Chapter 25

On Hunting: Lions and Humans as Hunters

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Abstract This is an interrogation of some commonly cited intuitions about killing animals, enjoying killing animals, and enjoying eating animals. It concludes that intuitions are the only possible philosophical guide through this territory. Accordingly if intuitions cannot be trusted, moral arguments about the killing of animals and related matters are likely to be fruitless.

25.1 Introduction

Lions hunt. Few would try to stop them doing so. But many try to stop humans hunting.

Why this difference? There are several possible reasons:

- a. It might be said that lions have to hunt, because if they do not, they will starve. This is not true of most modern human hunters. I therefore exclude from this discussion those human hunters who would starve if they did not kill animals, simply noting as I exclude them that, by exempting such hunters from any blame, we are accepting that the loss of an animal life is justified if the loss is necessary in order to save a human life. At the start, then, we have a normative assumption, which is almost universally shared, that humans are more valuable than non-humans.
- b. It might be said (and this is a point that relates closely and obviously to the first), that hunting is of the essence of the lion, whereas it is not of the essence of the hunter. One could not have a vegetarian lion, not only because a lion that ate only vegetation would die, but because killing is so quintessentially part of a lion's

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constitution that to make it vegetarian would be to un-wish it. A vegetarian lion would not be a dead lion; it would not be a lion at all.

This (the argument would go) is not true of humans. All of us know many human non-hunters, and they are not obviously non-human: it is not obvious that they are not thriving in the way that humans are intended to thrive.

The hunter's riposte would be simple contradiction. 'You are wrong', he (and it usually is a 'he') would say. 'Hunting and human identity are inextricably connected, in exactly the same way as hunting and lion-identity are connected. Excise the hunting from humans, and you will incurably damage human identity – and hence the ability of humans to thrive.'

Both the hunter's and the anti-hunter's claims are essentially empirical, but of course they are not the sort of empirical claims that can easily be empirically investigated. That is the justification for the form of my argument in this chapter, which is (unusually for a philosophy book) autobiographical and personally reflective.

- c. It might be said (and this is a point that relates closely and obviously to the second) that the real moral offence in human hunting lies in two facts: (i) that the human *enjoys* the process; and (ii) that the enjoyment is the primary reason that the human hunts. Lions may enjoy the hunt, but that is not their main motivation. It is more usual to see this argument as a slogan than a carefully examined proposition. Rarely does the proponent of the argument mean that they are against human enjoyment per se. They would be perfectly content if the hunter gained pleasure equal to that of hunting from simply going for a walk in the countryside. The argument is instead that there is something illegitimate about the particular type of pleasure that results from hunting. Here, of course, there is again an empirical assumption about the type of pleasure that this is. And in the articulation of that assumption (on the rare occasions when articulation is demanded), slogan again often predominates. It is often argued, for instance, that it is obscene for humans to get pleasure from any activity that involves the (avoidable) death of a non-human animal. This argument can only consistently be maintained by those who also argue for vegetarianism (and possibly veganism too), for the eating of a steak is distinctly pleasurable to many, and yet involves the avoidable death of a non-human animal. But a steak-eating objector to hunting might nonetheless say that there is a particular form of obscenity involved in *active* participation in killing, or at least in proximity with the death itself. This argument, in its simple form, would seem to entail moral condemnation of slaughterhouse workers, but not fix with vicarious moral condemnation those who enjoy the fruits of the slaughter house. And that, surely, is problematic. But if we remember that the real objection is to enjoyment of the process of killing, that problem at least evaporates. Even if we enjoy steak, we would condemn a slaughterman who got a thrill when he slit the cow's throat. That kind of thrill, we would say, is not at all the same as the kind of pleasure that we get when we eat a steak. Since it is not the same kind of pleasure, it is not wrong on the grounds of commensurability of pleasures for us to enjoy a steak. (It may well be wrong on other grounds).

