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# Killing with kindness: when hunters want to let you know they care

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## ABSTRACT

'Care' is a term that hunters increasingly apply to diverse practices pertaining to their interactions with wildlife. In this article, we investigated the extent and durability of hunters' use of care language, including appeals made to sentiment, relation, compassion, embodiedness and situated morality. After establishing the use of such language in contemporary hunting media, we discuss two case studies of contemporary sport hunting that tease out dimensions of care. These case studies show how hunters' appeal to care is deeply problematic and oppositely, how these hunting forms bring out new relations and scopes of care with wildlife unanticipated by critics. Without discounting hunters' sincerity, we note that hunters may use this language opportunistically rather than with consistent philosophical appeal. We conclude by discussing the possible role of hunters' appeal to care language in mediating public acceptance of hunting.

## KEYWORDS

Care ethics; hunting; killing; relations; distance

## Introduction

In the 20th century, hunters have faced allegations from animal rights activists, environmentalists and the public generally that they are blood-thirsty, ruthless, and that hunting is unnecessary for survival, or inefficient as means of keeping wildlife populations in check in modern society (Cartmill, 1993). Hunters have increasingly responded to these allegations by insisting that they *care* for wildlife (McLeod, 2007), unlike irresponsible factory farming and urban citizens alienated from the modes of their production and food (Callicott, 2014). By contrast, hunting appears to practice *personal responsibility* on the part of the hunter who enters into a relationship with a *particular* animal, and who applies situated and affective knowledge rather than principles derived from anonymous slaughter practice (Marvin, 2006).

The common public intuition of this century is that the lives of animals, and their interests in avoiding suffering, have moral weight (Catia & Eze, 2015). We may well consider it indefensible to take animal lives to satisfy comparatively trivial human interests such as gustatory pleasure or, for that matter, recreational motives. Even when hunting does not cause suffering for the animals exceeding that experienced in the wild, killing animals to satisfy such interests will appear paradigmatically *uncaring* (Curnutt, 1996). It is incompatible with caring for the animal's "vital biological needs," developing or maintaining its "basic capacities" (Engster, 2006, p. 28) or "flourishing" as an individual (Hamington,

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2001, p. 3), which have all been presented as the key tenets of care theory in recent decades' scholarship.

In this article, we examined hunters' uses of the language of care theory in their internal and external discourses. We asked: what might its use reveal about hunting generally and in some of its more recent developments, toward commercial and technologically augmented hunting, which abrogate some care features? Use of care language raises several important questions about the moral implications of care language for the legitimacy of hunting in the eyes of a skeptical anti-hunting public. Going forward, will hunters' use of the care language help to mollify hunting's critics through its appeal to sentiment, responsibility and empathy?

In what follows, we engage in a discussion on this phenomenon of so-called *killing with kindness* and how this may be understood to the outside world of non-hunters. We proceed in three main steps. First, we briefly clarify how and in what contexts hunters lay claim to care tenets. This section is supported by the combined methods of literature review of the scholarly literature on hunting and wildlife management and a short review of popular scientific and hobby articles within hunting media in Sweden, showing topics, arguments and word use that approximate care. This section illustrates the use of care by hunters, but does not aim to systematize or quantify it. In the second step, recognizing that hunting is now a term for a broad cluster of consumptive wildlife activities, we tease out two contemporary sport hunting practices for analysis that hunters have identified as upcoming challenges to hunting ethics their relationship with wildlife (von Essen, 2017). We show that these contemporary practices challenge hunters' self-selected discourse of care, which emphasizes virtues like embodiedness, relation and the promotion of animal welfare (Cahoone, 2009). Yet the contemporary developments of technologically augmented hunting and hunting animals in enclosures also raise new relations of care with regard to wildlife welfare, making them instructive cases for illustrating surprising new directions. In our third and final step, we discuss the implications of care language for hunters' self-understanding and their public presentation. In this discussion, we show that the care language has some justificatory value for hunters when confronting a skeptical anti-hunting public, as well as a potential element of self-rehabilitation of their image. However, care rhetoric also comes with a high price for hunters by highlighting the extent to which their actual practices fail to satisfy the clarion call for sentiment, responsibility, and empathy.

We do not see the hunters themselves as making any consistent, conscious theoretical appeal to care, but perhaps rather appealing to the language of care as an intuitive way of, among other things, making hunting seem palatable to a critical public (Van de Pitte, 2003). Moreover, we anticipate that care ethicists, the majority of whom are staunch opponents of hunting, would almost certainly reject the uses of care language by hunters, seeing it primarily as a gendered practice of male domination over nature (Adams, 1993; Kalof et al., 2004). Consequently, our paper does not engage with a care ethical evaluation of hunting, but descriptive ethics: we demonstrate how hunters themselves use this language. To this end, drawing inspiration from the theoretical tenets of care theory, we appeal to care only as it is used by hunters in their discourses to denote (1) a close personal relation to a particular animal (2) responsibility and stewardship concerning the welfare of prey animals (3) compassion and the avoidance of cruelty and unnecessary nonlethal harms to prey in lethal resolutions to the hunt.

