

When the butcher calls the hunter foul, and the muddied politics which follow

Speciesism and the EU opposition to the Swedish Wolf Hunt¹

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ABSTRACT

Rarely does the death of animals cause conflict between governments. However, the killing of some animals, such as seals, wolves, and other exotic wildlife, can cause heated conflict over whether the act of killing is itself justifiable. This paper provides an overview of a recent disagreement along these lines: between the EU and Sweden over the management of wolves. It juxtaposes the recent politicalization of the wolf hunt with an overview of two very different moral frameworks that humans use to conceive of the value of animals. This paper argues that these two moral frameworks share in employing a human-centrism which consequently restricts how the issue of justice can be introduced into policy discussions regarding the treatment of animals. However, the primary assertion made here is that while these two frameworks are constituted by speciesism, they represent two different positions which as is illustrated by the debate surrounding the justifiability of the wolf hunt, provide very different points to which questions of justice are truncated

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or introduced. Therefore, the assertion made in this paper is that the conflict between the EU and Sweden, over the justifiability of the wolf hunt stems from competing speciesist positions.

Introduction

Rarely does the human slaughter of animals become a contentious political issue. What determines whether the use of animal becomes a point of consensus or divergence? A major factor is whether the species in question is used in a way that most people find appropriate. While there is a general agreement of views over the appropriate use of pigs, chickens, cows and other production animals, animals such as polar bears, seals, wolves, and other wildlife can cause disagreement over what constitutes 'appropriate' use (Boyer & Hall, 2013). This paper provides an overview of a recent disagreement along these lines – between the EU and Sweden over the killing of wolves. It juxtaposes the recent politicalization of the wolf hunt with an overview of two very different speciesist positions used to conceive of the value of animals.

This paper explores how Sweden's justifications for the wolf hunt are tied up with a cultural narrative where moral considerations regarding the killing of wolves are confined by an anthropocentric imperative to achieve an imagined state of nature. This contrasts with a different, yet equally anthropocentric moral framework, which is associated with the oppositional stance of the EU. Specifically, this paper will explore the EU's stance towards questions of wildlife as represented by a moral framework that focuses exclusively in deriving benefit from killing animals through their use as production commodities. The EU is unable to share a similar disposition towards the wolf hunt because it lacks the anthropocentric "moral infra-structure". This infrastructure is necessary to allow the hunting of the wolf to serve as a source for cultural capital for the pursuit of an imagined state of ecological balance within Sweden's borders. I argue that the tension between the EU and Sweden over whether the wolf hunt is justified stems from the actors representing two distinct moral frameworks – frameworks that ultimately provide different meanings and points of limitation to how justice and moral responsibility towards animals can come to be expressed within political debate.

Sweden: the animals in a hunter's ecology

The wolf was thought to have been nearly extinct in Scandinavia in the early 1970s (Liberg, 2005). Since then, and by the winter of 2011, the population has reestablished itself (Liberg et al., 2012). The public and scientific discussions of wolf management in Norway and Sweden shared common features: fear of predators, herd (reindeer, sheep) security, competition for prey, and the need to preserve biodiversity (Andersen, 2003; Heberlein & Ericsson, 2009; Johansson, Karlsson, Pedersen, & Flykt, 2012). In 2010, Sweden allotted for a wolf hunt in which 27 individuals could be killed from the population of approximately 250 (Sullivan, 2013). In justifying the hunt, the Swedish Environment Minister Lena Ek stated that, 'Sweden has never had so many large predators as now. That's good news for everyone who works to protect biodiversity... But it means we have to take into account people who live and work in areas with a concentration of predators' (Sullivan, 2013, para. 5,6). There have been several important studies which detail the prevalence of fear within Swedish society towards predatory mammals like the wolf (Johansson, Karlsson, & Flykt, 2011). Almost half of the population fears meeting a bear in the wild, and 25% fear meeting a wolf (Johansson et al., 2011). There are approximately 300-350 wolves in the whole of Sweden (Sullivan, 2013). While there has never been a recorded wolf attack in the wild in the history of Sweden, the fear of the wolf informs management decisions, to some degree. Curiously, however, while justification of the wolf hunt is informed by irrational fear of the wolf, it is also supported by a broader cultural narrative of stewardship through hunting.

In Sweden, the wolf is amongst the wild mammals and birds managed by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA has the broad directive of 'long-term conservation of viable populations of wild animals occurring naturally in the country' (Naturvardsverket, 2012). The EPA has maintained a line of justification for the wolf hunt, based on the idea that the wolf population in Sweden is genetically unhealthy due to inbreeding. Supporters of this idea see inbreeding as a threat to the long-term health of the species, and their ability to sustain a population in Swedish forests (Agence France-Presse, 2013; Liberg, 2005). The science behind the justification for the wolf hunt has recently begun to be questioned (Chapron, Lopez-Bao, Kjellander, & Karlsson, 2013). However, as will be explored further, biological conservatism is understood as being a dominant moral narrative which

both provides opportunities as well as limitations on how the management regime is able to conceive, justify, as well as address particular moral issues pertinent to the wolf hunt.