Note that the harm done to the cow by the thrill-seeking slaughterman is the same as that done by a reluctant slaughterman. Philosophers might say that the cow killed by the thrill-seeker has sustained a *wrong* in a way that the cow killed by the reluctant slaughterman has not—since the first cow has been a vehicle for an illegitimate pleasure. But this analysis—though traditional—takes us nowhere. The real objection to the thrill-seeking slaughterman, as to the thrill-seeking hunter, is one based squarely on another set of normative assumptions—this time about the kind of character that decent humans should have, and hence the kind of behaviour that they should demonstrate. Like most moral assertions, it rests on an intuition. In this case the intuition is that decent humans should not enjoy the process of killing another creature. It is hard to interrogate this intuition robustly without making some assumptions (which are religious or anthropological or both) about the sort of creatures that humans are and should be. And hence the debate between the hunters and the anti-hunters becomes shrill and intellectually uninteresting: there is simply a stand-off between those who insist that humans shouldn't enjoy the business of killing animals, and those who insist that there is nothing wrong with that enjoyment. It is an argument of the 'O yes it is', 'O no it isn't', type.

To break out of this tedious and sterile debate it is necessary to look harder at the underlying intuitions. I start by examining my own. I then move to a consideration of the work of José Ortega y Gasset. He took more seriously than any other modern philosopher the argument that the enjoyment of hunting might be a reason to commend rather than condemn hunting. He alone, then, addressed squarely the really problematic argument—my point (c).

I do not address here the argument that hunting, even if intrinsically morally offensive, is justifiable on other grounds—for instance that culling is necessary to ensure the health of an animal population or an ecosystem, or that it brings much needed funds into an economy. Such arguments will turn on the facts pertinent to the particular case being considered, on the philosophical worth that one attributes to the relevant utilitarian calculation, and on the theory of value that one uses in weighing the moral offence of the human hunter against the harms or wrongs that may result if the hunting is not permitted. The most interesting of these issues (the issue of the theory of value) is necessarily considered as I address the issue of enjoyment. Whether or not some variant of utilitarianism is the best way to approach these questions is a generic issue: hunting does not raise any novel difficulty in relation to the way the issue should be approached.¹

¹For overviews of the arguments regarding the ethics of sport hunting, see Dickson, B. 2009. The ethics of recreational hunting. *Recreational hunting, conservation and rural livelihoods: Science and Practice* 59–72; Gunn, A. S. 2001. Environmental ethics and trophy hunting. *Ethics and the Environment* 6 (1): 68–95; King, R.J. 1991. Environmental ethics and the case for hunting. *Environmental Ethics* 13 (1): 59–85; Varner, G. 2011. Environmental ethics, hunting, and the place of animals. In *The Oxford handbook of animal ethics*; Loftin, R.W. 1984. The morality of hunting. *Environmental Ethics* 6 (3): 241–250; Gibson, K. 2014. More than murder: Ethics and hunting in New Zealand. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 31 (4): 455–474; Causey, A. S. 1989. On the morality of hunting. *Environmental Ethics* 11 (4): 327–343.

25.2 Confession and Reflection

I have killed many animals. I started when I was very young. As a boy I shot rabbits and birds; I trapped, fished, and followed hunting hounds. I continued as an adult. I am too ashamed now to want to give many details, and do not need to confess for the sake of absolution. But I have ridden after foxhounds and staghounds, run after hare-hunting beagles, crawled through the African bush in search of plains game, shivered before dawn in trenches on the foreshore as I waited for the geese to come in from the sea, wandered around the hedgerows in the evening in hope of a pigeon or two, and (fanatically, year after year) stalked red deer in the highlands of Scotland. I have spent many an evening in pubs in the Lake District after a day's fell foxhunting, singing songs about epic hunts of old, and cheering when the hounds in the song caught up with their fox and 'broke him up' on the mountain side.

There are no doubt many levels of explanations for this behaviour, and probably my own view about why I engaged in it is the least likely of all views to be accurate. The more emphatic someone's assertion about their motive, the less likely it is to be credible. But it does seem to me that its root was a desire for an intimate connection with the natural world, and for the self-knowledge that is impossible without that connection.

