

Słowa kluczowe: polowanie, spotkanie, dramat, etyka zwierząt, Ortega y Gasset

Keywords: hunting, encounter, drama, animal ethics, Ortega y Gasset

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THE DRAMA OF HUNTING

1. INTRODUCTION

Hunting is a puzzling phenomenon and an important part of mankind's cultural heritage. Since our ancestors acquired agricultural skills and hunting became a leisure activity, the perception of the passionate and skilful chasing of animals has undergone a serious transformation in society. Christianity spurred the reconsideration of the role of nature and animals in the created world and marked a new beginning in a process in which certain aspects of hunting came to the forefront while others were obscured. Even in our post-Christian times, hunting still has a symbolic power; however, society maintains an interest in it mainly due to the animal-rights movement.

In what follows I would like to argue that in spite of the radical transformations in cultural views on hunting (from a virtuous to a despicable activity), it has one essential aspect that has not changed: *a certain kind of hunting allows for the utmost dramatic and personal encounter¹ with animal nature*. The significance of this encounter is critical for any further consideration, be it legislative, economic, or cultural, and can only be fully expressed by philosophy. Rather than arguing for a definitive position concerning animal rights, I would like to demonstrate in a phenomenological way that hunting possesses an irreducible dramatic character that

1 Concerning the usage of the word „dramatic,” I very much rely on the complex contribution of Tischner's radical redefinition of drama; this paper in actuality aims to be nothing more than a footnote to his philosophy of drama by further extending its realm of legitimacy. See especially: Tischner, 1989. A comprehensive analysis of his contribution has been recently published in: Jagiello, 2020, 65-111.

should be fully taken into account with respect to the law. In order to do so, however, first some space needs to be made for philosophical reflections regarding the mainstream discourse concerning hunting and animal rights; secondly, the types of hunting must be clarified; and thirdly, I will offer a phenomenological account of the personal encounter with wild animals.

2. QUESTIONABLE PRESUPPOSITIONS

In the vast literature concerning hunting and animal rights, there is a common presupposition that determines not only the methodology but also the formulation of the relevant issue: “Do animals, and more specifically wild animals, have rights?” (Takáčová, 2012, 57-59; Hegedus, 2016). The debate is centred thus on the status of animals (Regan, 1985), and since animals are more than objects/property but are not persons/subjects of the law, they fit into neither of these two legal categories. It is argued that in order to protect them from abuse, a new category must be formulated according to which some “rights” can be attributed to them². Thus, there is a legislative problem that must be resolved by either expanding the concept of “property” or by modifying who is a “subject of the law.”(Tóth, Hérány, 2013).

Certainly, both categories (and combinations of the two) rely on the conceptual and argumentative help of philosophy. It must be observed, however, that the discussion around the philosophical foundations of technical juridical terms entails a tacit presupposition concerning the problematic relationship between philosophy and the law. Is philosophy expected to merely offer a concrete solution to a complex problem, or is it rather acknowledged in its capacity to illuminate a puzzling phenomenon in order to eventually draw forth some practical considerations? I would argue for the second case by offering an example of what I consider the key element for understanding hunting: the “*dramaticism of hunting*”.

The present argument rests upon a conviction that cannot be defended in this short article but which must be made explicit. Post-modern Anglo-Saxon society in particular has a tendency to transform any issue of contemporary social relevance into a juridical problem that must be overcome (or at least complemented by) a more philosophical approach that rediscovers and restores the original context of the given phenomenon, allowing it to be seen in its complexity. Without the aid of philosophy, juridical reflections might mask important distinctions. If this

2 For an illustration of how the animal rights movement is linked to the libertarian movement and human rights, see Bentham, 1789. For Singer’s interpretation of how animal rights may be based on the capacity to suffer, see Singer, 2017. .

general observation is sustainable, then it is applicable to hunting. Thus, restoring philosophically the concept of hunting as a complex cultural activity by exploring the conscious experience of those who engage in certain types of hunting with the right disposition can and even must correct legislative short-sightedness.

