

# The morality of hunting

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Dead animals, guns, and a learned love for nature litter my childhood.

Mountain climbers, fishermen, amateur naturalists, and hunters populate my family. My father's grandfather taught him to hunt, and Dad passed this experience on to his son (my brother) and, in later years, to my younger sister. He even got my city-girl mother to shoot her first deer last year.

From this point, one could predict something about my character: I, too, am a hunter. I drive to our nameless “camp” with my parents and siblings every few weekends, hide out in a blind, and shoot an animal. But perhaps I stand out. Perhaps I defy them and oppose their beliefs. Every time the family heads out to hunt, I remain stubbornly in the car. I refuse to consume the venison they collect.

Perhaps I am even a vegetarian. Contrarily, I am neither. I don't like guns and the sight of a bloody carcass faintly nauseates me, but my most beloved meals are venison-based. I do not hunt, but I support hunting. Because of the memorable experiences shared, environmental stewardship provided, and historical background recalled by hunters, this activity is both morally sound and acceptable. If my brother wrote this piece, it would probably begin with a touching account of his first hunt.

Ducks, I believe. Hunters often introduce the children in their lives to hunting this way, indelibly staining that point in their lives. Geoffrey Norman writes in his 1999 essay “Hunting Keeps the Wildlife Population in Check” that he recalls “getting [his] face smeared, when [he] was 12 years old, with the blood of the first deer [he] ever killed” (Norman). James A. Swan remembers a similarly poignant point in his life and records it in his novel cum research

paper In Defense of Hunting: Yesterday and Today (Swan). Though some may think this practice barbaric, the clarity with which these men recall it shows the awe of boys for nature and their lifelong love of that moment.

But was that moment moral? And when Lark Ritchie and Brian Douglas Ritchie defend hunting as “ a tradition” and “ the group experience” (Ritchie), how do they prove that it is ethical? They prove these morals of hunting easily. The personal experiences hunters cherish reflect their respect for nature. They show that hunters do not mindlessly butcher animals, but instead act as respectful predators; they hold a grateful reverence for the animals they kill. Because of this respect, hunters also drive to care for nature. They provide needed services, such as population control.

Many anti-hunting advocates argue that, as Cleveland Amory puts it, “‘ Overpopulation’ is a smokescreen” (“ Hunting Is Immoral”). However, Amory fails to defend this claim; rather, he commits the logical fallacy of evasion by neglecting to address the claim at all. Hunters can actually be some of the best conservationists. Many conservationists also claim that it is actually the fault of the hunters themselves that population problems exist at all. As Peter Muller describes in his essay “ Hunting is Unnecessary and Destructive,” “ Hunters go after healthy big animals for meat and trophies.

This leaves the diseased and congenitally weak animals to breed—thereby degrading the gene pool and spreading disease” (Muller). There lies some truth in his first statement—the entire purpose of trophy hunting is to collect the largest, most prominent specimens. However, this does not hold true for many hunters, those concerned with the longevity of their sport and game.

My own father takes scrupulous care of the land, the people, and, most relevantly, the animals at his hunting camp through a county wildlife preservation program. It deals directly with landowners and hunters in order to educate them about conservation and control of local species. Many programs like this exist nationwide, such as the Federal Wildlife Restoration Program, the National Audubon Society, and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

These projects enable hunters—the responsible, respectful hunters that exist outside of so-called conservationists' field of view—to maintain their prey's vitality and value. Finally, hunters control overpopulation in many ways and for many reasons, as Norman lists in "Hunting Keeps the Wildlife Population in Check." He proves that "the deer population has exploded...because of [man] and his works" (Norman) by giving all the ways in which deer actually benefit from man's actions. He then asserts that, because of humans' responsibility in the "explosion," they must take responsibly for keeping it controlled in the most natural and productive way: hunting. His defense of hunting may seem inhumane, but it always proves more effective compared to other methods of population control.

Norman discusses these "other methods" in his essay, especially in the subsection entitled "Problems with Other Methods of Deer Control." He describes situations in which anti-hunting advocates so detested hunting, even when their communities were overrun with deer, that they would only allow the hapless animals to be killed through "bait and shoot" methods; be rendered infertile through "unwieldy and expensive" contraceptive programs; or be relocated by simply shipping them elsewhere (Norman).

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Apparently, they can accept “ out of sight/out of mind.” All of these alternative methods turn out awkward, costly, or both. The easiest and cheapest method of deer control is to hunt, and to hunt as mankind has for thousands of years.

Famous cave paintings prove that mankind literally has hunted for millennia. Literature and film also tell classic stories of the wild Indian hunting buffalo on the American prairies, turning the animal into a lifestyle. These tales may be romanticized or embellished, but opposition still dwells in debate today regarding their present-day manifestation. Anti-hunting advocates assert that the practice may have been necessary at one point in time, but that none of today’s people need to hunt to survive. Native American families have no more trouble getting food and clothing than anyone else; therefore, they have no more right to kill animals than anyone else.

Besides, modern Native Americans do not hunt on horseback with hand-made bows and arrows; most hunt with guns. These advocates have protested hunting for decades, as shown by the 1870 political cartoon captioned “ A savage pastime; or, the morality of field sports” (see Figure 1). But hunting has survived and thrived due to its common acceptance and historical necessity. Pro-hunters and many Native Americans believe otherwise. The authors of “ Hunting Is Ethical,” Lark and Brian Douglas Ritchie (status Cree Native Americans in Chapleau, Ontario), argue that hunting is “ a morally and ethically acceptable practice” (Ritchie). Although their essay does not specifically address the history of hunting, they clearly contend that the human instinct to hunt was necessary in the past and remains a right of all responsible people.

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In conclusion, hunting is a topic of debatable morality. On one side, anti-hunting advocates believe it is a cruel activity based only on the hunter's enjoyment and with little to no regard for the animal victims. On the other side, hunting is an activity based on awe-filled respect for nature, sentimental values, and admiration for history. For these reasons, hunting is morally acceptable when the participants take part responsibly. Works Cited  
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