

HUNTING MYTHS

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INTRODUCTION

The constant repetition of certain themes used to justify recreational hunting and to show that hunting is not a morally suspect activity is striking. These themes are really myths repeated in essay after essay, book after book, and in supposedly objective newspaper articles. Typically it is said that that recreational hunting is a basic part of our human nature, is something more than merely killing animals, is necessary, reduces the number of wild animals, and limits these animals to the carrying capacity of the land. These ideas, not always clearly delineated or explained, are more like a circular cluster of ideas where one idea is used to corroborate another.

These myths are the very heart of the attempt to justify hunting; they try to show that hunting is neither a gratuitous act of cruelty, nor a sadistic practice and that hunters are neither callous nor insensitive. Hunters claim that hunting is a socially acceptable act that not only provides pleasure and happiness for the hunter, but that encourages the development of virtues such as courage, discipline, patience, respect and self-control. Once it is shown that such claims are not true, the grounds for accepting hunting as a morally legitimate practice vanish.

HUNTING IS AN INHERENT PART OF HUMAN NATURE

Writers trying to justify recreational or sport hunting frequently assert that hunting is an ancient and very basic part of human nature. A particular version of this assertion holds that hunting is an instinct. This idea is almost always emphasized, although the exact meaning of 'instinct' varies from author to author. and is often neither consistent nor clear.

In an article entitled "The Morality of Hunting" in *Environmental Ethics* Ann Causey examined in great detail the notion of hunting as an instinct. (For a longer examination of some of her assertions, see my *Ethics and Wildlife*.) Causey explained that hunting, as an instinct, is neither good nor bad because instincts do not fall within the realm of moral judgment since they are not a matter of choice.

The urge to hunt may be viewed as an original, essential trait...It is not morally wrong to take pleasure in killing game," she asserts, "nor is it morally right. It is simply not a moral issue at all, because the urge itself is an instinct, and instincts do not qualify for moral valuation, positive or negative. Thus, the urge to kill for sport is amoral, lying as it does outside the jurisdiction of morality... She further explains that "nothing that comes directly by way of nature is inherently good or bad, and that includes those traits of the human species which are not of our deliberate choice and which are *not subject to conscious control*....Of course, none of this should be taken to imply that the *acts* of hunting are themselves amoral" (Causey 1989, 338).

Such statements might lead us to believe that Causey is contrasting the urge to hunt with the act of hunting. There are, however, two problems here.

First of all, those who condemn hunting might well agree that "urges" should not be either praised or condemned so long as they are not acted upon. Those who object to hunting criticize the transformation of those urges into actions, to the killing of an animal.

The second problem is that Causey's notion of 'instinct' does not fit the definition of 'instinct,' a word that was originally used as a scientific term to refer to "an impulsion to perform some biological function, such as migration or reproduction; a stereotyped, species-action pattern; a genetically determined, endogenously controlled mechanism underlying species-characteristic behavior"(Immelman, K. and C. Beer 1967, 151-2). As explained by these definitions, an instinct cannot be separated from behavior: it either impels or underlies such behavior or is itself the behavior.

A well-known example of a behavior that in the past was thought to be an instinct referred to newly hatched herring gull (*Larus Argentatus*) and laughing gull chicks (*Larus Atrilla*). These chicks peck at the beak of a parent for food. This behavior was once believed to be invariable and stereotypical—traits that were said to characterize instinct. It has been discovered, however, that not only does this behavior vary from chick to chick in several different respects, but that it changes as the chicks learn. It is now considered

“misleading”(McFarland 1987, 310) to consider such behavior instinctual. In fact, scientists no longer use the term ‘instinct’ because of the difficulty in distinguishing between it and various aspects of learning. (Hale and Margham 1991, 303).

Causey’s problems are magnified because she is not consistent in her assertion that the hunting instinct is simply an urge to hunt. She says that “Reason may overpower the hunting instinct in an individual” thus whether or not one hunts is subject to conscious control and it is precisely this control that permits moral criticism. By her own words, then, Causey has removed hunting from the nonmoral realm and placed it squarely within the realm of morality where it may be judged..

Nor would Causey’s arguments be helped by the claim that she is using ‘instinct’ according to some less precise, but common understanding of the word. The everyday use of the term ‘instinct,’ if it means anything at all, refers to behavior that is invariable, inherent, and reflex-like. While these characteristics do not refer to many kinds of human behavior, even humans have reflex reactions, such as the commonly tested knee jerk. It does not make much sense to try to argue that human activities, such as hunting, that are not engaged in by the vast majority of people, whose numbers are steadily decreasing, and that vary from person to person, are instincts since hunting is clearly not invariable, nor is it a kind of reflex-like behavior.

Ortega y Gasset also calls hunting an instinct although he does not do so to try to show the morality of hunting, but rather to simply explain it. Ortega talks of the “predatory instinct which survives in modern man as a rudiment” (Ortega y Gasset 1985, 119). He claims that this is a “very humble reflex, residual fossil of an instinct that man retains from the time he was a pure beast” (120). It is this instinct that accounts for hunting today, an instinct “which was established in the organism of man hundreds of thousands of years before history began.” To make his point, Ortega relates the story told by a hunter concerning several men who are traveling by car to a hunting reserve. Suddenly they see two wolves crossing the highway. They stop the car and grab their rifles. Ortega says the men see the wolves as game, that is as animals to hunt. According to Ortega, they see the wolves in this way as a matter of “reflex” caused by the animals themselves (119). Ortega claims that the wolves “feel themselves to be possible prey, and they model their whole existence in terms of this condition” (120) Ortega continues that

It is not man who gives to those wolves the role of possible prey. It is the animal—in this case the wolves themselves—which demands that he be considered in this way, so that to not react with a predatory intention would be anti-natural (119).

In order to “blame the victim,” that is, in order to claim that the wolves themselves bring about the human predatory response to try to catch them, Ortega now claims to know how the wolves themselves feel. They are, he says, creatures gifted with marvelous powers of evasion, to the point where they are essentially “that which escapes.” For Ortega, “The only adequate response to a being that lives obsessed with avoiding capture is to try to catch it” (120).