3. A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO HUNTING – SOME METHODOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

Although a philosophical reflection is more often triggered by amazement for what there *is*, it can also be brought about by a puzzling issue. In these cases, the right methodology of philosophy is to take a step backwards, distancing ourselves from the problem in order to see beyond it³, allowing the original givenness of the phenomena to come forward. This approach has different aspects worth enumerating here:

- 1) It reframes the question in order to be fully aware of the dramatic character of the issue, elevating the horizon of the discussion by calling attention to elements of transcendence, the common good, the divine, etc. Philosophy does not intend to resolve the drama, but make it more explicit.
- 2) Stepping back means to acknowledge what one takes for granted.
- 3) It also means to establish a healthy distance with the surrounding cultural world, which tends to usurp results for political aims.

Even if philosophical reflections concern *animal rights*, what is at stake with regards to hunting is not so much the resolution of a social problem than the need to *re-learn how to approach* the issue *contemplatively*. The act of contemplation is certainly not to be understood here as an evasion, nor does it stand in any contradiction to action and practicality; rather, it is precisely the type of reflective act that allows for an action to be free, for any act that is not matured through contemplation remains conditioned by whatever triggered it.

It is the animal world *in itself*, as *part of reality* as well as *in relation to human self-understanding* that invites us *contemplate* it. The act of contemplation has been masterfully characterized by Dietrich von Hildebrand (1976)⁴, thus, it is sufficient here to stress only one point: as opposed to other types of reflection, *con-*

3 Socrates was a master of this manoeuvre, as we can see in the Euthyphro (one of the dialogues of Plato's *elenco*). See Plato's *Dialogues*: Gorg. 509 c4-5; Apol. 21 d1-d7; Eutif. 5a 3- c7, 15c11-16a4; Carm. 165 b4-c2, 166c7-d6; Laq. 186 b8-c6, d8-e3; Hip. Ma. 286c8-e2; Lisis 212a4-7, 223b4-8 ; Men. 71 a1-7, 80d 1-4; Banq.216 d1-4.

4 Recovering Blondel's distinction, we can say that the sapiential reflection here is not *ad usum*, but completely *ad summum*. See Blondel, 1906, 338-339.

templation is a distinctly receptive mental activity of centripetal directedness allowing the object to *show itself from itself*.

In order to find a contemplative path to the question of animal rights, two methodological considerations seem necessary: 1) First, any truly philosophical approach to the question should identify the specific *experience of encountering animals as such*. 2) The philosophical analysis of the encounter with animals contains both *analytical* and *phenomenological* elements. The main question here concerns the *meaning* of the very experience, i.e. the relationship between the newly acquired content and the meaning-context (*Sinnzusammenhang*) in which it is embedded.

Therefore, the analytical and phenomenological methods must be complemented and even guided by Western *hermeneutical* considerations (Seifert, 2009)⁵. While the analytical approach will help us to define hunting and the different types of hunting experiences, the phenomenological approach will come in handy when describing the encounter, and hermeneutics is needed to decipher its message concerning human self-understanding.

4. HUNTING AND THE REVISED ORDER OF PROCEEDING

Although most of the contemporary discussion on animal rights considers hunting as a special legislative issue, in a more philosophical approach a certain type of hunting appears to be the *paradigmatic case of encountering wild animal nature*. By this I mean that hunting can illuminate animal nature as such, as well as what the encounter with the quarry implies for human self-understanding. Thus, in considering hunting, we might see hidden aspects of both animal and human nature. This claim is true for a *certain kind of hunting carried out with a specific attitude* because it leads us to a *dramatic* encounter.

Let me now describe this type of hunting and then offer a possible description of the dramatic encounter.

5. THE SPECIAL TYPE OF HUNTING WITH THE POTENTIAL OF A DRAMATIC ENCOUNTER

It is certainly not an easy task to define hunting. The etymology of the term (Douglas) helps us to understand that it is about searching for, pursuing and killing

5 Concerning the relationship between man and nature, this comes down to the very experience of the encounter with animal nature that must be considered in the overarching context from creation to eschatology with a focus on what truly changed man's relationship with nature: the Incarnation.

a wild animal. It refers to a variety of activities: hunting can be classified according to its object (bird, big game), the type of territory in which it is carried out (Safari, canned), the manner in which it is carried out (quiet, noisy hunting, *faire chase*), the purpose it serves (recreational, pest control, wildlife management, poaching) or the method used (shooting, dogs, falcons).

