

The Moral Basis for Public Policy Encouraging Sport Hunting

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I will approach the issue of the morality of sport hunting (hereafter simply "hunting") slantwise. Rather than focusing on whether hunting is right or wrong, I will focus on whether governments ("the state") are right or wrong to promote hunting when it is a dying cultural practice. In Canada alone, where hunting is traditionally very important, hunter numbers are down by half in about a decade.¹ Letting hunting die a natural death, either because we have morally matured in accord with the evolution of our cultures, or because we have simply no time for it or no interest in it, would be the pragmatic solution to the theoretical problem. The central question here then is, by what moral right does the state promote the practice of hunting for sport when it is in deep decline? The obvious subtext concerns whether one of the two contending philosophical views on the morality of the practice gets more purchase if it can be shown that the state is on shaky moral ground when it proselytizes on behalf of hunting.

Why Is Hunting Controversial?

That hunting is highly controversial is without question. Virtually all areas of North America have their acrimonious disputes between pro- and antihunting factions, many of which perdure for years. Recent or current examples include the debate about wolves in Ontario, about grizzlies in Alberta and British Columbia, about the spring bear hunt in Colorado and Ontario, and about doves in Michigan and Wisconsin. The warmth of debate is sometimes such that whole regions (e.g., Massachusetts about whitetails in the Quabbin dispute) or even nations (the United Kingdom over foxhunting) are polarized. The issue unleashes such passion as it does in ordinary people because, for most of them, it is a moral matter. Precisely what the moral matter is varies from person to person. The arguments are for or against anthropocentrism and resourcism, the presumption to manage scientifically, the wildness or constructedness of "nature," animal rights versus human rights, hunters' rights versus nonhunters' rights, a gun culture versus another sort of culture, etc. Hunters appeal to traditional values, hunting as character and skill building, as nurturing a proper relation to nature and promoting one's spiritual and aesthetic impulses, as providing a healthy outlet for a biological cum psychological imperative, as concerned with the good of species, and as promoting widely shared conservation goals. Antihunters argue for "letting nature be," human harmony with the rest of nature, animal rights,

the harmful consequences of hunting to hunters (“brutalizing” them) and to society (“naturalizing violence”), etc. The controversies are heated precisely because they touch upon deep and central moral beliefs about nature, animals, and humans.

Why Do So Many North American Governments Support Hunting, Even Though It Has Become a Morally Controversial and Politically Sensitive Issue?

1. Economic and Political Considerations

Although hunting is a matter of public controversy, for the most part the state prefers to ignore (if not to beg) the moral question about hunting in public announcements and policy statements. It is business as usual: the state continues to endorse hunting as a matter of policy and to permit or mandate its agencies to promote it. The reasons for state encouragement of hunting are doubtless complex, but it is highly likely that financial and conservation benefits play the central role. According to the Canadian Wildlife Service, hunters contribute free services and substantial funds toward conservation and game management:

Hunters typically are very knowledgeable about wildlife and contribute directly to wildlife conservation by being able to understand and correctly identify species, by collecting and providing data to wildlife management authorities and, in some cases, by maintaining a balance in overabundant populations. Hunters provide substantial financial support to organizations dedicated to conservation, both through license fees and by their fundraising efforts which contribute millions of dollars to conservation programs in such areas as education, research, and habitat protection. A recent analysis indicates that, over the past 15 years, Canadian hunters have contributed \$335 million and 14 million hours of volunteer work to habitat conservation.²

Hence the departments charged with wildlife matters (Natural Resources, Fish and Game, Environmental Conservation, etc.) invariably regulate and promote recreational hunting because it is a powerful, efficient, and cost-effective tool in wildlife management, and because it promotes habitat conservation and the benefits that brings to society.³

In addition, hunters make a direct financial contribution to local economies. This is considerable in places like Alberta, where nonresident big game hunters pay high fees and must hire guides to hunt. Considerable additional benefits accrue to the associated industries—outfitting supplies, gun, off-highway vehicle, food, accommodation, transportation, etc. More mundane political considerations weigh heavily as well. Recent decrees that hunting is to be continued and encouraged often come from legislators, not popular votes, and the legislators are lobbied by highly organized and well-funded hunting and gun ownership groups. Some governments of the day are dependent on the goodwill of the rural population (Alberta) or of gun

owners (Texas). Moreover, the government departments promoting hunting may be self-interested, in that a significant portion of the funding of such departments may be dependent upon the number of hunting licenses sold. So political expediency and economies of wildlife management clearly counsel tolerating hunting, and encouraging it if necessary.

