

Module # 4 – Component # 2



Moral Philosophy

The content that follows was written by **Charl F. Badenhorst** and was derived from his Master's Degree Thesis in Philosophy (Applied Ethics) completed under the Unit for Environmental Ethics at the University of Stellenbosch. The views of Charl Badenhorst **do not necessarily represent** those of WildlifeCampus, its management or staff.

Introduction

Most of the anti-hunting positions assume an animal rights, animal liberation, or a respect for nature view, or a blend of the three. As such, the landmark publications by three philosophers have had a major impact on articulating their positions in a rational, philosophically grounded manner. Tom Regan, Peter Singer and Paul Taylor have each respectively published landmark texts,¹ as has Bernhard Rollin,² which have had a resonating effect on not only articulating issues concerning animal welfare in general, but also in articulating clearly the moral arguments against hunting. Evelyn Pluhar³ could also be included in this category.

The influence of the writers is broad concerning the impact their ideas have had on the hunting debate, as they have served to **lay a philosophical basis for the debate concerning the treatment and exploitation of animals by humans** and served to promote ideas that the treatment of animals cannot be based exclusively upon their instrumental value to humans.

¹ Regan, T. 1983. *The Case for Animal Rights*. Berkeley: The University of California Press; Singer, P. 1976. *Animal Liberation*. New York: Avon Books; and Taylor, P. 1986. *Respect for Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

² Rollin, B. 1989. *The Unheeded Cry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³ Pluhar, E. 1995. *Beyond Prejudice: The Moral Significance of Human and Nonhuman Animals*. London: Duke University Press.

The theories outlined in the works directly impact on and influence the positions of the anti-hunting groups outlined above,⁴ and the standing of anti-hunting organisations in the public view can arguably be said to have been strengthened by their appeal to serious philosophical works such as the ones mentioned. The campaign against hunting on the part of anti-hunting organisations was thus based upon and advocated by the theories laid out in the above works, in that the works themselves served to articulate animal issues clearly in ways more accessible to the general public.

A notable example can be found in a project that HSUS has in place called “Animals and Society”, which is geared towards **expanding the number of college courses in America concerned with animal welfare, animal rights and animal ethics issues.**⁵ It maintains an active list of all the college courses in America related to these fields, and the list contains numerous references to the above authors, as well as prominently featuring a detailed outline of the courses offered by Rollin, Regan and Pluhar at their respective universities.⁶ PETA offers works by Regan and Singer for sale through its website, and “highly recommends” *Animal Liberation* to anyone who is considering becoming an animal rights activist.⁷ What follows, then, is a brief summary of the main arguments outlined in some of these works.

Animal Liberation was written by Singer in 1976 to provide a contemporary philosophical justification of the animal rights movement.⁸ Singer's basis for argumentation is a utilitarian philosophy of natural rights that draws largely on the work of utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham.⁹ Singer **contends that animals and humans are to be considered equal** on the basis that both share the characteristic of sentience, i.e. the ability to suffer. Furthermore, if they are equal, they possess a natural right to the **equal consideration of their interests.**¹⁰ The placing of human interests over the interests of animals is thus unjust, and what Singer terms *speciesism*, which is likened to racism. “Speciesism ... is a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one's own species and against those members of other species.”¹¹

This theory is the basis for the animal liberation movement, and as demonstrated is also the theoretical basis for PETA's stance towards animal issues and trophy hunting in particular.

⁴ An example of this is the founding of PETA in 1980, which was inspired by Singer's *Animal Liberation*, following its publication in 1976.

⁵ HSUS 2003b.

⁶ The respective courses offered by the writers are: Rollin (Colorado State University) – *Animal Ethics, Ethical Issues in Genetic Engineering, and Science and Ethics*; Regan (North Carolina State University) – *Contemporary Moral Issues*; and Pluhar (Penn State University) – *Ethics and Social Issues*.

⁷ PETA 2003b.

⁸ Tuohey and Ma 1992: 79.