This will sound perverted to many, and certainly there are perverted variants on the theme. If I said, for instance, that the death of a creature was the most tectonic, fundamental thing about its life apart from its birth, and thus to be an agent of its death was to be involved with the creature more intimately than any animal apart from its mother ever had been, I would rightly be characterised as a Nietzschean psychopath. But it wasn't that. It was a desire grounded in the basic Darwinian knowledge that these creatures were my close cousins, and I therefore needed to know them in order to know myself: to know what sort of creature I was, where I had come from, where I would be going (the same way as all those dead animals, in fact) and hence where my home really was. Only if I knew these things would real relationship be possible, and relationships, I knew even (or particularly) as a very young child, were the whole point of being alive. I hunted, therefore, to describe and to situate myself.

The suffering and death of sensate creatures might seem a high price to pay for this self-knowledge. To kill something to know oneself sounds monstrous: on an obscene par with Raskolnikov. I cannot pretend that it is not. All I can say is that that is how it is, and that the fact that that is how it is is a consequence of the interconnectedness of things.

No other way seemed possible. A man with binoculars isn't as *involved* with the deer he's watching as the same man watching the same deer through the sights of a loaded rifle. With the dreadful squeeze of the trigger finger comes the knowledge of shared destiny: one day the trigger will be squeezed on me. No evasion is then possible, either for the deer or for me: no physical or psychological evasion; no pretentious philosophising. The bullet tells it the way it is.

I tried less violent ways of getting close to the wild. I watched, collected, swam, crept, and slept out. I still do. My boyhood bedroom was full of skulls. Crudely

stuffed birds, suspended on thread, hovered over my bed. I spent my pocket-money on glass eyes and formaldehyde. But none of it worked. My incurably reductionist, linguistically-tyrannised brain kept me from getting close to the sensory worlds occupied by non-human animals. I couldn't live in the same woods or rivers as they did. We could only really meet in the killing fields. We shared DNA and death, and not much else.

This all sounds dreadfully earnest: the stuff of morbid psychopathology. It was indeed serious. Though not (though I would say that, wouldn't I?) morbid. Partly the earnestness was because I knew that unless I learned about myself and about how to relate, I was done for. But there was a moral earnestness too, manifested in ceremony and fastidiousness. There was no Dionysiac revelling in my hunts: they were all sedate and Apolline. The death was always a source of real regret and remorse. I have always thought obscene those triumphalist photos of smiling hunters crouching fatly behind an animal, shot at no risk to them (cf. Kalof and Fitzgerald 2003). I can never quite choke down the thought that the animal lived a much more satisfactory life than those hunters ever could. I was not surprised to learn that many indigenous hunters pray before a hunt for the animal to be delivered up to them, and afterwards for protection from divine or ghostly anger. When, in Africa, I saw for the first time the Continental practice of putting a respectful sprig of vegetation on the dead animal, I gratefully recognised the sentiment. My childhood and adolescent hunting diaries are achingly meticulous. Every detail is laboriously recorded: weather; how I got there and back; which hounds made the running; even what was in my sandwiches. It seemed to me that I owed this care to the animal. It was no small thing to take its life: the least I could do was to document the death carefully.

I think that this ethos is unusual amongst modern western hunters. It is certainly the norm for most indigenous hunters, and I suspect that it was the norm for most of human history. If that suspicion is right it might be said to ground an ethical argument.

The argument would go something like this: Suppose that we have been behaviourally modern for around 40,000 years (which is more or less the consensus, at least in relation to humans in Europe). Assuming that a generation is 20 years, that is 2000 generations. Assume (wrongly, and over-generously to Neolithic people) that the Neolithic revolution (which involved settlement, planting, and the domestication of livestock) happened everywhere in the world simultaneously 10,000 years ago, and put an end to hunter-gatherer life styles then. There have, then, been 500 non-hunter-gatherer generations out of the 2000 behaviourally modern human generations. We spent our formative years as hunters. Our anatomy, physiology and psychology were all designed to hunt and to survive being hunted ourselves. We are both predator and prey. In our personal, modern, formative years we are hunters too: watch any child, uninhibited by tyrannous education. Our behaviour recapitulates our evolutionary history, just as Ernst Haeckel thought that embryos did. Since we are quintessentially hunters, we will not be properly ourselves unless we hunt. Any scheme of ethics has to deal with that inescapable fact. A scheme of ethics that presupposes that we are something other than what we are is pointless: ethics must deal with the facts as they are: with the world as it is; not with some pastiche. And therefore (goes

the final step in the argument), no correct ethical code could unwish our predatory instincts. To do so would be to unwish ourselves: to cause the subject of our ethical deliberation to evaporate, making that deliberation pointless (cf. Cahoon 2009). It follows that the ethics of hunting should be directed towards the regulation of hunting, not its abolition.

