Module # 8 – Component # 1

Integrity and the Trophy Hunting Experience

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, it’s management or staff.

Introduction

This Module serves as a conclusion to all of the various aspects covered in this course regarding the morality of hunting, by which an attempt will be made to bring them into a contextual discussion of the notion of integrity in relation to trophy hunting in Africa.

When speaking of Integrity in relation to the hunting debate we are necessarily concerned with an inescapably broad conception of the term, as an adequate and well-defined concept of integrity that is relevant and applicable to all aspects of the debate will itself require a work of its own. It is therefore difficult to pin down “Integrity” without being unnecessarily generalised.

The main point to make regarding integrity and hunting though is that integrity is generally conceptualised to be a virtue. In the search for morality regarding the act of hunting and its conflicting meanings in society today, integrity as a virtue may be one of the few things that hunters and anti-hunters agree upon. Integrity is also the antithesis to Corruption, something that both parties profess to actively oppose in respect to environmental issues. Having “Integrity as a Virtue” as a commonality may then provide a broad, though as yet undefined, basis for agreement in approaching the issue of hunting, and for a basis in evaluating the conflicts inherent in the debate itself.

1 Cf. Montefiore (1999: 9) for a discussion of the relationship between integrity and virtue, whereby integrity contributes to the “wholeness of virtue”.

2 Montefiore 1999: 8.
Integrity may therefore be applied in a way that is relevant to most, if not all, of the personal, political, ecological, philosophical and economic aspects of the hunting debate, in that the integration of a person’s values and beliefs in their daily lives, and the consistency with which they act according to these beliefs; the logical characteristics of philosophical arguments, and their consistency in terms of non-contradiction and validity; authenticity of certain hunting practices; and the health, stability and sustainability of ecosystems and wild species may be all discussed under the banner of Integrity as Virtue, so to speak.

Perhaps more importantly, one could be more specific in the application of Integrity as Virtue to The Hunting Experience itself. This includes the cognitive aspect as well as the historically constructed and commercially packaged “hunting experience” that was discussed in Module # 7. One then deals with integrity in the varied terms of authenticity, consistency, honesty, sincerity, fulfilment (of expectation), truth, or substance; and by so doing also deals with the notion of arguing with integrity for or against hunting, which is directly applicable to the politics of the debate discussed in the previous Module.

Throughout this Module, then, I will seek to identify various conceptions of Integrity that may be applied to specific problematic areas within the debate, by analysing some examples that may indicate inconsistencies, fallacies, manipulations, etc.; and others that may indicate authenticity, sincerity, coherence, etc. This assumes that consistency, truth, honesty, validity, coherence, sincerity and similar notions form part of the whole that is Integrity as a Virtue.

3 Insisting on integrity within the competitive hunting industry may be problematic and not a useful pragmatic option, although it seems a worthy ideal. This is because notions of honesty, fairness, obligations, personal values or moral duties are not necessary or at times desirable for the market to function (Ross 1999: 291), even though they may nevertheless contribute to its efficiency. A company or business that is seen to have integrity necessarily increases its appeal within the market but is prone to fall behind its less-scrupulous competitors (Brown 1999: 281-282).
What Defines a Trophy Hunter

The first question that must be clarified is: What defines a trophy hunter? This has important implications insofar as it addresses the role of the ideal ethical hunter in Africa.

Throughout this course, and for the reasons outlined at the beginning of Module # 6, the notion of trophy hunter has generally been intended to refer to those hunters who choose to hunt the Big Five species in Africa. It is intended to refer to persons who pay for the opportunity of hunting lions, leopards, rhinos, elephants or buffalo. It does not refer to the normal biltong or venison hunter who chooses on occasion to hunt a trophy kudu because of its remarkable size or horns, as all hunters may be called trophy hunters in the sense that they would no doubt appreciate the remarkable size or trophy quality of an animal.

It is an aesthetic thing to admire a beautiful animal, and if a hunter happens to shoot an animal that can be called a trophy he/she would not normally consider it a grievous matter. However, not all hunters hunt with the intent of shooting a trophy, even though trophy size is valued highly in the hunting of plains game. Also, some hunters may only partake in one trophy hunt in their lives, lasting only 21 days, having saved up for what is often regarded as a “dream” safari hunt in Africa, in which case they would nevertheless still be regarded as a trophy hunter. What is of concern in this Module, though, is the consistency with which an Idea of the Ethical Hunter conforms to the actual practices of Big Five trophy hunters in Africa today, as well as the consistency with which anti-hunting arguments are applied to a specific African trophy hunting context.

