Chapter I

The Case for Hunting

A. Hunting: What it is. What it is not.

The case for hunting first must contain an assertion of the value and worth of that activity. Hunters make a claim. They assert a proposition: hunting is a valuable and significant activity. In the terms of a debate, they are stating an affirmative position. Hence, the case for hunting is structured differently from the case of anti-hunting in that the latter is essentially an attack, while the former is primarily a statement of a position and only secondarily a defense of that position.

Let’s begin with definitions.

A 1990 article in Sierra, the magazine of the club by that name, begins with a story of a recent shooting of buffalo that had left Yellowstone National Park. The shooter commented; “I don’t even call this a hunt. It’s just a shoot.”

Most people would agree with this assessment. It was not hunting. The shooting of buffalo who have lost their wariness through living in a protected park without predators (wolf or man) is not hunting. Yet we still call the person a “hunter” and what he did “hunting.” Such common usage often confuses issues and distorts arguments. The result is that some people are against “hunting,” while others argue for “hunting” but the people are not talking about the same thing.

A general definition of “hunting” is that it “is the pursuit of, and the capture or kill of, prey.” As such, hunting is a part of the life of every animal which eats another animal, from the microscopic to the largest mammal. In simpler life forms, hunting, both the manner of the hunt and the object of the hunt, is genetically
determined. In more complex life forms, hunting (at least the manner of hunting) may be taught by the parents of the offspring.

Before humans evolved, hunting was a way of life for many mammals, including the ancestors of the humanoids (human beings). These ancestors, the Australopithecines of Africa, 5 to 6 million years ago used tools to hunt and to cut up what they killed. So hunting preceded the earliest forms that the anthropologists label humanoids, such as Homo erectus, who lived 1 million years ago. Even if we start with these humans, it would be true that for the last 1 million years humans have hunted.

The earliest life patterns of human beings are not well-known, but the earliest human beings were omnivorous, i.e., they ate plants and animals that they could find, capture and kill. The earliest tools that we know are the tools of the hunt, e.g., arrow points, spear points, scrapers. For about a million years humans hunted, killed and ate prey.

By the time of recorded history (c. 8,000 years ago), humans had just begun domestication of plants and animals (c. 10,000 years ago). After this time, agriculture was the basis of some cultures, while hunting remained the basis of other cultures.

Some sociobiologists point out that this agricultural and the subsequent industrial civilization has been so recent in the development of humans (the last 10,000 of 1,000,000 to 5,000,000 years) that these civilizations "...have put nothing into the basic wiring of the human animal." They say, "We are wired for hunting - for the emotions, the excitements, the curiosities, the regularities, the fears, and the social relationships that were needed to survive in the hunting way of life." They claim, "Man the hunter is not an episode in our distant past: we are still man the hunter, incarcerated, domesticated, polluted, crowded, and bemused." 2

Throughout prehistory and historical times, humans' survival depended upon their ability to hunt successfully. Their ability to hunt contributed to their survival, but the hunt may have been as much a mythical and religious act as a utilitarian one. The early (c. 30,000 years ago) paintings in the French Pyrenees caves of the animals hunted are beautiful and haunting scenes in the life of a primitive people. Joseph Campbell claims that the vast area of the paleolithic Great Hunt extended from the Pyrenees west across Siberia and to the Mississippi River. He says that "...the peoples who first came to America from northern Asia...brought with them the rites and hunting methods of that world." 3

His view is that the nature of the hunt was reflected in the Blackfoot legend of the origin of the Buffalo Dance. Campbell says, "The main point of all such legends is that between the animals hunted and the human communities dependent for survival on their offering of themselves, there has been a covenant established, confirmed, and reconfirmed in certain rites performed in relation to certain fetishes..." He says that the view was that the animals gave the rituals so that the animals, when slain, would return to the mother source for rebirth. On the other hand, "...when such rites were performed and the mystery of the order of nature thus recognized, the food supply of the human community would be assured." 4

To say that it is natural for humans to hunt is an understatement of historic proportions. That the chase provides a thrill is not some abnormal quirk of a morally depraved person but is a natural response of humans living in nature. Humans evolved as runners whose best physical activity for their cardiovascular system is just that of the hunting pursuit: slow running with short bursts of speed. Killing animals did not make humans "savages," that is, morally deficient. Killing animals for food, clothing and mythic reasons was part of participating in an ecological environment in which humans existed both physically and mythically.

Humans apart from nature is an abstraction. They require food that only nature can provide, clean air that is produced and purified by nature, clean water that is purified by filtering through soils, and the companionship of their clan who live in touch with nature.

One of the most important books on hunting was written by a philosopher, José Ortega y Gasset, entitled Meditations on Hunting (originally published in 1942). 5 This book is not only important, it is also rare. Rarely do philosophers muse about the essence of hunting.

Plato did say that the art of hunting was restricted to the hunting and the capturing. After that, hunters and fishermen hand over what they have to the cooks. He also mentions the hunters' strategy of finding a trail leading into a thicket, surrounding the thicket and keeping careful watch that nothing slips through and gets
Ortega gives a formal definition of hunting: "Hunting is what an animal does to take possession, dead or alive, of some other being that belongs to a species basically inferior to its own." (The last part of this definition is questionable. Do not snakes hunt mammals? Do not lions occasionally hunt humans?) He adds two qualifications: a) "...it is necessary that the hunted animal have his CHANCE...." and b) "It is not essential to the hunter that it be successful." Indeed he says, "The beauty of hunting lies in the fact that it is always problematic." For him the essence of hunting is "...a contest or confrontation between two systems of instincts."

Ortega defines hunting in another way. He says that hunting is a way of life. He observes that while life presents us with some unavoidable necessities, the ways and the means we use to meet these needs is left to our inventive minds. "So, for man, existing becomes a poetic task...of inventing a plot for his existence, giving it character which will make it both suggestive and appealing."

One of the generic ways of being a man, says Ortega, (and it was the first way), is being a hunter. In the Palaeolithic time "...living was hunting." Ortega believes that this way of life exists at least in principle as a permanent possibility. Hence he says a person may return "...to that pristine form of being a man...." A person may have "...the pleasure during a few hours or a few days of being 'Palaeolithic.'" So Ortega says about hunting: "When...modern man sets out to hunt, what he does is not a fiction, not a farce; it is, essentially, the same thing that Palaeolithic man did." Ortega understands sport hunting as the exercise of "artificially perpetuating, as a possibility for man...that early state in which, already human, he still lived within the orbit of animal existence." It is with this "superlative diversion" that we can take a vacation from our current way of being and return to an early way of being that remains a permanent possibility for humans.

Ortega asks what people do when they are free to do what they please. He answers that they enjoy racing horses, competing in physical exercises, dancing, engaging in conversation. "But before any of those, and consistently more important than all of them has been...hunting." He adds that hunting is "...the most appreciated, enjoyable occupation..." of a man. Obviously, not everyone would agree with Ortega's high assessment of hunting.

The settlement of the United States by Europeans, and their westward expansion across the continent, was accompanied by a utilization of the native wildlife as a source of food. Note the journal entry of October 26, 1728 by William Byrd, who was surveying the dividing line between Virginia and North Carolina: "Our men had the fortune to kill a brace of bears, a fat buck, and a wild turkey.... And that we might not be unmindful of being fed by Heaven in this great and solitary wilderness, we agreed to wear in our hats the maosti, which is in Indian the beard of a wild turkey cock...." This is an example of the Europeans using wildlife for food as they moved into the unsettled (by Europeans) areas of America. In using wildlife in this manner the Europeans were following the practice of the native American peoples. Contemporary sport hunting in America has evolved out of the context of the frontiersmen hunting wild game.

Later the wildlife was hunted by commercial hunters who supplied the new cities of the frontier areas. An examination of restaurant menus in the 1870s and 1880s in cities like New Orleans, St. Louis and Chicago will amply demonstrate the abundance of wild game being provided by commercial hunters for the people of the cities on the edge of the frontier. This commercial hunting of game for food has now been banned in the United States.

In a discussion of contemporary hunting, one needs to distinguish between subsistence hunting, which is defined as hunting for food for survival; commercial hunting, which is defined as hunting with the business purpose of supplying meat for a market; and general sport hunting, which is defined as highly regulated (with seasons and bag limits), noncommercial hunting. Subsistence hunting was done by early people and is practiced by the typical hunter of today. The category of general sport hunting may be broken down into different types of hunting based on the motivations, interests or intentions of the hunters. Before
we discuss these types, we first must describe the general category of sport hunting.

“Sport” hunting means following methods of hunting greatly restricted by law and regulations, such as what time of day to start and to stop, what kind and size of gun, what sex is permitted to be shot, what times of the year, and how many of what species may be taken. Other restrictions are placed on the hunt by individual hunters (e.g., not shooting young gobbler, even though legal) and/or by tradition of local hunting ethics (e.g., not shooting quail on the ground but “flushing” them to fly before shooting). Restrictions on more effective or efficient tools or machines to find or kill the game are enforced. For example, the use of airplanes or helicopters in hunting large game is prohibited because of the desire of the hunters to be engaged in a “fair chase.” Hunting methods that are too efficient, such as the “baiting” (putting out corn) of wild turkeys, or “spotlighting” (hunting at night with lights) for deer, are prohibited. In fact, if one wants to know the most efficient and effective methods and devices to kill wildlife, one need only to consult the hunting rules and regulations and note what is prohibited by law. Restrictions by law, by individual ethic, and by traditional customs are important aspects of sport hunting.

As noted above in regard to paleolithic hunting, hunting has always been circumscribed by laws, customs and ethics. The essence of hunting has never been simply killing animals. Both subsistence hunting and sport hunting have their own regulations. The difference between the two is that subsistence hunting is necessary for survival and sport hunting only supplements the diet of the hunter. The challenge and the thrill of the hunt is shared by both.

“Sport” hunting is contrasted by anti-hunters with meat hunting, but hunters include the obtaining of meat as an essential aspect of sport hunting. Indeed, hunters react as negatively as anti-hunters to the anti-hunters’ characterization of sport hunting as killing just for the fun of it and wasting the meat of the animals killed. The hunter’s position is stated well by the philosopher Holmes Rolston, III, in the best book ever published on the topic of its title, Environmental Ethics (1988): “A characteristic injunction in the sportsman’s ethic is that meat must not be wasted....Mere killing for sport is not justified but must join its ancient function....the quarry should not be sacrificed outside the paradigm of meat-hunting.”16

What are the reasons for the extensive restrictions on sport hunting? First, sport hunting is not subsistence hunting. If it were a question of survival, the hunter would use the method that was the most effective. The hunter would probably accept fewer restrictions if they prevented him from being successful and thereby surviving. Second, hunting is a cultural ritual that is infused with meaning. This is true even in subsistence hunting by native peoples. Modern rituals and meanings are maintained and even heightened in conditions where the hunting is a sport. The hunter and the hunted (the predator and the prey) have a bond in that the hunter must have a healthy population of prey for the hunter to be successful. The hunter’s well-being depends on the well-being of the animals that he kills. This apparent contradiction is resolved by understanding that the herd or population must survive even though, of course, the individual animal hunted does not survive (it is killed). One of the primary reasons the anti-hunter and the hunter disagree so greatly is that the anti-hunter focuses on the individual animal (how can you kill what you love?) and the hunter focuses on the population (the hunter admires and respects what he kills.)

In the disagreement between the hunters and the anti-hunters, the word “hunting” is used in both the general sense of pursuing animals, and in the narrower sense of sport hunting. Often writers shift from one sense to the other without recognizing the resulting mistakes in their arguments. A prime example of this is a statement in a “Hunting Fact Sheet #1, An Overview of Killing for Sport,” by The Fund for Animals, which says, “In fact, in its report on the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the U.S. Senate’s Commerce Committee stated, ‘Hunting and habitat destruction are the two major causes of extinction.”17 The article then attacks sport hunting. But the “hunting” referred to in the Senate committee report uses the term in its general sense (in this instance it primarily refers to market hunting), whereas the attack is directed against sport hunting. Cleveland Amory, an anti-hunter, refers to the above quote and also quotes Roger Caras’ reference, in Caras’ book Death is a Way of Life (1970), to the Red Data Book of the
International Union for the Conservation of Nature, which lists factors in the endangerment of animals. Amory credits Caras with pointing out that the only major factor listed as the cause for endangerment with regard to many animals is "hunting." To understand the meaning of "hunting" in this context, one need only note the reference to the Amazonian manatee as endangered because of "hunting." No one would seriously propose that the manatee is the object of sport hunting, yet Amory uses the references to attack sport hunting. Another example is in an article in the book, *The Preservation of Species* (1986). The author says, "The intensely organized efforts to trap passenger pigeons, the global activities of whaling fleets...and the arrogant killing of Bengal tigers are among the historically important occurrences of extinction through hunting....hunting remains a serious problem...with poaching still occurring on tigers and Japanese whaling fleets still taking many whales." Note that this author uses "hunting" to mean (1) the trapping of passenger pigeons, (2) the activities of whaling fleets and (3) poaching. This is the generalized sense of "hunting" and is clearly not sport hunting and refers to activities which most sport hunters would oppose.