## Methods

To illustrate recent empirical examples of care discourse, we reviewed online articles, editorials and news items that appeared under the tab *viltvård* (wildlife management) of web hunting magazines in Sweden. There are two hunting associations in Sweden with respective popular hunting magazines in both print and online format: the Swedish Hunting Association and its magazine *Svensk Jakt*, and the National Hunters' Association and its magazine *Jaktojägere*. The associations have approximately 150,000 and 40,000 members respectively. While the magazines of the associations are mainly directed toward hunters, editors have expressed ambitions that these magazines be in part 'coffee table magazines', palatable to the general public: meaning no blood on the covers and only respectful photos of animals (von Essen, 2020). The magazines and their covers are *kontakttextsortet* ('contact-establishing-texts') (Held, 2005), meaning they perform an ambassadorial function for hunting. Hence, we suggest that these magazines are not merely for closed internal circulation, but are also part of in a process of hunters rehabilitating their image before the general public.

Our approach was to review all articles under the *viltvård* tab (*Jaktojägere*:  $n=30$ , *Svensk Jakt*:  $n=68$ ). This means that care language appearing in other themes and topics, including "editorials", "hunting clips", "shooting" and more as divided by species or type hunt, were not searched. This would likely have revealed substantially more instances of care language. Our aim with this presentation of care language by hunters, however, was not to systematically quantify its use relative to other types of discourses; rather, this section illustrates that the care language occurs, and the broad contours in which it is used. This allows us to proceed to the thrust of the article: what this deployment of care language means for hunting.

It should be noted that the term *viltvård* is not a direct translation of wildlife management, but translates as *wildlife care* (-vård being the same term used for e.g., elder and maternity care). Across the two magazines, we looked for claims that (1) hunting is *relational*; (2) hunting involves *emotion*; (3) hunting involves *active stewardship*; (4) hunting ensures *end to suffering* through quick deaths and (5) hunting involves the exercise of *situational ethics*. The coding was conducted by the first author who consulted the coauthor for verification.

The choice of Swedish hunting media was in part mediated by convenience and familiarity with the research context. But as a case context, Swedish hunting culture also represents a community that received criticism in prior decades, but is experiencing something of a quiet resurgence, in part because of the popularity of wild game meat (Ljung, 2014), and the governmental mandate of the Swedish Hunting Association to manage wildlife sustainably. Accordingly, Swedish hunters are exceptionally attentive to their public representation and recognize that their actions represent the whole of hunting (Hansen et al., 2010).

## Care in Contemporary Western Hunting Practice

### What Is Care?

Ruddick (1998) points out three distinct but overlapping meanings of care: (1) care as opposed to justice; (2) care as a kind of labor; (3) care as a particular relationship. Tronto (1994) defines care broadly as "... everything we do to maintain, contain and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (p. 40). He further divides care practices

into (1) attentiveness; (2) responsibility; (3) competence; (4) responsiveness. Hamington (2003) emphasizes this social and relational dimension of care by tying it to embodiedness. “Care denotes an approach to personal and social morality that shifts ethical considerations to context, relationships, and affective knowledge” (p. 3). These overlapping meanings of care all inform the arguments we derive from hunting discourses in the subsequent sections of our study.

Claims made by sport hunters today approximate rhetoric of care ethics. Hunters may be said to grasp at the care concept by interacting with animals in a multisensory capacity (Franklin, 2001) rather than viewing them through a distant gaze (Clement, 2003) or through a plastic wrap at the supermarket, and caring for animals as stewards (Holsman, 2000) by contributing to environmental improvement such as by habitually feeding game, constructing bird boxes, and sparing land for more destructive land-uses like agriculture and development. This is argued by hunting defenders to forge a better sense of community with animals (King, 2010).

Altogether, scholars observe an overall, albeit often slow, shift from a utilitarian to a relational orientation among many Western hunters over the past thirty years, reflecting trends in the non-hunting population (Ljung, 2014; Manfredo et al., 2016). From being concerned with meat, an increasing number of hunters today report enjoying being able to watch deer grow and recognize when they are pregnant and give birth (Makoto & Cheon, 2017). The ‘eco-buddy’ and ‘compassionate transcendental’ are popular categories of hunters (Littlefield & Ozanne, 2011). Moreover, in her media discourse analysis of six hunting magazines from the 1960s-today, von Essen (2018) found today’s hunting texts are significantly more concerned with promoting animal welfare and environmental management. These aspects gradually became the major ethical topics compared to earlier decades when ‘unethical’ in these texts referred to offending hunting sensibilities and upsetting landowners and neighbors over territorial disputes. Next we present claims as to care relations in detail, by reviewing empirical and scholarly arguments that hunting in contemporary Western societies appeal to care. We note five arguments that stand out by approximating the care theory ethics, namely that: (1) hunting is *relational*; (2) hunting involves *emotion*; (3) hunting involves *active stewardship*; (4) hunting ensures *end to suffering* through quick deaths and (5) hunting involves the exercise of *situational ethics*.