I would suggest that if Ortega’s description were accurate, in addition to being a hunter, he would also be, at the very least, a rapist for why should the fleeing wolf be the only creature

that wakens this rudimentary instinct. Many women also feel—and often are—possible prey, but does one really want to assert that this feminine fear justifies acting as if women *are* prey or that the only natural response is that of a predator?

In one way or another the claim is constantly made that hunting is an inherent part of our human nature. For example, in his book, *In Defense of Hunting* James Swan asserts that

The hunting instinct is bred into the bones and blood of at least most of us and is one of the most fundamental elements of human nature” (Swan 1995, 176).

For Swan, hunting is not an instinct in the sense that it is inevitable: he clearly sees that it is a matter of choice. He says, “...we exercise more choice and control over our instinct than other animals do”(120) Thus, unlike Causey, he holds that hunting is not outside the realm of morality. Instincts can provide satisfaction and a sense of belonging. “Instincts,” he explains, “are the driving force to satisfy our physiological needs” (144). Here he seems to be referring to our need for nutrition; he ignores the fact that meat is not necessary to fulfill such needs.

Swan sees hunting as a positive good because it not only provides the fulfillment of our physiological needs, but of our psychological needs as well. He says,

Life without hunting is possible. In the near future, we will be able to give up the physical act of sex for reproduction and replace it with sperm banks, test tube fertilization, and surrogate motherhood. A world without hunting or sex is possible, and seemingly safer, but is it desirable? (16-17).

For Swan, the obvious answer is no. He goes so far as to say that “trying to deviate from our instinctual nature [hunting] is a primary cause of mental disease” (175). He corroborates this view by psychological hypotheses rather than by deductive arguments.

In his book *Bloodties: Nature, Culture and the Hunt*, Ted Kerasote makes the same kind of assertions. In response to the criticism of hunting, Kerasote says,

The hunter’s reply [is] that hunting, along with procreation, is *the oldest expression of our genetic nature*....(Kerasote 1994, xvii, my emphasis).

He muses whether a test could be devised “that might locate the ancient compulsion to hunt in the spirals of my DNA” (221) Clearly Kerasote, like Swan, sees hunting as something good, that allows us to “connect” with animals, with nature. The “reward” of hunting, he says, is that it

attaches me to this place and the animals I love, asking me to own what each of us ought to own in some personal way—the pain that runs the world(240).

Obviously if he thinks pain runs the world he has a whole *Weltanschauung* that he had not explained. Why would one want to connect to the pain that runs the world rather than with the joy that is in the world, even if that joy is infrequent?

It is not at all clear how these authors think we can believe that hunting is a basic or fundamental part of our human nature for if it were, one would expect that everyone--or almost everyone--would engage in hunting. If hunting comprises a part of our essential human nature, why is it that only a small percentage of the population hunts? If it is inherent in human nature, why is it not more broadly displayed? We know that hunting is practiced by ever decreasing numbers. Has human nature changed or is it now changing? Furthermore, if it was so much a part of our nature, our common human nature, one would think that it would be more or less the same wherever and whenever it occurs, but that is not true either.

Ortega provides a description and analysis of hunting that avoids at least some of my criticism. Ortega asserts that humans have a dual nature so it is reasonable that not everyone would hunt. He says:

Primitive hunting, however, was not a pure invention of primitive man. He had inherited it from the primate animal from which the human peculiarity sprang. Do not forget that man was once a beast. His carnivore's fangs and canine teeth are unimpeachable evidence of that. Of course he was also a vegetarian, like the Ovidae, as his molars attest. Man, in fact, combines the two extreme conditions between being a sheep and being a tiger (Ortega 1985, 103).

First of all, humans do not really have the fangs of a carnivore. I am not sure if Ortega's comment in the passage quoted above about carnivore fangs and canine teeth refers to an ancient ancestor or to man himself, but in either case, the comment is not based on any evidence for none of the ancestral fossil skulls that have been found possess carnivore fangs or canine teeth that look anything like those of a predator. The canines of a predator are much longer than the other teeth and there is a space on the opposing jaw in which the long canine fits so that the predator can close his mouth. Neither humans nor any of the great apes have such a space.

Ortega's description, however, raises other questions: it is not at all clear what he is talking about when he says that primitive man inherited hunting from a primate animal. The primate animal that was the common ancestor of both human and nonhuman primates is generally held to be an apelike vegetarian. While we know, for example, that chimpanzees will hunt monkeys, meat is a small portion of their diet, just as hunting is not a major activity taking up most of their time.

In general, it is a little strange that Ortega asserts that hunting is inherited since the most famous expression of his philosophy is "Yo soy yo y mi circunstancias (I am myself and my own circumstances) by which he means to show that "human life is not a thing or even a being, it has no nature but we ourselves make it." For Ortega, we are free beings in the most radical sense, because we feel ourselves *fatally* compelled to exercise our freedom. Man is free by compulsion (Ferrater Mora 2003, 164-170).

People who hunt do so not because our very nature demands that we hunt, not because hunting is a basic or inherent human trait, but because hunting is an opportunity offered by our

culture. Hunting is thoroughly ritualized and governed by culture. It is the culture that decrees who hunts, what is hunted, how the hunt takes place, when and where the hunt occurs. In many cases these rules and regulations are imbedded in laws. We are free to take advantage of this cultural opportunity or not.

For the sake of the argument, however, let us agree that hunting is an important part of human nature. What would this show? It would still not prove that sport hunting is to be praised morally or even that moral condemnation is uncalled for. These writers simply assume that if something is a part of human nature it cannot be criticized. This, in itself is a suspect notion for one could argue equally well that human nature is selfish, intolerant, and so forth—traits that are usually condemned. Traits are not understood as good simply because they are considered natural or innate. They are often the very traits we struggle against in an effort to be moral.

Furthermore, even if we admitted that hunting was an important part of human nature, let us call it a kind of biological demand, it would still be possible to refuse it for this is precisely “what human beings do at times. They repress their biological drives in the name of possible actions having some end in themselves, for instance, in the name of knowing for knowing’s sake” (Ferrater Mora 1965, 151). Ferrater speaks of the “repression and sublimation of biological drives” and points out that

...without some transformation of biological impulses there would be no possibility of an ‘objective world’; there would be only what we may call a ‘subjective-biological world’: the world of the species” (151-152).