Critique. The state acted in terms of the moral insights of its citizens when it institutionalized hunting practices. But as a noted defender of hunting observes, "there has been a dramatic shift in how the public views nature and natural resources," which is why we are having these disputes.⁴ The law is changing in various ways to reflect this new attitude, and specifically to reflect the fact that people (however inconsistent in relation to mainstream dietary practices) no longer understand animals as being simply property, or, in the case of wild animals, public property, and find cruelty to them to be morally repugnant. Both the proponents of animal rights, who represent a minority opposed to hunting, and the majority, whose diverse reasons often include a desire for wildernesses free of human intervention and therefore free of hunting, represent this transformed consciousness. It would seem that the state is simply biding time in ignoring the moral questions, for the very understandable reasons that it does not know how to manage differently than it does, and perhaps because it is not confident that people opposed to hunting would accept the consequences of their beliefs if wildlife populations exploded without culls. So the state continues to presuppose the legitimacy of management, often resisting calls for a public debate and refusing direct demands for change. (It also continues to presuppose that hunting is one of the best management tools and that it has no viable alternatives, despite the insistence of some that we seek them.) But begging the moral question or refusing to broach it does not put the state on the moral high ground or legitimize the practice on any grounds other than expediency and economy, which many now question as sufficient reasons.

2. *Heritage Preservation*

As to recent measures to revivify the practice of hunting, striking examples are provided by the state governments of Illinois and New Hampshire and the provincial government of Ontario. These have by legislation formalized hunting as an important part of the cultural heritage of those jurisdictions. As expressed in New Hampshire House Bill 273 (signed May 15, 2001), the state "recognizes that the heritage of hunting, fishing and trapping are [*sic*] in the best interest of the state and that they should be recognized, preserved, and promoted."⁵

The thinking is that we as a people *are*, that is, we have survived and prospered, and we are *what we are*, that is, resourceful and self-sufficient individualists, because of our hunting past. Contemporary institutionalized hunting is simply a continuation and formalization of necessary and expedient practices from times past. To now abandon hunting is to risk losing some of the virtues of the national character. Hence the regular meeting of heads of state to discuss hunting is called the *Governors' (or Premiers') Symposium on*

North American Hunting Heritage, reflecting the theme chosen by powerful hunting advocacy groups such as the Canadian Outdoor Heritage Alliance. At the premiers' meeting in August 2000, Ontario's Premier Mike Harris detailed why "our heritage of hunting is a good heritage." It is because "[h]unting is about more than just hunting. Hunting is about sharing knowledge, experiences, memories. It's about passing on our traditions. . . . But most of all hunting is about learning to understand and to respect and to love the natural world."⁶

Critique. This is the usual story about the cultural and moral advantages of hunting and, as with the telling of the same story in innumerable hunting magazines, it leaves some people wondering about the connection between community, respect, love, and killing. That aside, it is a plausible tale about how thinking and acting in relation to nature contribute to self- and national identity. The first problem that strikes us is that much more needs to be said to establish that it is a heritage to be continued rather than merely remembered, that what may have been necessary for survival for our ancestors should be reenacted for sport, and that moral beliefs appropriate to a past religious and philosophical framework are appropriate to the present. The moral question of the legitimacy of hunting cannot be begged when it is precisely that which is at issue. Although often treated as such, an appeal to tradition or heritage is not an appeal to principle, a lesson we have learned in regard to other aspects of our heritage (such as institutionalized slavery).

A second major concern with invoking the national heritage to legitimize hunting morally is that it argues from the legitimacy of subsistence hunting to the legitimacy of recreational hunting. Most advocates of the moral considerability of animals, often the most determined opponents of hunting, whether they focus on the individual and disallow hunting, or on the species and countenance hunting when necessary, have no problem with killing an animal in self-defense or with subsistence hunting when truly necessary rather than a lifestyle choice. These involve trade-offs of vital interests between a human and an animal, whereas sport hunting is seen as a trade-off of vital animal interests for trivial human interests. The appeal to tradition will work only if it promotes continuity of ideals while presupposing common needs and purposes. But we no longer need to subdue nature, tame wilderness, and open up the last frontier, tasks which mandated the slaughter of animals. Indeed we have become critical of the construction of nature in modernist thinking, and of humans as forming themselves by contesting it. So new reasons, relevant to contemporary circumstances, are required to justify hunting.