First, to Marvin (2006), the relationality between hunter and animal comes out clearly when compared to animal killing in the industrial context. Here, slaughter is clinical, distanced and governed by “rules, routines, repetition, predictability and inevitability.” (p. 17). The killer is a professional who has an impersonal and non-individualized relationship with the animal victim. Critical animal studies observe that everything about slaughter minimizes relations and personal element. There are “metaphorical and literal walls” between butchers and animals, and above all between consumers of meat and the animals (Colling, 2013, p. 6), so as to neutralize any psychological discomfort for workers associated with the practice or industry.

A review of hunting literature affirms the belief that hunting actively creates a relationship where none existed before (Marvin, 2006). To other hunting advocates, it re-activates relations between man and nature: corporeal relations between predator and prey, as opposed to clinical distanced ones in modernity. It is one of profound connectedness and spiritual humility, affirming man’s place in nature (Cartmill, 1993). On this basis, hunters increasingly defend hunting as an ethical form of meat consumption in comparison to

agricultural and industrial meat production: declaring it a personally responsible form of carnivory (Hettinger, 1994).

With relationships come *emotions* to animals, which constitutes the second way in which hunting approximates key tenets of care ethics. Perhaps surprisingly to the critics who regard hunters as apathetic to animal suffering (Cartmill, 1993), much hunting scholarship is devoted to the affective dimension of hunting, involving not only excitement, but also guilt, shame and remorse in the taking of a life (Causey, 1989; Luke, 1997). Hunting is argued to be justified not despite of but *on the basis* of its emotions. To kill dispassionately is morally problematic (Mcintyre, 1996), and the domain of professional cullers. This is superficially consistent with care ethics which cautions against cold-blooded killing and killing in the name of principle or justice (Noddings, 2013). For this reason, we might anticipate care ethics to be skeptical toward institutional killing, which in the case of hunting might be professional sharpshooters fulfilling kill quotas.

Furthermore, hunting defender Swan (1995) declares that the relations invited by hunting compel duties, and hence argues that “If people were responsible for killing even a small portion of the meat they eat, animals in general would be treated with more respect and compassion” (p. 191–192). As a relation that compels duties akin to care, hunting is primarily a form of *stewardship*, constituting the third way in which hunting connects to caring. As part of this claim, hunters are the wards of wildlife. In North European and Germanic cultures, there is an especially strong tradition of care based on such stewardship. Falzon (2008) argues that care is reliant on ‘good’ management practices, allowing game to feed, breed, flourish and reproduce, much like plants in a garden. This may be why, for example, we find words like *hege* in German to describe a traditional relationship between hunters and wildlife based on principles of stewardship and care (*hege* comes from the word *hag*, referring to an enclosed area of shrubs under the owner’s protection). Hunters even contend that their roles as caretakers of the environment means that “if it wasn’t for us” (Øian & Skogen, 2016, p. 111) the situation for animals would be considerably worse: on both individual and species levels of well-being.

In the fourth appeal to care, hunters purport to alleviate suffering for animals when they kill them. Whether rhetoric or conviction, hunting defenders use the so-called *harvest-or-holocaust* defense: “we shoot ‘em to save ‘em” (Wood, 1997). They purport sparing animals from what they term ‘nature’s grisly drama’ with natural deaths involving far more suffering (Loftin, 1984; McLeod, 2007). To Cahoone (2009), the suffering of animals killed in hunting is not a moral harm unless it exceeds the suffering of an animal in a wild death. He suggests that the ‘natural’ fates of a wild animal involving disease, starvation, nutritional stress and predation, are more gruesome than a hunter’s rifle. As Rolston argues: “Bullets inflict no more pain than do the fangs of a cougar but rather less (Rolston, as cited in Hettinger, 1994). The argument is then that hunting is acceptable, even a mercy, if it does not inflict ‘unnecessary suffering’ (Tickle, 2018).

In the last argument linking hunting with care ethics, we include the scholarship in hunting that insists upon hunting ethics being contextual and situational. Ethics defy standardization, on hunters’ account, and cannot be figured out on the basis of *a priori* principles (Gibson, 2014; Hanna, 2006). To Hanna (2006), decisions about ethics should not be made “in the absence of any meaningful personal experiential context” (p. 249). Leopold (1946) maintained “the ethics of sportsmanship is not a fixed code, but must be formulated and practiced by the individual” (p. 232). While national hunting codes exist, and hunter

communities of practice are often loosely constituted by shared ethos, ethics remain grounded in moral relativism and pragmatism, stressing the importance of social context. This is an underacknowledged link to care ethics, which defines itself against universal principles of justice and “rigid rationalist abstractions”, arguing instead for a more situationally-informed ethic (Donovan, 2006). In Sweden, for example, hunters adhere to the maxim of ‘freedom with responsibility’ when it comes to their wildlife ethics, while in the U.S., Morris (2010) writes that ethics are often individually interpreted and locally applied. Hunting shares with care ethics, then, a dynamic moral direction of our ethical responses to animals on the basis of choices made “consciously, coherently and contextually” (Gaard, 2002, p. 135). We leave for the time being, the question of whether or not this is superficial agreement with care ethics, unresolved.