HUNTING IS AN ANCIENT TRADITION

As if to corroborate their claim that hunting is a part of human nature, many authors point to the long history of hunting, claiming that this history stretches back into the prehistory of mankind and some even assert that hunting was the spur to our evolutionary development from protohumans to modern homo sapiens. Causey repeats with approval the comment of Roger Caras, the former president of the ASPCA (American Society for the Protection of Cruelty against Animals) that “Man did not originate the hunt, rather man originated because his predecessors had learned to hunt” (Causey 1989, 336-7). Swan refers to hunting as “a continuum of human experience that has gone on for millions of years” (Swan 1995, 2). He explains that “Instinctually, we are hunters, and have been since the days of Olduvai Gorge 4 to 5 million years ago” (177). Even Charles List writing in an article entitled “On the Moral Distinctiveness of Sport Hunting” published in *Environmental Ethics* in 2004 writes that

Whether or not one accepts the ‘hunting hypothesis’ which asserts that hunting is causally responsible for the way in which humans developed, it is undeniable that humans have hunted *during all phases of social change and evolutionary development* as one way of providing food (List 2004, 158, my emphasis).

The Hunting Hypothesis was the name given to the ruling intellectual paradigm that accounted for human origins in the early years of paleoanthropology and paleoarcheology (Lewin 1988, 100). In 1924 when Raymond Dart discovered the first australopithecine fossil, known as the Taung child, he was convinced that this early ape-like creature was in fact a human ancestor that walked upright. In his essay “The Predatory Transition from Ape to Man” he wrote that

...man’s predecessors differed from living apes in being confirmed killers; carnivorous creatures that seized living quarries by violence, battered them to death, tore apart their broken bodies, dismembered them from limb to limb, slaking their ravenous thirst with the hot blood of victims and greedily devouring livid writhing flesh (quoted in Leakey and Lewin 1978, 260).

Dart based his ideas on damage he saw in fossilized baboon and early hominid skulls, believing that the early protohumans were cannibalistic and carnivorous (260-261).

Dart’s ideas were known, but not widely accepted until they were popularized in a series of books by Robert Ardrey. In 1961 Ardrey’s *African Genesis* introduced the notion of the killer ape to the general public and became a best seller. *The Territorial Imperative* followed in 1966, the *Social Contract* in 1970 and the *Hunting Hypothesis* in 1976. In the latter Ardrey wrote that “Man is a predator whose natural instinct is to kill with a weapon” (As quoted by Leakey and Lewin 1978, 262) and “Man is man, and not a chimpanzee, because for millions upon millions of years we killed for a living.” (As quoted in Leakey and Lewin 1993, 183). It is not surprising then that in a scientific meeting in Chicago in 1965 hunting was identified as the spur that led early apelike creatures to evolve into modern humans.

These ideas concerning man's predatory nature and the notion that hunting enabled protohumans to evolve an upright stance and large brain are repeated by more contemporary writers justifying hunting. The problem is that scientists have discovered evidence that shows that these ideas, so widely articulated and so sincerely believed by so many in the sixties and seventies, are not valid. Dart, for instance, mistakenly believed that these protohumans had "weapons" that, in fact, they did not possess.

Books and articles questioning this view of early hunting have been published for years, yet Swan in his book published in 1995 still quotes Ardrey's *The Hunting Hypothesis* published some 19 years earlier in 1976. As early as 1969 George Schaller and Gordon Lowthar conducted an "experiment" of sorts by investigating if they could obtain enough food to survive by scavenging rather than hunting. In 1978 Glynn Isaac questioned the view of man the hunter pointing out that it was difficult to know if the meat from the bones that were found came from scavenging or from hunting. "For the present," he said, "it seems less reasonable to assume that protohumans, armed primitively if at all, would be particularly effective hunters" (Lewin, 1988, 101). In the same year, Leakey claimed that

Throughout the whole of humanity's long evolutionary career plant foods have been the primary food: the large size of our cheek teeth and their unusually thick enamel tell us that (Leakey and Lewin 1978, 134).

Lewis Binford went even further. He stated that "Between 100,000 and 35,000 years ago the faint glimmerings of a hunting way of life appear" (quoted in Leakey and Lewin 1993, 188). In 1979 three different sets of researchers discovered that some of the fossil bones bore both cut marks made by stone tools (manmade tools) and teethmarks made by predators. It is generally agreed that when the cut mark made by the stone tool is over, or on top of, the "gnaw mark" that the bone was scavenged from a carnivore (192). "Man the scavenger" doesn't have quite the impressive ring as "man the fearless hunter."

Most scientists now reject the notion that hunting was the engine that spurred human evolution, but writers trying to justify hunting are loathe to accept the scientists' views. If Binford is correct, hunting might have a history as short as 35,000 years, not even the blink of an eye in evolutionary terms, yet those who try to justify hunting still insist on this million year history.

Writings on this notion of scavenging continue. James O'Connell, for example, not only asserts that early humans drove off predators from their kills and scavenged the meat, but he further hypothesizes that such a supply of meat would have been insufficient to maintain the life of tribe members who, unlike apes, were known to share food. (quoted by Bob Holmes, 2006) He believes that the social organization among early humans resembled that of many contemporary hunter-gatherer societies—an idea that is also questioned. In such societies, it is the women and children, who daily gather or collect most of the food that enables them to survive. Hunting may be important in many such societies: hunters are highly praised when they return from a hunt lasting several days with meat, but in such societies meat is a treat rather than the primary source of food. One might ask why this high praise for meat, which is such a small percentage of the diet, or why this praise for male hunters who procure it, rather than for the

women and children who supply the major portion of the food for the tribe, but these are questions for an entirely different essay.

The hypothesis of ancient man as a hunter is rejected by Donna Hart and Robert Wald Sussman in their recently published book entitled *Man the Hunted: Primates, Predators and Human Evolution*. These authors hold that early man, like other primates, evolved as the hunted, not the hunter. Concentrating their study primarily on *Australopithecus afarensis*, Sussman and Hart claim that the latter lacked the teeth and digestive tract to “process a diet of meat.” They also point out that controlled fire, which could have made the meat digestible is not found in the fossil record. The same is true of the weapons or tools that would have enabled these early ancestors to kill large animals. Hart and Sussman assert that human behavior evolved because humans were prey: social living provides protection and thus has survival value for prey animals and is a common response to predatory pressure.