Roger Disilvestro in his well-written book, *The Endangered Kingdom* (1989), describes the destruction of wildlife in the United States during the nineteenth century. An unbelievable number of passenger pigeons, buffalo, pronghorns, deer, and elk were slaughtered in a short time as the new nation feasted on the natural biological richness of the continent. To describe this process of destruction as being done by "hunters" leads easily to the feeling that today's "hunters" are doing the same thing. Since one is opposed to the former, should one not be opposed to the latter? For example, Disilvestro describes the discovery of the Steller sea cow off the west coast of the United States in 1741. This seven-ton sea cow was typically harpooned and dragged ashore and butchered. He then says that the sea cows were "...hunted into extinction only 27 years later." It is easy to remember that they were "hunted into extinction" and misunderstand the meaning of the phrase. Again he refers to "hunters" who killed thousands of passenger pigeons "...at night by burning pots of asphyxiating sulfur in roosts and by setting fire to trees to frighten flightless squabs out of nests." Again "hunting" and "hunters" are used here in the general sense of pursuing animals. The activities described are not sport hunting and are opposed by sport hunters as strongly as by the "anti-hunters."

Sometimes anti-hunting groups include as hunting such activities as the clubbing of seals, trapping for fur, harpooning of whales by factory ships, shooting of various animals, including game animals, by government control agents, and game law violations such as the killing of bears for their gall bladders, or rhinos for their horns. These activities are not sport hunting and can only be referred to as hunting in the most general sense, noted above, as pursuit. These activities are different issues than sport hunting, and they must be decided for or against on their own grounds, but they have nothing to do with the activity of sport hunting.

Robert Loftin, in an article entitled "Plastic Hunting vs. Real Hunting," attacks "artificial hunting," which he defines as "...the killing of pen-reared, often exotic, animals in confined or controlled circumstances." Such "plastic" hunting he believes is "...a cheap, flimsy substitute for the real thing." His distinction between "plastic" hunting and "real" hunting is important. What is lacking in "plastic" hunting is wildness (species such as quail and ducks are semi-domesticated, and the larger animals have lost their wariness), engaging nature on its own terms, pursuit with possibility (usually likelihood) of failure, and being a part of nature. Emily Mitchell calls these "canned hunts" and says, "...they are slaughter, not sport, with no vestige of a fair contest between man and beast." She concludes, "True hunters should be delighted to join in bringing an end to a perverted bloodlust." Surely sport hunters agree.

Loftin gives his idea of what real hunting is like: "At its best, hunting can be an act of worship, a sacred ritual that mystically reaffirms the essential unity of humans with the primitive order of nature and their complete dependence on it." The buffalo shoot referred to above was not "hunting" even in the generalized sense of pursuit since no pursuing occurred, just shooting. This is an example of something that was called "buffalo hunting" and the participant, a "hunter," when what happened was not even hunting in the generalized sense. Real hunters, as Loftin and Mitchell understand, disdain such activity. Whether or not one agrees that the buffalo should be shot or opposes the shoot-
ing, the shooting should not be called "hunting," and the shooter should not be called a "hunter."

Those who wish to attack hunting in general or sport hunting should attack the real thing, not some phony version of it. Those who wish to support hunting and/or sport hunting should defend only the real thing and not some "plastic" version. In the heat of the battle in the hunting/anti-hunting controversy, hunters defend too much and anti-hunters attack too much. Hunters are afraid that if they give an inch, all will be lost. Their argument is the slippery slope argument: if you admit that any form of shooting is undesirable, or if you agree that hunting should not be done at this time and at this place, you will end up with no hunting at all. Anti-hunters attack phony versions of hunting, poaching, government animal control and commercial slaughter (of whales, dolphins, seals) as if these things were hunting. In order for the discussion between the hunters and the anti-hunters to be clear, both need to be talking about genuine hunting.

We must then give a definition of hunting that will be useful in the hunting/anti-hunting arguments. Hunting as used in these arguments refers to sport hunting, even though the "sport" is often omitted. Sport hunting is the pursuit of wildlife in which the hunter, following the ethics of hunting (e.g., giving fair chase and meeting wildlife on its own terms), kills wildlife for food and trophy. The qualification of "for food and trophy" means that killing wildlife must not be done without a serious purpose. One may sport hunt only for food without any interest in obtaining a trophy. But this definition of sport hunting does not accept the killing of wildlife for a trophy when the meat is not to be used as food by the hunter or by someone to whom he gives the meat.

In the following discussion we must continually ask ourselves if the "hunting" referred to (by either hunter or anti-hunter) is hunting so defined.

**B. Types of Hunters**

It is not surprising that, given the complexity of the motivations of people, that hunters themselves are moved by a complex set of motivations. If one sorts out these motivations and distinguishes between them, hunters may be divided into different "types" based upon their primary motivation for hunting. This typing is somewhat artificial because any given hunter does not have just one motivation but rather a complex set of motivations. Nonetheless, it may be helpful in understanding hunters (and hunting) to separate them into groups, such grouping dependent upon their primary motivation. In an important study, Stephen R. Kellert of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies conducted a survey of people's attitudes toward animals. He connected these attitudes with hunters' and anti-hunters' motivations. As a result of these studies he grouped hunters into three clusters: utilitarian/meat, naturalistic/nature, and dominionistic/sport hunters, and grouped anti-hunters into two clusters: humanistic and moralistic.25

The first part of the designations of hunters refers to the people's attitudes toward animals: utilitarian means their primary attitude was the practical and material value of animals, naturalistic means their primary attitude was an interest and affection for wildlife and the outdoors, and dominionistic means their primary attitude was one of mastering and controlling animals. The second part of these designations of hunters refers to the primary reason given for hunting.

The largest number of hunters was the utilitarian/meat hunters, who listed as their primary reason for hunting the obtaining of meat. This group comprised 43.8% of the persons who hunted during the past five years. Characteristics of this group of hunters were: they were more likely to live in rural, open-country areas, to have greater experience with raising animals, to include a disproportionate number of persons over 65 years of age and to have earnings of less than $6,000. They viewed hunting as a harvesting activity.

The second largest group was the dominionistic/sport hunters whose primary reason for hunting was the mastering and controlling of animals. This group constituted 38.5% of those who hunted during the past five years. Characteristics of this group were: they were more likely to reside in cities, to have served in the armed services, and to have greater experience with raising animals, to include a disproportionate number of persons over 65 years of age and to have earnings of less than $6,000. They viewed hunting as "...involving mastery, competi-
tion, shooting skill and expressions of prowess."27

Since they were primarily interested in these social aspects of hunting, it was consistent that they were primarily interested in ritualistic hunting (like formal fox hunting) and were not concerned one way or the other about the death of the animal, that is, the death of the animal was incidental to the hunt. Of all the classes of hunters, this class of hunters would be disliked the most by the anti-hunters. Much of what they find objectionable about hunting is exemplified by these hunters. However, the anti-hunters fail to recognize that what they see as so despicable about hunters, the pleasure of killing, is not of interest even of this most distasteful (in the anti-hunter’s view) group of hunters.

The third group were the nature/naturalistic hunters, who were the hunters whose primary purpose in hunting was to be in contact with nature. They composed 17.7% of the group, but more of them hunted often (35.3%) than the other groups. Characteristics of this group were: significantly more people under 30 years of age (a possible trend for the years to come); higher socioeconomic status; more backpacking, camping out and bird watching. They saw hunting as an active, participatory role in nature. They understood themselves as becoming an integral part of nature, and their primary focus was on wildlife. They tended to be aware of man’s hunting origins and of the interdependence of prey and predator. More than any of the other types, they felt the need to rationalize the death of the animal. They understood the paradox of killing what they admired. Their view was that in hunting one understands “...more fully the inherent oneness of all life through facing death in nature.”28 They felt “...a greater respect for life through personal involvement in the eternal drama of life living off death.”29

In another article, Kellert remarks on the attitudes of people toward different types of hunting. He notes, “The general public overwhelmingly approved of the two most pragmatically justified types of hunting--subsistence hunting as practiced by traditional native Americans and hunting exclusively for meat regardless of the identity of the hunter.”30 Kellert also notes three other statistics regarding three other types of hunting. “On the other hand, approximately 60% opposed hunting solely for recreational or sporting purposes, whether for waterfowl or big game. Moreover, over 80% objected to the notion of hunting for trophies. Perhaps most interestingly, 64% approved of hunting for recreational purposes as long as the meat was used.”31 These last three statistics show how important the question is that is asked of people when one is trying to determine people’s attitude toward hunting. If one only asked and only paid attention to “60% opposed hunting solely for recreational or sporting purposes,” a person could easily conclude that the majority of people oppose sport hunting. But the statistic that “64% approved hunting for recreational purposes as long as the meat was used” shows quite a different attitude toward sport hunting.

Both the attitudes of hunters which gives us the above distinction of “types of hunters” and the attitudes toward hunting given to the “types of hunting” show how complex are the hunters’ motivations for hunting and how complex are the public’s attitudes toward hunting. Kellert’s basic study focuses on people’s attitudes toward animals and only secondarily how these attitudes toward animals affect their attitude toward hunting. While Kellert is pleased with people’s positive feelings toward animals, he notes, “...the emotional rather than intellectual basis for this interest and the focus on pets and specific wildlife species pose some potential problems.” Further, he is concerned that “an overly emotional attachment to animals may result in misguided priorities--as was suggested by the finding that the baby seal issue was of far more concern to the public than the Endangered Species Act...”32 Other research suggests a different way of looking at the motivations of hunters. R. Jackson and R. Norton suggest that the individual hunter goes through five phases in his personal development: shooter, “limiting out,” trophy, method, and “mellowing out.”33 Still other researchers suggest that these two ways of looking at the situation may be compatible. The suggestion is that Kellert is looking at a cross section of hunters at a given point in time and that Jackson & Norton are looking at the development of an individual hunter through time. The latter suggestion is that a particular hunter may be at different times in his life (to use Kellert’s terms) a meat hunter, then a sport hunter, and finally a nature hunter.
Nancy Connelly propose three primary motivational orientations, not narrowly referring to hunting but more broadly to wildlife-related recreation. "Affiliative-oriented" means that the individual is primarily motivated by his desire to accompany another person's companionship. This motivation may be connected with the expressed desire to be a part of a hunting tradition. "Achievement-oriented" means the person is primarily motivated to achieve some goal, which might be meat, trophy, sighting or photography. "Appreciative-oriented" means the person seeks peace, a sense of place or being a part of nature.34

One might reasonably guess that the achievement-oriented hunter would be the one that harvested the most deer. But Decker and Connelly's research in the state of New York in 1987 shows that the appreciative-oriented hunter was the most successful and the one that passed up the most opportunities to shoot. The explanation by the researchers is that the appreciative-oriented hunter is probably the more mature hunter with the greatest experience. The idea is that the mature hunter is more likely to be motivated by his aesthetic experiences of being a part of nature, since he may have achieved many of his goals (meat, trophy, etc.) earlier in his hunting career. A common reflection among older hunters is "I hunt more and shoot less."

Decker and Connelly show that the assumption that every hunter wants to shoot as many deer as possible is not true. Further, their study shows that the assumption that hunters who seek a second permit to kill a deer do so to allow them to kill another deer "...was not accurate for most hunters in our study."35 Instead these additional permits were often used to allow the hunters to continue being in the woods hunting, that is, they were interested in continuing their hunting rather than in killing another deer.

