CON HUNTING ARTICLE

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Works Cited

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Counterpoint: Hunting is Cruel and Damaging Recreation
Thesis: Human society must evolve beyond the desire to kill animals for recreation and pleasure.

Summary: Killing animals for sport is pointlessly cruel. Even though hunting was an ancient part of human society, and an important factor in the ability of early humans to obtain food and supplies, the need for hunting to supply food and materials has declined as agriculture developed. Contemporary hunting has become mainly a recreational activity. Many animal species have been hunted to the point where their populations are no longer able to efficiently survive in the wild. Even common animals suffer from continued hunting as hunters remove the largest and healthiest animals from wild populations. Some animals sought by trophy hunters only exist in small populations and are threatened by extinction. As part of the evolution of human culture, humans should move away from hunting and instead try to decrease the amount of needless suffering in the world. Violence against animals should not be a recreational activity.

A Legacy of Hunting

Homo sapiens practiced hunting long before the development of agriculture. Hunting for food played a major role in the development of human psychology and culture. Animal materials were used to create some of the first clothing, tools and shelter. As humans developed permanent settlements based around agriculture, they moved away from hunting and began raising animals for food. Herding and animal breeding led to further social developments.

Within many societies, the process of hunting became part of the larger cultural tradition, transcending its utilitarian role. While many still hunted for food and animal products, others hunted for recreation. In societies across Europe and Asia, hunting was considered part of aristocratic society, and was practiced by members of the social elite. Ritualized hunting with dogs and horses was seen as a noble sport.

In the United States, hunting fulfilled a dual role. While the early colonists hunted for food and supplies, they also inherited the social hunting practices of European society. Even after the American colonies had established sufficient animal breeding and agricultural settlements to feed the entire population, hunting continued as both a recreational and a commercial activity. Americans hunted animal like buffalo for their flesh and beavers for their pelts, which were used to make clothing and decorations.

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As society developed, the need for hunting across the world was greatly diminished by the success of agriculture and commercial animal breeding. Over time, the practice of hunting became increasingly part of recreational, rather than utilitarian, culture. Many continue hunting out of a desire to maintain connected to historical traditions or to stay in touch with the natural environment. While there may be some benefits to this perspective on recreational hunting, the detrimental effects on species populations and the needless cruelty inflicted on animals have led to the development of a growing anti-hunting lobby.

The Ecological Argument

While hunting for food and materials was once a necessity for human society, many people in the twenty-first century argue that hunting unnecessarily reduces animal populations at a time when they are rapidly decreasing because of human encroachment, pollution and global warming. While most countries maintain laws against hunting endangered species, there are unethical hunters who practice "poaching," illegally hunting threatened animals, and posing a major threat to the continued existence of these species.

Other animals, like white-tailed deer, are abundant. It may be argued that hunting is needed in such cases to prevent overpopulation. On the other hand, hunters can harm these populations by consistently killing the healthiest individuals, which are often considered the most desirable hunting trophies, thereby leading to an overall reduction in the fitness of the species. In addition, many claim that hunting common animals like deer and rabbits helps to maintain the health of natural areas, reducing overgrazing and the destruction of habitat. Ironically, hunting organizations have become a cornerstone of the conservation industry, lobbying to protect habitat in order to maintain populations of animals to serve as game. Hunting to protect this habitat from overgrazing is a necessity only because human expansion and the removal of natural predators have led to a drastic reduction in the amount of viable wilderness.

Trophy hunters, those who hunt animals to use them as decorations, often desire to hunt rare and exotic animals that only exist in small populations. Many of the most desirable trophies, such as lions, tigers and elephants, are critically endangered species that are hunted primarily out of hubris. These magnificent creatures are destroyed, not for food or essential materials, but merely to satisfy human vanity.

The earth is in the midst of an ecological crisis. Many species are facing extinction. Given the state of the environment in the early twenty-first century, there can be little justification for continued trophy hunting. Even with the negative environmental consequences, thousands of trophy hunters pay for illegal hunting in Africa and Asia, where poverty helps to maintain a tradition of black market hunting that leads to the deaths of thousands of endangered animals each year. Most of the world's major predators, which tend to exist in small populations, are threatened by trophy hunting as well as loss of habitat.