It is fair to say, then, that at least for the present, the hunting hypothesis that claims hunting as that which furthered the evolution of mankind has been rejected by the vast majority of those scientists who are involved with human prehistory. It is a myth. Suppose however, for the sake of the argument that these scientists are mistaken and that hunting is as ancient as some would have us believe. What would that tell us about how we should morally judge sport hunting? Assuming that protohumans engaged in hunting in order to survive, this fact alone would not be sufficient to show that sport hunting in the twentieth or twenty-first Century ought to be morally applauded.

It is true that ancient traditions often appear valuable and worthy of being preserved, but just because a tradition is ancient does not in itself show that that tradition is either good or moral. Slavery, torture, war, rape of enemy women all have long traditions, at least as long as written history and perhaps much longer, but this fact does not allow us to proclaim that these traditions ought to be maintained, or that they are moral. If hunting was at one time necessary for human survival, it is not necessary now and indeed, the tradition of hunting is fast disappearing which is only one more example of the flexibility of human behavior.

HUMANS ARE NATURAL PREDATORS; HUNTING IS PREDATION

In trying to justify hunting, many authors liken human hunters to predators. To do so, however, requires that we ignore a number of facts. Charles List is one of those authors who see just such a similarity. He asserts that “one good obtained by hunting is food” and in this respect, he claims “Hunting by humans has at least this much in common with carnivorous predation by animals in general” (List 2004, 158).

Does List mean, for example, that a human killing a deer is like a wolf killing a deer in that both are obtaining food? To make such a statement overlooks one major factor: namely that the wolf has to kill to survive while a human does not. Humans eat meat for a variety of reasons: we like the taste, we are used to eating meat, it is convenient and so forth, but we would not perish if we did not eat meat. In fact, if we refrained from it, we would have lower cholesterol and probably be healthier. In sum, the biological predator kills to survive and thus out of necessity while humans prefer to kill animals to eat them. Eating meat is a matter of choice for humans. The differences between the true predator and a human acting as a predator are much greater than the similarities. Such a comparison is strained, to say the least. Furthermore, the necessity of the predator to hunt and kill means we do not make a moral judgment on this behavior—we do not condemn the killing because it is, so to speak, in self defense --but since the same necessity does not apply to a human hunting and killing for food, a moral judgment is not misplaced.

From a biological point of view, a human is not a predator. True predatory animals, that is animals that are predatory from a biological or physiological point of view have to have a weapon--or a number of weapons--with which to kill their prey. This is true regardless of whether the animal is a mammal, raptor (bird), fish, or insect. These “weapons” take many different forms such a large shearing or cutting teeth, sharp beaks that tear, claws or talons, paralyzing or poisonous stings, and so forth. The body of the predator must be able to catch and hold, kill and devour his prey. Humans do not possess such weapons: our teeth are much too small, instead of strong claws to grasp our prey we have only vulnerable hands, and so forth. Furthermore, our saliva is unlike that of other mammalian predators and our long intestines mean that meat stays within our body for a long times exposing us to dangerous conditions not experienced by mammalian predators with characteristically short intestines. Physically or biologically, we do not meet the basic requirements of a predatory animal; from a biological or physiological point of view, we are not predators.

Similarly, nonhuman primates, our closest mammalian relatives, are for the most part vegetarian and not predators. Although some chimpanzees have been seen to chase and eat monkeys, it is not their primary diet. At most, some scientists would classify some primates such as chimpanzees, as omnivores.

One could claim, however, that humans are cultural predators. It would be difficult to deny this assertion for while killing weapons are not a part of our body, we have used our brains to produce weapons that kill. From this point of view, one might conclude that humans are the world’s greatest predators. Nevertheless, the production of such deadly weapons are not an inevitable biological heritage, but rather a conscious choice that we have made. If indeed we are

cultural predators, this predation is open to praise or blame; it is not something neutral since we can choose to use our brains for various purposes: we do not have to create weapons that kill. Morality does not condemn the predator that invariably acts on the demands of his physiology, but cultural predation is not necessary: it involves a choice and choices can be condemned. In sum, the notion that human hunting is like the predation of wild animals is a myth.

EXCURSUS

So far I have I have quoted from authors who are explicitly trying to justify hunting. Let me now discuss a very recent (March 26, 2006) article, the lead article in the New York Times Magazine section, by someone who is not necessarily a hunting apologist. This article is an excerpt from a forthcoming book by Michael Pollan entitled “The Modern Hunter-Gatherer.”

If we examine what Pollan says, we find that while we may think that words like ‘instinct’ ‘evolution’ ‘authentic’ or ‘natural’ when used in reference to hunting are outdated or are found only in the passionate writings of those who defend hunting, this is not the case. Such words and the concepts they embody have been widely accepted, even by sophisticated and clever thinkers, who are not specifically trying to defend hunting.

The New York Times Magazine describes Pollan’s article in the following manner: “Seeking a better understanding of his *place in nature* and in the food chain, the author entered the woods of northern California—with a gun” (38, my emphasis). In talking about his heightened awareness of his surroundings on his first hunt, Pollan says that perhaps his experience “is precisely the sort of adaptation that *natural selection* would favor in *the evolution of a creature* who survives by hunting.” (41, my emphasis).

Sounding like Ortega whom he later quotes, Pollan writes, “Searching for his prey, the hunter instinctively becomes more like the animal, striving to make himself less visible, less audible, more exquisitely alert.” Then, revealing his sophistication, he continues:

What a minute. Did I really write that last paragraph? Without irony? That’s embarrassing. Am I actually writing about the hunter’s “*instinct*,” suggesting that the hunt represents some sort of *primordial encounter* between two kinds of animals, one of which is me? This seems a bit much. I recognize this kind of prose: hunter porn. And whenever I’ve read it in the past, in Hemingway and Ortega y Gasset and all those hard-bitten, big-bearded American wilderness writers who still pine for the Pleistocene, it never failed to roll my eyes. I could never stomach the straight-faced reveling in primitivism, the barely concealed bloodlust, the whole macho conceit that the most *authentic encounter with nature* is the one that comes through the sight of a gun and ends with a large mammal dead on the ground—a killing that we are given to believe constitutes a gesture of respect. So it is for Ortega y Gasset, the Spanish philosopher, who writes in his “Meditations on Hunting” that “the greatest and most moral homage we can pay to certain animals on certain occasions is to kill them.... Please (40, my emphasis).