⁹ Bentham, J. 1789. *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. [S.l.:s.n.].

¹⁰ Singer 1976: 1-20.

¹¹ Singer 1976: 7.

Influence of Writers

Tom Regan in his book *The Case for Animal Rights* differs from Singer in that he argues from a basis of **moral rights theory**, as opposed to utilitarian theory, although he comes to practically the same conclusions regarding the treatment of animals as does Singer. Briefly, Regan argues that “individuals” have equal inherent value, while the definition of “individual” is of a being that has a welfare. Animals who have beliefs, desires and psychological identities over time have an experiential welfare and therefore an inherent value. They therefore have an equal moral right to be treated with respect. The courses conducted by Regan concerning moral issues are promoted by HSUS on their website.

In Paul Taylor's book *Respect for Nature*, he advances a theory of environmental ethics which he calls “Respect for Nature”. This theory entails three main components, namely that to have a respect for nature, an autonomous, rational agent must adopt a moral attitude of respect for nature itself;¹² a **biocentric outlook** (i.e. the belief system on which an attitude of respect for nature depends);¹³ and an ethical system of standards and rules that serves as a guide following the acceptance of an attitude of respect and of a biocentric outlook.¹⁴

Taylor emphasises the importance of understanding the concepts of the “Good of a Being” and “Inherent Worth”, and points out differences between the concepts of intrinsic value, inherent value, and inherent worth.¹⁵ Beings have an inherent worth if they are seen to have a good of their own, while beings have a good of their own only if something is good or bad for that being without reference to another entity; that is to say, the good of a being is not dependant on its instrumental value or likewise to another being or entity. In emphasising the good of a being and its inherent worth, Taylor offers a different approach to that of Singer and Regan, although he arrives at the same conclusions, namely that an acceptance of a theory of respect for nature necessarily leads one to the rejection of the idea that humans are superior to other animals; it is here where Taylor's theory converges with Singer's concept of **speciesism**, although the arguments which lead to that conclusion differ as Singer's main criterion is sentience, whereas Taylor's is inherent worth.

The relevance of Taylor's work to anti-hunting groups within the hunting debate is not as easily defined as, say, Singer's is to PETA, although one can find remarkably similar sentiments to Taylor's theory in the objectives and mission of HSUS, which envisions the evolution of human behaviour from an attitude of exploitation to one of “compassion and respect” towards animals and nature.

¹² Taylor 1986: 59-98.

¹³ Taylor 1986: 99-168.

¹⁴ Taylor 1986: 169-218.

¹⁵ Taylor 1986: 72-75.

Pluhar's stance on animal rights issues, as laid out in ***Beyond Prejudice: The Moral Significance of Human and Nonhuman Animals***, also deserves a brief overview. Interestingly, her views regarding the moral rights of wild animals seem to coincide with those of Henry Salt's (his book *Animals' Rights: Considered in Relation to Social Progress* is regarded as one of the founding works in animal rights theory),¹⁶ and suggest a certain consistency regarding the validity of concerns about the rights of, or human obligations towards, wild animals.¹⁷ This is particularly so as Salt's book was first published in 1892, at a time when animal rights issues could not be considered to be as mainstream as they are at present, nor was the issue surrounding the topic of recreational hunting the cause of much debate.

She regards herself as a "second generation" thinker who aims to advance the ideas put forward by Singer and Taylor especially.¹⁸ Pluhar regards individual animals as being "**fully morally significant**" in that they are moral agents, and have moral rights (to life, freedom and well-being) which **humans are obligated to respect**. Humans, as moral agents, therefore acquire obligations and duties to animals in the same way that they do to other humans, when animals are removed from their natural environment. She argues that the **lives of wild animals should not be tampered with in any way, whether by means of trapping them, putting them in zoos, or manipulating their habitat**, as doing so violates their "preference autonomy" and strips them of their **natural instincts and evolutionary abilities**, as well as their "well being" and interests in terms of realising their purpose as they would do in a free natural environment.¹⁹