How Does the State Promote Hunting and Generate New Hunters?

In addition to moves to enshrine hunting in basic law, many governments have recently, in the interest of slowing down or reversing the decline in the number of hunters, strengthened or added programs to cultivate new hunters and to encourage the unenthusiastic, as well as to make hunting possible for

mobility-impaired people. There are “buddy” programs designed to introduce nonhunters to the sport in the company of an experienced hunter and “group” licensing fees to allow two or more to hunt for the price of one. These may or may not be part of an effort to encourage hunting among women, a group now being targeted by the hunting accessories industries. Many of the new programs do specifically target children. For example, the Canadian federal government (Environment Canada) has passed an amendment to the migratory birds regulations to institute “Waterfowler Heritage Days” that allows children (accompanied by “mentors”) to hunt free on special days closed to other hunters.⁷ This mirrors programs in the United States. Five provinces have correlative programs for hunting by children under provincial jurisdiction. Other provinces allow children to hunt for no or low fees, to use any weapon for waterfowl, etc. The thinking is that it is crucial to cultivate hunting in children, because the fervor for hunting declines as people age, and it is much less likely that an adult will take up the sport. This correlates with the ethical codes of hunting organizations, which typically include an obligation to “[p]romote hunting to younger hunters and take youngsters hunting whenever permitted.”⁸ Encouraging people to hunt before they are capable of reflecting on the central issues hunting raises is likely the best way to preserve the tradition a while longer. Wildlife management educators are also aware that there are fewer hunters among new candidates for wildlife management careers, and some share the belief that unless people are inducted into hunting as children, it is unlikely that they will become hunters and less likely that they will passively accept hunting as a principal tool for wildlife management.

Critique. Although there are significant exceptions, the state is now choosing to ignore the transformed social ethic in relation to animals.⁹ It might be argued that it incurs moral culpability in doing so. It is disingenuous, if not dishonest, to cite as the reason for the dramatic decline in hunter numbers a mix of factors such as less successful hunts due to declining numbers of prey and restricted bag limits, higher hunting costs, more restrictive gun controls, an urbanized population, and competing leisure activities¹⁰ without acknowledging also that people are now very concerned about nature, less trustful of scientific management, and more kindly disposed to animals than in the past. The state’s silence on the moral issue may follow not only from a conviction about the necessity of controlling animal populations, but also from a realization that to question hunting may be to question some important aspects of the conceptual framework within which the state operates. After all, the basic reason that the philosophical debate about whether we should consider animals and their “interests” is inconclusive is that the contenders argue from incommensurable conceptual frameworks and thus argue past each other. To seriously question the moral rightness or wrongness of hunting may be, for some at least, to question the prevalent consumptive attitude toward nature and therewith the very *raison d’être* of departments of natural resources and their like. It may be to question the old anthropocentric worldview of which the state is legatee and custodian, as well as the bureaucracy (and the science) that reflects it. On that supposition, it would be impractical, and perhaps

political suicide in some jurisdictions, for the state to open up a discussion of the issues which most exercise the contenders in the philosophical debate about hunting.

Secondly, preference shaping, creating desires in people in support of one's own interests and without attempting to justify the appropriateness of the desire, is a questionable activity, as we know from the moral and social critique of advertising. Preference shaping by the state in relation to a practice that is widely contested on moral grounds is preeminently questionable. Encouraging people to hunt is not like encouraging the public to exercise and to eat intelligently. Everyone agrees that fitness and good nutrition are desirable. In contrast, a large number of people think that sport hunting is undesirable on the basis of plausible if not confirmed opinions (e.g., because they think animals have rights or interests, that nature manages itself better than we manage it, or that hunting legitimizes guns and a culture of violence). Here, as with other practices questioned on moral cum pragmatic grounds, such as institutionalized gaming and intensive livestock production, the just state would, one would think, acknowledge the complexity of the issue and encourage informed debate. It is disrespectful of the citizens' moral autonomy to encourage them to adopt a morally contentious pastime while discouraging reflection by refusing discussion. It could be argued that it is completely scurrilous to encourage children to adopt the practice when there is much public concern and opposition to it. There is some desperation in targeting those unskilled in moral reflection to promote a practice contested on moral grounds.

Thirdly, for the state and its wildlife managers to acknowledge clearly that the future of hunting depends upon cultivating new hunters from the ranks of children, and the naive and half-hearted generally, is significant. Such an acknowledgment conflicts with the argument that hunting (predation) is quite natural to humans. To establish that hunting is an instinctual need would go a long way toward justifying the claim that the trade-off between hunter and quarry is not in fact that of a trivial hunter interest versus a vital animal interest, because acting on instinct is then a vital need of sorts, which may permit human interest to trump animal interest or else makes the relationship a nonmoral one.