### **The Care Language in Swedish Hunting Media**

Sweden represents part of what is often understood as North Germanic hunting cultural cluster (Falzon, 2008). Such hunting culture is characterized by an understanding of hunting and culling wildlife as ‘managing’ akin to wildlife gardening, with strong dimensions of stewardship. Sweden is also typical in that it reflects general trends in Western society regarding a deteriorating (but recently perhaps also rising) public acceptance of hunting in the 1980s (Peterson, 2004) and a downward trend in demographics participating in hunting. However, Sweden is atypical in enjoying an usually high public perception of hunting today, at 89%, high compared to other countries (Caro, 2017). The Swedish Hunting Association insists this is because, among other things, Swedish hunters devote their time to wildlife management (SJF, 2014). Swedish hunters also purport that “acceptance of hunting comes at a cost” of tending to public relations (von Essen, 2020, p. 3). Perhaps as a result of this work, acceptance of hunting has steadily increased in Sweden over the past thirty years (Ljung, 2014).

Appeals to care are present both in magazines meant for internal circulation, and contexts where hunters present themselves to the outside world. This is apparent, for example, in the popular TV show ‘Jaktliv’ (“Hunting Life”) on SVT, which attracts 200,000 viewers per episode. In the latest 2020 season, the theme is ‘wildlife care’. The extent to which the care discourse is emphasized has upset hunting critics, accusing the show of using euphemisms to hide killing practices (Stjernswärd, 2019). In 2019 episodes, the show hosts can be seen meeting local hunters who discuss their motivations for hunting, often emphasizing terms like companionship, keeping nature in balance, and receiving personal emotional fulfillment.

In hunting magazines, several articles from the past ten years focused on the importance of environmental improvement for game animals. In one article, hunters were encouraged to take time away from their annual moose hunt to construct bird boxes as “birds also need roofs over their heads [...] hunting is so much more than just shooting moose” (Pott, 2016). In another viltvård article from Svensk Jakt, hunters are given a schematic for how to build a quay for ducks (Karlsson, 2017). In a reader’s piece on a squirrel family enjoying baths that have been constructed for them, the squirrel’s needs are lovingly considered by the hunter, who suggests it ‘maybe doesn’t want to get wet’ and ‘hungry’ (Claeson Månsson & Svensk Jakt, 2018). Species conservation is said to be reliant on the individual efforts of hunters, such that feeding stations need to be built for the arctic fox (Pott, 2016b), and roadkill is

encouraged to be distributed by hunters to an eagle's nest and feeding site (Svensk Jakt, 2020). Elsewhere, prompts are made on behalf of animal welfare not to litter in nature, as it may harm animals (Henricson & Svensk Jakt, 2019). In Westlund (2016), a portrait of a hunter is presented with the title that the moose is "his best friend", with whom he lives in harmony and symbiosis in a shared habitat.

The hunting media articles under *viltvård* also turn up countless news items on hunters' rescue operations of wild animals in peril. Saving moose and deer that have gone through the ice in the winter are recurring topics, "I can't just stand there and watch when the moose is drowning" a hunter emphatically declares after rescuing the bull from a lake and giving it a gentle massage (Edman, 2019). Rescuing baby animals is seen as particularly rewarding, as it allows the hunter to watch a reunion between the moose calf and its mother, without the rescue, "the calf would never have made it on its own." (Edman, 2019). While sometimes the hunter has to contend with defensive attacks after the rescue, "that little rascal wasn't too grateful" (Ljung & Jaktojägare, 2018), other articles tell of connections, like rescuing a moose calf by boat, transporting it with an ATV and heating it up with blankets in the garage – stories which get picked up by national news media (Lindfors, 2017). Hunters are praised for having the embodied knowledge about what to do in these situations, to the point where first responders will defer to local hunters "who knows animals better than we do", as when a struggling deer buck was freed from a football goal net by a hunter (Ljung & Jaktojägare, 2018).