Generally speaking then, if the primary difference between categorical types of hunting lies in the motives of individuals, then an examination of motive, intention and desire (in relation to integrity) is important if we seek to properly distinguish between subsistence, sport and trophy hunting. Doing so will reveal why anti-hunting groups condemn trophy hunting, whilst to a certain extent forgive subsistence hunting. The methods and equipment used in both types of hunting may be the same, the animal killed may be the same species, age, and size, and the hunt may take place in an identical habitat; yet the one act is condemned, whilst the other is accepted. It is safe to say then, that the criteria used to condemn or accept an act of hunting do not rest solely on the methods employed but in addition depend largely on the purpose of the hunt. This may explain in principle why anti-hunters so vehemently oppose sport and trophy hunting, in that they implicitly question the moral agenda of those who participate in the above activities, and more specifically question the desires of hunters.

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4 The lengths of trophy hunts in Africa vary from 7 days to 21 days on average, depending on the budget of the client hunter, or the number and species he wishes to shoot.
The Desire to Hunt

The question of desires can be looked at in several ways in respect to hunting. One can say that hunters believe that the act of hunting, or more specifically The Hunting Experience, is a necessary component for their self-realisation or fulfilment. The desire to hunt therefore stems from the belief that hunting is essential to bring fulfilment. Anti-hunters therefore question the desires (that is, the desires to pursue fulfilment through hunting) of hunters, but when doing so also implicitly question the beliefs on which these desires are based, perhaps on the argument that “well-being does not consist of the satisfaction of desires that are mistakenly based on false beliefs”. They might also argue further that an act done in pursuit of a desire, which is itself based on a wrong belief, cannot be called an act of integrity. However, whether beliefs are true or not does not necessarily influence the sense of fulfilment one feels upon the satisfaction of desires, especially when one is not aware that one’s beliefs may be wrong. In this respect anti-hunters would be wrong in questioning the validity of the sense of fulfilment that hunting brings, as it may not be dependent on the truth or falsity of beliefs. Also, hunters do not hunt only in the pursuit of fulfilment; people hunt simply for the meat, diversion, or communion (with nature and other people). Similarly, anti-hunters may argue against hunting based on the belief itself that eating meat is not natural for humans, or that all hunters really are pathological killers. Hunters may therefore also justifiably call these beliefs into question.

The notion of integrity, however, addresses these problems by emphasising that the truth or falsity of beliefs, the satisfaction of desires, the individual personality traits, fulfilment or self-realisation, the ecological impacts, economic benefits, etc., all combine, or integrate, to lend an act of hunting its “wholeness”.

Part of the difficulty inherent in reaching a definite defensible position as to the moral worth of a hunting act, though, lies in the difficulty of quantifying an individual’s motives, intentions and desires, if it can be given that these combine to lend a hunting act its purpose. The truth or validity of beliefs may be determined more accurately, but only through a contextual analysis of the socio-historical and cultural contexts within which these beliefs function. Moral judgements as to the worth of a hunting act cannot therefore be attained by external analysis of method and consequence alone, although these are essential aspects to consider, but also need to consider the beliefs and desires that inform the act itself.

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5 Noggle 1999: 304.
Integrity vs. Morality

Equating integrity with morality is also problematic, as integrity alone is not sufficient for morality, as it does not always provide clear and straightforward direction. What can be discerned, however, and deduced by external observation, is the consistency with which hunting acts fulfill certain objectives and theories regarding stated aims and intended results and may fulfill the requirement for integrity in relation to the wholeness of The Hunting Experience itself. Emphasizing integrity in conjunction with morality, therefore, addresses the contexts in which moral arguments are applied.

An example of this may be a justification of trophy hunting that is merely based on economic consequentialism (for example, that hunting brings money to local communities, through trophy fees, taxidermy, employment of trackers, etc.). Hunters often state that they are conservationists as well as hunters, and that they hunt because doing so contributes to wildlife preservation. This is regarded as being a morally worthy contribution, and thus taken as a moral justification for hunting. However, even though this utilitarian defence has increasingly become the strongest form of argument for hunting advocates in general, it fails to justify the trophy hunting act from a moral perspective. This is because pro-hunters, and trophy hunters in particular, confuse the positive net result of their cost/benefit analysis as having a positive moral value.  