Pollan then comments that “this overheated prose ignorant of irony” may be the best language to describe the hunting experience or it may be—and this is the opinion he seems to favor—that some experiences are quite “different from the inside than the outside” (40). Pollan specifically refers to Ortega’s claim that the animal we hunt brings out the animal in us, but then characterizes it as “atavism pure and simple” while at the same time he notes that Ortega uses the word “authentic.” Pollan asserts that

...I did feel as if I had somehow *entered nature* through a new door. For once I was not a spectator but a full participant in the life of the forest.

Such ideas, claims Pollan, are “much less crazy to me after I had been in the woods that first morning....” (42, my emphasis)

After killing a pig, Pollan writes that he experienced “pride,” as well as “gratitude” and felt “unambiguously happy” without any “remorse” or even “ambivalence” although he had expected to feel these latter emotions. Soon, however, feelings of “disgust” and “revulsion” arise when the pig is being dressed. He asks himself, “What if it turned out I couldn’t eat this meat? Her death then will have been pointless, a waste.” (71) No doubt such comments make sense to Pollan since he writes about food, where it comes from, how cattle are raised, and so forth, but here he is stuck in his anthropocentric universe: the death of the pig is justified if he eats it and a waste if not. His frivolous pleasure in eating something without a “bar code” justified the pig’s death for Pollan even ‘though he knows perfectly well that he doesn’t need to eat meat to survive. He is a “meat-eater” and so killing is justified on the grounds of his choice. Why would a human choice to do something that results in the pain, suffering, and death of another living, highly developed being be justified on the basis of a taste preference, on the basis of a preference to be a meat-eater?

The article ends with a description of Pollan’s pleasure in entertaining his friends and cooking the “perfect meal” that includes the pig he had shot which had a “nutty sweetness that tasted nothing like store-bought pork.” He adds that

I knew the true cost of this food, the precise sacrifice of time and energy and life it had entailed. So perhaps that’s what the perfect meal is: one that’s been fully paid for, that leaves no doubts outstanding (71).

This is, once again although more skillfully expressed, the old idea often repeated by hunters that one must know where one’s food comes from, which means being a hunter. It is never quite clear why this seems so important. Does eating meat killed out of sight by someone else somehow involve some kind of hypocrisy? Do hunters think that hypocrisy is the only--or the major--element that needs to be considered in a discussion of the ethics of meat eating?

Also missing from this article is any realization that a hunter returns to nature only if man is truly a predator, as Ortega seemed to believe. If man is not a predator, then killing one’s own food, is not something natural, but just the opposite

I don’t know if it is quite fair to call Pollan’s article a justification for hunting, but it is certainly not a condemnation of it. It is worth noting that even in 2006 a college professor with a background in writing and environmental journalism still feels it is worthwhile to quote Ortega, to talk of instincts, and to more than hint that there is something authentic about killing your own food, “taking responsibility for the killing that eating meat entails. I wanted, for once in my life, to pay the full karmic price of a meal” (41). Now he is talking of karma? As Pollan himself says, “Oh, please!”

HUNTING IS NECESSARY

Knowing that sport hunting is a matter of choice and thus open to moral criticism, many hunting apologists try to show that hunting is necessary. These arguments take several different forms. Many writers assert that hunting is necessary for we have to eat, but we know now –if we did not know before—that we do not have to eat meat. For example, Swan asserts that “Man has been a natural predator for hundreds of thousands of years and has as much right as any other predator to hunt for food” (Swan 1995, 166). It is a little confusing, however, to find this assertion in a book justifying sport hunting where the meat is not necessarily eaten. The assertion “we have to eat” certainly does not justify trophy hunting.

The popular press repeats the notion that sport hunting is necessary on the grounds that without it we will be inundated with animals. We are told that without hunting, animal populations will soar; we will be up to our necks in deer or geese or whatever. Such animals, it is said, will destroy their habitat, the forests and everything else, creating a kind of wasteland where nothing grows. We are constantly told that since we have killed off most of the predators, we must now manage certain species or they will cause irreparable damage. This argument is especially evident in discussions about deer, a popular “game species.” The newspapers in Pennsylvania constantly talk of the “burgeoning deer herds.” We read that the problem of “overpopulation” exists because we have killed off the wolves, bears or wild cats that would “naturally control” the deer population, keeping it in check. “Deer will continue to overpopulate,” it is claimed, “unless humans step in and take the place of the predators we have eliminated.”

In general, then, the argument holds that since humans have already disturbed the natural world, we cannot simply sit back and do nothing unless we want further degradation of our environment to occur. Sport hunting, we are told, is the only way to “thin the herd” or decrease the numbers. It follows, then, that since hunting is necessary for our own self defense, it should be condoned, not condemned. This “argument from necessity” is fallacious for a number of reasons.

At most, predators may prevent a prey population from reaching a maximum number of individuals, but predators do not control prey populations. The reverse is true: the number of prey animals controls the number of predators. In a natural situation, a decrease in predators may lead to an increase in prey animals, but does not necessarily do so. If the predatory pressure is released, prey animals may temporarily increase, but then shortly thereafter, the number of predators would also increase. This makes sense for the prey are food for the predator and food is a major factor that will influence the number of animals that will be born or that can survive. If predators killed too many –or all their prey—then they would start to go hungry or starve and die. It would be difficult to see how such behavior could ever evolve since it would lead to the disappearance of both the predator and the prey. None of this should surprise us for there is often a kind of balance between predators and prey, a relationship that has evolved over millions of years.

Scientists are very careful when talking, for example, about the effect that wolves, bears, cougars, and other predators might have on the number of deer, saying that generalizations

cannot be made. For example, a deer herd that was heavily parasitized might succumb to predators much more easily than a herd that was not. Similarly a herd of deer living through a severe winter with heavy snows might suffer heavy losses from a pack of wolves. A number of conditions can influence the effect of predation. The belief that predators will control the number of prey animals and keep these numbers low rests on cases where the prey animal was not a native animal. Often the precise effects of predation are not known. What is clear, and what has been known for years, is that the prey population will not necessarily skyrocket in the absence of predators since there are a number of what may be called “intrinsic factors” or “self regulatory mechanisms” that will limit or stabilize an animal population.

