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The Ethics of Hunting

I do not feel that animals have rights that are violated by hunters who hunt for food. Human beings have been hunting animals for various reasons since the dawn of time, primarily as a source of food. Humans also have a role to play in the stewardship of the Earth through conservation efforts. Since Humans are one of the most destructive creatures on the Earth, it is our duty to make an effort to ensure that a species does not go extinct due to our activities. Finally, animals do not have rights that can be violated, instead they are subjected to certain obligations. Carl Cohen provides an arguement to prove that animals do not have rights. My claim can be thought of as a blend of utilitarian and deontological ethics.

A hunter who hunts for food, there is nothing morally wrong with hunting, since the hunter will be consuming the animal for food.

A hunter who hunts for food is not committing an unmoral or unethical act, instead they are merely acting in a manner to provide food for themselves or others. Take a look at predator and prey relationships in the wild, it can be seen that hunting is something that occurs on a regular basis. All species on Earth can be observed in some sort of predator or prey relationships, even predators are prey for larger predators. This relationship has come about as a means to support larger, more complex creatures. It also allows for the distinct diversity of species, which has been driven by millennia of natural selection. This process of evolution has led to species who can occupy almost any niche within an environment. Animals also lack a way to rationalize and communicate a way to stop predation from occurring. This rationality, according to Kant, is necessary to have rights. Kant thinks that rationality is what allows Humans to create and have rights, which is why animals cannot have rights. Utilizing an animal as a source of food is not something that a Human needs to be overly concerned about since they lack rationality. Descartes also has similar ideas on animal rights. Descartes views animals as biological robots. This idea is illustrated by the predator and prey relationship. Looking at the way predators hunt prey, it could be inferred that they follow some set of instincts that guide them in the process. Since animals behave in a certain way, the idea of biological robots are not that crazy to conceive. The main objection to hunting comes from animal rights activist.

Animals don’t have rights, Carl Cohen provides an excellent argument to support this claim. He says that animals have obligations, but these obligations do not necessarily entail a right that produces that obligation. He also believes that certain obligations do come from rights, but not all obligations are sourced from a certain right. Cohen thinks that these obligations that stem from a right are a product of a social contract of some sort that entails obligations based on the agreed upon social contract. Also, he goes onto explain that animal rights are a category mistake. His supporting example here is that if animals had rights, then we would need to interfere in predator and prey relations. However, the mere thought of this is absurd, since there are so many relations of this type, and doing so would place ourselves in danger. Building on this as a basis for denying the thought that all animals have rights, certain animals do receive additional obligations to protection based on their population status. An example of this is endangered species, since their existence as a species relies on a dwindling population of breeding individuals. In these situations, the animal only receives these benefits because Humans have stewardship over the Earth, and the loss of a species can have a significant effect on not only the locality, but to humanity as a whole. With the advances of modern medicine and science coming from studying native wildlife in remote or untouched expanses of land, the loss of one species can potentially cause important cures for a disease or illness to be lost forever. This loss has a large enough impact that a utilitarian calculation should be used to give an additional obligation to protect that species. This utilitarian calculation can be combined with a duty ethics approach to support the idea of human stewardship.

All humans are responsible for trying to limit the adverse effects of humanity on the environment, part of limiting that effect is through conservation efforts for various species. Kant outlines the details of deontology, or duty ethics and it is with this ethical viewpoint that human stewardship is created. It is our duty as humans to protect endangered species and to set up conservation efforts so that the planet can sustain all forms of life. Conservation efforts are designed to help managed displaced animal populations and ensuring that these populations do not overpopulate the land that they live on. Conservation efforts have helped establish healthy populations of once endangered, or overhunted species. For example, elk populations are now over 1 million strong, in 1907, there were only an estimated 41,000 left in North America (“25 Reasons Why Hunting Is Conservation”). This conservation of species is based upon utilitarian concepts, since the idea here is that the more species that exist, the better off everything on Earth will be. Hunting plays an important role in conservation efforts since the revenue from hunters generates millions of dollars for conservation efforts as a whole. This money is spent by conservation departments to help improve the land and help conserve other wild species. Looking at this situation from a utilitarian standpoint, hunting generates money that can be spent to better all wild animal populations. Another benefit is that the animal that is harvested can feed needy or hungry Humans, who may not be capable of supporting themselves or their families. While it is true that there is the death of an animal involved, there is nothing that gives a wild animal a right to a long life free of predation. Another important consideration is over population of wild animal populations. If the land can only support 10 deer, and there are 15, those 5 deer that the land cannot support will die slow, painful deaths from starvation, and will impact other creatures as well, since the diets of deer overlap with other wild animals (think acorns and squirrels).

Hunting is a morally acceptable and ethically fine activity to participate in. Animals do not receive any rights, and instead are subjected to obligations. This allows for a utilitarian standpoint that outlines hunting as an act that does not violate animal rights. Following deontological ethics, it is possible to put hunting into a person’s duty to keep themselves nourished (part of taking care of themselves). This also outlines the stewardship that Humans have a duty to uphold. This duty is charged to Humans since we are capable of looking at the bigger picture and being able to see the future of the Earth if we do not protect the planet. This rationality is another key aspect that helps to further deny the concept of animal rights. The argument from absurdity helps to explain this, since if animals have rights then a farmer would not be able to plow a field without being subject to a ridiculous burden of removing any creatures from the field (worms, insects, mice, etc) before being able to cultivate the field to help feed an ever growing population of Humans.

Works Cited

1. 25 Reasons Why Hunting Is Conservation. (n.d.). Retrieved May 5, 2015, from <http://www.rmef.org/Conservation/HuntingIsConservation/25ReasonsWhyHuntingIsConservation.aspx>