According to consistency principles, this would be inadequate as a moral justification, as it ignores the fact that these consequences are secondary and merely a by-product of the initial impulse (aim/intention) of trophy hunting. Arguably, many people do not hunt primarily out of altruistic beliefs to help poorer communities, nor do they hunt out of a sincere primary desire to preserve ecosystems and habitats for animals. These are, in this hypothetical example, secondary benefits apart from and exclusive to the primary intention, motivation or desire to hunt. Rather, the primary motive of the person intending to hunt, and which drives the desire to hunt, would more likely be the experience of the hunt in its entirety.

In a specifically African context (bearing in mind that we are dealing exclusively with the hunting of the Big Five), The Hunting Experience “in its entirety” which I refer to can be defined as the cognitive, psychological, emotional, sensory and physical stimulations and challenges offered by a hunt. It is not confined and limited to the act of stalking and killing an animal. It is rather an extended experience that begins when the client hunter is received by the outfitter or professional hunter (PH) organising his hunt and ends when he leaves the hunting camp.  

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4 Benjamin 1990: 53.
Therefore, part of the experience is being in the natural environment and wilderness, viewing and interacting with animals on a primal footing, having a relationship with the PH akin to camaraderie for a limited time and on a certain level, testing one’s skill in tracking and shooting animals, and perhaps being involved in an activity in which the ever-present possibility of the unexpected happening heightens awareness.\(^8\)

Ann Causey\(^9\) takes this view a step further and states 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”.\(^10\) [Author’s own emphasis]. The initial desire to hunt is not motivated by the potential benefits that may accrue from the act; rather it is the thrill of the chase and ultimately of the kill that gets the hunter into the field: “In the final analysis, the hunter does not hunt to manage, harvest, control, cull, or thin herds of game; he hunts to kill ...”\(^11\)

Therefore, to posit beneficial consequences, which hunting indirectly brings to ecosystems and communities, as a moral justification thereof, is to ignore the fact that trophy hunting is motivated by a personal desire for the individual gratification which the hunting experience brings to the individual hunter. This desire and motive is not for the well being of ecosystems and communities in itself, though these may be secondary desires in so far as they serve as a means to an end, the end being a healthy ecosystem which ensures the continuation of the possibility of being able to experience a hunt in the future. This becomes even more problematic in cases where the desire for the trophy is above other considerations.

In short, a person may desire a healthy ecosystem, or may desire to help poor rural communities. However, this desire in itself is not the same desire that motivates the choice to hunt. This justification is peripheral to the desire, to the intention, to hunt, and more importantly is peripheral to the individual satisfaction gained from the hunting experience itself.

The fact that trophy hunting indirectly provides peripheral benefits to communities or ecosystems themselves is therefore not sufficient to justify it from a philosophical moral point of view in so far as integrity is concerned, as the consistency with which the moral imperative “to kill in order to conserve” is integrated with the desire for the gratification provided by a hunting experience is unsound. In other words, the arguments and stated aims of some hunters that trophy hunting is necessary for conservation and the economic upliftment of rural communities, and therefore in utilitarian terms a moral imperative, presupposes that the economic upliftment of people and conservation are primary concerns, rather than the individualistic desire for gratification.

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\(^8\) Ortega y Gasset: “The hunter knows that he does not know what is going to happen, and this is one of the greatest attractions of his occupation” (1972: 150).
Peripheral Benefits

The stated aims and objectives, and moral imperative to hunt are thereby confused, as in this example the claim that “I hunt in order to conserve” can in reality be seen to be a case of “I conserve in order to hunt”. It follows that the integrity of justifying hunting according to these peripheral benefits, and the integrity of the hunting experience itself, is therefore brought into question, as hunting can only be regarded in this viewpoint as being an act of moral integrity if, and only if, the following criteria are fulfilled:

Firstly, only if peripheral benefits are essential and vital to the welfare of people and the environment, and therefore morally imperative.\(^{12}\) This would imply that out of a duty and obligation to ensure that the net benefit of goods outweighs the bad in respect to people and the environment, hunters are principally duty bound to hunt. The greater good demands that they do so, and the primary desire of hunters in order to fulfil this moral imperative overrides the desire for individual gratification.

