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Editorial

Humans and Other Animals: Rattling the Paradigm

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This special issue of the Bangladesh Journal of Bioethics is the result of an international online conference, Humans and Other Animals: Rattling the Paradigm, that was hosted by the University of South Africa and took place in December 2024. The aim of the conference was to create a space where students and early career practitioners, particularly from the Global South, could meet and explore the complex relationship between humans and other animals.

The conference was organized around three themes, Philosophy and Ethical Theory, Activism and Community-centered Approaches, and Cultural Production, Art, and Performance, and designed to address the prevailing lack of representation in animal ethics, both of local perspectives and of voices outside traditional academia. This lack of representation impoverishes the conversation, robbing all of us of fresh thoughts and diverse viewpoints. By bridging the gap between academia and the realities of life around the globe and beyond university walls, the conference served as a starting point for a more inclusive conversation that defies the narrow confines of Western academic philosophy.

In keeping with its inclusive spirit, the conference paired each presenter with a mentor in order to achieve its secondary goal of building capacity in young scholars and early career practitioners. In the month before the conference, the mentors, experienced scholars from South Africa, Malawi, and Nigeria, conducted pre-conference workshops, in which the presenters had a chance to get to know each other, practice their presentations, and receive feedback from their peers, their mentors, and us. The workshops were well received and significantly contributed to the success of the conference.

Short biographies of the mentors as well as the conference program, including all abstracts, are available at sites.google.com/view/humansandotheranimals.

After the conclusion of the conference, we invited the presenters to work their presentations into publishable papers. Those who took us up on this invitation worked hard, under the expert guidance of their mentors, and the result is this special issue, which contains the following six articles:

Jubayer Hossain argues that Bengali cultural and spiritual teachings rooted in Hinduism and Buddhism offer a more practical and emotionally resonant foundation for animal ethics than Western theories like Peter Singer's utilitarianism or Tom Regan's rights theory. Through a 40-day study with 17 participants, Hossain found that spiritual principles such as *ahimsa* (non-violence) were easier to understand and apply in daily life. He concludes that these culturally embedded frameworks provide a more sustainable, accessible, and compassionate approach to promoting animal welfare in Bangladesh.

Terkura Thomas Mchia explores how the Tiv people of Central Nigeria regard dogs and the green snake as sacred totems, reflecting deep moral and spiritual connections between humans and animals. He argues that these indigenous beliefs, rooted in respect, taboo, and mythology, offer valuable insights for developing an authentically African framework for animal ethics. By examining the Tiv worldview alongside similar traditions across Africa, Mchia suggests that revitalizing totemic practices can promote biodiversity conservation and challenge anthropocentric approaches to animal welfare.

Luvuyo Bomela investigates the persistence of dog-fighting as an illegal and violent practice linked to poverty, crime, and gang culture in Cape Town. Using a green criminology framework, Bomela examines how the Cape SPCA's community outreach programme educates residents, especially youth, to recognize, report, and prevent dog-fighting. He argues that community engagement and education can serve as proactive tools for animal crime prevention, despite challenges posed by socio-economic inequalities, mistrust, and under-enforced animal protection laws.

Sarah Israth and Syed Arman Hossain investigate how social media is transforming animal welfare in Dhaka, Bangladesh, by creating "imagined communities" of activists and enabling organized legal and policy advocacy. The study, based on digital ethnography and interviews, highlights how online platforms like Facebook shift individual rescue acts into large-scale movements, facilitating fundraising, sharing expertise, and mobilizing collective action against animal cruelty. This digital activism has led to significant real-world outcomes, including successful public mobilization against cruel practices like stray dog relocation and dog culling, marking a clear evolution from earlier, more fragmented efforts. Ultimately, the authors argue that social media has revolutionized animal welfare advocacy by promoting a more compassionate society and creating a cohesive, resourceful movement for interspecies justice.

Shannon Johnstone uses a Critical Animal Studies (CAS) framework to examine the ethical complexities of photographing animals confined in legally sanctioned roadside zoos. As a photographer, her goal is to challenge the anthropocentric gaze, which views animals as resources and their suffering as entertainment, by creating empathetic portraits that highlight the individuals' boredom, frustration, and incarceration. The paper analyzes how issues of power, representation, and perception are intertwined in the photographic process, using the image of a captive hyena as a case study to demonstrate how human bias can misinterpret animal expressions of stress as being comical or happy. Ultimately, Johnstone proposes that an artistic intervention in these photographs, informed by an "ethics of attention," can allow viewers to "see" the impact of confinement more clearly and encourage a less anthropocentric relationship with animals.

Morufu B. Omigbule and Sherifdeen A. Olafimihan examine the ethical dilemma of animal sacrifice in Yoruba rituals, which are performed for the utilitarian purpose of ensuring cosmic stability and the "greater good" of the community. The authors contend that despite the cultural importance of these rituals, the practice of treating non-human animals as "ritual disposables" should be reconsidered based on the Yoruba's own ethical principles, which acknowledge the sameness of pain and pleasure for humans and non-humans. Drawing on Judith Boss's stage theory of moral development, the paper asserts that the Yoruba cultural tradition, which allows for ritual modification, should aspire to a higher moral stage that protects the interests of all sentient beings, in line with contemporary animal rights discourse.

We hope that you, dear reader, will enjoy this unique collection of articles and learn as much from reading the articles as we did from working with the authors to bring the articles into their final form. We would like to thank our authors for choosing the conference and, subsequently, this journal as venues to share their ideas, and for their enthusiasm and perseverance throughout the process.

We also extend our sincere thanks to our conference mentors, Aragorn Elof, Dr. Yolandi M. Coetser, Dr. Yamikani Ndasauka, and Dr. Morufu Omigbule, whose encouragement and guidance, especially during the preconference workshops, were instrumental in the development of the ideas presented in

this special issue. Dr. Coetser, Dr. Ndasauka, and Dr. Omigbule, together with the three of us, also served as reviewers, and we gratefully acknowledge their thoughtful contributions in that role.

The conference, and hence this special issue, would not have been possible without the generous support of our sponsors, the Culture and Animals Foundation (CAF) and the Animals and Society Institute. We thank them sincerely and invite you to learn about the remarkable work they do for humans and other animals. If you are a scholar or artist interested in the human–animal relationship, we encourage you to visit cultureandanimals.org/grants and consider applying for one of the CAF's annual grants, which are open to applicants from all countries.

Finally, we express our heartfelt appreciation to our home institution, the University of South Africa, for its logistical and technical support during the conference, and to the *Bangladesh Journal of Bioethics* and its Executive Editor, our friend Professor Shamima Parvin Lasker, for providing this platform to archive and publish the conference proceedings.

We hope that this special issue serves as a record and an example of meaningful interdisciplinary and international collaboration, and as an inspiration for future scholarship, and we are sending our warm regards from Mzansi to Sonar Bangla, and to our readers everywhere.

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