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Brooks Congress 2020 Rapporteur's Report

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On February 14, 2020, over seventy experts in animal advocacy, cognition, law, philosophy, science, and rights arrived from across the country to the Palms Hotel and Spa in Miami Beach, Florida. They were there to serve as Delegates to the inaugural Brooks Congress, a first-of-its-kind event that aimed to bring together these top minds in order to inspire new thinking and new ideas around effecting change in the animal protection movement.

As the Brooks Congress Delegates arrived, refreshed by both the warm Florida weather and the prospect of sharing ideas with other leaders in the field, they were greeted warmly by the Brooks staff and by each other—many friends among them, as well as many new and exciting connections. This event would be one of the first in history to bring together so many of the top minds working and writing in the area of animal law and policy.

The first annual Brooks Congress began with a welcome by Timothy Midura, the President and Executive Director of The Brooks Institute, and Kristen Stilt, Professor of Law and Faculty Director of the Harvard Law School Animal Law & Policy Program, who would serve as the Moderator of the weekend-long event. The substance of the Congress began promptly, with the event's first keynote speaker, Alexandra Horowitz, bestselling author and PhD in Cognitive Science, delivering the first of three keynote presentations over the course of the weekend.

Horowitz's presentation, entitled Un-naming & Re-naming Animals, focused on the role that animal cognition may play in the animal protection movement's broader goal of convincing others to see animals as something more than "other," but rather as "someones" who deserve protection and consideration in their own right. After giving a broad overview of the history of animal cognition science, Horowitz asked the Delegates in the room why—not why they should, but why they do—care about the welfare of nonhuman animals. She proposed that it is because for those in the room, there is no significant enough distinction between humans and nonhuman animals to rationally explain caring for one and not for the other. And indeed, nonhuman animals share many characteristics that some may otherwise think of as uniquely human: a sense of self, unique facial expressions, the ability to learn and to imitate, the ability to lie, social understanding, sensitivities to others' minds, asking for help, and actively thwarting potential thieves, just to start. And she agreed that some of these understandings yielded from animal cognition research are helpful in "moving the dial" of people's understanding of animals. But, Horowitz argued, that is not sufficient. Rather, in order to truly understand them, we should not be looking to nonhuman animals to discover how similar they are to us, but rather to understand how to defamiliarize them from us, rename them, and understand them as "wondrously other" than human.

The first evening of the Congress concluded with a reception and dinner for Delegates, at which participants reflected on Horowitz's presentation and the impact it may have on the movement

going forward, continued to introduce one another, and shared their current projects and ideas for future endeavors.

The second day of the Congress, Saturday, was another day full of lively discussion and breakout sessions facilitated by participants on a wide range of topics. Just a brief stroll through the Congress venue, past the hotel lobby, and down toward the beach would give you snippets of intense discussions on every topic from the most important legislative measures to push to protect animals to the best way to train students in animal law and policy; from the best current science regarding the culture of fishes to new approaches to make the animal protection movement more diverse, inclusive, and supportive; and from the impact that current Supreme Court cases will have on the animal protection movement to the philosophical merits of different approaches to prioritizing law and policy efforts.

The second keynote speaker of the weekend, Syl Ko, took the stage next. Her presentation, entitled *On Black Veganism*, dismantled the common conception within the animal protection movement that what is necessary in order to make lasting change for nonhuman animals is merely the destruction of human supremacy from an objective point of view. Ko posited that many current efforts in the animal protection movement start from the understanding that looking at specific facts about nonhuman animals—be that their ability to communicate, their understanding of currency, or anything else—should inform humans morally with regard to how humans treat nonhuman animals. In the alternative, she argued, what is required is a different way of looking at what our obligations to nonhuman animals are altogether—in other words, an animal ethic that is not dependent on looking at facts or empirical research, but that is instead generated from within an anti-racist commitment. Instead of focusing on arguing that elephants should not be abused because they can feel pain, that chimps should not be experimented on because they form intimate relationships, or any other empirically-based effort, Ko argued that what is actually at issue in these efforts is the narrative that humans have constructed around animals and what it means to be an animal. By focusing efforts on the subjective understanding of humans, rather than on an objective one, Ko argued, the movement may be better situated to dismantle the narrative of animalia and how it has been deployed to cause harm, both to nonhuman animals and to humans.

The weekend's third and final speaker, impressively still drawing a packed house for a post-lunch keynote, Dale Jamieson, talked to the Congress Delegates about *How to Change the World*. Jamieson began by pointing out that deep social change, when viewed *ex post*, often appears necessary, obvious, and inevitable; but that that same change, viewed *ex ante*, seems unpredictable and unstable. In other words, there is a lot that we do not know about how to effect social change. Jamieson's presentation outlined many of what he called paradoxes of intentional change, or areas in the field of social and behavior change that may be surprising or seem counterintuitive. He highlighted, for example, the informational effect, which draws on the assumption and resulting strategy that providing new information to people will change their behavior or attitudes. In reality, however, the provision of new information has approximately the same impact on someone's behavior as group prayer that they will change their behavior does—i.e. not a statistically relevant one. Jamieson concluded by naming and describing four key questions that, he argued, must be looked at in any attempt to bring about meaningful social change: the composition question (the interactions between the government, institutions, civil

society, and the individual), the object question (the inquiry into the specific element one wishes to change), the agent question (the who and what behind the action), and the audience question (who is being addressed).

The weekend concluded Sunday morning with a panel event, featuring the three keynote speakers. This panel gave Delegates an opportunity to ask questions of more than one keynote speaker at a time, bring out themes they noticed among the presentations and throughout the weekend, and to reflect on how best to carry what they gained from the Brooks Congress forward and into their own work.

Throughout the weekend, Delegates noted what an excellent opportunity the Congress was to connect with colleagues and mentors, as well as role models and friends. The Delegates built coalitions, collaborated on upcoming projects and works of scholarship, and offered advice on subjects they had experience in. The Brooks Congress provided a unique way for leaders in the animal protection community to connect and strategize, allowing them to move forward in their advocacy efforts with a new perspective and framework for effecting change for nonhuman animals.

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The Brooks Institute is preparing a variety of resulting content from the Congress, including: Photo montage and photograph library, videos of the keynote speaker presentations, video interview responses to key questions, and survey of breakout sessions and interviews. These will be made available on the Brooks Institute website.