Secondly, only if these peripheral benefits can be obtained through trophy hunting. That trophy hunting is able to provide economic upliftment to communities is clear. That the value of a lion, for example, in terms of its trophy value is worth more than its value to eco-tourism is not so clear.\(^ {13}\)

Hunting would therefore be morally justified in the sense that the desire for the obtainment of peripheral benefits for things other than the hunters themselves is the primary motivation (desire) in the decision to hunt.\(^ {14}\)

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\(^ {12}\) This presupposes as a basis the acceptance of other moral theories; for e.g. that nature has intrinsic moral worth, yet that the value of the ecosystem supersedes in certain contexts the value of the life of an individual animal, where the death of the animal is seen to be beneficial to the long term survival of the ecosystem. This also presupposes that in this context, man is morally justified in killing the animal, as this is motivated by a sincere desire to preserve the ecosystem. Based on utilitarian arguments therefore, the peripheral benefits (i.e. income, food, jobs, etc.) provided by hunting may be utilised because it promotes the over-all good, both for ecosystems and nature, and humans.

\(^ {13}\) African Lion Working Group 1999. There is a lot of debate about this issue, as mentioned in Chapter 3. That lions are more valuable in trophy terms within specific habitats and vegetation types that are not conducive to eco-tourism seems the general consensus within conservation circles. That they are more valuable on the whole in terms of their economic trophy value seems to be in doubt.

\(^ {14}\) A distinction could also be made between the outfitters who supply the hunts (i.e. the means, land, equipment, etc.) and those who partake in the hunts (i.e. client, PH, etc.) so far as motives, intentions and desires are concerned. The client hunter does not have the same primary desire to hunt as the PH or outfitter – his is for the experience or trophy/meat, whereas the PH/outfitter is primarily concerned with the needs of clients, or for his passion for his profession.
These are therefore causal justifications of trophy hunting as opposed to primary ones. That is to say, they address the causal implications and not the inherent moral quality of the activity. If this line of questioning is correct, then it can be seen that consistency principles are not fully adhered to by hunters in the process of justifying trophy hunting of the Big Five on the basis of causal implications alone. If we take this further we can see that this approach of using utilitarian theory to justifying trophy hunting lacks a certain logical integrity, in that it doesn’t justify it at all (i.e. it doesn’t do what hunters claim it does) – it merely makes excuses for it.

One could argue that the commercially packaged “trophy hunting experience” is therefore inconsistent with the hunting experience, and moral imperative to hunt, that the Ethical Hunter himself presupposes and claims. In certain cases, in an African context, The Hunting Experience therefore lacks integrity according to this view. Although this offers pointers towards questions of morality, it does not impute conclusive moral judgement on the part of the trophy hunter, or on trophy hunting in general, and only allows for the conclusion that the experience lacks integrity, as do the attempts to justify the experience according to pure consequentialism.

As an aside, it is important to distinguish here between trophy hunting as an experience, and trophy hunting as a management tool. To say that the experience itself lacks integrity, does not imply that integrity is lacking in wildlife management appraisals in Africa that seek to establish trophy hunting as a viable alternative. In utilitarian terms alone, trophy hunting may be seen by wildlife managers as a necessity in certain cases, especially when one considers the status of the Big Five animals in certain parts of Africa.

To promote The Hunting Experience, in its commercially packaged form, as meaningful in this African context is a misnomer, as the meaning of The Hunting Experience to individual hunters is not contingent on ecological and ecosystemic realities. This also brings us to the irony of trophy hunting, and the paradoxical nature of its existence in Africa today. While the commercially packaged “hunting experience” is inconsistently employed in moral justifications of trophy hunting in Africa, the instrumental benefits trophy hunting brings in specific cases may make it a short-term necessity in utilitarian terms. This is especially when one considers the lack of alternative and workable options to wildlife problems forthcoming from anti-hunting groups that are able to provide the same ecological and economic benefits. I will highlight this in the discussion that follows in this Module, particularly in reference to the different species of Big Five animals.

Causey (1989: 341-342) supports this view, and says further that utilitarianism, while well intentioned, is an “impotent ethical defence” of hunting.

Harmful ecological impacts, and the status of wildlife, may influence the sense of fulfilment sought by individual hunters, but these considerations do not necessarily impact on the interpretation of the symbolic meaning of The Hunting Experience.