I have some sympathy with this argument, but the sympathy does not (now) amount to agreement. To say that something is atavistic is to describe its origins: to give an account of origins says nothing necessarily about ethics: to explain is not necessarily to excuse. To a first degree of approximation, the whole business of ethics and law is about the reining in of tendencies, not their licensing. Unless it can be established (and it plainly cannot), that the hunting instinct is a type of automatism, then our biological history can only mitigate the moral offence of killing another sensate creature, rather than constitute a defence to that offence.

If the argument worked, it would amount to a blanket defence for hunters. Even those who hunted purely for enjoyment could avail themselves of it. But I do not think that it works, and I am back where we started: hunters who need to hunt need no defence, and hunters who hunt simply because they enjoy hunting need to look elsewhere for their justification.

I no longer hunt. My reasons for stopping were not (or not mainly) philosophical. Nor did I have an epiphany such as John Fowles had. Horrified by the suffering of a broken-winged bird that he had shot, he hung up his guns there and then. I would like to be able to claim such a conversion, but mine was less dramatic. I simply got tired of killing things. I began to think I had killed enough, and I understood 'enough' to mean that there was a diminishing return from the deaths: I was not learning sufficient new lessons from the deaths, or bolstering my knowledge of old lessons, to make the deaths morally justifiable. This presupposes, of course, that I had concluded that the deaths were morally significant. I had: and cannot remember a time when I did not believe this. This was not based on any conviction about animal personhood. I am now convinced that at least some animals should be regarded as persons, but it is not necessary to believe this in order to believe that to kill an animal requires moral justification. I have not been helped at any stage by the complex and tortured philosophical literature on animal personhood: none of it does any real work for me.

All my reflection on the reasons for giving up hunting was *ex post facto*, after I had given up. Perhaps this disqualifies me from commenting on the morality of hunting. Nonetheless, and mainly because I have been asked to, rather than because I feel any great psychological or intellectual imperative to do so, I will continue for a while to comment.

Today my only hunting is vicarious. I get other people (other hunters, farmers, and butchers) to do my killing for me. I try to eat the flesh only of animals that have been happy, and have died well, and I only eat it in the context of a big celebration. For a dead animal to be defensibly on the dinner table, there must be a great deal of consequential human pleasure. Meat is for high days and holidays, not for a slumped midweek dinner. That would be disrespectful: not consonant with the animal's dignity or mine.

It follows that I have no Kantian qualms about using an animal as a means to an end. My concern is to ensure that the end is proportionate to my valuation of the animal's life. Two things follow from this.

First: one justification of meat-eating (which I find convincing), and one justification of some types of hunting (which, when it applies, may sometimes be convincing), is that unless humans eat meat, agricultural animals (for example) will not exist. Since the lives of at least some of those animals have more pleasure in them than pain, their deaths are justified, since without those deaths (and the agricultural system which abets those deaths), there would be, net, less animal pleasure in the world.

Second: Hunting purely for fun isn't *necessarily* unethical. To establish that it is ethical the fun would (as in my dinner party example) have to be very intense fun, of a sort that itself increased the net amount of good/pleasure in the world (ruling out, for instance, sadistic pleasure in killing or hurting). There are two notable philosophers who have looked seriously at this possibility without becoming mired in the morass of animal personhood. They are Roger Scruton and Ortega y Gasset. Scruton's work is, to my eye, derivative from Ortega y Gasset, and so rushed and superficial a derivation that while it is eye-catching and useful for polemicists, it is unlikely to make many vegetarians put on their red coats, or strengthen anything other than the ardour of hunting's apologists (Scruton 1998). Ortega y Gasset is a different matter. He deals fearlessly and fundamentally with the suggestion that human pleasure in hunting might be a sufficiently potent justification. I come to him in a moment. But first a point must be made about herbivorous animals.