Decker and Connelly conclude, "The primary motivation for participation in deer hunting for most hunters is neither a desire for venison nor a desire to manage deer...motivations for hunting deer are rooted in the areas of personal achievement, affiliation with friends and family, and appreciation of the outdoors."36

What gives hunters satisfaction? What is quality hunting? Traditionally it has been assumed that the perceived quality of the hunt and the resulting satisfaction of the hunter depended upon the hunter being successful in harvesting his prey. Some early studies proposed that quality hunting included better-than-average hunter success ratios. But other studies suggest that what hunters desire is "...reasonable solitude, primitive surroundings, rugged exercise, suspense, excitement, and a chance to put the skill of the hunter against the innate cunning of the prey, resulting in a hunt to remember with satisfaction whether or not a full legal bag is taken."37 These later sociological studies show that hunter satisfaction is more complex than had been thought and is "...not closely correlated with size of the harvest...Earlier assumptions that hunters were motivated primarily by taking home a deer were brought up short by resistance to antlerless seasons and adherence to the buck-only philosophy."38 Wildlife biologist Dale McCullough correctly points out that "...the goal of deer management should not be based on yield of deer, but rather on the yield of hunter satisfaction."39

Recent studies indicate that there are multiple factors affecting hunter satisfaction. These include "...desired psychological outcomes such as experiencing nature and the outdoors; social factors such as companionship, crowding, and hunter behavior; wildlife parameters including harvest, number of deer seen or shots taken; and management parameters such as rules and regulations, access roads, and area maps."40 In a 1984 survey taken at the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area in northeast Tennessee, the best predictor of hunter satisfaction was appreciation of the natural outdoors. "The variable ‘being in the outdoors more satisfying to me than being successful at bagging a deer’ had the highest correlation of any item in the model."41 The conclusion reached by the study was, "The importance of being in the outdoors was more influential than harvest success at determining satisfaction with the deer hunting experience."42 Also, the number of legal bucks SEEN was more important than the actual harvest. Group success was more important than individual harvest success.

These studies are helpful in understanding what hunters perceive as the satisfying elements of hunting. If we understand the hunters' perceptions, we can be clear about what they see themselves doing when they are hunting. The result will be that we have an accurate picture of hunting at least insofar as hunters perceive it.
What do hunters enjoy? The answers are diverse. They enjoy planning the hunt, getting away, being out of doors, camaraderie, and the hunting itself in which the hunter is a real participant in the obtaining of meat.

C. Why do people hunt?

Why do hunters hunt? What are the delights of hunting? What values do hunters attach to hunting?

It is important to notice that the fundamental argument between hunters and anti-hunters has to do with their quite different assessments as to the nature of hunting. The description by hunters of what they are doing and the view of the anti-hunters as to what the hunters are doing is, to put it mildly, significantly different. The question of motivation arises. Anti-hunters see hunters as bloodthirsty nuts who are engaged in a form of mostly macho, camaraderie-based human recreation. Anti-hunters think of hunting as the "recreation" of killing animals for the fun of it. Hunters see themselves as enjoying the outdoors, loving nature, supporting conservation, engaging in a tradition of long standing, participating in a cultural and often family ritual, and becoming a part of the prey/predator cycle of nature.

In order to understand the hunting/anti-hunting controversy, clearly one must make an important distinction. The distinction which is crucial is found in the two different ways of interpreting the question, "Why do people hunt?" The first has to do with motives, and the second has to do with justification of a practice. Sometimes both hunters and anti-hunters fail to distinguish between reasons why people hunt and reasons why hunting is (or is not) an acceptable and beneficial activity. If we asked people why they play golf, we would also get these two types of answers. Answers reflecting motivations are a different type of answer than answers defending golf as an appropriate, healthy or beneficial thing to do. So, too, in hunting we get these two types of answers. We must distinguish between them in order to clarify what question is being asked.

First, "Why do people hunt?" may be interpreted as asking for the motivations of hunters. "Why do you hunt?" is asking what appeals to you about hunting, what joy you get from hunting and/or what meaning do you find in hunting? This is one way of "giving reasons" for hunting.

The second way the question may be interpreted is as the asking for justifications of the benefits of hunting. The justifications are usually given in arguments that assert the value, contribution, or usefulness of hunting. Giving justifications is a form of defending one's practice.

To illustrate the confusion that sometimes occurs, let us jump ahead to one of the arguments given to justify hunting: it regulates the size of the herd of deer and thus prevents destruction of habitat. When a hunter gives this "reason," he is not explaining (even if he thinks he is) why he hunts. Conversely, anti-hunters who reject this answer as a "reason," i.e., why people hunt, are also confusing the two meanings. No, hunters do not go to the woods because they want to thin the herd. Their motivation is something else. But their defense may include this "reason."

This confusion even exists in scholarly publications by researchers in game management. For example, note the comments, "Studies of motivations for hunting have found that few hunters identify participation in management as a reason to hunt...." and "Although hunters commonly use the notion of 'hunting as a management tool' to justify hunting, they generally do not seem committed to this purpose." These researchers are confusing motivation with justification. They want to educate hunters to recognize their hunting as being valuable to management. They also want the hunters to gain personal satisfaction from being a part of the game management.

This education does need to take place. And hunters can gain satisfaction from knowing that they are participating in a larger scheme of game management. But hunters are not motivated to hunt as an exercise in thinning herds. On the other hand their hunting is justified or made reasonable by being a part of a rationally chosen plan to control the population of the herd.

Hunters' awareness that they are participating in a greater good will enhance their personal achievements and therefore give them greater satisfaction from their hunting experiences. Their awareness can also guide them to make rational decisions about their hunting, such as whether to shoot does as a part of a planned game management program. And their awareness will enable them to have a clearer understanding of their responsibility to the game population as a part of the natural cycle of survival.
them to give justifications for their activities. But these justifications are not reasons (motivations) why people hunt.

Let us begin with hunter motivation. One of the best ways to understand hunters’ motivations is to listen to them tell about what hunting means to them and to listen to their hunting stories.

Here are some hunters’ answers to the question, “Why do I hunt?”

Dan Sisson, a columnist for Field & Stream, articulates why he hunts. He first argues that “...the dynamic of existence on our planet” is not the preservation of all life but the interaction stemming from the fact that “...every species, no matter how big or small, is either predator or prey....” 44 Not only does he believe that hunting is ethical, but he gives as his first reason for hunting (1) “...the attempt to establish a strong ethical position in life. Few activities in this world test ethical standards as does hunting.” 45 With no one watching, the hunter makes decisions to follow or not to follow his own ethical code of hunting. Sisson adds that he hunts (2) I’...to nourish my aesthetic appreciation of nature,” (3) “...for food,” (4) “...because it deepens my relationship with my son,” (5) “...to contribute to conservation directly,” and (6) “...to simplify my life.” 46

Dennis C. Eggers puzzles over the same question. He raises companionship, tradition and personal achievement as possible (and often given) answers. He rejects each, saying that though companionship may be important for some, he tends to enjoy hunting alone; though tradition is significant, he does not envision himself as being a part of the past; and though personal achievement is a goal of some, he often comes home empty-handed and happy. He concludes that “the one all-important ingredient” is his relationship with nature. In hunting, he says he is not a spectator of nature, but a participant in nature. “Humans have always been, and will always be, a part of nature....I am a meat-eater, a predator and have accepted the natural instinct to be a hunter....I am a participant with nature. I am a hunter.” 47

Wade Bourne gives four reasons why he hunts. He says, “I love to be outdoors.... For me, the outdoors is an infinity of mysteries and beauties and subtleties. Hunting is a vehicle for observing and enjoying these things.” Second, “I hunt for the traditions involved.... The hunting customs I grew up with, and to which I still cling, give me a sense of belonging to certain places and times; hunting gives me roots.” Third, “I love hunting because I have a provider instinct. I enjoy producing food for my family through my own skills and endeavor.” And fourth, “I am a predator....I get a spark when I’m stalking game, a thrill that I find in no other facet of life. Understand that this thrill doesn’t come with the kill. I take no pleasure in killing.... Rather, the thrill is in the chase.” 48

Ray Sasser identifies with a quote he attributes to Sitting Bull, “When the buffalo are gone, we will hunt mice, for we are hunters and we want our freedom.” For Sasser, what is important are the “...timeless values of honor and a sense of belonging in the historic scheme of things....” He says, “The true sportsman respects the game he hunts and does not take its death lightly.... Why do we hunt? To me, the modern hunt is an allegory on life. We hunt for the meaning of life, either consciously or subconsciously, and sometimes find it in death.” 49

John Woods, outdoor writer and university professor, referring to a rabbit hunt, says, “The measure of a successful hunt should never be in the count of game taken anyway. What makes a fine hunt is the companionship of good friends, a bevy of active hunting dogs, some good rabbit chases with dogs mouthing from places no man would venture, a couple of well-taken shots and the safe practice of our sport.” 50

In a more reflective mood, Woods says, “I like hunting. I enjoy it. And I’ll admit that part of the enjoyment is a successful kill, although it is not of prime concern. Hunting offers so many other tangibles that are much more valuable to me. Watching a coyote sneak along a fencerow, seeing a wild turkey in his grandiose full strut display, smelling dew-drenched honeysuckle in the dawning breeze, or listening to thousands of waterfowl winging toward a late evening roost are experiences only God could supply. I think only hunters fully understand them.”

Woods’ attempts to define what hunting is to him: “Hunting for me is recreation. It’s sharing a hard day afield with a close friend climbing Montana mountain ridges, or slipping through Aspen groves in Nevada. It’s telling the story of how a deer got away, or calling in a buddy’s first wild turkey. Hunting is interaction with nature at its most simple level....”
He concludes his response to the question, “Why do I hunt?” with this reflection: “Perhaps in the final analysis the issue should be why does such a seemingly simple question have to command so complicated an answer as it usually does? Why should any sportsman have to justify his recreation with philosophy or science, or data, or reasoning of any kind? I hunt because I enjoy it. It’s that simple.”

Rick Bass, an outstanding writer, says, “I’m a hunter, a predator... My roaming has meaning - it's no longer just roaming, but hunting. The year's meat supply is in question. My meat, my family’s meat.... Meat from my valley, where I hope to live and die - where I cut firewood, where I pick huckleberries, where I walk, where I watch the stars - my valley.” He confesses, “...sometimes I feel guilty about being a hunter, a killer - a killer of deer and elk, though not of moose, because they’re too easy, and not bears, because...well, bears themselves are meant to hunt.” But then he says that after he kills an animal, “...what I do is pray, sort of. I give heartfelt, shaky thanks to the animal as I clean it....”

Mike Gaddis, in one of the most thoughtful articles on hunting ever published, says, “I love the quest and the conquest, and all the traditions and trappings of the sporting life. Nothing else has so completely captured my soul. Yet...I remain troubled. To hunt is to take a life. Where is the rationale that puts that right with the conscience of my middle years?.... It is ever more crucial to me that the moment in which I take a life while my own continues be one I can approach and walk away from with self-respect.”

Barry Vorse, executive director of Wildlife Forever, says in a letter, “I will probably hunt as long as I am physically able. To me, the rewards go far beyond bringing game home. However, that is the ultimate goal and like most hunters, I am at least somewhat disappointed when I come home empty-handed. I can also say in all honesty that some of the greatest moments I’ve had hunting have had nothing to do with killing game. Do I feel remorse when I kill an animal? Yes, I do. I even talk to the animals that I kill sometimes. I discussed this very topic with two very deep-thinking, thoughtful hunters who are acquaintances. Both of them admitted to doing the same thing.”

Ben Willoughby, a Mississippi outdoor writer, reflects: “Hunting is far beyond the final pull of the trigger or the release of an arrow. Hunting is a privilege and a tradition that both sides of my family have followed for generations. Hunting is not just being out in the woods and fields; it’s the planning and anticipation of a coming hunt. It’s reflections by the fire of past hunts and of seasons long ago. As I have grown older, hunting is the feel of a favorite gun, the comfort of a good pair of boots, the voice of a trusted friend through the thicket, the love and companionship of a faithful dog. These are all part of hunting to me.”