The benefits and drawbacks of technology are also discussed in relation to *viltvård* in both magazines. Drones using lynx urine or heat sensors are seen as humane solutions to scare away deer fawns to protect them from injuries from tractors in the field (Sønnergren, 2017). New traps for wild boars are condemned as inflicting unnecessary suffering, such that both hunters and animal rights activists are in solidarity in opposing the trap model (Rydholm, 2013). Articles are also ripe with empathy for suffering animals and the need to put these out of their misery as painlessly and quickly as possible. In this context, hunters feel "passionately" about tracking efforts for wounded game (Svensk Jakt, 2013). Hunters insist euthanizing animals is an act of compassion, and "not a macho thing" (Olsson, 2019),

In the *viltvårds*-tab, there are testimonials on the strong emotion associated with human-animal connections in hunting, where for example, the spring hare hunt gets hunters all "giddy" (Ljung, 2015). Hunters are encouraged to capture these connections through photography and art, which are modes in which one can come closer to nature. In an article interviewing a female vegan-turned-hunter, her journey is implied from asceticism to a re-grounding in nature (Svensk Jakt, 2012). Embodied relations with animals "from beginning to end", as opposed to alienated ones through media, factory farming or abstract relations are championed in readers' submissions (Svensk Jakt, 2014). In the latter text, "personal morality" is said to trump "intellectual reasoning" about universal ethical principles.

Above we have illustrated the hunting literature's claims to care, followed by a case study of contemporary Swedish hunting media from the two largest hunting associations using discourses of care to describe, make sense of, or legitimate hunting. Altogether we can see claims as to relationality, emotion, responsibility, alleviation of suffering and the exercise of situated morality. As we note in the introduction, however, hunting is changing rapidly today, with a proliferation of new hunting styles and hunters. There are particular practices of hunting that are interesting to examine from our point of view, as they dispense with, or significantly

truncate the role of the abovementioned virtues of, relation, emotion or stewardship in hunting. In care ethics terms, such practices in fact appear to show (1) less attentiveness; (2) reduced responsibility; (3) lower demands for competence; (4) less responsiveness. They also exhibit absent social relations and interdependencies between hunter and the hunted animal, which have been outsourced to someone other than the killer, or replaced by other means. Insofar as hunters lay claim to care ethics, then, what do these practices do to the credibility of such an appeal? We look at canned hunting and technologically augmented hunting as two particularly instructive cases of challenging hunters' discourse of hunting as a caring practice.

## **Canned Hunting**

In 1984, Robert Loftin termed canned hunting (i.e., the shooting of pen-reared animals or game in enclosures), "the single most alarming trend in hunting" (Loftin, 1984, p. 248). Many hunting scholars are in agreement with this assessment (Causey, 1989; Gunn, 2001). Game ranches selling package hunts for the paying tourist are on the rise today in many parts of the world. Canned hunting is termed such because the outcome of the hunt is all but guaranteed. Insofar as Marvin (2006) has described the essence of hunting to be uncertainty and the chance that the prey might evade the hunter, canned hunting goes against this by often ensuring "convenience and guaranteed chance of success" (Lovelock, 2008, p. 20) for the paying client.

Canned hunts vary with the size of enclosure, the number and behavior of animals and the skill of clients, and some canned hunts may demand effort and skill on the part of the hunter, but overall, there is a sense in which the animals' fate is predetermined as game. Its whole existence is predicated on its provision of recreation, trophy and meat. Animals are restricted in terms of their movement and autonomy, which may be especially problematic for animals with high needs for roaming or large territories, including bull moose. Despite this, canned hunting has been defended as a kindness on the basis of biodiversity conservation (Gardner, 2016). It is now a prevalent slogan across hunting tourism campaigns to 'be the savior' of a species: the 'kill it to save it' narrative. This appears to resonate well with hunters, many of whom have in the past seen themselves as kinds of Byronic anti-heroes who must do the difficult to serve the greater good (Falzon, 2008). The revenues from hunting tourism are said to ensure the survival of endangered species and is often advertised on this basis – as in 'last chance tourism'. Another way to put this is that individuals may be sacrificed for the care of the whole. Others, of course, remain skeptical, contending that "the desire to consume vulnerable spaces (and species) seems to outweigh tourists' commitments to supporting sustainable economies or ecological preservation" (Dawson et al., 2011 p. 262). This altruistic posturing has been criticized by Bulbeck (2005) as 'New Age Spirituality' that functions as self-reassurance, and as neo-colonialism in purporting the white man as a savior for Africa's wildlife.

### ***Canned Hunts Involve Relations of Killing Only***

A counterargument that weakens hunting's claim to care is that for canned hunting, the animals in enclosures have an ephemeral relationship, at best, with their killer. While for much of indigenous hunting, or even traditional hunting done in Western societies, killing of wildlife takes place after long periods of finding, tracking, stalking, monitoring, and feeding the animal, this is not the case in canned hunting, in particular canned hunting. In traditional hunting, the animal arguably only becomes game/prey at a particular juncture in

the relationship, as it still has opportunity to evade the hunter and die a natural death years later. In canned hunting, its end is predestined.