This is simply that, if the teleology can be forgiven, they exist for two purposes: to unlock the energy of the sun that is trapped by plants, and to transmit that energy to others. As to the first purpose, the energy is sequestered inside the cellulose walls of plant cells: herbivore digestive systems can break down those cell walls and release the energy. As to the second purpose, the digestive systems allow the energy to be transmitted to the herbivore itself, and then on, up the food chain, to anything that eats the herbivore. These two purposes have made herbivores what they are: have conferred their shape, their speed, their cunning, and all other aspects of their behaviour, their anatomy, and their physiology. Deer have been shaped by wolves (and wolves by deer). If deer were not edible, they would not be the way they are. They would not be deer at all. To unwish the teeth and the hunger of wolves is to unwish deer. It is not so inaccurate to say that deer exist to be killed. This biological fact (which turns out to be an ontological fact), is the hinterland from which Ortega y Gasset's *Meditations on Hunting* emerges.²

²Originally published as a Prologue to *Veinte Anos de Caza Mayor* (Edward, Count Yebes, Madrid, 1943) All citations here are from Ortega y Gasset 1972.

25.3 On Ortega Y Gasset's *Meditations on Hunting*

Ortega y Gasset refuses to embark on a systematic philosophical exploration of the subject of hunting. This refusal gives me confidence that my own refusal is intellectually reputable. Ortega y Gasset thinks that a rigorous exposition would be impossible because hunting, at bottom, is concerned with two issues that are definitively imponderable—death and Otherness: "...death is the least intelligible fact that man stumbles upon. In the morality of hunting, the enigma of death is multiplied by the enigma of the animal" (Ortega y Gasset 1972, 103). Add agency into the mix and the mystery becomes even more impenetrable: "...[D]eath is enigmatic enough when it comes of itself – through sickness, old age, and debilitation. But it is much more so when it does not come spontaneously, but instead is produced by another being" (ibid.).

With one important caveat, he successfully resists the temptation to philosophise, but he is clear about what needs to be defended—whether philosophically or in any other way: it is the ecstasy that comes from hunting.

Dionysios is the hunting god: 'skilled cynegetic' Euripides calls him in the *Bacchantes*. 'Yes, yes' answers the chorus, 'the god is a hunter'. There is a universal vibration. Things that before were inert and flaccid have suddenly grown nerves, and they gesticulate, announce, foretell. There it is, there's the pack! Thick saliva, panting, chorus of jaws, and the arcs of tails excitedly whipping the countryside. (pp. 89–90)

This ecstasy is only possible if humans are they they are meant to be, and do what they are meant to do: they are meant to be fit, brave, resolute, and principled—even out in the wilderness where no one can see if they are adhering to the hunters' code of honour (p. 35).

It entails energetic commitment to an act, which Aristotle and all happiness theorists since have insisted is essential to human thriving. But the ecstasy does not *consist* of fitness, bravery, and so on. It consists instead in immersion in a hot numinous bath. Its effect is to put man in his place: to restore his relationship with the natural world: to truncate his hubris. It is, ironically, a cure for the presumption that can flow from Genesis 1's urge to dominate and subdue. The Dionysiac ecstasy is ecstasy in the literal sense: standing outside oneself—a process that diminishes self-obsession and increases a sense of connectedness with the rest of the world.

Strictly speaking, the essence of sportive hunting is not raising the animal to the level of man, but something much more spiritual than that: a conscious and almost religious humbling of man which limits his superiority and lowers him towards the animal. (p. 111)

If hunting really produces this sort of ecologically realistic humility, there would be a compelling case for it. It would save many animals, many habitats, and many human souls. It would inhibit the drive to mastery: the hunter's natural place would not be astride a horse, but on his knees. If Ortega y Gasset's prescription works, it may be because (as my own experience sometimes suggested) there is in hunting a constant reminder of Mortality—and hence of one's own mortality. "Life is a terrible conflict", writes Ortega y Gasset, "a grandiose and atrocious confluence. Hunting submerges

man deliberately in that formidable mystery and therefore contains something of religious rite and emotion in which homage is paid to what is divine, transcendent, in the laws of Nature" (p. 112).

