

The Duel

Can trophy hunting ever be justified?



Michael Petrou
YES



Alice Cray
NO

YES It's the naked hypocrisy of it all that is the most tiresome. Anti-hunting activists—a great many of them, anyway—don't truly care about animal welfare. They have little to say, for example, about the intensive farming of pigs—far smarter than the dogs we pamper like children—which are raised in cruel and overcrowded conditions, dying in fear and, too often, pain. Activists' concern and moral outrage is reserved for animals with arbitrary physical characteristics that humans find pleasing—white fur, immense size, shaggy manes, big eyes—or those that are targeted for sport by rich American dentists.

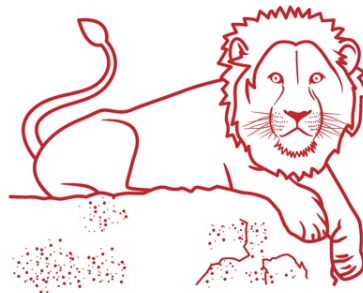
It can't really be animal welfare that motivates them, because hunted wild animals typically have better lives and deaths than animals bred and slaughtered for food. They live free, and with luck and skill on the hunter's part, don't realise that death is imminent until it is seconds away.

Those opposed to trophy hunting also claim to be motivated by the welfare of entire species and that their anti-hunting position is a stand in favour of conservation. I have sympathy for this argument. Hunting snow leopards is not a pastime that I would ever endorse.

But well-regulated hunting, even trophy-hunting, can be a force for good in conservation. In Canada, where I usually live, thousands of deer and moose are harvested every autumn, but populations remain healthy, and fluctuate naturally depending on factors that include the severity of winter weather and wolf predation. In addition to filling freezers with meat and maybe reducing slightly the number of livestock in factory farms, this practice gives people a stake in environmental protection. Hunters are natural conservationists

because the health of wild habitats impacts on them more than it does those of us who rarely leave towns and cities. And if a hunter who shoots a moose to feed his or her family also makes a trophy of that animal by sticking its antlers above her fireplace, where's the added harm?

NO Trophy hunting is a distinct and deeply troubling kind of hunting. It is a pastime generally reserved for elites who have enough money to hunt animals who are expensive to kill because they are rare (not for the most part deer or moose),



where their scarcity is typically down to prior human threats to their survival. The "trophy"—the head or some other part of the dead animal that may be hung on the wall—is a sign of the hunter's social position. There should be no pretence that this type of hunting is a means of survival: trophy hunting is a means of dominance.

Even if some trophy hunters consider the snow leopard off limits due to shrinking population size, the hunting of snow leopards is flourishing in Kyrgyzstan. Here, as elsewhere, the hope or myth is that hunting concessions will fund wildlife reserves. This is the essence of the argument for trophy hunt-

ing—that killing some animals is an acceptable way of maintaining areas large enough to support a population. Such an ends-justifies-the-means logic is common to arguments about economic efficiency. Not only is it empirically flawed—a lot of trophy hunting money is lost to corruption—it is morally problematic. There are ways to protect rare animals that do not involve killing them.

It is irrelevant that many hunted animals enjoy greater well-being than animals in the industrial food system. The horror of what is done annually to billions of sentient creatures in factory farms is so great that it is difficult to fathom. But that is no argument for killing wild animals by a less terrible and still morally objectionable method—and reducing them to decorations above the fireplace.

YES Some opposition to hunting in Britain is driven by class resentment, where hunting, for trophy deer at least, is seen as a pastime reserved for elites. That's not the case everywhere. There is Crown land throughout Canada where anyone with a firearms and hunting licence can harvest a deer for the cost of a bullet and a £25 tag. For another £60 a butcher will cut it into steaks for you, though many people do that themselves. It's a similar situation in many states of America, where you live.

I don't see the clear line between this kind of hunting for meat and hunting for a trophy that you do. I think you can hunt an animal for food, and for whatever satisfaction you get from also mounting its head or horns on a wall. But it seems you are most bothered by hunting more exotic animals, such as lions and bears, exclusively for trophies, as opposed to for meat as well.

Here, I should say that I personally hunt only for meat (though I do wear coyote fur,