### ***A Quick Affair***

Although canned animals may well be tracked, monitored and fed by the proprietors of the enclosure approximating a relationship that goes beyond the kill, it is not *these people* that deliver the fatal shot. They meet their ends at the hands of strangers who come for a day to maximize their investment, often commanding steep prizes for big trophy bucks (up to 20,000 USD, cost added per inch of antler size, see Booth, 2009). In most cases, someone else will also handle the meat for them post-hunt. In von Essen (2017), a Swedish hunter criticizes the increase in canned hunting on account of “You don’t step in to do the stewarding stuff. You just go out a few days a year, the prices are through the roof so when you’re out there you want to shoot yourself an animal. You want to maximize your investment” (p. 10). Franklin (2008, p. 41) describes this for hunting tourists: “There is nothing but their own pleasure and interest binding them to the place” adding that “nothing about these experiences that galvanizes a longer-term relation of care”.

Canned hunting fails in establishing a relationship between the hunter and the animal. The traditional hunter ideally maintains and works on their land often for a lifetime, making it a habitat for desirable wildlife species, and thus develops a stewardship relation with the latter. This coheres with understanding care as a kind of labor. When a tourist hunter visits a game ranch, however, no such relation through labor exists. Similarly, prey do not come to be known through personal knowledge or personal meanings, but the consumption industry fills this void by imposing false meanings (Simon, 2019) where animals are caricatures (Bulbeck, 2005) and, as in canned hunt advertisements, typically displayed through itemized pricing. The fee that the hunter pays to the enterprise for the pleasure of the hunt effectively collapses relations into currency. Instead, this is outsourced to a person (in the form of a broker or outfitter) who does not do the killing, imparting distance in the relationship between hunter and prey (Causey, 1989) and allowing the commodification rather than internalization of care as a sentiment.

As to why this is important and problematic, Gibson (2014) argues that “responsibility to minimize suffering comes specifically from developing a relationship with animals through the entire process of hunting” (p. 492). Here, killing involves only a split second of innumerable hours spent in the field to observe nature. When the process of hunting is thus collapsed into a product, it is likely that the relationship is insufficient in generating the kind of responsibility required to promote animal welfare. What is offered is not any sort of relational hunting, but the briefest of interactions “... only in the sense of constituting an attack, scuffle, fracas, skirmish, melee or other hostile rather than pacific ‘engagement’” (Cohen, 2003, p. 292).

### ***The Welfare of Canned Animals***

Canned hunting may be said to be ‘good’ for animals in ways that demonstrates attentiveness to animal welfare. We have already noted the argument that they have substantial conservation value, if not for the individual animal then for its species. Many animals would not exist in the ‘wild’ were it not for commodifying them in game ranches (Ripple et al.,

2016). However, canned hunting often also extends care to its animals. Legally these animals are owed feed, monitoring of their health and potential medical treatment (Palmer, 2010).

Hunting enthusiasts have characterized life for wildlife as red in tooth and claw and are joined by wild animal welfare scholars who look to shatter the idyllic view of nature as peaceful (Catia & Eze, 2015; Sözmen, 2015). Hence, when they kill wild animals, hunters claim they are sparing them a more violent death through starvation, interspecies predation, parasites and disease or intra-species violence. This has been a leading justification for so-called therapeutic wildlife management in which carefully regulated hunts are consistent with a moral obligation to minimize pain for wild animals. This is especially the case with species that overshoot their habitat's carrying capacity, like deer, involving stress and harms to themselves and other species.

Even when hunting is not explicitly therapeutic, Gunn (2001) argues that ironically, the much-derided trophy hunter at canned hunts is the hunter demographic that is most likely to secure a quick and painless kill for the animal. This may be so, because elaborated rituals of fair chase and the use of e.g., cold weapons (like the compound bow, knives and daggers) which might otherwise prolong an animal's suffering, are dispensed with unceremoniously in canned hunts. The paying hunting client at game ranches, to quote Causey (1989) "would, if possible, dispense with the hunt altogether and go directly to the kill" (p. 332). While this adherence to technological efficiency violates codes of fair chase, it may result in quick, efficient deaths.

Hunting scholars have also criticized appeals made by hunting ranches that they step in as part of a duty-to-prevent suffering. Kerasote (1994), for example, regards this duty-to-prevent-suffering argument "the lamest" in hunters' arsenal, as it poses hunters as "Florence Nightingales with rifles" (p. 218). He suggests that hunters do not care about reducing the suffering of their prey at all. This is supported by Cartmill (1993), who points out that hunters are typically the first to protest when predators start taking over the job of controlling prey populations.

An objection to Causey's argument that the trophy hunter kills animals quickly and humanely is that canned hunts, in practice, invite a variety of hunter profiles, many of whom are far from virtuous hunters (Kuentzel & Heberlein, 1998), including "jocks who are participating in a competition using game animals as foils for macho displays of strength and courage" (Causey, 1989, p. 333). Research on wildlife tourism shows that people may be less ethical in their behavior when going on holiday and paying than when hunting at home (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014). While these hunters may contribute to impersonal care inasmuch as they pay a fee that contributes to conservation, they may also take excess shots and be obsessed with maximizing bag limits in a way that presents harms to the animals they hunt.