It is easy to parody this. Indeed it is not easy, when one is attempting to argue rigorously, not to do so. It is also hard not to compare it unfavourably with the reality of many hunts: with the snobbery, the fat red faces, the big lunches, the screaming dismemberment, the broken-winged bird crouched in the bracken. Both the parody and the comparison should be resisted. There is a serious point being made here, about serious hunts by serious people. It is the red faces and the picnic basket that are the distortions (or so Ortega y Gasset would say).

Perhaps all this is not so far from my own speculation about humans as quintessential Upper Palaeolithic hunters, and hunting necessary as an expression of that nature, and an expression of that nature as necessary for personal integration and hence personal and corporate morality. I don't know, because Ortega y Gasset's formulation is by definition inaccessible to this (or any) sort of interrogation. It may be contemptibly weak as a result. It may also be indestructibly strong. How could we know?

There is one point at which Ortega y Gasset, neglecting his own injunction to himself not to philosophise, does move into territory where he is vulnerable to the ordinary dialectical weapons. In a passage reminiscent of C.S. Lewis's (1940) speculations about animal suffering, he asks: "...is it so certain that the beast is afraid? At least his fear is not at all like fear in man. In the animal fear is permanent; it is his way of life, his occupation. We are talking, then, about a professional fear, and when something becomes professional it is quite different." (pp. 90–91; cf. Scruton 2002).

One might have thought it tactically unwise for Ortega y Gasset to have exposed himself in this one place, since to be humiliatingly contradicted there might impeach the rest of his case, which otherwise would have remained subject to the absolute immunity to emphatic contradiction enjoyed by all metaphysics. But in fact it was shrewd, for his argument is surely both right in fact (it is, in essence, the same point that I have made above: herbivores are professional die-ers), and necessary to his frankly religious case—since in order to establish that his religion is good and not evil, and since nothing can be said about the goodness or evil of death, *something* has to be said about the magnitude of the animal suffering that has to be offset in the ethical calculus against the goods that result from the Dionysiac ecstasy.

Ortega y Gasset's non-argument is, it seems to me, the only argument that can be made for the ethics of sport-hunting. Yet the uncertainties inherent in it (indeed which are necessary to it) leave me queasily unconvinced. Ortega y Gasset himself seems to acknowledge that this will be (indeed probably should be) the case. "Every good hunter is uneasy in the depths of his conscience...He does not have the final and firm conviction that his conduct is correct. But neither...is he certain of the opposite..." (p. 102).

The precautionary principle does not help us out of this bind, since we do not know what is at stake. Perhaps by choosing not to hunt we are endangering ourselves and

countless non-human animals. Perhaps by choosing to hunt we are killing persons who will revenge themselves eternally.

On the question of the ethics of *enjoying* hunting, then, we are no further forward. Argument tells us much less than our intuitions.

We shouldn't dismiss or denigrate our intuitions. They are ancient, and informed by a great multitude of sources. When assessing the value of an intuitive moral hunch, it is reassuring if the hunch is shared by others whose values and behaviour are generally commendable and have stood the test of time. Which takes me back to lions.

25.4 Another Look at Whether Lions Should Be Allowed to Hunt

If it is wrong for lions to hunt, even if they have been designed by Darwin to do so, and would die if they didn't, it seems probable that it is wrong for human hunters to hunt for mere fun.

There is an ancient and venerable line of authority that suggests that lions are not meant to hunt, that teeth are not meant to be sharp, and that co-operation and altruism, rather than competition, suffering, death, and waste, are the main fuel of the complexity-generating machine that is evolution. It is in the first of the two Hebrew creation stories in the book of Genesis. Genesis 1: 20–27 tells how all living things, including man, were created. In verse 18, man is given dominion. But very plainly this dominion does not include killing animals, for at this point *all* creatures are vegetarian. “And God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so” (Genesis 1: 29–30 [RSV]). In verse 31 God surveys everything that he has done, and concludes that ‘it was very good’. What is ‘very good’ is a regime in which there is no predation, and where the only food is plants.³