In a provocative article, “The Wilderness Within,” Chris Madson, editor of Wyoming Wildlife, the magazine of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, draws an analogy between the wolf’s continual running along the perimeter of his pen and our restlessness, depressions, coronaries and nervous breakdowns. He says of the wolf pacing in his cage, “He is hunting caribou, still hunting after four generations in cages.” Madson says of us, “...I think I know why we run....we are still largely untamed creatures living in cages of our own making.... What we may still fail to appreciate is the place wildness occupies in the human spirit.” He adds, “...we are beginning to find that the world doesn’t run properly without some measure of wildness in it. The same can probably be said of the human animal itself. Whether we recognize it or not, our hunt is still going on--the same restless search to the horizon that has brought us from the plains of the African Pliocene to where we are now.” With rare perception Madson enlightens us: “If we’re far enough removed from wilderness, we may not even recognize the root of the feeling, but that makes very little difference--we still can’t leave it behind.” And with poetic insight he concludes, “Now and then, it demands free rein in an empty place, a long run in the tall grass and through the timber. Without that, it will subside at last into pacing the perimeter of our circumscribed lives, without direction or rest, looking for a way out and finding none.”

Madson’s article is one of the finest expressions in literature of the inner needs we have of the wilderness. It may tell us more about why people hunt than most hunters could possibly give. That wonderfully enlightened comment, “Whether we recognize it or not, our hunt is still going on...,” expresses a sense of the naturalness of hunting that is embedded in the human psyche.

In a more direct response to the question of why people hunt...
Chris Madson, addressing the North Carolina Wildlife Federation in 1991, outlined four aspects of the hunting experience which, for him, express the heart of hunting. (1) “I appreciate hunting as a discipline. Pursued as I like to pursue it, hunting demands skill, knowledge, endurance, and patience; virtues I think are worth developing.” (2) “I appreciate hunting as a passport to unique places and moments.” He described a waterfowl hunt on the North Platte River and then commented about flushing 50 geese and twice that many mallards off the misty river and into the sun: “With any luck, that sight will be with me when I close my eyes for the last time.” (3) “I appreciate hunting as one way - perhaps the only way - of really participating in the doings of a wild place.” (4) “I appreciate hunting as tradition. Appreciation for the hunting experience transcends generations, even centuries.” Rarely are hunters as articulate as this outstanding outdoor writer.

Stephen P. Mealey, Forest Supervisor of Boise National Forest, gave the keynote address at the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep Conference, San Antonio, Texas, 1994. In his address, “Ethical Hunting: Updating an Old Heritage for America’s Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Future,” he states his view of hunting as a “ceremony of reconnecting.” He says, “Hunting for me has become a ritual or ceremony of reconnecting to one of earth’s oldest and most fundamental processes: ‘life unto life, only through death.’ This ritual allows me to participate directly in the life and death cycles on which all natural systems depend. It allows a humbling, spiritual communion with stone age ancestors.... It links me back to a fundamental and ancient respect, and magical or religious appreciation for animals....”

Jon Magnuson, the Lutheran campus pastor at the University of Washington in Seattle, is a bow hunter who reflects on the current status of our society and its paradoxes: “...as populations become increasingly urbanized and technologically sterile, natural cycles of decay, death and rebirth become dangerously romanticized and more remote from realities of daily life. We still kill animals and plants to sustain ourselves, but we deny it.” As he draws his bow, he is “...poised with the decision whether or not to loose the arrow. A prayer now on my lips. My fingers release...[in order to] identify myself with an ancient primordial ritual, the spilling of blood.”

Jim Posewitz, a longtime Montana conservationist and the founder of Orion - The Hunters Institute, gives his views in his book, Beyond Fair Chase:

You need to be familiar with the field, the woods, the marsh, the forest, or the mountains where you hunt. If you work hard and long at this aspect of hunting, you can become a part of the place you hunt. You will sense when you start to belong to the country....Many people hunt for a lifetime without learning this, and they miss the most rewarding part of being a hunter....Hunting is one of the last ways we have to exercise our passion to belong to the earth, to be part of the natural world, to participate in the ecological drama, and to nurture the ember of wilderness within ourselves.

Let us look at four themes in these responses: 1) being a part of nature, 2) the importance of tradition, 3) being a provider of food and 4) being a predator - an instinctive behavior.

One major theme of these responses is a recurring theme of the hunters’ desire to be a part of nature. Hunting is an attempt to reaffirm their relation with nature. People have been alienated from nature and have responded to that alienation with either the destructive desire to conquer it or the paternalistic desire to pet it. Hunters want to affirm that they are a part of nature.

The question arises, “Why can’t you just walk around in the woods and enjoy nature without engaging in hunting?” The answer to this question is very important and revolves around the difference in observing and participating, in standing outside of and being involved in, in separation and unity, and in sightseeing and being a part of. A tourist who is sightseeing, a photographer who is taking pictures of wildlife, a hiker who is observing, a bird watcher who admires, a naturalist who studies objectively, all are not participating in the processes of nature. Their actions are those of an individual entity who is above, beyond, outside, or distinct from that which he observes. Why is this not satisfactory? It does provide many satisfactions, but it is not the same as participating in the processes.

The desire to become, to be, a part of nature, to re-enter the natural world, to marvel at its wonders, to participate in its secrets, its excitement and its surprises is basic to the appeal of hunting.
Imagine hunting in a creek bottom, and suddenly a brace of ducks explodes off a small slough that you had not seen. The bright colors of the ducks amaze you as well as their physical agility and speed. These marvelous creatures were not put there by man. They are the creations of nature. Their beauty and abilities are splashes of splendid excellences on the canvas of nature. The experience is trapped in your memory and will remain vivid even in the winter of life.

In a few seconds all is silent again. The black water of the long, serpentine sloughs settles back to stillness after the splashy departure of the ducks. The tall, slim, hardwood trees of the rich, wet, bottom soil sway in the cold wind as they stretch their limbs far up into the gray November sky. Silent and musky, dark and damp, wild and wonderful, it is an enchanted place. If you cannot feel this, then you will feel like a stranger in an incomprehensible world. If you can feel it, then you have re-entered the primordial world of nature, become a participant in the flow of the seasons, heard the call of the wild, and felt at home again. To be here is preferable to being at any other place. Houses and streets, cars and bicycles, businesses and churches are foreign things, artificial and external.

Being in nature is comfortable and satisfying, peaceful and restful. Your blood pressure drops. Time slows. You must catch the cadence of the woods, the flow of the creek, the pulse of the crickets. You must slow down. The speed of town is inappropriate here. You must learn to sense. Listen, look, feel, smell, taste. Listen near and then listen far. The chirp of the bird, the croak of the frog, the caw of the crow, the yelp of the turkey, the quack of the duck are the notes of the music of the woods. To hear them is an accomplishment. To appreciate them is a blessing. To know them is to know nature. Look near - at the ground under your feet, at the moss by the base of the tree, at the turkey track in the mud. Look up - into the trees, along the limbs. Is it a bump or the head of a squirrel? Notice the leaves and the limbs, the nests and the hollows, the crooks and the turns of the branches. Look far - up the hill, down the bottom, across the creek. Is that a shadow or a deer? It does not matter.

One is inside nature.

Ortega, in Meditations on Hunting, says, “Man cannot re-enter Nature except by temporarily rehabilitating that part of himself which is still animal. And this, in turn, can be achieved only by placing himself in relation to another animal.” Therefore, “…only by hunting can man be in the country.” He amplifies this view: “…the pursuer cannot pursue if he does not integrate his vision with that of the pursued. That is to say, Hunting is an Imitation of the Animal. Therefore we will not be understanding hunting if we take it as a human fact and not as a zoological fact that man takes delight in producing.”

What is the proper response to nature? Are we to be a part of an ecological whole which maintains a diversity of species and is self-reproductive? Or is pristine nature, which we wish to preserve, nature without one of its natural creatures, people? A natural setting without humans interacting with it became rarer and rarer as humans expanded outside of their original homeland of Africa into Europe and Asia and then into the western hemisphere. The human expansion has continued in our time because of the increase in world population.

Can humans live within nature without destroying it? Our record is not good. Yet there is a deep desire of some people to be a part of nature, not just to stand outside it and observe. One expression of this being-in-nature is hunting. Human action is not alien to nature. Neither is death (caused by humans or other animals). Rolston says about people’s participation in nature through hunting: “The ecological ethic, which kills in place, is really more advanced, more harmonious with nature, than the animal rights ethic, which, in utter disharmony with the way the world is made, kills no animals at all.”

Although the subject of nature photography has not arisen in the above testimonials, the desire to participate in nature, not to be a spectator, is often the reason hunters give for not substituting nature photography or sightseeing for hunting. In photography
and in sightseeing, the person is an outside observer, not a participant. Photography and sightseeing have their own delights. Their advantages include the fact that they are not consumptive.

In discussing environmental strategies for the use of natural resources, Rolston suggests the rule that on public lands non-consumptive use should have a higher priority.

Private land could be the main source of consumptive use. He does not reject any consumptive use in public lands but only assigns a lower priority to it. Of the consumptive uses, he says we should favor those that are soonest renewable. Then he comments, "Wildlife photography will be favored over hunting, because the photographer leaves the buck there for others to enjoy; the hunter brings the buck back with him. Still, the buck will be replaced the following year."64 The advantage of the non-consumptive use is obvious: the buck will be there for other photographers.

Yet Rolston is perceptive in his comment that the buck will be replaced by another one. In a wilderness setting one of the predators, a mountain lion, a bear, or a man, will kill him. Yet he will be replaced by the healthy herd of which he is a part. It seems reasonable that when we have competing interests, such as those who want to photograph and those who want to hunt, we should set aside areas for each activity. Some public lands could be devoted to one activity and other lands designated as hunting areas.

With the increase in pressure from a seemingly ever-increasing human population and the seemingly endless destruction of wilderness areas, we may one day be reduced to only photography or sightseeing. However, these activities are significantly different in their participatory aspects from hunting.

The tourist standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon viewing the spectacular scene will not stay long. The wonder of the big ditch wears off quickly for the tourist who comes there for "the view." As a spectator, the tourist is outside nature, looking in. Despite his/her location, he/she is not "in" the country, not a part of the events being observed, not subject to the variations of the environment except in minor ways (rain sends the tourists home). Riding a bus with fifty other people through Yellowstone National Park does not put one in nature. Such a viewer can hardly share with the environment its dynamic, changing aspects. The viewer may appreciate the beauty observed, but only in a minor way does he participate in its reality. The point is not that sightseeing is bad. It is not. It may be the only way that many people will enjoy any of the wonders of nature. But for some people (including hunters), sightseeing is not enough. They want to participate in the processes of nature.

The second major theme found in hunters' accounts is the importance of tradition in hunting. The aspect of tradition is important for some hunters. That tradition may be a family tradition and the roots associated with a particular place, or it may be the identification with all hunters--a sense of understanding Sitting Bull's statement of his being. Family tradition (usually an extended family including friends) as an important value in hunting is expressed in the books of Robert Hitt Neill, The Flaming Turkey (1986) and Going Home (1987).65

One can not read Neill's description of "Big Robert," his father, who was the center of a group of hunters, without feeling the admiration, comradeship, closeness, companionship, and close personal relationship of the hunting group. Tom Kelly, in Dealer's Choice (1983), tells a charming story of his nine year old daughter hunting with him on her first wild turkey hunt. The "Colonel's daughter" holds her own. Wit, charm, honesty, and openness permeates their relationship. Kelly says about his daughter hunting turkeys, "Nine year old girls are not put here to understand but to enjoy."66 Such family hunting traditions are a part of the culture in many parts of the country.

Tradition in the larger sense is well illustrated in Aldo Leopold's comments after having just missed a buck with his bow and arrow, "As the buck bounded down the mountain with a good-bye wave of his snowy flag, I realized that he and I were actors in an allegory. Dust to dust, stone age to stone age, but always the eternal chase!"67

The third major theme in hunters' accounts is that of being a provider of food. To be a food provider through hunting is a direct, straightforward action that provides satisfaction for many hunters. Knox says, "Part of what makes hunting such an intensely emotional experience is the physical responsibility you take for the death of your food."68

It is a matter of historical record that from the time of the early cave drawings of animals to today that wild game (fish, animals
and birds) has been a source of food for people. At the earliest stages of human development people got all their food from wild sources. In addition to the types of game mentioned above, people also used fruits, vegetables and grains as food. The domestication of wild things came in the taming of the animals and the development of agriculture. Nonetheless, wild nature remained, even if secondarily, a source of food for people.

In the history of the settlement of the Americas, nature provided an important source of food for the settlers. With the development of technology (especially with regard to guns) came an increasing ability to kill the game and catch the fish. Interchangeable parts were first developed for guns. The result was an expansion of the number of guns available to the general population. This population feasted off nature's bounty.