Even in the absence of predators, the number of prey animals is limited by factors such as the food supply. It is simply not true that predators are necessary to prevent prey populations from infinitely expanding, and thus it is simply not true that having removed the predators, we must now take their place. This argument attempting to show that hunting is necessary fails: it shows a lack of understanding of the role of predation and either an ignorance or a disregard of those self regulatory mechanisms that limit animal populations from infinitely expanding. The necessity of hunting is a myth.

It is also necessary to understand that humans probably could not, even if they wanted to, duplicate the role played by natural—biological--predators. Predators tend to keep prey herds healthy by eliminating the sick, the injured, the malnourished, and so forth. While no one would deny that predators sometimes kill healthy, mature animals, such animals are not the main source of their food. Predators, even opportunistic predators, primarily kill the sick, the very old, and the very young. Data has shown this to be true again and again. These sick, old and very young are the very animals that human hunters seek to avoid, but even if they did not, many scientists believe that humans probably lack the discrimination to be able to discern which animal has a slight anomaly in its gait due to arthritis or which animal has peculiar eating habits caused by a dental abnormality. Schaller, in his study of lions, said that “The predators weed out the sick, and old, they keep herds healthy and alert.” He adds that predators possess a “discernment which cannot be matched by man; predators are the best wildlife managers” (Schaller 1972, 407). In a natural environment, for the most part, the fittest survive. The reverse is true in most hunting environments since hunters want trophies, big healthy animals, and not infant animals or sick and diseased animals.

Sometimes the myth of the necessity of hunting is expressed in terms that we must kill the animal not to prevent ecological damage, but for the sake of the animal itself so that it does not suffer from overpopulation and ultimately die from starvation. This argument would have us believe that it is more humane to kill the animal than to let it starve to death. The hunter who repeats this argument presents himself as an animal welfarist.

The welfarist hunter who kills animals to save them from the suffering or starvation involves the myth that animals only starve when there are too many—whatever “too many” may mean. In reality, however, hunting does not prevent animals from starving. For example, in a severe winter, deer may starve even if there are only a few of them. Deer have also been known to starve when the snow is deep with food close by. Fawns born late in the year may never gain sufficient weight, no matter how much food is available, to enable them to survive a winter.

They will die whether or not the herd is hunted. Similarly if adult animals are constantly chased by hunters, it is possible for them to use up their supply of stored fat, and starve during a harsh winter. In this case, hunting could cause starvation rather than prevent it.

The welfarist hunter often argues that it is more humane to be shot to death quickly with a bullet or a razor tipped arrow than to die slowly of starvation. It would be interesting to know how the hunter weighs the animal's suffering and comes to the conclusion that starvation causes more suffering. This belief rests on the myth that a hunted animal dies a quick death and ignores the fact that hunted animals are often wounded. If we compare the suffering of the animal that is wounded from a bullet or a razor tipped arrow that is designed to cut through sinew, flesh and nerves—an animal crippled, dying from blood loss or slowly over days from infection with the animal that dies from starvation, it does not seem immediately clear that starvation is the worse fate. No matter who collects the data, hunters always assert that wounding rates are much lower than those published; they do not admit that they wound birds that they never retrieve, that they shoot animals that run off to die in some hidden place, yet one has only to read a hunting magazine to learn that deer hunters, for example, are taught how to follow the blood trail left by a wounded animal. Indeed, by knowing what to look for the hunter can often judge how seriously wounded the animal might be and what part of the body or what internal organ was hit by the bullet or arrow and thus how far the animal might travel.

SPORT HUNTING REDUCES ANIMAL NUMBERS

Nothing would seem more commonsensical than to believe that recreational hunting reduces animal numbers. For each animal that a hunter kills, there is one less animal, so total numbers are reduced. How could anyone argue with that? No one could argue with this myth unless he or she knew something about the population dynamics of animals.

Let me discuss deer as that is the most popular game animal in the United States. If a number of deer are killed or removed from a herd while the food supply remains constant, the deer will tend to reproduce more abundantly because food is a very important factor in reproduction and in this case there is more food for each deer. Does (female deer) will have twins instead of single births, or triplets instead of twins, and they will breed at a younger age. This reproductive increase has, of course, physiological limits. These increases make sense as an evolutionary mechanism that would ensure the survival of the species in case of a natural catastrophe. Game agencies estimate how many animals or more precisely how many male and female animals can be removed without decreasing the total population. They take advantage of these innate mechanisms by limiting not only the number of animals that can be “harvested,” but the number of days in the hunting season, when they may be hunted, and so forth.

Most hunters, for example, in Pennsylvania and elsewhere do not want to shoot a female deer; most prefer to kill a male deer, many want a trophy. This preference has meant that in PA only 3% of the male deer reach full maturity (5 years of age). It also means that with the annual removal of male deer, the natural roughly 50:50 ratio of male to female deer has been upset. Estimates of these ratios range from 5 females to every male to 20 females for every male. After hunting for a number of seasons, it then happens that 70, 80, or even 90 % of the herd may be reproducing instead of the more normal 50% or so. Thus, a number of deer can be killed every year without decreasing the total herd size.

Interestingly enough, it is these very same mechanisms that will limit a herd in times when food is scarce or the density is high. The number of multiple births will decrease, the age at which the first breeding occurs may be delayed for two or even three years, and females may conceive only every other year instead of every year because after the demands of reproduction they have been unable to regain sufficient condition (or weight) to conceive. There is even evidence that “not only may they not reach the threshold weight normally required for ovulation, but that the threshold itself may actually be higher in high-density populations” (Albon et al, quoted in Putman 1988, 113).

Mortality also changes in high density herds. Neonatal juveniles have a high mortality rate in high density herds. This was thought to be due to the mother not being able to get sufficient food to be able to produce enough milk for her offspring, but research has shown that in high density herds, malnourished mothers also do not take sufficiently good care of their young fawns so that there is an increase in their death (Langenau and Lerg, quoted in Putman 1988, 113). In addition, a higher percentage of fawns may not be able to gain sufficient weight to survive their first winter in high density herds.