How Might the State Counter a Charge That It Is Acting Irresponsibly in Promoting Hunting?

It must be conceded that the state does acknowledge hunting to be a moral matter, on a shallower level than that upon which the debates about animals and nature take place. There are interesting implications in this for the deeper matter under discussion here.

1. The "Ethics of Hunting" Argument

The state does overtly appeal to ethics, though the appeal takes place within a framework which axiomatically prioritizes human over animal interests. It is, for example, clearly stated by many management units that they

are committed to encouraging conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitat, for the sake of present and future human generations. Such units are charged not simply with regulating and promoting hunting, but with promoting ethical hunting. Given the presupposition of the moral legitimacy of hunting, ethical hunting as it relates to animals involves humane treatment of prey—that is, attempting to kill quickly and painlessly, not feeling or showing disrespect for the vanquished, not wasting their bodies, etc. Ethical hunting also covers relations to other hunters and to the public. In the first case, one respects bag limits so that others can also enjoy the sport, does not endanger other hunters, helps them develop their skills, helps them search for wounded animals, etc. Ethical obligations toward the public center on respecting property rights, not endangering residents, not offending sensibilities by inappropriate displays of the quarry, etc. Prudence, as well as moral concern, would thus counsel the state to insist on ethical hunting, given the fact that the widespread disregard for the niceties of the laws regulating hunting have brought hunters into bad odor and that the prevalence of poaching compromises management objectives.¹¹

Critique. Presupposing the anthropocentric framework and the legitimacy of hunting, this ethics of hunting seems coherent. It is however vulnerable to a well-known objection against the coherence of ethically responsible hunting: to have sanctions against cruelty to animals may imply recognition of independent moral standing—that animals are beings of such a kind that one ought not to let them suffer.¹² Certainly new legislation (such as the proposed Canadian Bill C 15) giving greater protection to animals focuses on animal well-being, rather than on avoiding the effects of gratuitously harming animals on the perpetrator of the harm.

Secondly, the common injunctions not to show disrespect for the vanquished or insensitivity to the distress of observers imply some awareness of the moral questions glossed over by most hunters as well as the state. This acknowledgment that vainglorious “hero” photographs of hunter and downed quarry, the spectacle of a moose crumpled into the back of a pickup or a deer draped over a car roof, are distressing to some viewers is clear recognition that some part of the public finds hunting (and even perhaps hunters) morally repugnant. This suggests that the moral issue of hunting should be aired rather than suppressed by the state, and that until that is done, it is premature to prop up the practice by cultivating new adherents and providing incentives to the lax.

2. *The “Right to Hunt” Argument*

As we have seen, states which have recently affirmed hunting in basic law characteristically appeal to tradition or heritage. Hunting as we have it is perfectly consistent with the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century beliefs which inform North American culture, such as Locke’s political and religious views about nature as raw material for the benefit of humans and about animals as resources. (In fact the Lockean notion of property so fundamental to our political and economic system was seen by Locke as implied in a more

basic right to the appropriation of animals.) Hunting is a right derivative from the right to subsistence. It was won for the nongentry at great cost in historical confrontations such as the French Revolution. Hunting and gun ownership continue to be associated with liberty, a very fundamental right indeed.

It is in fact the default position of the state that everyone in society who has the relevant qualifications has the right to hunt. It is then merely contingent that now the vast majority do not choose to do so. The ethical question provoked by hunting is then, in the state's view, one peculiarly appropriate to liberal democracies and the competing wills of people and has nothing to do with, for example, the interests of animals or how best to relate to nature. Opposition to hunting is a manifestation of the tyranny of the majority over a diminishing minority with contrary tastes. As Harris puts it, people opposed to hunting believe that "because they don't like hunting they have a right to say nobody can hunt."¹³ Alberta's Minister of the Environment, Halvar Jonson, admonishes those who express opposition to the grizzly hunt (whom he wrongly supposes to be all and only nonhunters) thus: "Although many people oppose hunting, I believe the views of minorities in a democracy must also be respected."¹⁴

