

The Pluto Paradox: *Goofy gets pants, but Pluto does not*

*Pluto is **Mickey Mouse's pet dog** first introduced in the 1930s. ... Pluto is a pet dog. This relationship is especially weird in light of Goofy. Goofy is theoretically also a dog. But he is an anthropomorphic character who wears clothes, talks, and walks upright like Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck.* - Google

Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities. It is considered to be an innate tendency of human psychology - [Wikipedia](#)

Non-consumptive wildlife watchers (us) on one side and consumptive, exploitive hunters and trappers on the other, accuse each other of being emotional and unscientific and guilty of anthropomorphising. Our opposition sling the term “anthropomorphism” as a slur, not unlike the term “bunny hugger”. Guilty as charged, which of us has not been inspired by classic animal books like “Charlotte’s Web” or moved to empathy and political action by, yes, a Disney classic like “Dumbo”? Or one of the superb nature videos available to us, such as the life work of Sir David Attenborough?

Ultimately, “anthropomorphism” is not a taboo or an epithet. And, after 14 years of meetings, rallies, protests and hearings, I can report both sides are passionately emotional.

As Jim Robertson puts it in “Exposing the Big Game”:

“Real environmentalists, inspired by altruism, care deeply about wildlife and aren’t afraid to let their emotions and their conscience be their guide.”. . . How many times have humane activists heard them [hunters] say that laws regarding animals should be based on ‘science, not emotion’? Science is important for understanding behavior, and the workings of nature. . . but it’s not in and of itself a source of moral guidance.”

As we wildlife watchers ceaselessly point out, the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners (NBWC) does not represent the general public. Like similar bodies in every state, they are an outgrowth of the frontier days who serve hunter convenience, opportunity and success. Nevada wildlife law reflects this mindset.

"All animals are equal but some are more equal than others." – George Orwell

What is scientific or logical about Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) Chapter 501: *Classification and Taking of Wildlife*? Like wildlife management systems across the country, Nevada sorts our wildlife into predetermined categories, based upon each animal's value to the sportsman.

The animal in and of itself does not exist in this scheme; man only exists, and the assumption is that only one segment of humanity exists: hunters and trappers. This is not obvious anthropomorphism like dog birthday parties with funny hats. However it can be interpreted as anthropomorphic because the intrinsic nature of the animal is not considered. This rating scheme is a projection of man's desires upon the natural world. Perhaps a more precise word is anthropocentric.

Wild living beings are either game mammal; big game mammal; fur-bearing mammal; protected or unprotected. Why? The tautological explanation in the statute: Because they are "*so classified by [Wildlife] Commission regulation.*"

And this arbitrary classification of animals makes no sense in view of NRS 501.100:

Legislative declaration regarding wildlife. "1. Wildlife in this State not domesticated and in its natural habitat is part of the natural resources belonging to the people of the State of Nevada."

If all these animals belong to me, I want them all protected by law. But they are not.

Animal law is inconsistent and inadequate:

NRS 574.100

1. A person shall not:

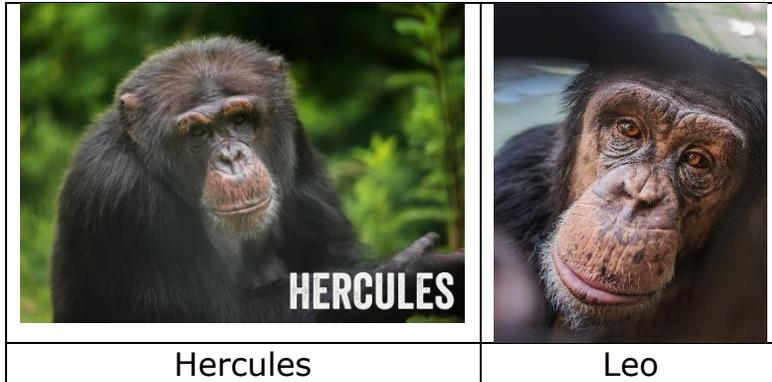
- (a) Torture or unjustifiably maim, mutilate or kill:
- (1) An animal kept for companionship or pleasure, whether belonging to the person or to another; or
 - (2) Any cat or dog;

"As used in NRS 574.050 to 574.200, inclusive: 1. 'Animal' does not include the human race, but includes every other living creature." This sounds like the universe of animals is being addressed by the law, but that is not the case. In fact, only two species out of the thousands upon this planet are deemed "pets" by the State of Nevada: dogs and cats. A pet enjoys statutory protections against cruelty, unlike, say, the coyote, who is "unprotected" and classified as a year-round target. Meanwhile, NRS Chapter 501, wildlife law, reads as though NRS 574 does not exist. There is no mention of cruelty in Chapter 501, and so, in practice there is no limit on the cruelty inflicted upon our wildlife.

Perhaps some day these glaring inequities in animal law will be addressed.

" appreciating nonhumans as unique individuals, fellow travelers through life with their own unassailable rights to share the planet." - Jeffrey Masson

There are ample examples of anthropomorphism in the animal advocate universe. Perhaps more extreme than dressing a dog up for his birthday, is the Nonhuman Rights Project, a U.S. civil rights organization, which takes their belief in inherent rights to the courtroom, laying the groundwork for fuller recognition of nonhuman rights. Perhaps best known is the story of "clients, Hercules and Leo (Chimpanzees). . . two former research subjects and the first nonhuman animals to have a habeas corpus hearing." After five years of legal struggles, Hercules and Leo were granted the best possible life in an accredited sanctuary where they reside to this day. Full personhood? No, but the legal seeds were planted.



Pursuing the ideal of “unassailable rights” where do we draw the line?

From “The Third Chimpanzee” by Jared Diamond:

“Somewhere along the scale from bacteria to humans, we have to decide where killing becomes murder, and where eating becomes cannibalism. Most people draw those lines between humans and all other species.

“. . . If our ethical code makes a purely arbitrary distinction between humans and all other species then we have a code based on naked selfishness devoid of any other principle.

Our understanding of anthropomorphism expands constantly as we examine these basic questions. Beyond our many entirely legitimate gripes with the existing system, what do we envision for the future?