In order to single out the type of hunting that allows for a *dramatic encounter*, we must first make some distinctions.

I. Big game hunting

The subjects involved in an encounter are what makes them significant. Thus, in order to talk about a meaningful encounter between humans and animals, it is reasonable to first consider the example of *big game hunting* (given the hierarchic structure of the *regnum animalae*). It is obvious that a lion is a more intelligent, developed, complex entity than a duck, and encounter with him permits a deeper discovery of wild nature. The more the animal's intelligence approaches that of humans, the more intense and personal the encounter.

II. One-to-one encounter

Secondly, regarding the experience of the encounter, the mode of pursuing the given animal must be unaided (without dogs, falcons, etc.). Although hunting dogs are involved in the process of searching and do not exclude the immediate character of a face to face encounter, we can see more clearly if the hunt occurs between the hunter and the hunted only. While the mediation of the trained animal between the human and the wild animal may offer a more complex picture of our relation to nature, its instrumental usage might divert our attention from the one essential point of the whole experience: man's radical *exposure to nature*. The intervention of the trained animal might evoke the sensation that man is just another hunter in the hierarchy of mammals. This half-truth corresponds to man's paradoxical place in nature according to which man is fully part of and totally beyond it at the same time. As I will describe later, hunting – when properly understood and lived – offers the existential experience of this paradox.

III. Internet and canned hunting

Thirdly, if one wants to get acquainted with the wilderness of animal nature, the soulless postmodern invention of "internet hunting" („Internet Hunting Fact Sheet”) would certainly be the least eligible option, replacing the real encounter with an empty pretence. Although staged hunting posits an intense and safe experience, it also excludes aspects of nature that are disturbing or trivial. The shoot-

ing and killing comes to the forefront – deprived of its whole drama and orchestrated around the individual technical capacity of the hunter – and the search for the animal is regarded as secondary. Aspects of this simplistic, self-serving thinking are also present in *canned hunting*, though perhaps to a lesser degree. This hardly qualifies as more than training for the real adventure: encountering the wild animal in the wilderness. Whatever is understood by *wilderness* is a term relative to the realm of cultivation and culture, existing on the edge of the domesticated as the realm that challenges and questions it. Hunting is the perhaps most important traditional way of going back and forth between civilization and wilderness – a movement proper to human nature, which is naturally called to transcend itself⁶.

IV. Faire Chase⁷

Fourthly, there must be rules for game hunting (as there always have been). One becomes a hunter not when firing the first shot, but when realizing that encountering the prey is an ethical relationship that demands certain attitudes and behaviour on behalf of the hunter. Hunting is an experience that reaffirms men's paradoxical nature, requiring the person to be fully present as a human – which implies resisting brute animal instincts. Although hunting is an act that reaffirms humans' superiority to animals, it does not do so on the basis of man's capacity for killing: it is shown in the free obedience to the rules demanded by nature. Thus, fair chase hunting is defined as "the ethical, sportsmanlike, and lawful pursuit and taking of any free-ranging wild, native...big game animal in a manner that does not give the hunter an improper advantage." ("Fair Chase Statement").

Fair chase, however, involves more than the hunter's realization that would be ethically wrong to misuse their natural and technical advantage. It also requires self-knowledge, teaching self-respect through the recognition that unethical behaviour would dishonour the hunter. The specific virtues of temperance and accountability concern more than just the relation to one's own self and to the particular animal; it is based on an attitude towards nature in general (*Ibidem*). "Fundamental to all hunting is the concept of supporting the conservation of natural resources. Modern hunting involves the regulated harvest of individual animals in

6 According to de Lubac, the Christian tradition affirms that man has a natural desire for the supernatural. Cf. de Lubac, 1965, 150–51.