Humans therefore have an **obligation of non-interference towards wild animals**, and they should therefore not be tampered with in any way, as their lives are inextricably linked to the "morally neutral evolutionary processes" that form their natural and free environments, in which they exist as "consciously goal-seeking nonhuman animals". Human animals, as she puts it, are not morally neutral, and therefore our actions need careful deliberation in circumstances where the lives of wild animals and our own intersect.²⁰

¹⁶ Salt, H.S. 1980. *Animals' Rights: Considered in Relation to Social Progress*. Pennsylvania: Society for Animal Rights. The 1980 edition was published by the Society for Animal Rights, with a preface by Peter Singer, which further illustrates the correlation and flow of ideas between the animal rights and liberation groups.

¹⁷ Salt 1980: 45-53. Cf. Chapter III, entitled "The Case of Wild Animals". The views that coincide with Pluhar's are: the fact that animals have rights that humans should respect; the notion of an obligation towards wild animals; that wild animals, in their natural free state, enjoy a sense of autonomy, and self-interest ("... an unowned creature has the same right as another to live his life unmolested and uninjured except when this is in some way inimical to human welfare"); and that it should only be acceptable to kill animals where absolutely necessary, as in acts of self-defence.

¹⁸ Pluhar 1995: ix.

¹⁹ Pluhar 1995: 274. In terms of the reference to "preference autonomy", Pluhar has Regan's notion of the term in mind.

²⁰ Pluhar 1995: 274-280.

As far as hunting is concerned, besides the points raised above, her objection is that it causes injury, maiming, and death to **morally significant non-human animals**, as well as humans (i.e. through hunting accidents). She also discounts claims by hunters that they are **acting in the best interests of wildlife by hunting them**. She does not however believe that humans have the obligation to treat wild and domestic animals in the same way, even though they have the same moral standing, and that there are circumstances when the killing of animals is acceptable (i.e. in cases of self defence, or mercy killing).²¹

Pluhar's stance on animal rights is relevant to the hunting debate today because her views regarding human obligations towards wild animals in terms of our actions stand in direct contrast to the views expressed by philosophers such as Ortega y Gasset and Aldo Leopold.

²¹ Pluhar 1995: 278-284.

EcoFeminism

Another significant source of anti-hunting sentiment relevant to moral philosophy can be found within ecofeminist (**Ecological Feminism**) literature. What is notable about an ecofeminist stance is that it emphasises the relationships between entities (i.e. humans, animals, etc.) that define “who one is”. As an ethic, ecofeminism therefore entails a shift from emphasising matters of rights, duties, and rules for determining moral standing etc. to a conception of ethics that grows out of “defining relationships”.²²

This also entails a shift from granting moral considerability to nonhumans exclusively on the basis of possessing notions like rationality, sentience, or rights, to a “highly contextual account to see what a human being is and what the nonhuman world might be, morally speaking, *for human beings*”.²³ **Ecofeminism thereby voices certain other values**, such as love, care, trust, and friendship, which may come about through human relationships to animals especially, and that are often overlooked within the hunting debate and often dismissed as overtly sentimental or naïve by pro-hunting groups. An ecofeminist perspective is relevant here because it provides a context for some of the concerns expressed within the debate regarding the relationships between man and nature and provides a counter point to primitivist defences of hunting.

A common ecofeminist critique of hunting is that it is a violent “sport” which is a form of **patriarchal domination over nature**.²⁴ The roots of sexist oppression, as well as other forms of oppression such as racism, are seen as lying within “an oppressive patriarchal conceptual framework characterized by a logic of domination”.²⁵

²² Warren 1995: 222.

²³ Cheney 1987: 144, as quoted in Warren 1995: 222.

²⁴ Glotfelty 1994.

²⁵ Warren 1995: 216.