Critique. Because it is tied to the heritage preservation argument for hunting, the right-to-hunt argument faces the same objections raised above. A traditional practice may or may not be moral; an independent argument for the moral legitimacy of the practice is required to establish it as moral. Second, though one can plausibly go from affirming the right to subsistence to the right to hunt (disregarding context), one needs additional grounds to go from the legitimacy of hunting out of need to that of hunting for fun.¹⁵ As for politicians' seeing the moral matter as one of (in)tolerance in a democracy, one can tolerate a spectrum of views, and specifically respect a minority view, when it does not concern a moral issue. When it does and the issue is not dodged, the minority loses—its right to produce or consume hate literature or child pornography, to ban abortion, to euthanise defective newborns, to execute criminals, etc. It seems that killing animals for sport has become one of these sorts of issues which, absent philosophical or scientific consensus on the matter, should be decided in the same way as these other issues have been decided (given the way contemporary liberal democracies function)—by free votes in legislatures, plebiscites, or one of the other counting mechanisms for determining the drift of the *Zeitgeist*. This occasionally happens. However, the more usual case is for the state to be silent, or to affect tolerance for either of two contrary views, while continuing with the status quo—that is, state advocacy and subvention of hunting. The rhetoric of tolerance for opposing moral viewpoints becomes finally offensive in those cases in which public policy reflects the minority (that is, hunter) viewpoint only. Though many people who do not hunt are simply disinterested, there is a good chance that if the will of the people were consulted, the majority would decide for a number of different reasons against sport hunting in many jurisdictions where the state is now encouraging it.¹⁶

3. *The Utility Argument*

Though politicians do not usually acknowledge or defend their value assumptions, this does not mean their value assumptions are indefensible. One could perhaps provide a sketch of the implicit ethical framework that undergirds most public policy, including hunting policy. Most public policy presupposes the moral legitimacy of the practices it promotes in terms of utilitarian principles, supplemented by an ideology of rights and freedoms. We have already suggested that utility, measured by the simplistic and politically expedient standard now usually favored by our governments (i.e., cost) is a primary reason for dedicating state resources to producing new hunters. It will be expensive, and quite possibly less effective, to manage wildlife populations without hunters or without a sufficient number of them. The decision to manage animals as usual is made in the absence of much research on alternative means of control and of course as a result of a reluctance to bear the heavy initial costs of design and implementation of any new strategies. But there is nothing preventing the state from engaging in a more complex and responsible form of utilitarian thinking, even while continuing to prioritize the economic. It might investigate alternative means of wildlife management and, using full-cost accounting and considering the medium and long term, it might conclude that hunting is after all in the best interest of the state, in terms of conserving animal populations, maintaining their health, and reducing environmental destruction. As matters now stand, the public is asked to accept on faith that hunting is essential to management. Secondly, the state could conceivably win its case for the subvention of hunting by canvassing desires without worrying solely about costing them out. Were the public well-informed and thoughtful about the consequences of not managing, managing poorly, or costly management of wildlife populations, again, it might well approve the state position on hunting. For example, as wildlife managers remind us, to credibly oppose management means considering the possibility of more animal/auto accidents, grazed crops, goose-fertilized parks, cougars and coyotes with a taste for pets and children, etc.

Finally, again computing utilities in terms of desires without concern for cost, the state might find itself in the right simply because the majority find gun ownership more desirable than they find hunting repugnant. There is considerable latitude in utilitarianism for moral harms, as long as majority preferences are satisfied. The state is currently unwilling to take the risk of seeing how the majority would decide.

Critique. Although the state's utilitarian ethical framework might be deeper and more responsibly applied, it represents only one form of utilitarianism, that committed to narrow anthropocentrism and the maximizing of undifferentiated desires. Though utilitarianism permits restriction to an anthropocentric framework, it certainly does not mandate it. Many opponents of hunting, most famously Peter Singer, are themselves utilitarian. It is just that they have reflected on the foundations of their view and offered reasons for counting animals into moral decision making. That is, the problem is not utilitarianism itself, but that form of it which begs the questions of the

human/nature and human/animal relationships. Classical utilitarianism may qualitatively differentiate human desires (John Stuart Mill), as well as include animal utilities (Jeremy Bentham). To put the current moral debate about hunting at rest on the level of reason rather than hand counting, the state would have to (uncharacteristically) justify its operative moral framework, or at least to show that the public endorses it. But the insights it represents are arguably at odds with the public's deep concern about the environment, its express willingness to pay for environmental conservation and remediation, and its new understanding, backed by science, of animals as less alien from us than previously thought.