7 The animal protection organization In Defense of Animals claims that there is no such thing as faire chase and thus "recreational hunting" is nothing but a murderous business. "The truth is, the animal...has virtually no way to escape death once he or she is in the crosshairs of a scope mounted on a rifle or a crossbow." I will argue that faire chase can still be fair, and that it involves complex ethical considerations that go far beyond the type of weapon used. See "In Defense of Animals".

a manner that conserves, protects, and perpetuates the hunted population, known as sustainable use.” Thus, fair chase hunting is certainly not centred on the act of killing animals, but rather on a series of actions that express care for the individual animal, their environment, and the complex balance between them and other animal populations. It requires thoughtful contemplation of the equilibrium within nature as well as the relationship between nature and culture. It is in this sense that the document confirms “hunting should be guided by a hierarchy of ethics.”

The last one of the 6 tenets of fair chase hunting is particularly interesting in our context: “Recognize that these tenets are intended to enhance the hunter’s experience of the relationship between predator and prey, which is one of the most fundamental relationships of humans and their environment.”

Both claims require precision. In my reading the first part stresses the right ethical contemplation and corresponding behaviour that intends to enhance the “experience” along the lines of a deeper understanding of the dramatic encounter with the animal and thus, the rediscovery of human nature both pertaining to animal world and going radically beyond it (DeMello, 2012, 74.). It is in this sense that we can understand the second part of the admonition that I would rephrase like this: the dramatic relationship between predator and prey that becomes evident through the encounter reveals something fundamental about man’s place in the world and his dramatic responsibility to preserve and cultivate nature (Posewitz, 1994).

V. Three purposes, three types of hunting

Is hunting *only* about preservation of nature and certain species? The environmental philosopher Gary Varner identifies three types of hunting: *therapeutic*, *subsistence* and *sport*. If the main purpose is the preservation of certain species or the equilibrium of the eco-system, the activity falls into the first category. If, however, it has the purpose of supplying nourishment and material resources, we can talk about subsistence hunting. Hunting becomes a sport when the intentional killing of the animal primarily serves the enjoyment of the hunters.

Anti-hunters (Wood, 1997, 57–106). usually find the first type unnecessary, claiming that there are better, less painful techniques to control animal populations. They also argue that the second purpose, supplying nourishment, is outdated in most places. It may have been legitimate in the past, but nutritious food can now be made available in less harmful ways. In their eyes, the worst excuse is finding pleasure in an animal’s suffering, thus hunting as a sport can only be immoral.

One could develop some counterarguments responding to each of these accusations. These claims, however, are less powerful when we consider that hunting, when rightly understood as a complex cultural and ritual phenomenon, can be

the activity that unites these legitimate purposes by providing a *reflective balance among them*. In another words, authentic hunting is therapeutic and serves the subsistence of humans (Gunther, 2019). There can certainly be another legitimate purpose for hunting beyond nutrition, but just that there is a clear limitation of how much a hunter can eat, there must be limits to other needs as well. Hunting is essentially about these limits; it is a virtuous praxis of limiting one's needs to the measure of what nature provides us with. If the hunter entirely leaves the grounds of subsistence hunting, he steps outside of nature and participates in its soulless exploitation.

To some extent, subsistence hunting is based on an attitude that was greatly admired by the Stoics: observing the laws of nature and understanding how those rules are prescriptions for a good, balanced and virtuous life. Those who want to abolish hunting are often not aware of how it is based on a *participatory closeness to nature*. It is in this sense that hunting may indeed offer a concrete praxis to save us from the illusion that dealing with the natural world is a question of looking at data and interfering technically by redesigning ecological systems. Subsistence and therapeutic hunting, when rightly understood, do not exclude but rather reinforce each other.

Let us now consider the question of how these aspects are related to hunting as a sport and, more particularly, to its joyous character. Ortega y Gasset's masterful analysis dispels the cultural misunderstanding that the sport of hunting serves the purpose of individual satisfaction or the perverted desire to kill. Only the modern mindset so used to a fragmented worldview could make the claim that the joy stems from the act of intentionally killing animals rather than from living the relationship of man and nature in a way that corresponds to the human vocation: by getting involved in a personal drama with body and soul. Hunting has been regarded as a virtuous activity for centuries because this dramatic involvement with nature implies making the correct moral judgements based on complex considerations. Anybody whose pleasure stems from the act of extinguishing the animal's life misunderstands the purpose of hunting and is not fit to be a hunter.