Feminists therefore **seek to end sexist oppression by ending all other forms of oppression**, as they are all connected to this logic of domination. **The domination of women is regarded as being inseparably linked to the domination and exploitation of nature**, as seen by patriarchal attitudes that equate nature with femininity/women, and rationality/technology with men. The masculine sphere of life emphasised reason (technology/science) and freedom in distinctions between man and nature, and entailed a disconnectedness from and domination of nature, while the feminine sphere was assumed to represent passivity towards and connectedness with nature.²⁶ This patriarchal framework historically allowed for the objectification **of women and nature**, whereby they were “hunted, invaded, colonised, owned, consumed and forced to yield and produce”.²⁷

Women, nature and animals have therefore been kept in a state of inferiority and powerlessness by this patriarchal system. This is emphasised especially by cultural ecofeminism, in which all forms of oppression are reduced to the oppression of women, whereas social ecofeminism does not attempt such a reduction, but rather regards the oppression of women as only one among many such forms of oppression, which are expressed in the patriarchal dualism of nature vs. reason.²⁸

Within the hunting act, there is also a **discernible erotic relationship between the hunter and his prey**,²⁹ as the structures of certain hunting narratives resemble a sexual encounter.³⁰ This affirms from an ecofeminist perspective, that hunting is an **act of rape** and violence towards nature that serves to **justify a culture of brutality**,³¹ in that hunting is the brutal play-acting³² of patriarchal domination over the non-human world.

Whereas a primitivist defence excuses the violence inherent in the hunting act by an appeal to the inevitable predatory inclinations of humans due to the evolutionary process, ecofeminists regard this **violence as inherently part of a system of domination**, which is encouraged and reinforced by the patriarchal hunting culture.³³ The pro-hunting emphasis on reason and science, particularly in sustainable utilisation arguments, along with its rejection of many of the anti-hunting positions on the basis that they are **overtly emotive, sentimental, irrational, or naïve** would therefore seem to affirm for ecofeminists this patriarchal characteristic of the hunting culture.

²⁶ Plumwood 1992: 8-9.

²⁷ Glotfelty 1994.

²⁸ Plumwood 1992: 10.

²⁹ Luke 1998: 627-655. Luke undertakes a fairly detailed analysis of the sexual and erotic relationship between the hunter and his prey as it is presented in various hunting literature. He discusses Ortega y Gasset in this regard, and which I will return to in Section B of this thesis.

³⁰ Kheel 1996: 38.

³¹ Collard 1989: 34.

³² Play-acting in the sense that hunting mimics acts of war and political power struggles that characterise patriarchal domination in society.

³³ Although, within this “patriarchal” hunting culture, there are many women who hunt as well.

Conclusion

The main organisational bodies within the debate that have officially expressed their opposition to all forms of recreational hunting, and trophy hunting in particular, can be seen to be prominent animal rights, animal liberation, and animal welfare groups, namely HSUS, PETA and FFA.

An emphasis on the **interests of individual animals serves as the main impetus for their opposition to recreational hunting**, although not all of their arguments can be reduced to such a simplistic analysis. Holistic concerns over the ecological impact of hunting, as well as concerns over the purely instrumental value that animals are regarded as having in the economic arguments surrounding hunting, are also expressed by these groups.

The intentions of hunters themselves are questioned as being self-serving against the backdrop of these concerns, which leads to **the moral condemnation of recreational hunters** in general. HSUS, in particular, stands in direct opposition to SCI and is most active in the attempts to draw attention to the perceived “evils” of trophy hunting, by striving to negate the various claims made by SCI as to the benefits of trophy hunting, and its relevance in modern society. In brief, HSUS, as well as the other groups, reiterate that trophy hunting should be regarded as a “cultural abnormality”, and reinforce, to a degree, the stereotype of hunters as being pathological.

The philosophical works by authors such as Regan, Singer and Taylor, amongst the others I have highlighted, are prominent amongst the general theories that inform the views of these groups pertaining to hunting, and in certain cases, such as PETA's, have had a direct influence on their establishment. These theories outlined above will be explored further in this course where applicable. In the following Module (Module # 5) I offer a brief conclusion regarding the **nature of the stalemate** following the discussion of the previous three Modules.