### **Care while Alive**

In canned hunting, does the housing of the animals in an enclosure where they are spared from nature's harms like suffering from disease and starvation make their lives more bearable also *before* the kill? A free-roaming rhino may have not only high mortality, stress and risk throughout its life in the wild, but might be subjected to significant psychological and physiological damage (like poachers cutting off its horn) or natural harms in the form of parasites, nutritional stress or interspecies violence. In an enclosure, it is spared from such harms. There are objections to the argument of enclosing an animal for its own

purported health benefit. Sözmen (2015) suggests a life sheltered from harmful experiences may be inferior to a life considered more ‘authentic’, in terms of mirroring nature – even with the natural harms and struggles this entails. However, animal welfare scholars also note on the ideas of Rollin (1992) that ‘wild’ animal nature is not valuable on its own; hence, on a biocentric utilitarian rationale there is no moral harm in keeping an animal in an enclosure if enjoys a greater aggregation of positive mental states here (Kasperbauer & Sandøe, 2015): “happiness matters at the end of the day [rather than] . . . natural living” (p. 172). A ‘natural’ life for an animal in the wild, furthermore, is often short. Most animals die in great numbers shortly after coming into existence, according to Catia and Eze (2015). Their lives are prolonged in enclosures, often to acquire majestic antlers.

Insofar as a certain length of life may be seen as a precondition for the animal’s flourishing and attainment of positive mental states, canned enclosures that rear game over longer lives, in particular to ensure bucks acquire antlers with age and can be popularly sold as trophies at a premium, they would seem to provide better opportunities for flourishing. Of course, this raises the separate issue, on the same biocentric utilitarian rationale, of whether it might now be *more* harmful for a hunter to end an animal life with a net positive well-being, compared to taking a malnourished suffering animal life in nature. It has also been observed that long lives or majestic-*looking* animals are not necessarily the happiest. Simon (2019) notes that trophies negatively impacts animal welfare as some bucks have been bred so severely for the size of their antlers that they have trouble holding their heads up. Keeping animals confined in smaller spaces than in the wild also presents an increased disease risk (Cooper et al., 2010).

Overall, canned hunting is a dubious match with care ethics. Its commodification of human-animal relations imparts distance between the hunter and his prey in several dimensions and hence severs the very relationship upon which a relation of care may be built. But canned hunting may also be morally beneficial in sparing animals from harms they might experience in the wild. Next, we examine technologically augmented hunting in terms of care and relations.

### Technologically Enhanced Hunting

Recent hunting sociology research by Littlefield and Ozanne (2011) demonstrates that technology increasingly replaces relations in hunting. The principal distance is imparted between that of hunter and prey. Self-identified naturalistic hunters are among the most critical opponents of excess technology. In von Essen (2017), hunters declare that of techno-hunting “it’s not real hunting. It’s something else” (p. 9). In Gibson (2014) likewise, time spent devoted to GPS devices and technologies for reading the weather are seen to take time out from improving the efficiency and accuracy of shooting. Petersen (2000) is similarly enraged by hunting technologies for “encouraging humans to hunt with their butts and wallets [...] rather than their boots, brains and hearts.” The hypothesis is that technology ‘hides’ the kill, imparts geographical distance, convenience, and otherwise masks the difficult and gory details of the hunter-prey relationship. You cannot “be one with nature”, as a hunter argues in von Essen and Hansen (2018, p. 9) “ . . . with wires and antennas coming out of every direction.”

Insofar as hunting seeks justification involving relations with animals based on seeing, sensing and experiencing the kill, technology would seem to truncate the relationship and

impart distance. To Donovan (1996), it is through ‘sensual empathy’ and intercorporeality that we can come to know another’s suffering; this is bypassed with too much technology. This argument certainly applies to human warfare: it is a great deal easier to remote-operate a drone strike, killing dozens of people, than it is to deliver such death in person and be confronted with the violence at first hand. Remotely triggered rifles in virtual hunting, and heli-hunting are extreme examples of imparted physical distance in the kill relation in a way that has been called “shooting an animal that doesn’t have a clue” (Makoto & Cheon, 2017). Taking aim from beyond the prey’s sensory range, violates the intercorporeality in hunting that hunting defenders take as an essential component in establishing a relation of care.

### ***Better Technology Is Safer for the Prey***

This does not mean, however, that all hunting technologies sever relations between humans and animals. The case can be made as to the opposite. The proficient gearhead hunter is likelier to achieve a quicker, more efficient kill than a bare-bones, cold weapons hunter who insists on finishing off his prey at a close encounter using a knife. His scoped rifle, laser optics, range meter and topographical GPS maps to calculate wind speeds for an accurate shot, mean less risk of maiming the game. When it comes to tracking and euthanizing maimed animals, the idea is generally that the more gadgets and aids, the better. In this sense, the technology at hand for hunters today enables them, if willing, to be more caring hunters. Here technologically is put in the service of minimizing suffering. To not use the most efficient killing method is instead akin to adding unnecessary suffering, and is frowned upon.