VI. Quiet hunting

Sixthly, concerning the mode in which hunting is carried out, I would like to recall the distinction between quiet and noisy hunting (Rudolph, 1990, 335; Oiggins, 2004, p. 132). Noisy hunting includes occasions when the horn is used, while quiet hunting implies immersing oneself in the quarry's environment.

The experience of hunting I would like to endorse here for its dramatic and contemplative aspects belongs to the category of *quiet hunting*. It is not my purpose here to morally condemn "noisy hunting", I merely would like to stress the

epistemological and moral superiority of *quiet hunting* since it allows a one-to-one relation with the prey and a more thoughtful approach to nature.

Let us now characterize the kind of hunting that allows for this dramatic encounter with nature.

6. THE DRAMATIC ASPECT OF HUNTING

My claim is that the above-characterized way of hunting offers a *highly dramatic encounter* between animal and man. There are some aspects that allow us to talk about a drama: (a) it entails a serious conflict that endangers the life of at least one of the participants; (b) it involves a morally relevant and meaningful free decision; and (c) it has a great representative power concerning the relationship and the nature of each entity involved; from an external point of view the events embody the complex interrelationship between man, nature, and the divine.

As argued above, *big game hunting* best incorporates these characteristics.

There are several essential aspects of hunting that express this symbolic, *surplus meaning* that comes to the fore through an authentic encounter. One is the animal's capacity to expose nature as it was created, as opposed to civilized, cultivated nature. Some animals, such as apex predators, certainly have this capacity more than others, since animal nature reached a more intelligible expression in them than in lesser beasts.

Even when the main purpose of hunting is nutrition, it remains a significant cultural way of relating to nature that needs to be regulated by rituals acknowledging its moral and spiritual dimensions. It is a way of recognizing that the relationship between humanity and nature is fascinating and problematic at the same time. Hunting – ruling nature and taking care of the fragile equilibrium as well as the actual killing of the animals – has spiritual and moral implications that need to be made explicit, socially regulated and symbolically thematized. Through its dramatic power, quiet hunting provides us with fundamental insight concerning what it means to participate in nature.

Living this drama fully is good for man, for it gives him the opportunity to learn and even to radically reconsider his relation to nature. One cannot eliminate the drama by playing it down. That is why I would disagree with those who argue that immersing ourselves in nature does not require the hunting of animals (“Hunting”). A wild-life photographer has fundamentally the exact same experience of encountering the wilderness, but as argued above, it is the possibility of killing the animal that triggers reflections on our responsibility to preserve and regulate nature. It is the hunter who enters the forest, who fully assumes the drama of man's prob-

lematic relation to nature, *who puts himself in the dramatic scenario* of facing the animal and who has to make the right decision. What characterizes the hunter is that he takes on the responsibility of pronouncing a life or death judgment over a being that has been created to dwell in co-existence with humans and other species.

Only a person who is prepared through the admiration of nature while being immersed in it could reasonably carry this weight, especially when it comes to the more highly-developed apex predators. However, they can only do so when aided by a culture in which life in itself is highly valued. Our contemporary Western society regularly sacrifices nature for the sake of economic growth. This happens when we try to avoid the drama between man and nature without realizing that man necessarily participates in nature.

Hunting is a special activity that is often attacked because it resists alleged social progress by (1) restoring the dramatic scenario in which the moral tension of man's radical interference in nature can be existentially lived; and (2) by insisting that this is not possible in an abstract way, but only through bodily participation and entering into nature.

Thus, although the mechanisms of nature can be studied through science, its true meaning reveals itself to those ready for a personal encounter. Above, we mentioned the example of big-game hunting in order to analyse the exposure to life-threatening danger it might entail. The key issue, however, is not so much facing the danger but rather being exposed to the natural environment with *a certain attitude*: good hunting requires taking a step back, observing nature, and contemplating the processes of life.