This legacy and tradition is still maintained. For example, "In 1982, nearly 3 million white-tailed deer reportedly were bagged by about 12 million recreational hunters in the United States and Canada...." If we make a conservative estimate that each deer will produce 75 pounds of meat, the amount of meat provided by deer hunting is 225 million pounds per year. This food is a significant factor for a part of the population. This meat can be replaced from an increased supply of domestic meat, raised by others, killed by others, butchered by others, packaged by others, and bought at the supermarket. But hunters find a satisfaction in their direct participation in obtaining their own meat from wild sources.

There is also an element of naturalness in this process. To eat is to kill (whether one kills plants or animals). Living things require food. Alfred North Whitehead, a twentieth century philosopher, said, "It (what has been eaten) has been robbed of something... Life is robbery... The robber requires justification." A part of that justification is that nature has evolved such that organisms require the ingestion of other organisms in order to live. Theodore Vitali, a philosopher at St. Louis University, argues, "Our right to kill... stems from our right to life. We have every right to kill other living beings other than man because we have a right and obligation to sustain our existences and the conditions for our existences... We have, in short, the right and obligation to take life because the taking of life is crucial to the sustaining of life."

Even the vegetarian cannot escape the necessity of consuming organisms. One may choose which organisms (vegetable or animal). One may choose which animal (domestic or wild). One may choose who obtains and packages it (others or yourself). But the direct action of obtaining one's own food provides a deep satisfaction.

Obtaining that food directly from nature not only establishes a direct relation with nature, but often brings recognition of the power that lies behind nature and its provisions. The hunter often feels that the Creator of nature is the ultimate source of the food that sustains life. The hunter often gives thanks to God for the harvest of the hunt. In doing so he responds as people have done for a million years to the joy of the successful hunt.

Of course one can also obtain food directly from nature by gathering. Picking berries, digging roots, and catching fish are other ways of obtaining food directly. And these activities also carry great satisfaction with them.

The fourth major theme that occurs in hunters' responses is that hunters hunt because they are instinctive predators. Ray Sasser says, "..I struggle with the question anti-hunters ask--how can you kill something you love? I kill selected deer because I am a predator with instincts not fully encased beneath a veneer of civilization." He explains, "Because of genetics and evolution, we deer hunters are predators. Paleontologists tell us that our ancestors were hunters and foragers.... We are hunters because we evolved from a race of predators."

The last sentence in this statement expresses what is often called "The Killer Ape" hypothesis. Anti-hunter Matt Cartmill begins his book, A View to a Death in the Morning; Hunting and Nature through History (1993) with a chapter so entitled. Cartmill argues against this view saying, "There is no good evidence that Australopithecus ever made tools or weapons."
"It is a safe bet that our australopithecine ancestors were hunters in a broad sense: that is, they sometimes killed and ate other animals, just as chimpanzees and people do today. And since people today are more predatory than chimpanzees, it is another safe bet that hunting took on an increased importance during the course of our evolution from chimpanzee-like ancestor. But none of this implies that hunting was what “made us human.”

Most hunters would be satisfied with the position that hunting was a part of our evolution. They do not need the further assertions that we evolved from killer apes or that hunting made us human.

Ortega raises the issue of why men hunt and suggests two elements in the answer to this question: living Paleolithically (as noted above) and instinct. With regard to the biological basis of instinct he notes that “...hunting is not an exclusively human occupation...not even peculiar to mammals.” Hunting, the taking of possession, is “…a contest or confrontation between two systems of instincts.” The two systems are the aggressive instinct of the hunter and the defensive instinct of the game. Hunting for sport is the “…discharge of the predatory instinct which survives in modern man as a rudiment.” The reflex of pursuit is the “…residual fossil of an instinct that man retains from the time he was a pure beast.”

In a wonderfully entitled book, The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game (1973), Paul Shephard argues that in the transition from hunter/gatherer societies of earlier humans to the farming societies, humans lost a great deal. Shephard asks, “Can we face the possibility that hunters were more fully human than their descendants? Can we embrace the hunter in ourselves as a step toward repairing the injury to our planet and improving the quality of life?” Shephard sees humans as originally evolving as hunters. He says, “The human cardiovascular system evolved as part of the physiology of hunters, who regularly ran for their lives.” (They no doubt ran for their lives from lions, tigers, etc. and toward animals they were hunting.) So Shephard understands hunting by humans as part of their natural evolutionary development. His view is: “Man is in part a carnivore: the male of the species is genetically programmed to pursue, attack, and kill for food. To the extent that men do not do so they are not fully human.”

Shephard is correct that humans are partly carnivorous. We are also partly herbivorous. Or more simply stated we are omnivorous. The best guess is that we evolved from omnivorous creatures. Shephard’s view of the male of the species leaves him open to the criticism of being macho and chauvinistic. Females of our species are quite capable of killing. So this is not a male trait. His last statement is an extreme one with which few people would agree. Human nature is not so narrowly programmed. Rather, human beings find fulfillment in a large number of ways. While hunting may be one of these ways, it certainly is not the only one.

With regard to the eating of hunted animals Shephard comments, “The loss from our culture of the hunter’s attitude of the sacredness of eating is perhaps one reason that we have mistakenly come to think of killing animals as shameful.” He adds, “Ecologically, death leads to life, not in a hazy and obscure way but in the eating of the prey. Among hunters the fallen prey is universally cherished and honored both for itself as a thing of beauty and in the solemnity and meaning of its death.”

For a hunter whom the anti-hunters will love to hate they need turn to no other than Humberto Fontova, a wildlife writer. Fontova says, “We like to kill animals. I can no more explain this predatory instinct to the satisfaction of Friends of Animals than I can anyone else can. But I won’t throw up a smoke screen of rationalizations when confronted with this unnerving but unavoidable fact.” Fontova acknowledges other contributory factors to his desire to hunt, such as his love of the outdoors, the challenge it brings, the reward of studying nature, the fellowship, and the ability to feed his family. Then he says, “But mostly, I recognize the urge as a predatory instinct to kill. Man is a predator--has been for tens of thousands of years. It’s going to take a while to breed that out of us, and thank God I won’t be around by then.” Fontova’s position is one of the most extreme in the literature. His claim that people like to kill animals is rejected by almost everyone. That this “like” is an instinct is even more questionable. It is true that people have been predators for tens of thousands of years. It is also true that millions of people (Hindus) have been vegetarians for thousands of years. So, the issue is not about breeding an instinct out of us. It is about evaluating human activ-
ities in the context of our natural/cultural existence.

With Fontova's position we have a shift from the view that hunting is instinctive to the view that the urge to kill animals is instinctive. But the desire to hunt cannot be reduced to the desire to kill animals. If what is instinctive here is the desire to kill animals, that desire may be satisfied by taking the job of killing animals in a slaughter house or by going out and shooting domestic cattle in a field. After all, one can shoot domestic cows, sheep, and goats if one just gets a thrill out of killing animals. Few, if any, people would call that hunting. Most hunters reject the idea that they get a thrill out of killing, but they do say that they enjoy hunting.

In a wonderful book entitled, Women Who Run With the Wolves, Clarissa Pinkola Estes describes the instinctive self which she calls the Wild Woman. Estes studied wildlife biology, wolves in particular, as well as Jungian psychology. She compares wolves and women:

Healthy wolves and healthy women share certain psychic characteristics: keen sensing, playful spirit, and a heightened capacity for devotion. Wolves and women...are deeply intuitive....A healthy woman is much like a wolf: robust, chock-full, strong life force, life-giving, territorially aware, inventive, loyal, roving....Yes, we remain human, but within the human woman is the animal instinctual Self.86

Although Estes is giving an account of the instinctive life of women, she may have expressed better than any male wildlife writer the elements of the instinctive life that find expression in the desire to roam the woods and hunt wild game. Most of her characterizations of the instinctive life apply to males as well as females.

Estes does not address the topic of hunting except in a psychological sense. She has a chapter entitled, “Hunting: When the Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,” in which she tells the myth of the Skeleton Woman. This is the story of a fisherman who catches a skeleton woman. She says, “The fisherman motif shares some archetypal symbolism with the hunter, and these represent, among many things, the psychological elements of humans that seek to know, that strive to nourish self through merging with the instinctual nature.”87 She argues that we must all deal with the Life/Death/Life principle. She applies this principle specifically to love and generally to self-development. It also applies to all aspects of life including hunting. Estes says, “The fisherman’s challenge is to face Lady Death, her embrace, and her life and death cycles.”88 “Eventually, we all have to kiss the hag.”89 In hunting, one faces death.

In one of the most carefully reasoned articles on hunting available, philosopher Ann Causey also argues that hunting is instinctive. She begins her explanation by dividing hunters into two groups: sport hunters and shooters. She excludes subsistence hunters whose “...activities are considered by most who address this issue to lie outside the realm of moral scrutiny.”90 She defines shooters as those who have a utilitarian motive for hunting, usually the obtaining of meat for the freezer. She includes in this category poachers, slob hunters, and hunting jocks who are in competition to display macho features. She defines the sport hunter as one who seeks to be “...a link in the chain of nature, connected as predator to prey, and thus to participate directly in natural processes and phenomena....”91

Her exclusion of the subsistence hunter is a mistake because this leads her to believe that “The sport hunter alone regards his prey with admiration, respect, and reverence and he alone must rationalize his seemingly contradictory act, that of inflicting death and violence on something he has worked hard to become a part of.”92 She fails to note that this same dilemma was faced by early hunting peoples whose hunting was a religious/mythical action of killing that which gave them life. Hunting cultures developed rituals and customs which reflected their understanding of the mystery of “life only through death.” They faced this paradox of life through death with stories of identification (clans) and with mystical preparation.

Much of our modern culture is less honest and seeks to avoid the reality of death, to reject the paradox of death sustaining life, to overlook the sacredness of the relation between humans and other animals, to flee from the responsibility of the impact of our actions on nature, and to deny that we humans are a part of nature. The modern hunter’s dilemma, of which Causey writes so well, should not be understood as uniquely applicable to the modern hunter. The modern hunter’s dilemma is actually an instance of the response of all of us to the paradox of life through death.
ern sport hunter, rather it is an essential aspect of the hunter/hunted relationship. Without respect for the animal, hunting is just slaughter, whether done by ancient or modern man.

Causey rejects all the arguments of the benefits of hunting by the hunters and all of the arguments of the immorality of hunting by the anti-hunters, because she argues that they are irrelevant. If all these benefit/harm arguments were to be found unsound, both sides would, she says, maintain their positions. Why? The answer, as we have noted above, is that these are not sources of motivation but arguments as to the benefit/harm of hunting.

The crux of the issue, according to Causey, is that "...the motive for sport hunting boils down to the enjoyment of activities undertaken as part of the quest for and ultimately the achievement of the kill. In the final analysis, the hunter does not hunt to manage, harvest, control, cull, or thin herds of game; he hunts to kill; and the accusatory note always rings loudest when the anti-hunter angrily declares that the hunter kills for fun."93 She is certainly correct that we must distinguish between arguments (presented by either side) and motives (of either side). This does not mean that the arguments are without value. They are not. Indeed, arguments, especially about the ecological impact of hunting/non-hunting, are significant. If, and how, hunting is done needs to be, in part, determined by such arguments. But these arguments of benefit/harm are not addressed to the basic motivation of human behavior. We may ask about that, too.

Causey poses the question, "...is it morally wrong to wish to hunt for sport and to take pleasure in the occasional kill?" Her answer is, "It is not morally wrong to take pleasure in killing game; nor is it morally right. It is simply not a moral issue at all, because the urge itself is an instinct...the urge to kill for sport is amoral...."94 So Causey answers the question, "Why do people hunt?" with the answer, "The urge to kill for sport is instinctive." In giving this answer she agrees with Ortega and with Fontova that hunting is a "predatory instinct."

