

Named, numbered or anonymous: how the Human-Animal Relation affects the naming of individual animals

Stef Aerts

KAHO Sint-Lieven, Hospitaalstraat 23, 9100 Sint-Niklaas, Belgium & Centre for Science, Technology and Ethics, KU Leuven, Kasteelpark Arenberg 1 – bus 2456, 3001 Leuven, Belgium

Abstract

Over the last decade, in the Dutch language area different classifications have been proposed for the way humans relate to animals. De Meester proposed to use the importance of the death of the animal as the discriminating element (De Meester, 2000), while Schnabel (2003) proposed to use a notion of ‘closeness’. As the former is too rudimentary and the latter too informal, Lips *et al.* (2004) proposed to use a combination of the importance of death and the amount of veterinary costs that people are willing to pay, regardless of species or other biological criteria. It is that classification that is most informative about the naming of individual animals.

Lips *et al.* (2004) distinguished seven human-animal relations: utility animals (incl. farm, experimental and working animals), pets, service animals, exotic animals, hobby animals, harmful animals, and wild animals. Locating these in a cartesian plane shows that animals in the upper right corner (death highly unwanted, high veterinary costs) are normally given individual names. Animals in the first quadrant, but close to the origin, could be considered as “numbered animals”, and those in the lower left regions as “anonymous animals”.

This analysis clarifies the difference between the inevitable overlaps between categories (e.g. zoo animals are given names, not other wild animals; as are horses, but not other hobby animals), and it helps explain why it was common to name all cattle until a few decades ago, but now this is usually only done for bulls.

References

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