What is called for is, in addition to a fully understood accounting of the impacts of wildlife populations on our lives, an accounting of the trade-offs we are willing to make between pragmatically based desires and our insights into the kind of people we want to be, the lifestyle most conducive to self-respect, and the kind of community (denaturalized and hard technologized versus natural and soft technologized, etc.) we would prefer if we had the option. It is the complexity of determining what is worthy of desire, rather than of surveying what people in fact desire, that leads to the construction of coarse utilitarian moral templates (wedded to classical economics) and thence to coarse political correlates. One hopes that the state will eventually acquire the level of sophistication shown by a public uneasy with hunting and engage the fundamental moral issues, rather than continuing in the bad faith it now manifests when it exerts itself to reduce the dramatic decline in the number of hunters by trying to persuade the innocent and the reluctant to take it up.

Notes

¹The number of hunters in Canada has fallen from 500,000 a little more than a decade ago to 197,000 now (as reported in "Ottawa Wants to See More Kids Hunting," *Edmonton Journal*, August 25, 2000), and the number in Alberta, for example, has fallen from 140,000 to less than 100,000 in the same period (cf. Alberta Environment <www.gov.ab.ca/env/fw/hunting/numberhunters.html>).

²Alberta Environment <www.gov.ab.ca/env/fw/hunting/numberhunters.html>. Cf. also Canada Newswire, "New Wildlife Habitat Canada Report Says Hunters Contributed \$335 Million to Wildlife Habitat Conservation in Canada in Past 15 Years" (<[www.Newswire.ca/releases/August 2000/25/c3639.html](http://www.Newswire.ca/releases/August%202000/25/c3639.html)>).

³Wildlife management agencies in the United States and Canada and their "mission statements" can be accessed via links at <www.HuntingLinks.com>.

⁴Jan E. Dizard, *Going Wild: Hunting, Animal Rights, and the Contested Meaning of Nature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 184–85. Cf. Dizard's appendix for the results of surveys by the National Opinion Research Center on public opinion on environmental issues. Gary Francione reports that two-thirds of Americans polled by the United Press agreed with this statement: "An animal's right to live free of suffering should be just as important as a person's right to live free of suffering." He claims also that more than half of the American public believes that killing animals for fur garments and for sport hunting is wrong. Cf. Francione, *Introduction to Animal Rights: Your Child or the Dog?* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), xix.

⁵As quoted in the "Legislative Alert" section of *The Hunting Network* (<www.hunting.net.com>).

⁶As quoted in "Ontario Premier Promises to Enshrine Hunting in Law," *Edmonton Journal*, August, 25, 2000, A8.

⁷ Cf. "Waterfowler Heritage Days" (www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca/heritage/faq_e.html).

⁸ "Hunters' Rule," *The Hunting Network* (www.hunting.net.com).

⁹ Cf. Bernard Rollin, *Farm Animal Welfare* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1995), 3–26, for an account of the factors that have led to a new social ethic for animals and the changes in law this new ethic has prompted.

¹⁰ These reasons are cited by Alberta Environment (www.gov.ab.ca/env/fw/hunting/numberhunters.html).

¹¹ Cf. Dizard, *Going Wild*, chap. 4.

¹² Cf. L. W. Sumner, "The Canadian Harp Seal Hunt: A Moral Issue," in *Living with the Earth: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Kent A. Peacock (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 283–99, esp. 288.

¹³ Quoted in "Ontario Premier Promises to Enshrine Hunting in Law"; cf. note 6.

¹⁴ Letter to author, November 14, 2000.

¹⁵ One reviewer has raised, in response to this remark, the objection that most hunters eat what they kill and "generally make some fuss over the eating of game," thus countering the implication that sport hunters hunt "for the hell of it." This point is raised in order to weaken the distinction made here between subsistence hunting and sport hunting, as well as the claim that the former is, whereas the latter is not, excusable as meeting a vital need. However, the reviewer clearly acknowledges that most hunters do not need to hunt. Therefore, it would seem, they do so only because they want to and do so irrespective of the moral issues involved. However "important" (in the sense of gratifying) the pastime is, it nonetheless involves a willingness to override the vital needs (to life, etc.) of an animal to promote the nonvital wants (to chase, hide, kill, etc.) of the hunter. Again the moral issue is glossed: By what moral right do we deprive an animal of its life when we do not need to do so?

¹⁶ The result of such a debate might well depend upon how people understand the relation between legitimizing hunting and sustaining the gun culture. It would be a serious blow to advocates of the right to gun ownership were hunting delegitimized.