Causey finds common ground between the anti-hunter Roger Caras and the pro-hunter Jose Ortega y Gasset. They both believe that "...the desire to hunt is the modern vestige of an evolutionary trait of utmost adaptive significance to early man."95 This evolutionary trait is still there. She quotes Caras, "the will to hunt, the desire to hunt, lies deep. It is, and I do believe this, inherent in man."96

Causey makes an important modification of Caras' view that the desire to hunt is inherent in man. She states that "...the urge to kill may be viewed as an original essential human trait." Note the change from "desire to hunt" to "urge to kill." She argues, "The instinct to kill was necessary for paleolithic man. The pleasure resulting from satisfaction of that urge was also necessary in order to reinforce the urge..."97 A more plausible way of stating the situation seems to me to be that man was driven by hunger to hunt and that killing was necessary to satisfy his hunger. The pleasure needed here was that of a full stomach, not the pleasure of killing. The instinct that lies at the base of this need for food is the instinct of hunting reinforced with the thrill of the chase.

Let us draw an analogy. The thrill and joy of football is in accomplishing the task of running and passing until one's team crosses the goal line with the football. It is the playing (or watching the play) of the game that is enjoyable. Of course, we could not remove the goal of crossing the goal line (or some other goal) because this would make all the running and passing useless, without purpose. But it is not crossing the goal line alone that thrills people; it is primarily the play. The "play of the game" that is rerun a hundred times on TV is the spectacular catch of a pass or the broken field running of a fast back. Football would not be more thrilling if the offensive team lined up ten yards from the goal each time (resulting in many more crossings of the goal line). In fact, it would be less interesting if they did so.

So it is with hunting. If the thrill in hunting was primarily in killing, then the more killing the more the thrills. Killing a hundred buffalo out of a milling herd that stand there while a person shoots them is no sport hunter's idea of hunting. Causey, who defends sport hunting, and the anti-hunters who hate it, both make the same mistake. They think that the thrill is primarily in the killing, not in the hunting. If the thrill was in the killing, then Causey's shooters would be hunters par excellence. But they are not. What distinguishes these shooters from the sport hunters? It is the nature of the chase, the pursuit of the game, the participation in natural predation that are the distinguishing features.

One need not have killed in order to have hunted, just as one
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need not have crossed the goal line to have played football. You cannot remove the goals of either hunting or football and still maintain the integrity of the activity. The goals are an essential part, but the joy is in the activity.

Listen to a hunter. “Often such people as wives, town commentators, get-the-limit hunters, and meat shooters do not understand what real turkey hunting is about. They think that you go turkey hunting to kill turkeys... But they are wrong... Anyone who believes that a turkey hunt is a failure if you don’t kill a turkey does not understand turkey hunting.... The purpose of hunting turkeys is to hunt turkeys. Not to kill turkeys.... If you do not enjoy hunting turkeys you will soon quit. There is not much turkey killing to turkey hunting. So do not confuse that with turkey hunting.”

One might draw another analogy between the hobby of gardening and the sport of hunting. Gardening is an activity that people choose because they receive joy in growing plants and in working with the soil. Gardeners participate in nature in a similar way that hunters do. And they derive a similar satisfaction. The goal of vegetable gardening is the growing of food for the gardener. This growing of food with its base in agricultural life may have lost its economic efficiency. The vegetables grown in the garden may cost the gardener more than those available in the grocery store. Yet the gardener persists. Why? Because of the satisfaction derived from the activity itself. What if the gardener knew that he was going to throw away the food he was producing? Such a waste of the end product would destroy the goal of gardening. That goal must be preserved if gardening is to be authentic. But the joy of gardening is in the activity, not just in obtaining its goal.

Caras’ view of hunting is more correct than Causey’s. Caras says “hunting is instinctive.” Causey’s modification of this to “killing is instinctive” is a mistake. The insight that hunting is instinctive is more illuminating for our understanding of hunting. The urge to hunt in humans may be a remnant of an ancient mammalian instinct which was an important part of the evolution of humans. Ortega also agrees with this view. He holds (as noted above) that pursuit is a residual fossil of an instinct.

A better way of stating the case may be that hunting is natural, and, as such, it lies outside the realm of morality. How one hunts is the object of moral consideration. Hunting may be done ethically or unethically, but hunting itself is natural (as is eating).

It is also correct that hunting is pleasurable. This aesthetic enjoyment probably flows from our ancient past. We have always been a part of nature, and we remain so today. Physically, we are suited for the chase. Many modern people have abandoned the chase but have retained elements of the chase such as walking, running, and jogging, as the best “exercise” for their health. These elements of the chase and the meat provided by it contribute to people’s natural well being.

In reading hunters’ explanations of why they hunt it is obvious that many hunters cannot articulate their motivations, understand the essence of their activity, nor appreciate the heights which they can achieve. Indeed it is remarkable to find one who can. One hunter who can is Tom Kelly of Spanish Fort, Alabama. Kelly, one of the finest outdoor writers of our time, has obviously spent a lot of time thinking about the nature of hunting. In his book, Tenth Legion (1973), Kelly describes the highest level of hunting that he has experienced. It is a level which few hunters may have attained; it is nevertheless a real level.

Kelly begins his book on turkey hunting with a clear and unambiguous statement that the object of turkey hunting is to kill gobblers. He asserts, “Any man who hunts, hunts in order to kill, no matter what he says about it....the ultimate aim of a blood sport is the death of a beast.” However at the end of his book he describes “the final stage” in hunting in a different way. He observes that “...one of the strangest enjoyments in the sport comes from not killing turkeys” and he refers to “...the strange fact that it is possible to possess a turkey without killing him.” The explanation of the divergence between these statements lies in the distinction, noted above, between the goal of an activity (crossing the goal line in football) and the enjoyment of playing (or watching the play of) the game. It is not clear that even Kelly is clear about this distinction and its illumination of the meaning of his sport.

To explain this strangest of enjoyments Kelly describes a situation in which a hunter has hunted a particular gobbler for many days. Each time, the gobbler has successfully eluded the hunter’s attempts to call him into shooting range. He describes the relation
between the hunter and the gobbler as both a duel and a game. About the fifth or sixth time of matching wits, Kelly says, "The game changes." He describes the nature of the change:

There is no longer any obligation to kill the turkey. The desire to do so remains, but the obligation goes, and the entire affair moves into a different plane, almost a new dimension... He is hunting now for the pure joy of the chase, for the intellectual exercise involved. The bird has not just become human-man and bird have become one-and they dance together... There is a degree of mysticism in it as well, and a degree of softness.

The obligation of the hunt disappears. The hunt moves to a different plane, a new dimension. There exists the pure joy of the chase-they dance together. Few hunters have understood so much. Fewer still have been able to articulate it so well. Kelly understands what Aldo Leopold knew: hunting is an artistic skill which produces aesthetic enjoyment.

"O.K.," says the anti-hunter, "but why kill the poor thing? Why not just take his picture and walk away?" Kelly has an answer. He describes his hunting a particular gobbler for eight consecutive mornings. Each morning, despite all Kelly can do, the gobbler outsmarts him. On the ninth morning Kelly changes his tactics again and this time succeeds in having the bird walk within range, offering a clear shot. Kelly did not shoot. But he says, "I knew that I had ruined it the minute he was gone, for you may take all the pleasure you choose in losing, so long as you lose. You cannot throw the game."

"You cannot throw the game"--what does he mean by that? First, why does he call it a game? The sport of turkey hunting for Kelly is bounded by tradition and rules which insure its difficulty and a sense of meeting the gobbler on his own turf and on his own terms. It is not the shooting of turkeys in a field with a rifle out of a pickup window. Kelly thinks less of a person who would do this than does the most rabid anti-hunter. Kelly uses only a shotgun (which has a limited range-often short of where the turkey will come) and tricks the gobbler into coming to the sound (produced only by traditional methods, not electronic devices) of a turkey hen. Kelly matches his knowledge of the terrain with the turkey's inclination to move in a certain direction, matches his hiding with the gobbler's keen eyesight, matches his patience with the gobbler's level of interest in the unseen hen. The odds clearly lay in the gobbler's favor. The evidence of this is the empirical criterion of the number of unsuccessful hunts (many) versus the number of successful hunts (few).

Second, why is not shooting the gobbler "throwing" the game? When Kelly did not shoot that ninth morning after he had finally succeeded in getting the gobbler in range, Kelly felt that he had "degraded" the gobbler. His opponent, fairly defeated, was given a victory he did not deserve. Kelly felt he had "demeaned" him by treating him as if he were unworthy. Kelly says, "I could not have demeaned him more if I had caught him by the foot in a steel trap and beaten his head off with an axe handle."

Why? Because the days of hunting had bound the two together in their respective roles of hunter and hunted--"the turkey and I had possessed each other." They had "danced" together. Each played a part in the drama of nature. Kelly understands what Aldo Leopold knew: hunting is an artistic skill which produces an aesthetic response.

The hunter respects the hunted as the hunted. Despite anti-hunter's claims, the hunted cannot ever become the hunter (within the context of the man hunting gobblers). The two are not equal. The two cannot change places. "Do unto others..." does not apply. The hunter respects the hunted for what it is--a wily, wild animal with which the hunter matches outdoor skills and which provides food for man. Killing does not demean it, degrade it, nor show lack of respect for it.

D. Arguments supporting hunting

The above discussion has been about why people hunt, in the sense of what motivates them to hunt. Now we need to consider why people hunt in the sense of the reasons why hunting is an acceptable and beneficial activity. The above had to do with motives, and this section has to do with justification of a practice. We must consider the justifications hunters give for their activity, hunting.

Hunters' arguments that hunting is beneficial, not detrimental, include (1) the wildlife management support argument, (2) the
hunters are conservationists argument, (3) the excess population argument which can be subdivided into (3a) the starvation argument and (3b) the renewable resource argument, and finally, (4) the money argument.

Hunters tend to support wildlife management and anti-hunters tend to oppose it. Hunters were in the forefront of the establishment of game laws to protect wildlife and for the creation of agencies, usually state game commissions, to enforce the laws and to give direction to game management. In the current debate between hunters and anti-hunters, hunters most often side with the game biologists, the professional wildlife managers, and the state wildlife government agencies.

Despite hunters' general support, they sometimes have long and confrontational experiences with regulatory agencies and their wildlife experts. Hunters' perceptions about wildlife ("There are no deer this year! The wolves ate 'em all.") have sometimes been challenged by wildlife managers with scientific data based on research. Sound management techniques, such as shooting of does where there is an overpopulation of deer or the sex ratio is out of balance, have often been opposed by hunters. The hunters were taught long ago by these agencies that for the purpose of conserving the deer herd the hunters should not kill does. This law became a principle with many hunters. When the wildlife managers later advocated the shooting of does because of overpopulation, many hunters resisted.

Aldo Leopold, the father of game management in the United States, had a long and difficult public fight with deer hunting groups in Wisconsin because he advocated the reduction of the deer herd in that state. When Leopold succeeded in opening an antlerless season in 1943, and when almost three times as many deer were killed as ever before, Leopold was labeled with the "Crime of '43." It was many years before the correctness of Leopold's position was acknowledged and before this sound management technique was used again.

Nonetheless, in the running dialogue between the biologists and the hunters, the many hunters have learned over the years that the biologists have the knowledge and information to manage the herds and the flocks. For example, the length of the duck season, the daily limits of ducks, and which species of ducks can be shot are worked out by the biologists each year based on the results of the counting of the duck populations. Hunters have learned to follow these regulations. Of course, there are violators of the game laws, but hunters and all hunting advocacy groups strongly support game laws and the prosecution of game violators.

Hunters depend upon knowledge gathered by the game biologists, and some hunters become quite knowledgeable about nature and its wildlife. Hunters criticize anti-hunters for not knowing about wildlife and consequently recommending actions that would in fact be detrimental to wildlife. Kellert, in his national survey, noted that anti-hunters had "among the lowest knowledge-of-animals scores of any group studied." Williamson of the NRA argues that contrary to popular opinion "...bird feeding has no long-term effect on songbird populations, and properly regulated hunting has no long-term effect on quail numbers." Watching birds at one's bird feeder out the window may be a pleasant experience for the viewer, but that leaves open the question whether such feeding is beneficial to the songbird population. Apparently it is not. It may be beneficial to those individual birds, and in so far as it is not harmful, bird feeding should not only be permitted but encouraged because of the enjoyment that people have in observing this wonderful aspect of nature. The impulse to help needs to be nurtured. But many such apparently beneficial efforts may be misdirected and even harmful. On the other hand, hunting may be beneficial or, as in the case of quail, have no long term effect on the wild population. The issue here is, "Is an activity beneficial to the wildlife population?" The answer to the question can be given only by scientific study of wildlife.