It is not merely limiting oneself and renouncing immediate intervention; it is rather the very active readiness to be transformed through participation in the life of the forest. What makes hunting a deeply purposeful activity is that, once the hunter enters nature, renouncing control over the environment by following the animal into its world, *anything can happen*. Being a hunter goes along with accepting uncontrolled organic processes (as opposed to mechanisms) that may or may not demand one's life but that almost certainly go beyond the limits of the technically-designed life postmodern men and women desperately hold on to.

The hunter's approach to nature entails a paradox, the simplifying of which would destroy the meaning of hunting by reducing it to a mere leisure activity. On the contrary, authentic hunting is about the *dramatic scenification of a complex relation* allowing all essential aspects to become an existential and potentially transformative experience, for it offers and requires a certain *catharsis*.

The complexity stems from the fact that an intense closeness to nature is a *sine que non* of hunting, but unification with nature is undesirable. Immersion

into the wilderness helps to see how man is both inferior and superior to animals. In the complex experience of hunting, man is empathetically testing the limits of unification with the animal; he has to get into their mindset, has to hear and see what the prey is hearing and seeing. This challenges man and is counterbalanced by the dramatic encounter with the animal when man “emerges from nature” as the creature called to care for it. The experience of hunting thus offers a realization of man’s unique status in nature: in contrast to any other animal, *the fulfilment of human nature requires overcoming nature*, transcending himself by realizing that man is made to lovingly care for all life, *fallen nature*⁸ and everything that there *is*.

7. DRAMATICALLY EXPERIENCING NATURE’S SUBORDINATION THROUGH HUNTING

The hunter’s readiness to leave their comforts behind and go out into the wilderness is a counter-cultural expression, a sign of their openness to seeing human nature in another light. This change of perspective invites us to an existential re-definition through *encountering* nature, but this dramatic experience comes at a high price: the consideration of taking the life of an animal. Today it is widely recognized that our horrendous waste-culture does serious harm to nature and the environment. The peculiar *post-modern aspect* of this destruction is that it happens under the disguise of “normality,” because (1) the consequences are often exported to the economic and cultural peripheries; and (2) the fast-spreading urban lifestyle almost completely avoids any participatory relationship with nature. Hunting as a dialogical motion in which human nature is put on a trial offers the possibility of acknowledging nature’s systematic and almost unconscious destruction. Offering a personal and dramatic experience can help us to take responsibility for at least part of it.

Nature is subordinated to man, yet this cannot be taken for granted. It is only visible to those who have accepted their limitations: that fragile human nature itself can collapse into savagery by being unfaithful to its higher vocation. What we call hunting is an expression of *cultural resistance* to fallen human nature, manifested as greed, pride, or even the perverted joy of killing an animal.

The hunting tradition affirms that these evil forces need to be controlled by strict rules and the exercise of virtues in community, through rituals that concern

8 We know (especially since Darwin) that the natural world is not an ideal world of peaceful and harmonious relations. The idea of a continuous struggle for life, clear manifestations of which gave rise to the theory of the survival of the fittest, allows us to see that nature is not self-sufficient, but rather needs loving care in order to find a reasonable balance among so many processes.

the mystery of creation, nature, life, and death. It is thanks to these ritual practices (rather than legal restrictions) that dehumanizing temptations can be resisted and human nature transformed to the point of honouring and showing gratitude for animal life. In this way, hunting can recognize human nature's call to go beyond animal nature as well as acknowledge the high price of creation's subordination to humanity, clearly manifested in the reception of the animal's life.

This complexity reinforces the classic anthropological account offered by della Mirandola (2012, 51): man holds an intermediary role among created beings for being the only creature whose status within creation is not clearly defined. Since animals do not have free will, they are not morally accountable for their deeds and omissions, and therefore cannot become unworthy of being what they are⁹. Humans, on the other hand, do not fully realize their own nature when they act immorally. In other words, the *ontological dignity* of humans implies *acquired dignity*, the free realization of one's own nature in accordance with their call (Lobato, 1997). Thus, some animals are more perfect examples of their kind than others – like the apex predators – but their nature is complete (although not unaffected by the original sin). In contrast, there is a significant degree of incompleteness in human nature; it is “unfinished” without our responding to the call to *thankfully receive our existence*.

