majority Authority.

The Board recognizes that a society may determine that its existing arrangements require reform.

It further recognizes that members of that society may disagree.

The existence of dissent does not establish institutional failure.

However, the means employed to contest or prevent collective decisions may raise independent ethical concerns.

These questions shall receive separate examination.

No consolidated finding concerning Jenner is entered.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM A

Regarding the Proposed Classification of the Rosebush as an Unimproved Agricultural Feature

The Office of Property Classification has considered a preliminary description of the site as an unimproved agricultural feature.

The classification appears to rest upon the absence of visible human construction above ground.

The Office recognizes that the rosebush itself was not designed as a conventional residential building.

However, the available records establish the existence of substantial subterranean improvements.

These include organized chambers and mechanical infrastructure.

The Office therefore considers the classification incomplete.

The fact that a building is situated beneath vegetation does not establish that the building is vegetation.

Nor does the absence of a visible roof establish the absence of an inhabited structure.

The proposed classification is returned for revision.

The Office further requests that future descriptions distinguish between the botanical structure and the infrastructure located beneath it.

The Board recognizes that the occupants were rats.

It does not recognize that circumstance as an adequate substitute for a site description.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM B

Regarding the Assertion That the Electrical Consumption Was Too Small to Merit Examination

The Office has considered the proposition that the rats' electrical consumption may have been negligible relative to the total consumption of the Fitzgibbon household.

The proposition is not established by the available record.

No reliable consumption measurements have been submitted.

The Board therefore declines to assume either substantial financial injury or complete insignificance.

Nevertheless, the Office identifies a distinction between the amount of a resource consumed and the existence of authorization to consume it.

A small unauthorized use may produce limited damages.

It does not necessarily become authorized by virtue of its size.

Conversely, the absence of authorization does not establish that every instance of consumption warrants a punitive response.

The Board therefore requires proportionality.

The Office further observes that a miniature electrical system may be capable of producing disproportionately sophisticated results.

The rats' considerable technological accomplishments do not, by themselves, establish the quantity of electricity consumed.

The proposition that advanced engineering necessarily results in either high or low utility costs is not sustained.

Actual measurements would be preferable.

The Office recognizes that obtaining them retrospectively may be difficult.

It declines to invent them.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM C

Regarding the Proposed Designation of the Settlement as a Tenant Community

The Office has reviewed the suggestion that the rats should be classified as tenants of the Fitzgibbon property.

The designation is not supported by evidence of an established rental agreement.

No lease has been produced.

No evidence of agreed rent has been entered.

No authorization to occupy the premises under a tenancy arrangement has been established.

The Office therefore declines to assign that legal status.

Nevertheless, the absence of a tenancy does not establish that the occupants lacked every ethically relevant interest.

The Board distinguishes between the legal incidents of tenancy and the broader moral concerns associated with the displacement of an established community.

The Office further observes that a population cannot be deemed to have entered a rental arrangement solely because it occupies space adjacent to a household that pays property expenses.

The proposed designation is rejected.

The question of appropriate recognition remains open.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM D

Regarding the Suggestion That the Rats Were Merely Following Their Nature

The Office has considered the proposition that rats ordinarily obtain resources from human environments and that the conduct under investigation should therefore be understood as ordinary animal behavior.

The Board acknowledges that ordinary rats frequently interact with human settlements in ways that humans may regard as undesirable.

However, the enhanced rats demonstrated capacities extending far beyond ordinary foraging behavior.

They understood technological systems.

They developed collective plans.

They established organized infrastructure.

They considered competing ethical objectives.

They questioned the morality of their own dependence.

The Office therefore finds that a general statement concerning ordinary rodent behavior is insufficient to resolve the conduct of the enhanced community.

The Board further observes that recognition of the rats' extraordinary intelligence cannot be selectively suspended whenever that intelligence creates responsibilities.

The community cannot claim sophisticated autonomy when asserting its independence and then rely exclusively upon ordinary animal instinct when its methods of obtaining resources are questioned.

Such selective classification would produce an unstable ethical framework.

The objection is rejected.

The Office recognizes that rats are rats.

It further recognizes that these particular rats had learned to debate whether their conduct was right.

The Board considers that development relevant.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM E

Regarding the Concern That Recognition of the Settlement Would Require Recognition of Every Burrow on the Property

The Office has received the argument that acknowledging the rosebush community's interests would require recognition of every animal habitation on agricultural land.

The Board considers this conclusion unsupported.

The present investigation concerns a fictional community possessing extraordinary cognitive capacities, organized governance, complex infrastructure, and the ability to deliberate concerning collective obligations.

The Office does not propose that every animal shelter be classified as a municipality.