It is this appeal to scientific evidence gathered in the field by wildlife professionals that most hunters believe should be the basis of decisions about hunting activity. The limitations on hunting in terms of what species can be hunted without harming its population, where they can be hunted, with what means, and with what limits should be set by wildlife specialists.

Wildlife biologists tend to be concerned with populations of animals, not with individuals as such. They are reflecting nature's seeming high regard for the population, but little regard for the individual, in the ecosystem. Hunters' interest too focuses on the
number and health of the population. Removing a certain number of individuals does not affect the general population of abundant species.

Biologist C.H.D. Clarke in “Autumn Thoughts of A Hunter,” says, “Biologists, and most of all, wildlife biologists, know that any thought of man that he is apart from the rest of the living world is a perilous delusion.” He then states his view of hunting in the context of his biological understanding of nature: “The killing of an animal by another is harmful only if it is out of harmony with the functioning of the whole organic complex.” For scientific knowledge of “the whole organic complex,” hunters depend upon wildlife biologists. With this information, hunting seasons and bag limits are set so as not to be harmful to the ecological system.

In 1990 The Izaak Walton League of America, founded in 1922 and one of the nation’s oldest and most respected conservation organizations with 50,000 members, reaffirmed its “...long-standing support of sport hunting as a valuable management tool where hunting seasons are based upon the best scientific and biological data available and where hunting is conducted within the boundaries of good sportsmanship and ethics.” Their reasons for this stand include the view that sport hunting “...is a necessary and integral part of scientific wildlife management as it is practiced in this country.” The league attributes the current abundance of many game species which were once on the verge of extinction to the success of wildlife management. The league conceives of hunting as being “a necessary and integral part” of this wildlife management.

In general, then, hunters typically support wildlife management and the professionals who have been trained to manage the wildlife. The result of such support, hunters argue, has been the preservation of endangered wildlife.

The second justification of hunting is the claim by hunters that they are conservationists. They point to the historical evidence of a ninety (90) year history of support of wildlife protection, propagation, and restoration. In 1900 they supported the Lacy Act and in 1918 the Migratory Bird Treaty Act which stopped the killing of wildlife for market purposes. Although this activity of supplying meat for commercial markets is traditionally called “market hunting,” it had few of the characteristics of hunting. It was a slaughter, sometimes with cannons, of ducks and other wild game that could be sold for food. If this is called hunting, then it should be said that hunters opposed it. They opposed it because of the great destruction it brought to the wildlife populations. It was the hunters who opposed the slaughter and who worked to end it. Hunters have worked to preserve many forms of wildlife, including the antelope, the buffalo, the deer, the elk, the turkey, and the bear, some of which were on the edge of extinction.

Traditionally, hunters have been the supporters of wildlife. It was Teddy Roosevelt who, between 1903 and 1907, “...by vigorous employment of his executive pen, would more than double the area of land under Forest Service control, from 63 to over 150 million acres.” Roosevelt appointed Gifford Pinchot to head the Forest Service. In 1907 Congress passed a law that would prohibit Roosevelt from establishing more national forests. He felt obligated to sign the bill, but in the hours before he did so, “...he proclaimed 16 million acres of new forests....It is one of the enduring images out of conservation history: Roosevelt and Pinchot on their hands and knees in the White House, busily mapping out the new national forests, the hours ticking away, their opponents unaware of the impending coup.” Hunters identify with the battle for conservation of wildlife.

An important factor in the conservation efforts of hunters is that in the preservation of habitat for game species, the hunters have been a major factor in preserving nongame species. It is true that hunters in the past have not had much interest in nongame research, preservation, and enhancement, but it is also true that as the general public has become more aware of the preservation of many of these nongame species, so, too, hunters’ awareness and interest have increased. In preserving habitat for game, hunters have played an important role in preserving nongame animals. Today's continued purchasing and/or leasing of land by hunting groups such as Ducks Unlimited preserves land from “development” in which no wildlife would exist. Also, many organizations such as Wildlife Forever, which are supported mainly by hunters, are committed to benefit all species.

Hunters as conservationists have supported the re-establishment of herds and flocks of animals to their historic ranges. One of the great successes in wildlife restoration was the re-establishment...
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The restoration was necessary because by 1940 the native wild turkey of the United States had been decimated by killing and by habitat destruction to the point that there was a real possibility that they might become extinct. Their population was down to "...about 30,000 between the turn of the century and the end of World War II..." John Madson says, "This decline was only partly due to hunting, whether for subsistence or the market. Changes in the landscape had been catastrophic." Although they had been native to 38 or 39 states, they then existed in only 21.

Attempts at restoration began in the 1950's with the ineffective methods of releasing tame turkeys and/or pen-raising wild turkeys and then turning them loose. These methods failed to create viable flocks that could maintain themselves.

Then the use of the cannon net to catch wild turkeys was discovered. The transplanting of wild turkeys proved an effective method of re-establishing wild turkeys where they no longer existed. In 1951 Herman (Duffy) Holbrook, a biologist in South Carolina, was the first person to use the cannon for capturing wild turkeys. The result of the new capture technique made possible the wide distribution of wild turkeys.

By 1985 there were 3 million wild turkeys in the nation. In 1990 there were 4 million. Today wild turkeys exist in every state except Alaska. The National Wild Turkey Federation is working on a program to restore wild turkeys to the 50 million acres of remaining habitat conducive to wild turkeys by the year 2000.

The wild turkey restoration was accomplished by hunters. Admittedly they did it because they wanted to hunt the turkeys. Yet the facts are that the wild turkey was not only saved from extinction, but it is now flourishing. Hunters, non-hunters, and anti-hunters can now enjoy the sight and sound of wild turkeys within the person's own state no matter where they live.

A similar story for pronghorns can be told. From the edge of extinction, the pronghorns once again are flourishing over much of their historic range.

Another "magnificent story," told by Bob Jessen, waterfowl program leader for Texas Parks and Wildlife, involves the Canada goose. In 1946 the Canada goose season was closed in the Mississippi Flyway by presidential proclamation. At that time, there were only 30,000 Canada geese in the Mississippi Flyway scattered between Illinois, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Today there are 1,300,000 Canada geese in this flyway. In the late 1940's there were 50,000 birds in the Atlantic flyway. Today there are 1,500,000.

The greatest success story is the white-tailed deer. These deer were the backbone of the native American culture. Then they became an important trade item for the newly arrived Europeans. The deer were killed without regulation or management until they, too, were eliminated from many regions. With modern wildlife management techniques, the white-tailed deer population today may be as great as it was when the white man first landed on these shores. This success story is so well-known that it need not be recounted here.

The third argument to justify hunting is the excess population argument. This argument should be subdivided into two subarguments (although these are often confused as being one argument): the starvation argument and the renewable resource argument. Robert W. Loftin, in an article "The Morality of Hunting," recognizes that there is sometimes a confusion of these two subarguments in the hunter's presentation of the overpopulation argument. Yet Loftin presents the second subargument as being something wrong with the overpopulation argument. He recognizes that there is another argument here, but does not present it as such. To make the argumentation clear, we will present the two subarguments as separate arguments.

The starvation argument is the well-established point that the larger herbivores that are traditionally hunted, such as deer, elk, moose, and antelope, will overpopulate and destroy their range. Evidence of such destruction is the appearance of a "browse line," i.e., a visible line of the bushes and plants below which there are not leaves. The animals have eaten all of the leaves that they can reach, and a person can see the line above which they cannot reach for food and below which there is nothing. The destruction of their food supply will in turn weaken the condition of the animals and in the face of a hard winter will result in the starvation of many animals.

Wildlife biologist Dr. Walter Howard, in his book Animal
Rights vs. Nature (1990), states the starvation argument very well: "...my main tenet is that it is better for a population of animals living in man-disturbed environments to have the surplus individuals selectively killed by humans rather than to let most of the population become highly distressed or even die due to disease, starvation or other factors resulting from habitat alterations." Howard stresses the point that we have already modified the environment, and so we must take that fact into account. He says, "...we have a moral responsibility to do what we can to maintain healthy populations of animals and preserve biological diversity." Hunters accept this moral responsibility and believe that hunting is beneficial to wildlife populations.

Before we exterminated the natural predators, the predators fed off populations of herbivores, and thereby kept their populations in check, and so prevented them from destroying their habitat. Today these wild herbivores exist alongside domestic herbivores such as cattle and sheep. The reintroduction of natural predators such as mountain lions, wolves, and bears into areas where ranching and hunting coexist today would not be tolerated by the ranchers who would experience financial losses due to predation by such natural predators. Howard also notes the hypocritical attitude that many of us have in that we argue for the reintroduction of large predators such as bears, wolves and mountain lions in places other than where we live. Would you want a grizzly in your backyard? Not many would say "Yes." So if we are going to advocate putting them in someone else’s area, we must recognize people’s fears and also be willing to compensate for the losses that the predators would create.

Today there is a symbiotic relationship between the ranchers and the hunters, and between the deer (elk, antelope, etc.) and the cattle. The deer are browsers and typically feed off plants that cattle do not eat. Deer habitat is maintained by the ranchers because of the economic value of hunting leases. Stopping of hunting would create a disaster of starvation in the midst of this modified environment (i.e., without predators). Stopping hunting would also destroy a major incentive for preserving deer habitat.

There are areas where natural predators can be reintroduced, and where this is possible it should be done. The quality of our wildlife experience would be enhanced by the presence of such magnificent animals. In the past, hunters have had too narrow, too selfish a view with regard to the herds and flocks of wildlife. Like the anti-hunters, the hunters of the past have focused on individual animals. It is true that this particular deer killed by a mountain lion would still be alive if the lions were not present, and I might have had the opportunity to kill it myself, but the deer population is not better off without predators. Sharing the bounty of the forests with natural predators is beneficial to the wildlife population, and such sharing enhances my hunting experience.

It is true that the hunters preserved game so that it could be hunted, but it is also true that in preserving habitat for game, hunters preserved the habitat that was beneficial for all forms of wildlife. It is also true that some hunters enjoy nongame animals as well as those that they hunt. The existence of the populations of wildlife in the United States today is a result of the efforts and contributions by hunters. When anti-hunters proclaim hunting as "The War on Wildlife" (title of a brochure of The Humane Society of the United States), hunters naturally resent the claim. They hold themselves to be the historic conservationists.

Hunters understand that hunting is beneficial to the herds of large herbivores who are no longer hunted by their "natural" predators. Under conditions where the reintroduction of these large predators is not feasible (such as small cattle and sheep ranches or suburban areas where there are large numbers of people), hunting is necessary. Under conditions where the reintroduction of predators is feasible, hunters and the "natural" predators should share the prey.

The second part of the excess population argument is the harvesting the renewable resource argument. In a wonderfully entitled article, "Slow turkeys, pickup trucks, apple trees, and animal rights," Charly McTee envisions seeing a big, red, shiny apple hanging on a tree. He can pick it and take it home and eat it, or he can leave it and let it fall to the ground and rot. He says, "No matter what you choose to do with the apple, your choice has nothing at all to do with whether there will be an apple on that tree next year. What matters for next year’s apple crop is the health of the apple tree." Then he adds, "The animal rights people are worried about the apple; we’re concerned with apple trees." Finally he applies his analogy, "It works the same way with hunting and..."
wildlife populations; if the turkey population and habitat are in
der order, then the big gobbler you got this spring will be replaced by
another next season.  

Several important factors are evident here. First, while the
starvation argument applies to ungulates, the renewable resource
argument applies to different kinds of animals such as turkeys.
These are two different arguments that apply to two different kinds
of animals. Neither argument undercuts the other. Second, note
the distinction between individuals and populations—there is a dif-
ference between what we do to the apples or the gobblers, and how
healthy the tree or the turkey population and habitat are. Third is
the renewableness of the resource—the fruit of the tree and last
year’s hatch of turkeys. The fourth factor is not at all obvious, but
it is nonetheless important. Turkeys (and quail, grouse, ducks,
doves, woodcock) can overpopulate an area, but they do not tend
to destroy their habitat (in contrast with the herbivores). What
happens with birds is that the excess of the flock dies because of
lack of food or suitable habitat. The result is that (within natural
fluctuations) a certain area of habitat will have a certain number
of turkeys or quail. If each fall the spring hatch is not hunted, you
will have the same number of birds in the spring as you would
have had you hunted them. This is the well-known game man-
agement principle that you cannot stockpile wildlife. The amount
of turkeys or quail that exists is not dependent upon hunting which
is properly controlled by game management (nor, interestingly
enough, upon predators) but upon habitat. Harvest the renewable
resource or not. The numbers of the resource will not change.