As I insisted above, not even the recognition that man is elevated above animal nature guarantees an unproblematic relationship with it. Overcoming the nature that surrounds us as well as our own limitedness when faced with the *mystery of being* while encountering an animal remains a dramatic experience.

Insisting on the importance of a certain kind of hunting goes along with stressing that we can never take the fact that nature sustains us for granted, as we simply take its fruits through a consumption void of all dramatic aspects¹⁰. Consuming is either a dramatic participation in nature or it is a lie with tragic consequences. The truth hunting shows us is twofold: (1) that nutritious meat is only available through a radical intervention into nature, and (2) nutritious animals only exist through grace. The prey in front of the hunter's eyes appears as a gift that nature offers to humans. For most of the post-modern urban population, meat is as a consumer good that arrives ready for cooking or consumption, and the link between the food and the animal is completely missing. It is arguable that the hunter who is personally, bodily involved in what it takes to put meat on the table can give a more

9 For a powerful counterargument to this point see Mester, 2014.

10 As Wendell Berry powerfully claimed, this dramatic character is hidden by post-modern alienation from agriculture. See Berry, 2018..

thankful account of the grace-filled, gift-character of the animal's existence, the highest form of acknowledging its dignity.

8. THE GAZE OF ANIMALS (CFR. ARMSTRONG, 2011)

The dramatic encounter of man and prey reaches its climax in the revelation of the given animal's nature in its innocent gaze when seen through the cross-hairs. What does it tell us?

Animals may not feel sorrow over their own death, but they do require the highest degree of empathy we can have toward them. They do not ask for mercy, yet they do express a compelling innocence. Their appeal contains no reproach, for they cannot morally judge actions, but they offer resistance, struggling for life. It is deeply significant that life is precious to them, their innocent gaze expressing the mystery of life on earth. It is not self-serving but highly communicative to one who can understand it. What is vanishing becomes the centre of attention in the dying animal's swan song. Do they accuse us? Undoubtedly there is a question addressed to us humans: Why should I die? What have you done to make this necessary?

Man is left alone in a long silence, wondering whether the killing of the animal was justified. As Ortega y Gasset (2007) rightly argues, hunting is more about this dramatic puzzlement than anything: a man must enter it in order to discover his own role in nature.

It is in this sudden lifeless silence that animals tell us about who we are and are not yet: those who are called to rein in the created universe even though we are not prepared to do it without higher assistance. It is the silence in which one has to assume the consequences of original sin¹¹.

Hunting offers us an opportunity to experience man's fall as a rupture with the purity of nature (White, 1967). Some can bear this tension between our lost innocence and our vocation to care for creation. Some can understand that animals point us toward our task to rein over nature by never forgetting our own culpability. Some understand that hunting is primordially a drama in which every single time the animal is sacrificed, the hunter is presented with a question he cannot answer by himself: when will nature be redeemed (Ricoeur, 1967)?

11 Regan comes close to this vision when he writes: "...tears come to my eyes when I see, or read, or hear of the wretched plight of animals in the hands of humans." in Regan, 1985. Animals as well as the whole of nature are affected by original sin, but this (to the contrary of Regan's position) does not diminish the unique responsibility of humans in creation.

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THE DRAMA OF HUNTING

SUMMARY

In this short essay I demonstrate that the contemporary discussion on animal rights has some problematic presuppositions concerning the role of philosophy. I argue that what is necessary is not so much to resolve the alleged cultural dispute than to *re-learn how to approach it contemplatively*. A certain type of hunting can offer a highly dramatic and personally transformative encounter with the animal world through which we can consider our participatory relationship with nature. Thus, after a short methodological introduction, I identify the type of hunting that may allow for such an experience. After the dramatic aspect of hunting is described and analyzed, I explain how the encounter with the quarry illuminates man's paradoxical place in nature and its subordination to humanity. I finish by phenomenologically describing what the gaze of the hunted animal communicates and how witnessing it restores the contemplative context in which an authentic human response might be given to nature.