There are also other behavioral changes that may affect survival in high density herds. In general, aggression increases. Male competition may be so intense that not every female gets bred. Similarly subordinate females may be chased and prevented from breeding. Subordinate females with young fawns may experience increased threats that inhibit her ability to suckle the fawn or care for it properly resulting in increased fawn mortality.

Population size is also influenced by immigration and emigration which are, in turn, triggered by population density. In high density herds, emigration increases.

We can generalize these “intrinsic mechanisms.” With a good food supply or low herd density, reproduction will increase and mortality will decrease which means the herd will increase whereas in a high density herd, there will be increased competition for food, reproduction will decrease and mortality increase which means the herd will decrease.

These mechanisms explain how a deer herd can *stabilize itself* even in the absence of predators. When herds are hunted and individuals are removed (killed) every year, density is reduced and reproduction is pushed to its highest possible rate. These mechanisms explain how it is possible that half million deer can be killed every year in Pennsylvania without a decrease in the herd, estimated to be between one million and one and one half million animals. Sport hunting, as it is practiced in the United States, does not reduce numbers, nor is it intended to do so.

In general, game agencies do not want to reduce the number of game animals. They see hunters as their natural constituents and thus they view their role as providing hunting opportunities, not in trying to reduce the number of game animals. Their own self-interest is also based on hunters since it is hunters who buy licenses and the money from the sale of licenses goes to pay the salaries of those who work in these agencies. (Game agencies in the United States also receive tax money that is levied on sporting goods, ammunition and so forth. This money is collected by the Federal Government and then returned to the various states under the terms of the Robertson-Pittman Act). In order to provide opportunities for hunters, game agencies must maintain sufficient animals so that hunters can find something to shoot and they must make sure that there are animals to hunt each year. Game administrators admit that hunting is like cutting the grass: it is something that must be done every year providing a never-ending opportunity for the hunter.

In Pennsylvania in the hundred years from roughly 1903 to 2003 the deer herd went from nonexistent to over a million animals; deer had to be brought into the state so that hunters could shoot them. This increase in the size of the herd took place despite the fact that the number killed increased almost every year. In fact, deer populations in Pennsylvania and Michigan remain at unnaturally high levels because there has been a concerted effort to manipulate the environment to increase reproduction. By law, the Pennsylvania Game Commission must spend a certain percentage of every dollar gained through the sale of deer licenses on the improvement of habitat. In Pennsylvania this is done by clear-cutting of forests which provides the new shoots, the ideal food for deer. With a steady food supply, deer reproduce at their maximum and next season's hunters are assured that they will have plenty of animals to shoot. Deer hunters

themselves know that they do not want the number of deer reduced for this would make their hunting experience more difficult and they would be less likely to come home with a carcass..

None of what I have said should be understood to claim that hunting could not reduce numbers. In fact, we have lots of examples where commercial hunting has reduced numbers severely and even driven--or almost driven-- animals into extinction. The passenger pigeon is a famous example as are the buffalo (bison) of Yellowstone National Park whose population was reduced from millions to less than one hundred animals.

HUNTING IS MORE THAN SIMPLY KILLING

Almost every hunting apologist acknowledges that hunting of necessity involves killing—otherwise it would not be hunting we are told—but insists that killing is not the most important part of hunting; killing is not the end or goal of hunting it is said.

Ortega insists that killing is not the purpose of sport hunting and is not even an essential part of it, although the death of the animal is the purpose of what he calls utilitarian hunting or what is commonly called subsistence hunting (Ortega 1985, 45). In a widely quoted and often repeated passage he says:

To the sportsman the death of the game is not what interests him; that is not his purpose. What interests him is everything he had to do to achieve that death—that is, the hunt....Death is essential because without it there is no *authentic* hunting: the killing of the animal is the natural end of the hunt and that goal of hunting itself, *not* of the hunter. The hunter seeks this death because it is no less than the sign of the reality for the whole hunting process. *To sum up, one does not hunt in order to kill, on the contrary, one kills in order to have hunted...*What he [the hunter] is after is having to win it, to conquer the surly brute through his own effort and skill with all the extras that this carries with it: the immersion in the countryside, the healthfulness of the exercise, the distraction from his job and so on and so forth (96, my emphasis).

For Ortega, hunting is a kind of escape from the present, everyday world. It is a way of throwing off, for a short time, the problems and obligations of the present prompted by a kind of nostalgia for our ancestral state, for a past that we have moved away from (113). All cultures, claims Ortega, share this dream of an ancient “golden age.” The distant past appears as a simpler and easier time, as an “enchanted island.” Man wishes to return to what Ortega calls “natural man,” which is Paleolithic man (116). The “grace and delight” of hunting are rooted precisely in man’s wish to return to his ancestral proximity to animals, vegetables and minerals—in sum to Nature.

Ortega admits that we would not really be happy if we could return to this primeval state, that hunting is an “artificial return,” and an “enormous anachronism.” He also acknowledges that hunting requires artifice such as the establishment of hunting preserves, and hunting seasons. Nevertheless, Ortega insists that “when man hunts he is doing precisely the same thing that Paleolithic man did.” Even though the weapons have changed and even though the role of hunting is different since for the ancient man it was the center of his life while for the modern hunter it is a temporary suspension of his life as a modern twentieth or twenty-first century man. “The hunter,” says Ortega, ‘is at one and the same time a man of today and one of ten thousand years ago.’”

One might well contend that the differences between the Paleolithic hunter and the modern hunter--which Ortega acknowledges are “decisive”--change the whole nature of hunting. If the Paleolithic hunter is killing to eat, if his continued survival depends on him obtaining his

nourishment from a hunted animal, his attitude is going to be much different than someone engaging in a desire to escape the pressures of modern life. For the ancient hunter, hunting is essential for survival, for the modern hunter, it is simply a diversion. This is the very distinction that Ortega had made between subsistence hunting and sport hunting. Ortega had proclaimed that subsistence hunting was concerned with killing the animal whereas sport hunting is not, so Ortega's own claim that prehistoric man and contemporary man are the same man seems inconsistent.