Nor does it suggest that ordinary agricultural work necessarily requires negotiations with all resident wildlife.

The existence of relevant differences does not eliminate the need for consistent ethical reasoning.

The Board further recognizes that ordinary animals possess welfare interests independent of advanced intelligence.

However, the precise nature of those interests and the appropriate means of protecting them may differ from the questions concerning an organized autonomous community.

The Office therefore rejects the proposition that recognizing one ethically significant circumstance requires treating all circumstances as identical.

The Board also declines to establish a universal municipal incorporation procedure for burrowing mammals.

The question has not been presented with sufficient supporting materials.

FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE NOTICE

On the Difference Between Building a Civilization and Becoming Responsible for One

The Office concludes this proceeding with an observation concerning the nature of institutional development.

The rats began as experimental subjects.

Their lives were governed by purposes they had not chosen.

Their abilities were altered through interventions they did not control.

Their subsequent escape permitted them to establish a life beyond the laboratory.

They learned to build.

They learned to organize.

They learned to preserve knowledge.

They learned to acquire resources and transform those resources into infrastructure.

They developed a community.

And that community eventually faced a question familiar to civilizations far larger than itself.

Was its prosperity being sustained at a cost it had declined to acknowledge?

The rats could have treated that question as an insult.

They could have regarded it as a threat to their achievements.

They could have insisted that their suffering entitled them to whatever advantages they had secured.

They could have refused to distinguish survival from convenience.

Instead, they considered changing the arrangements upon which their society depended.

The Board does not regard this as evidence that the rats had become morally superior to every other population.

It does regard it as evidence that they were capable of recognizing a difficult truth about themselves.

The community's technological achievements were considerable.

Its engineering demonstrated intelligence.

Its organization demonstrated cooperation.

Its political deliberations demonstrated the capacity for disagreement.

But its willingness to question its own advantages demonstrated something further.

The ability to govern one's conduct according to principles that may require sacrifice.

The Office recognizes that such willingness does not guarantee success.

The Plan involved uncertainty.

Its implementation faced opposition.

The community's future remained vulnerable to forces beyond its control.

Nevertheless, the ethical significance of the decision does not depend upon the absence of risk.

A civilization does not demonstrate its maturity merely by becoming powerful enough to obtain what it wants.

It begins to demonstrate maturity when it asks whether it ought to continue obtaining what it can.

The rats had learned to use human electricity.

They had learned to construct machinery.

They had learned to maintain an organized settlement beneath a rosebush.

These were substantial achievements.

But eventually, they asked whether their continued reliance upon resources taken from others was consistent with the kind of society they wished to become.

The Board finds that question more significant than the presence of electrical lighting.

The Office further recognizes a practical complication.

The community's decision to leave the rosebush required abandoning an infrastructure that had made its existence comfortable.

The resulting sacrifice was not incidental to the ethical inquiry.

It was evidence that the rats understood the difference between identifying an obligation and accepting its consequences.

The Board therefore concludes:

The rats' first achievement was escaping an institution that controlled them.

Their second was constructing a society capable of governing itself.

Their third was recognizing that self-government includes responsibility for the burdens that society places upon others.

The Office considers the third achievement indispensable to the legitimacy of the second.

It further observes that this principle is not confined to rodents.

The matter is entered.

The Board now turns to the political consequences of the Plan.

It recognizes that the proposed transformation divided the community.

Some members were prepared to accept uncertainty in pursuit of independence.

Others preferred the security and advantages of the existing settlement.

The resulting disagreement raises questions concerning legitimate dissent, leadership, majority authority, and the difference between political opposition and coercive interference.

These questions shall be examined in NIMH-ERB-004.

The Office recognizes that the rats were capable of governing themselves.

It must now determine how they conducted themselves when they disagreed about what self-government required.

So entered.

Office of Improbable Jurisdiction
Experimental Intelligence and Autonomous Persons Review Board
Division of Autonomous Settlements, Resource Dependencies, and Extraordinary Municipal Arrangements

END OF NIMH-ERB-003

SOURCE RECORD

Record A: Robert C. O'Brien, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (1971). Particularly the accounts of the rosebush settlement, the rats' acquisition of technology, and the proposed relocation to Thorn Valley.

Record B: Don Bluth, director, *The Secret of NIMH* (1982). Particularly the depictions of the technologically developed settlement, the proposed relocation, and opposition to the Plan.

Prior Proceeding: NIMH-ERB-001, *Preliminary Investigation into the Rats of NIMH*, Office of Improbable Jurisdiction (October 25, 2026).

Companion Proceeding: NIMH-ERB-002, *The Experimental Subjects*.

Scope of Findings: Fictional ethical and institutional analysis. No finding of actual real-world legal liability or regulatory misconduct is made.