The Ethical or Moral Argument

There is no longer any need to hunt animals to produce food or obtain materials for survival. While there is still a market for animal fur, leather and meat, they are all unnecessary given the capacity for synthetic manufacturing and agricultural food production. As a recreational activity, hunting involves killing animals for sport, which is seen by many people as morally wrong. Some have even posited that modern hunting is akin to recreational murder, as the animals are no longer utilized in any practical sense and pose no danger to humans. The moral opposition to needless killing has led to the development of an ethical lobby against hunting.

There are some who object to hunting because of the suffering it causes. While hunting may have been necessary for our distant ancestors, it is argued that humankind can and should evolve beyond the desire to harm animals for pleasure. Most animal lovers detest the idea of killing animals as a sport. Objectors often call attention to certain hunting methods that cause prolonged suffering, such as the use of traps or snares which may cause an animal severe or lengthy pain before its death.

Even the best hunters often fail to kill their targets with a single hit, and many intended prey animals end up dying only after suffering from their wounds or bleeding to death. Anti-hunting lobbyists argue that, as hunting is unnecessary, it is morally and ethically wrong to continue it as a sport when it causes suffering in animals.

There is no doubt that hunting requires a certain comfort with the idea of inflicting death, but many

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hunters do not recognize any moral issue with killing or harming animals. Some may believe that non-human animals lack the capacity to experience pain and suffering as humans do, and therefore feel little or no empathy for them.

While many animal rights activists raise the issue of cruelty, there are some who argue simply that human society should evolve beyond the point where killing defenseless creatures is considered normal behavior. Human evolution necessitates the development of morals and ethics that involve protecting life in all forms. Some religions, including certain sects of Hinduism and Buddhism, have moral guidelines that forbid killing or eating animals and are therefore fundamentally opposed to hunting. These religious traditions are part of the overall ethical view that sees hunting as part of primitive human activity and promotes a more peaceful, enlightened approach to human-animal relations.

Dominion Over Nature

Ancient human societies were more closely linked to the raw, wild aspects of the natural world. To those cultures, hunting was inextricably part of survival, but it also fulfilled a psychological need to dominate and control the environment. By killing animals that competed for food or threatened their safety, ancient humans mastered their environment and became the most dominant creature in the history of earth.

In the modern era, hunting for food and protection is a luxury rather than a necessity. We have discarded the need for hunting and have kept only the psychological desire to dominate. While hunters often espouse the belief that hunting allows them to stay in touch with their animal nature and with the environment, more and more hunting serves only to allow humans to declare, without necessity, their ability to dominate other creatures. Perhaps this is the same psychological mechanism that urges some humans to kill or dominate one another. While it takes little skill to kill a rabbit or deer compared to the challenges faced by ancient hunter armed with stone spears, hunters still argue that they are facing a serious challenge.

The argument carries little weight when hunters use an expensive array of visual and olfactory camouflage products and scoped semi-automatic rifles loaded with hollow-point bullets in order to ambush a defenseless animal. While a few hunters faithfully use ancient techniques to track and hunt with bow and arrow, many modern hunters are concerned more with having a trophy than with the challenge of hunting. Even less challenging are "canned" hunts, in which the prey animal has been captured ahead of time and is released just to be killed, ensuring that the hunter has a target and removing any shred of challenge with the trivial exception of close-range marksmanship. This is the world of modern hunting, in which animals are dominated not out of any need to survive but out of a pathological desire for domination and violence.

Conclusion

While there are many arguments against hunting, the pro-hunting lobby is still powerful, representing that part of society that wishes to hold onto the culture of our ancestors. While this desire may be understandable, and while there are some contributions hunters make to conservation and the protection of some species, hunting is, nevertheless, a wasteful and violent activity that is not an appropriate part of an evolving human society. Humans often tout their superiority over animals and point to the developments of culture as evidence of it. Yet there are many who still have a primitive thirst for death and dominance. This represents an ancient and powerful drive that, given the state of the world, must be abandoned. Until humans can learn to look upon suffering and death as something to be avoided rather than inflicted, what hope do we have to eliminate war, murder and violence from within our society?

Ponder This

1. What are the primary arguments that that author makes against hunting? Which of the author's arguments is most or least convincing? Explain.
2. The argument is made that violence against animals is similar to violence against humans. Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. The author claims that hunting is a cultural tradition that should be left behind as human society advances. What are some other ancient traditions which are no longer practiced?
4. Does the author seem to leave out or sidestep any important issues in the debate over hunting? Discuss.
5. Does the author provide more facts or opinions to support the argument against hunting?

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