Hunters’ claim to care through technology is also illustrated in the example of remote-sensor cameras, which are increasingly popular to keep track of the wildlife. Such camera surveillance enables the hunter to get real-time updates to their smartphone as to what the animals are doing at all times, and it gives them a better estimation of their family and pack dynamics and ability to tell apart individuals (von Essen & Hansen, 2018). This is important, inasmuch as the hunter who has surveilled their land for the past few weeks, knows not to shoot a wild boar that previous footage has revealed to be a sow with piglets in tow earlier that week that she has to provide for. Such an insight enables the hunter to make an informed ethical decision to spare the piglets of suffering and death by choosing not to kill their mother.

In this way, technology presents a paradox for care not unlike how canned hunting entailed both harms and care. On the one hand, excess technology risks severing the relationship between hunter and prey, opening it up to impersonal, and hence empathy-less, interactions. On the other hand, it can also be used to, first, ‘get closer to’ animals digitally and virtually so that a relation is formed remotely, and, second technology facilitates swifter kills with less suffering.

### ***What Does Hunters’ Care Language Reveal and What are Its Implications for the Legitimacy of Hunting?***

Having exposed the various contexts of care language generally, as well as the specific cases of canned and technologically augmented hunting, we now return to the questions in our introduction concerning its implications for the legitimacy of modern hunting. First, what does care language in Swedish hunting media, and its extension to our cases of commercial

and technologically augmented hunting, reveal about the relationship of hunters to hunting skeptics? Killing animals for sport appears incompatible with the sensibilities of an urban public. From the perspective of such a skeptical public, hunting appears disrespectful of the vital biological needs and capabilities for flourishing of those animals targeted by hunters to fulfill their trivial interests in recreation (Van de Pitte, 2003). Consequently, the language of caring and responsibility offers hunters rhetorical means to counter public perceptions of hunting as an illegitimate practice.

This is not to say hunters' frequent uses of care language are necessarily insincere and merely opportunistic. Many hunters may genuinely believe (and with good reason) that hunting establishes a less cruel and more responsible relation to nonhuman others than industrial factory farming. Nevertheless, we contend the prevalence of care language in hunting discourses is a function of hunters feeling ever-more embattled in a hostile climate of urban public opinion, skeptical about the ethical credibility of their motivations. What are the larger implications of hunters' appropriating care language? Should we expect the language of care to win over hunting's critics such that they come to acknowledge the legitimacy of killing animals with kindness? We see this as unlikely. It is unlikely because of the ambivalence of care language applied to hunting. On the one hand, we might say there is an undeniable plausibility to this language if hunting is presented as a counterpoint to factory farming and the suffering this inflicts on nonhuman others through mass food production. Hunters (especially those who eat their prey) may rightly claim to establish a more caring and responsible relationship to the particular nonhuman animal they kill recreationally than the food production industry establishes to those it anonymously slaughters commercially on a massive scale. This effectively turns the rhetoric of care against the urban critics of hunting, placing them in the position of either having to defend factory farming as a lesser evil than hunting or redirecting their critical gaze away from hunting to industrial food production. On the other hand, hunters' care language risks giving hunting critics a critical standard that may be turned against them: 'So you say you care about the animals you kill recreationally; let's look at the details of your practices and see just how caring you really are!' Close scrutiny of practices belie hunters' claims to care, as we have demonstrated in this paper.

## Conclusion

Despite its use among advocates for contemporary hunting, care ethics has not formally embraced hunting as an expression of care. The assumption among care ethicists is that killing healthy animals that would otherwise have lived normal life spans is incompatible with caring. This would appear to be the general perception of many publics, regarding sport hunting as cruel and atavistic. Consequently, hunters find themselves in the position of wanting to let society know they care. That is, they want to let us know they care to offset their negative public image and relegitimize hunting in terms of language and concepts embraced by their critics. We have argued, however, that care language – deployed as *relegitimization strategy* – is almost certainly doomed to failure. It leaves hunters having to defend an inherently implausible position: that it is caring to kill healthy animals for recreational purposes. Hunting's critics may even become the real beneficiaries of this linguistic strategy, taking the opportunity that hunters have handed them to expose the ways in which highly commercialized practices, such as those we have discussed in this

paper, are deeply uncaring and perhaps continuous with modernity's mass exploitation of nonhuman others through imparting of distance in the hunter-prey relation. Future research should explore the vulnerabilities created by hunters' *own* arguments, rather than engage with straw-man attacks on hunting. We further encourage studies that clarify the extent to which hunters' discourses are for internal meaning-making as compared to rhetorical purposes of convincing a skeptical public, though this will naturally be difficult to ascertain.

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