

From the Editor

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The current issue has five articles and four book reviews. Three of the articles concern animal welfare, an increasingly popular topic in our journal. The fourth concerns the causes of food insecurity in Pakistan and what policy responses are needed to correct this situation. The last article is an empirical study and a recommendation of a new approach to finding out how local groups perceive environmental change.

The first paper is by Frank Kupper and Tjard De Cock Buning. Its title is “Deliberating animal values: a pragmatic-pluralistic approach to animal ethics.” This paper advocates the turn to a pragmatic, pluralistic approach to animal ethics because ethical monism towards animal ethics hampers and oversimplifies the moral debate because of the value pluralism present in contemporary society, especially about animal welfare issues. The authors offer “a pragmatist critique of ethical monism in animal ethics and presents the results of a qualitative study into the value diversity present in the different ways of thinking about animals in the Netherlands. Carefully arranged group discussions resulted in the reconstruction of four distinctive moral value frameworks that may serve as instruments in the future process of moral inquiry and deliberation in the reflection on animal use.”

The second paper is by Michael Greger. In “Transgenesis in animal agriculture: addressing animal health and welfare concerns,” Greger looks at the ethical problems connected to the commercialization of genetically engineered (GE) farm animals, especially its impact on animal welfare. Greger reviews production-related diseases associated with extant breeding technologies and the predictable welfare consequences of continued emphasis on prolificacy at the potential expense of physical fitness. He then goes on to explore areas in which biotechnology could be used to improve the welfare of animals while maintaining profitability and also the regulatory schema to improve agency integration in GE animal oversight.

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In the third paper, “A defense of animal rights,” Aysel Doğan argues that animals have rights in the sense of valid claims on us. These rights include a right to life, to liberty in the sense of freedom of movement and communication, to subsistence, to relief from suffering, and to security against attacks on their physical existence. These rights are based on the fact that they have an interest in living, freedom, subsistence, and security and these interests are of vital importance to them. They “do not belong to us; they are not the things we have already possessed by virtue of our own nature.” The author goes on to defend this thesis against a number of alternative views, but he qualifies the rights claim in this way: these valid claims “might turn out to be actual rights as society advances and new scientific-technological developments facilitate finding alternative ways of satisfying our vital interests without using animals.”

In the fourth paper (“Food insecurity in Pakistan—Causes and policy responses”), authors Dr Mohammad Aslam Khan and Dr S. Akhtar Ali Shah cite “Vision 2030” of the Planning Commission of Pakistan to support their claim that about half of the population in the country suffers from absolute to moderate malnutrition, with the most vulnerable being children, women, and elderly among the lowest income group. Even though the government of Pakistan has taken steps to alleviate this condition, the authors want to introduce some new thinking into discussions regarding the challenges of food insecurity. They identify the limitations of current policy responses and suggest “crucial measures to improve the present grim scenario. Policy makers, planners, practitioners, and academicians in countries with comparable socio-political and economic setup can view this discussion as a case study and may apply the findings in their domain accordingly.”

The last article uses and recommends a new participatory method for measuring local perceptions of detrimental environmental changes in their locale that have a negative effect on them. In “Local Perception of Environmental Change in a Semi-Arid Area of Northeast Brazil: a new approach for the use of participatory methods at the level of family units,” authors Shana Sampaio Sieber, Patrícia Muniz de Medeiros, and Ulysses Paulino de Albuquerque report on their findings from using this new method with nine local families, a method that includes all members of each family. They chose their locale because the “diversity of plant resources in the Brazilian semi-arid region is being compromised by practices related to agriculture, pastures, and forest harvesting, especially in areas containing Caatinga vegetation (xeric shrublands and thorn forests). The impact of these practices constitutes a series of complex factors involving local issues, creating a need for further scientific studies on the social-environmental dynamics of natural resource use.” They summarize their findings by first identifying the three questions they asked participants: (1) how do families perceive the environment in which they live? (2) how has this environment changed over time? and (3) what is the importance of each landscape unit for these families? “Regarding the first question, we found that families’ perceptions about the environment in which they live was affected by their lifestyle and dependence on natural resources. We found that greater dependence on natural resources leads to a greater understanding of the environment dynamics.”