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Topos: Comparison and Narrative

The Legacy of Laika and Félicette

The Space Race of the 20th century is often remembered as a triumph of human ingenuity, but it also carries a darker legacy. Among its many sacrifices were Laika, a stray dog, and Félicette, a street cat, whose lives were taken in the pursuit of knowledge. While their missions contributed to the advancement of space exploration, they also highlighted the ethical questions surrounding the use of animals in science. This paper delves into the tragic details of their stories, the limited outcomes of their missions, and the moral debates they continue to spark.

Laika, a stray from the streets of Moscow, was sent into orbit aboard *Sputnik 2* on November 3, 1957. She was selected for her calm demeanor and adaptability to harsh conditions, but her fate was sealed from the beginning. The Soviet Union had no plans to bring her back alive. Within hours of launch, Laika succumbed to overheating due to a malfunction in the thermal control system. Her death was neither peaceful nor necessary, as the spacecraft's design flaws made survival impossible. Reflecting on her fate, Soviet scientist Oleg Gazenko later admitted, "The more time passes, the more I'm sorry about it. We did not learn enough from the mission to justify the death of the dog."

Félicette, launched by France on October 18, 1963, initially appeared to have a better fate. Her mission aboard the *Veronique AG1* rocket sought to study neurological effects in space, and she returned to Earth alive, her capsule landing safely with the help of a parachute. However, Félicette's survival was short-lived. Scientists euthanized her weeks later to examine her brain tissue, seeking insights into her neural activity during flight. Tragically, this examination yielded no significant findings, rendering her sacrifice effectively meaningless. As one

researcher later lamented, "Félicette's death was an act of unnecessary cruelty, contributing little to the knowledge we sought."

Public reactions to these missions were as complex as the missions themselves. Laika's death sparked international outrage, with animal rights groups protesting her treatment. Félicette's story, on the other hand, was largely ignored at the time, overshadowed by human spaceflight milestones. Only decades later has her story gained recognition, but the renewed attention underscores the ethical dilemmas surrounding her unnecessary death. Both animals have since become symbols of the cost of scientific progress, raising questions about how far humanity is willing to go in its quest for knowledge.

The stories of Laika and Félicette are haunting reminders of the sacrifices made during the early days of space exploration. While their missions contributed to humanity's journey to the stars, they also highlighted the moral complexities of using animals in science. Laika's tragic end and Félicette's needless death illustrate the fine line between progress and cruelty. As we celebrate the achievements of the Space Race, it is crucial to remember these creatures, whose lives were taken in the name of discovery. Their stories challenge us to pursue knowledge without forsaking our ethical responsibilities.

Works Cited

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