Even if Ortega insists that this modern diversion we call hunting is something to which men dedicate themselves—even if only for a short time-- and even if it involves hardship, risk and physical effort, although one wonders exactly what the hardships and risks are, still diversion is not the same thing as necessity (20) Furthermore, whatever hunting meant for early man, the danger was real because he did not have the weapons that we now possess. The two experiences are completely different, just as the two hunters are completely different. Even if the hunted animal is the same size, Paleolithic man hunting with stones or crude weapons faced a kind of danger completely unknown to even a big game hunter in Africa or India today with his high powered gun and special bullets.

The notion that the hunter hunts to escape from the modern world and to be one with nature may well reflect what the hunter wants to do and what he thinks or imagines he is doing, but none of this means that that is what is actually happening. This is all part of a myth that modern man can return to Paleolithic man, that despite his high tech bow or gun, despite his razor tipped arrows, despite his camouflage clothes, his portable tree stand, his use of scents to attract an animal or to hide his own scent, he can assume the persona of his ancient ancestor. The modern hunter has to pretend that his life is threatened, that he is hunting a fierce animal, and that the odds in favor of the hunter are limited, but none of this is true. The majority of hunting accidents today are caused by hunters falling out of tree stands, shooting each other or even themselves by mistake. One does not hear of many incidents in which accidents the prey has killed the hunter. Ortega held that the animal had to have some sort of "fair chase"—a condition which he thought was essential to modern hunting., but in almost all modern hunting the animal has little or no chance except for the blunders of the hunter.

I believe Ortega may be correct when he says that hunting is a *wish* to return to a simpler world, to a world in which we feel ourselves a part of nature. The desire to feel ourselves less alienated may be part of what motivates some people to hunt. There are even people in Pennsylvania who declare that they feel closer, not only to nature, but to God. Much of our western tradition, however, has been an effort to see ourselves as removed from nature, above it and superior to it; since we alone are "made in God's image" and we are quite different from the other inhabitants of the earth according to the dominant tradition of the last two thousand years or so.. The modern person cannot forget how we have used our brain, developed science and transformed the world. Now dressed in camouflage, doused in scents to hide his own, employing other scents to attract the animals he wants to kill, peering through high tech binoculars, and using sophisticated weapons modern man tries to convince himself that he is becoming one with nature. To believe that is to believe a myth.

HUNTING TEACHES VIRTUES SUCH AS COURAGE, SELF CONTROL AND PATIENCE

Hunters claim that hunting teaches or develops virtues such as courage, patience, and self control. The hunters' own descriptions of hunting cast doubt on their claim..

Swan, for example, talks of passion as opposed to rationality, saying that "it is in the passions that people achieve their highest potentials of being human (128). He agrees with Yung's idea that "Goodness that is based almost entirely on the intellect and on book learning and is not linked too our *inner nature* ultimately becomes destructive." (My emphasis) To explain our inner nature, Swan quotes Marie-Louise von Frantz who said:

Living means murdering from morning to evening, we eat plants and animals...plants suffer...so vegetarians cannot have the illusion that they do not share in the wheel of destruction. We are murderers and cannot live without murdering. The whole of nature is based on murder....The realization of the destruction and the wish to live are closely connected (132).

Does such a view encourage self control, sympathy and empathy? Doesn't such a view provide a rationale for violence? If we cannot live without murdering, why even try?

How does Ortega describes the peak experience, the excitement of the hunt, called "buck fever" by some and blood lust by others?

Blood, for Ortega, is an essential part of the hunt. When blood is spilled, since it is the liquid that carries and symbolizes life "it produces at first disgust and horror" (91) but this is only a first impression. "If the blood flows abundantly ...it intoxicates, excites, maddens both man and beast." He tells us that "Blood has unequalled orgiastic power" (92). In this connection, Ortega mentions both bullfights and the ancient Roman Games: "the blood of the gladiators, the beasts, the bull operates like a stupefying drug" (91-92)

No doubt Ortega knew that Saint Augustine said much the same thing in his *Confessions* when he wrote about the Roman Games. Augustine related the story of a student of his, later to become a bishop, who accompanied some friends to the gladiatorial games. Augustine described the amphitheater as "seething with the lust for cruelty" while his young friend closed his eyes, determined to ignore the "atrocities" taking place. Suddenly the crowd roared and the young man opened his yes to see what was happening.

When he saw the blood, it was as though he had drunk a deep draught of savage poison. Instead of turning away, he fixed his eyes upon the scene and drank in all its frenzy....He reveled in the wickedness of the fighting and was drunk with fascination of bloodshed...He grew hot with excitement, and when he left the arena, he carried away with him a diseased mind which would leave him no peace until he came back again (VI, 8).

Perhaps both Ortega and Augustine are correct when they talk about the excitement and intoxication of blood. Ortega sees it merely as one part of hunting, Augustine sees it as a kind of disease. Even Pollan writes of the “Dionysian intoxication, the bloodlust that Ortega says will sometimes overtake the hunter” (Pollan, 2006, 68).

Such descriptions do not show that courage, patience or self control are developed. In fact, self control seems to be completely absent. Rather, hunting and blood sports discourage sensitivity and empathy and encourages violence, lack of control, and self indulgence. If the blood of hunting and of the bullfight acts like a “stupefying drug” and “intoxicates and maddens” isn’t this a sufficient reason to avoid such experiences and to condemn them morally? Isn’t this a rather high price to be paid for a diversion, a way of escaping from the world, a choice to eat meat not wrapped in plastic and marked with bar codes?

CONCLUSION

I have tried to show that the foregoing justifications for hunting are myths, and therefore in themselves do not show that hunting is immune from moral condemnation.

There are a number of important and quite different reasons that would support the condemnation of hunting, but that is the material for another paper. I would just mention in passing that hunting 1) involves a completely unnecessary and gratuitous waste of sentient life, 2) upsets the environment in a myriad of ways, 3) institutionalizes and presents violence as recreation and the way to solve problems, and 4) corrupts a common view of dominion over animals into ruthless domination of animals.

In fact, hunting can be condemned on two well-accepted—and rather elemental—principles:

Principle 1: It is wrong to cause sentient beings non-trivial suffering except when it is in the animals' own individual interest or except for some essential moral purpose.

Principle 2: It is wrong to cause sentient beings non-trivial suffering for the purpose of recreation or amusement.

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