This renewable resource argument has a scholarly version
called “the replaceability argument.” This is the argument that the
suffering and death of one animal which is killed by a hunter is
acceptable if the individual animal is replaced by another. Peter
Singer in Practical Ethics (1979) rejects this argument, saying that
“the shooting of a duck does not lead to its replacement by ano-
ther.” Robert Loftin, in his article “The Morality of Hunting,”
accepts the replaceability argument. He quotes Singer but dis-
agrees with him: “I think that this is an excessively narrow inter-
npretation of the verb ‘lead to.’ While shooting a duck per se does
not create another duck, it does lead to the production of another
duck and many other animals through the financial contributions
of the duck hunter and the efforts of those who represent his inter-
ests.”  
The concept of irreplaceability applies only to humans
because only they are self-conscious, unique personalities
(“souls”). All other living things, including trees, fish, birds, and
mammals, are replaceable. Loftin concludes that ethical hunting
“...is a good according to pragmatic ethical principles, since the
prohibition of such hunting would likely result in intolerable loss
of habitat for both game and nongame animals.” The loss of
habitat would occur because money used to purchase and maintain
that habitat is derived from the sale of hunting licenses, guns and
ammunition.

Loftin is arguing for the morality of hunting on the basis of
utilitarian grounds (greater goods accomplished than evils done).
Singer’s anti-hunting views (which will be presented in the next
chapter) are also based on utilitarian grounds. Hence both are pre-
senting the same type of argument and reaching different conclu-
sions.

Theodore Vitali argues for hunting. The second and third parts
of his argument are also utilitarian, while the first part is based on
an argument about rights. He summarizes his position succinctly:

Hunting for sport or pleasure is ethical because (1) it does
not violate any animal’s moral rights, (2) it has as its pri-
mary object the exercise of human skills, which is a suffi-
cient good to compensate for the evil that results from it,
namely, the death of the animal, and (3) it contributes to the
ecological system by directly participating in the balancing
process of life and death upon which the ecosystem thrives,
thus indirectly benefiting the human community. As such,
hunting is not only a natural good, but also a moral
good. Although Vitali accepts anti-hunter Paul Taylor’s philosop-
high view (which will be presented in the next chapter) of rights and
his concept of person (I would not), Vitali argues that “...only
humans manifest such powers of reflection and choice, at least up
to this point in current investigations...” hence animals do not
have moral rights. So sport hunting cannot violate animal moral
rights, since they do not have reflection and choice.

Vitali also argues that the good accomplished in the exercise
of human skills in hunting (what he calls a natural good) is “a
sufficiently proportionate good” to the natural evil of the loss of an animal’s life. In weighing the goods and evils involved, he judges that the goods outweigh the evils.

His ecological argument for hunting is that a balanced ecosystem is a natural good upon which humans depend, and that “…the taking and loss of life are essential to the well-being of the total system and are thus indirectly and contextually natural goods.”26 Contrary to the anti-hunter’s ecological argument that sport hunting is “anti-evolutionary,” Vitali argues that, properly limited by conditions (such as the few number of grizzly bears in the lower states and the need for them to be a part of a balanced ecosystem), sport hunting contributes to the natural balance of nature and is therefore a moral good.

Another philosopher, J. Baird Callicott, defends Aldo Leopold’s land ethic (discussed in chapter III, “Leopold’s Ethics of Hunting”). Leopold’s fundamental principle is “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”127 Callicott points to the fundamental aspect of this principle: “...the good of the biotic community is the ultimate measure of the moral value, the rightness or wrongness, of actions.”128 Callicott deduces from this principle that “…to hunt and kill a white-tailed deer in certain districts may not only be ethically permissible, it might actually be a moral requirement, necessary to protect the local environment, taken as a whole, from the disintegrating effects of a cervid population explosion. On the other hand, rare and endangered animals like the lynx should be especially nurtured and preserved.”129 Callicott, following Leopold, is concerned with the ecological system as a whole and with the existence and health of species within the system. Actions (including hunting) are evaluated by the effect that they have on the whole.

Leopold’s principle should be understood within the context of an appropriate scale of space and time, and of the change occurring within a dynamic nature. An appropriate scale of space and time can be defined by noting the length of time involved in the evolution, and sometimes extinction, of plant and animal species. The natural history of the earth has evolved many different climates in many places. Even the continents have come together and separated. The process continues.

Leopold’s principle, “to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community,” must be understood within the scale of the long-term dynamic changes of nature. The current destruction of the rain forests throughout the globe, with the extinction of hundreds of thousands of plant and animal species, is a clear violation of the principle. It is easy to understand this violation in the reduction of a vital, dynamic biotic system of a rain forest to bare, sterile land on a scale that the forest cannot replace itself, and on a scale of affecting the climate of the planet, and on a scale of exterminating whole species faster than they can be replaced by evolutionary development.

The importance of scale can be seen in the contrasting situation of small clearings for farming by natives. These small forest clearings are abandoned after a few years, and the clearings begin the process of returning to forest again.

The smallness of the scale allows seeds to be dropped by birds, blown by the wind or by other natural processes, thereby reseeding the clearing. A succession of plant communities follow as the clearing closes and rejoins the forest.

Leopold’s principle does apply to human action in contrast to the actions of natural forces, such as earthquakes, natural climate changes, and cycles of nature. If a volcano blows its top and destroys the forest on a side of a mountain, that is a natural event which should not be characterized by moral considerations. The event is not good or bad; it is natural. If humans destroy the side of a mountain, then the principle does apply, and we can ask if a biotic community has been destroyed. The question of scale will immediately arise. If either nature by itself, or nature in conjunction with man’s efforts, can restore the biotic sphere, then the principle has not been violated.

Leopold’s principle is a baseline principle. It is a minimal requirement. The integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community is a condition sine qua non of human action toward nature. But the principle is not the most that we may ask concerning human action. We may wish to preserve a species in a certain location, such as a community of a cold climate plant species that is currently existing in a warm, southerly region, or we who value the aesthetic experience of seeing otters (or some other animal) in our region, and may well argue for the preservation of
Hunters understand wild game as a renewable resource (this is the renewable resource argument noted above) that requires scientific management. Hunters want quail to flourish in the fields. Hunters know that the quail population is dependent basically on the quality of the habitat and seasonally on the weather, seed production, disease, etc. Not to hunt the quail will not result in more quail over the long run. Quail have a 70% to 80% mortality yearly. Hunters work to provide better habitat for the quail. They also support game laws that protect the quail.

Hunting the quail in a sporting manner is a thrilling experience for the hunter who traditionally hunts with dogs that point the quail. Walking many miles through the fields in the crisp autumn air, watching the dogs work, noticing the hawk that flies over the field, examining the tracks of wildlife, sharing an afternoon with a friend, working for one’s supper, following one’s own as well as traditional ethical codes of quail hunting, the hunter knows, understands, appreciates, and admires this bird he pursues. The covey is flushed and the hunter tries to shoot the quail as it quickly disappears. Yes, the hunter kills the individual quail, but he protects the covey. The hunter eats what most people consider the tastiest of all game birds. The hunter is the provider for his family that day.

Hunters also make “the money argument.” They argue that hunters have “paid the freight” for the protection and the enhancement of wildlife. They have followed the dictum, “Put your money where your mouth is!” Money for wildlife has come from excise taxes from the Pittman-Robertson Act, duck stamps, license revenues, private wildlife organizations, and money spent on private land for wildlife habitat.

One of the cornerstones of this financial contribution by hunters is the Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937. Today this act has a 11% excise tax on rifles, shotguns, ammunition, and archery equipment, and a 10% tax on handguns. These taxes go to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which allocates them to the states which must contribute $1 for each $3 of federal funds. The state money usually comes from hunting licenses. During its history, it has contributed about $2 billion (including state contributions) to wildlife. In 1988, the receipts from the excise taxes were $265 million. At the present, about 50% is used for habitat improvement, 27% for research, 13% for land acquisition, 5% for hunter education and shooting range development, and 5% for administration. Through the money for acquisition, more than 4 million acres have been purchased. The act also requires that all hunting revenues of the state go to wildlife conservation and that competent personnel be hired to manage wildlife.

Duck stamps, sold by the federal government to duck hunters, contribute money to wildlife. In 1988 that amount was $20 million. The government’s requirement of hunters purchasing stamps prior to hunting has guaranteed success in this program. It has been so successful that most states have imitated it and now have their own state duck stamp that is required by law of hunters. Many fund-raising efforts associated with the stamps, such as selling copies of the painting on the duck stamp, selling the stamps to stamp collectors, and selling other items such as plates or cups with the picture on them, have also produced money. Other organizations have imitated the government’s idea and produce stamps and other items to sell to their supporters.

Money from hunting licenses is also a major contribution to money used for wildlife. Revenue for hunting and fishing licenses in 1988, including state duck stamps, was $661 million. Often hunters buy a combination hunting and fishing license, while many other hunters buy a fishing license as well as a hunting license. If one wanted to exclude non-hunting fishermen’s contributions from the amount claimed by hunters as their contribution to wildlife, as the anti-hunting group wants to do, some amount could be subtracted, but it would be difficult to determine the exact amount. These funds derived from licenses have been the traditional source for the support of state game commissions, who provide game wardens to protect wildlife, and wildlife biologists to study wildlife and to make recommendations based on population studies of hunting seasons and limits.

Private fund raising efforts by hunters has been, and is, an important source of money for preserving wildlife. The Ducks
Unlimited banquets are one well-known activity that has been very successful. Other organizations, such as the Wild Turkey Federation, have followed these successful methods. The Wild Turkey Federation also sells turkey stamps each year. These stamps are not required for hunting, but are bought by turkey hunters to support the work of the federation. The stamps are also bought by stamp collectors. The federation has also established a Wild Turkey Super Fund, through which they have raised in excess of $3 million and spent $2 million in the last six years. This money is expended in scientific research projects on wild turkeys and in purchasing habitat suitable for wild turkeys. The Wild Turkey Federation has a program of providing seeds and plants to hunters to be used to improve habitat. Of course, the purpose of this habitat improvement is to create a bountiful and healthy turkey population. But one cannot create good turkey habitat without providing good habitat for many wildlife species.

There are many other organizations of hunters for individual species such as quail, elk and other animals. Each organization raises money for research and for purchasing habitat suitable for the species of its interest. T. Allan Wolter of the Wildlife Legislative Fund of America estimates that $50 million is spent by these organizations and by individuals who build duck houses, watering holes, etc.

The total of the above figures is $996 million per year spent by hunters for wildlife. That’s $1 billion a year! An accumulated total of past years equals $12 billion. The benefit to wildlife is tremendous.

In addition, hunters spend money on privately owned land to improve wildlife habitat. The amount of money spent annually by hunters for habitat improvement on private lands has been estimated at $200 million, but no one has accurate data. Even without accurate data, it is clear that a lot of money is spent because hunters want to improve hunting.

The amount of money that the 16,700,000 hunters age 16 and over spent in 1985 in the pursuit of their sport was $10.1 billion. In addition, there were 1,800,000 hunters age 6-15 whose expenditures are not listed. In 1988 the amount spent by hunters 16 and over was $12 billion. Obviously, the impact of hunting on the economy is great.

If hunting were to be stopped, much of the money from the above sources would not be raised and the wildlife would be the losers. There can be no doubt that in the last fifty years the primary sources of money for wildlife have come from hunters.

As part of the money argument, one could add the political support hunters have given in the establishment of wildlife preserves, refuges, parks, forests, and wilderness areas in which wildlife flourishes. This is not a claim that hunters have done these things by themselves, but it is the claim of the hunters that they have played a significant role in the preservation of wildlife in America.

Hunters argue for and help promote the well-being of nature. Hunters want to insure the well-being of the ecosystem, and they see people as being a part of that natural balance. Anti-hunters focus on the well-being of individual animals and see people as outside of nature and its processes. For hunters, “natural” includes the actions of people. Hunters want to be a part of nature. For hunters, animals have great value both in themselves and in their utility. In the hunters’ view, animals may be used because human values are higher than animal values. Hunting does not show a disrespect for nature; rather it is an expression of an appreciation of the hunters’ good fortune to participate in, and hence to be a part of the processes of nature.