But it all goes catastrophically wrong. Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, and are expelled from the garden. The whole of the created order is warped by their disobedience. But this does not cause a fundamental change in the divine mind. It is not until Genesis 9 that Noah is told that he can eat flesh as well as plants, but this is by way of a rather grudging dispensation (Genesis 9:3). It is not the way things are meant to be. The old intention is remembered in solemn edicts about the value of life and the shedding of blood: “Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man's brother I will require the life of man.” (Genesis 9: 4–5). Blood taboos are prominent in subsequent biblical edicts. They are

³The second of the two creation stories is silent on this issue: see Genesis 2: 4–25.

meant to be intrusive and inconvenient. Their purpose is to remind humans that the state of affairs in which blood is shed was not the original plan. No blood is to be eaten (Leviticus 17: 10–14); there are laws dealing with menstruation (Leviticus 15: 19–30) and peri-parturient bleeding (Leviticus 12: 1–8). Predation itself was never part of the plan, and the Hebrews are reminded of this by the prohibition on eating birds of prey (Leviticus 11: 13–19).

Far from teeth and claws being of the essence of lions, teeth and claws diminish them: de-lion them. How much more, if that's right, must a Parker Hale .308 de-humanise and diminish an omnivorous human.

I can't lift my own morality direct from these verses. They are too strange. Nor have they consciously informed my own thinking. But I am reassured by the concurrence of my intuition and the tradition. I note that the Noahide dispensation has never, in any of the subsequent Talmudic disputation, been thought to accommodate recreational hunting.

25.5 Hunting and the Anthropocene

Nobody denies that we are in a historically unprecedented and vertiginous age ('the Anthropocene'), characterised by anthropogenic ecocide, which (since the gods tend to punish hubris very ruthlessly and efficiently) may well lead to our own extinction. There is much discussion about when the Anthropocene started. The least popular suggestion is William Ruddiman's (2003): the Anthropocene started sometime in the Neolithic. The broad consensus is represented by the Anthropocene Working Group (AWG) of the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy of the International Commission on Stratigraphy, which voted for an as-yet-unspecified start date in the middle of the twentieth century (Subramanian 2019). Ruddiman is surely the nearest. Yet even his date is too late.

When *Homo sapiens* first arrived in South America and Australia (the dates are contested, but the date is almost certainly prior to Ruddiman's Anthropocene date) large animals were quickly decimated. The men were intoxicated by the sight and the taste of all that easy, lumbering flesh: the animals (unlike those of Africa and Eurasia who had known for millennia the sorts of creatures we are), were fatally naïve (Tudge 1999). If you were large and edible in late Pleistocene Argentina you would disagree with the AWG. The AWG's date seems to be a symptom of shifting baseline syndrome. The right baseline is not the already devastated world of the twentieth century, but the world of the Upper Palaeolithic, when you could have walked between Pacific islands using the backs of turtles as stepping stones.

The speed and size of those early American and Australian killings mark three massive and repercussive changes in human hunting history. First: The human populations concerned weren't large, and killings on that scale were unnecessary. Previous killings had been necessary. Second: because of the naivety of the animal populations, the killings were easy. Previous killings had been hard. And third (a guess): the killings (unlike the previous killings) weren't reverential, fearful, or sacramental.

There weren't prayers over the corpses, or oblations or sleepless nights. There were just too many dead animals for that sort of cult to be sustainable. Since cult sustains ethos and mindset, humans became casual killers. You can only kill casually something of which one is not a part, and so the casualness prised humans out of their place in the natural world. Now they stood outside it, arrogant and cruel. The Upper Palaeolithic hunters became petroleum executives, and the Anthropocene had begun.

It might be said that good, respectful, quaking, humble hunting might help to turn back the clock; to re-educate us; to re-forge proper relationships with the non-human world. And for some individuals it might. But it is too risky to advocate this as a strategy. Blood is heady stuff. It does unpredictable things to humans.

25.6 Conclusion

I agree with Ortega y Gasset: There can be no firm philosophical conclusion.

I disagree with y Gasset: sport hunting is not acceptable. I cannot demonstrate this conclusion: I can only give an account of the intuitions which tend towards it, and some of the arguments that, while not capable in themselves of making out the conclusion, might be said to buttress the intuitions.

I am uncomfortable about killing animals. I have sold my guns. This makes me feel better. It makes me feel more myself, not less. I can say little more than this.

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