This narrative of biological conservatism is reflective of a particular way to view animals, in which their moral worth, and thus any questions related to justice, are tied up with a presupposition that they are to serve some ecological function, (Garner, 1994). Numerous human-animal studies scholars have critically examined this way of formulating human-animal relations (Isenberg, 2002; Kneel, 2005). This formulation of human-animal relations, referred to as the ecological approach by Donaldson and Kymlicka (2011), describes a framework for distributing moral worth to animals, where it is whole populations of animals, rather than individuals, which are the focus of attribution. Animals are not individuals, but abstract ideas known as species. Animals may be capable of suffering individually, but what informs the moral framework as we interact with a particular animal is how we believe it to function as a part of the ecological whole (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011). While the ecological approach theoretically places human interests as being at par with other animals, humans are also assumed to be the stewards of ecosystems. Therefore, it is non-human populations of animals that serve as the predominant source for manipulating, influencing and achieving balance in nature. Within the ecological approach, it would be justified to cull, or discard, whole populations of individuals if it was thought that such an act benefited the whole in some way. Of course, what the whole is, at any given time, is consequential to how a society comes to interpret and value what it collectively conceives of as the un-human or natural world. As such, the act of culling vast amounts of individuals can be justified within this ecological approach to human-animal relations as being a fulfilment of a moral, albeit speciesist, duty.

With animals and humans being acknowledged as equal stakeholders in maintaining a healthy environment, the ecological approach often provides the ability celebrate our moral parity with non-human animals. Yet as we know the process of population culling in the name of "conservation" or "environmental sustainability" is directed only towards non-humans. With the wolf not being conceptualized as an individual amongst a group of individuals but as an abstract species, questions relating to our moral responsibility towards the wolf are inherently framed by instru-

mentalization. It would therefore be our effective use of this instrument that would allow the wolf the opportunity to contribute to the broader idealized natural landscape to which it is a part. This sets out demands that the wolf population be of a particular stature. There shouldn't be too many of them, nor should there be too few.

Bio-conservationism serves not only as the frame of the debate, but also the instrument with which humans deal with unnatural figures in their natural world, like the allegedly inbred wolf.

So, in addition to using benchmarks of measuring the quality of species based on its total demographic numbers, socio-scientific evaluations of nature have also endeavoured to measure the internal genetic health of non-human populations. Similar to the rationale underpinning the various eugenics programs of the 1930s, when the gene pool is thought to have become too damaged, then the moral framework is activated to legitimize a cleansing campaign. As such, terms like conservation hunting and protection hunting rhetorically frame killing wolves as restoring a natural balance in nature, for the benefit of the wolf. Because an ecological approach to wolf-human relations is officially stipulated by the Swedish government (Ministry of Environment 2011), considerations for the management of its wolf population cannot exist outside these particular patterns of human-centric concerns.

Sweden: a sense of self through duty and hunting

In our relations to wild non-human animals, acting out the role of environmental steward has provided an effective venue not only for maintaining the distinction between human and animal, but also for expressing distinction amongst humans. For example, expressions of culture or gender often find performative space through fulfilling the responsibilities associated with stewardship. From within this human-animal relations model, through infusing a quasi-ecological humility with an expression of masculinity, humans find not only a source of motivation to carry out the ugly but necessary duties associated with the act of conservation hunting, but also a source that distinguishes them from other humans, through the celebration of a presumed heightened level of understanding, skill, and sacrifice. As Donaldson and Kymlicka (2011, p. 168) note:

According to this macho strain in ecological thought, nature's laws are harsh, and it is weakness and squeamishness to wish otherwise. Individual acts of compassion towards individual animals can't change the overall frame-work, so they are a futile form of sentimental sloppiness even if they don't lead to actual harm to animals or ecology. The desire to carry out such acts betrays a lack of understanding of nature, even a hatred of nature's processes, (Hettinger, 1994)

These sentiments can be seen echoing in a 2011 statement made by the Swedish Minister of the Environment, Andreas Carlgren, when in response to EU opposition to the wolf hunt stated: 'The aim of the Government's wolf policy is for wolves to achieve the favourable conservation status that they currently lack. This requires strong and controversial measures, and the different aspects of wolf policy cannot be considered in isolation, as the Commission tends to do' (EU Business, 2011, para. 4, 5).

When relating to other species from within the ecological approach, human-animal relations are geared towards defending what humans see as the correct, or most natural state of nature. However, the symbolic or cultural value that is gained by having the wolves around is not attained by having them simply around, but by the act of managing them in a way that ensures they take their place in an imaginary landscape. The ecological approach to human-animal relations presupposes that there exists some sort of broader cultural utility derived from participating in environmental stewardship. Not only does this ecological approach require a land base and resources in which it is practiced, but there also must be some means by which members of the in-group can collectively identify over understanding and partaking in a shared duty towards nature. This ecological approach to human-animal relations provides justification for killing wildlife such as the wolf because the act of hunting and stewardship is itself a means to which Swedish identity can be performed and solidified.

The EU: the sentimental butcher

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has been one of the most outspoken NGOs to oppose the hunt, and in 2011, was one of the first to claim that the hunt did not comply

with the EU Habitat and Species Directive (World Wildlife Fund [WWF](#), 2011). Initially, the WWF argued that the wolf population was particularly vulnerable on account to its genetic instability. However, much of the media attention which attempted to garner support for their campaign centered on eliciting a much more emotionally charged response from the public, rallying moral outrage through descriptions of the killings themselves and by alluding to the subjective experiences of the individual wolves during the hunt. For example, just prior to filing the complaint with the EU, WWF criticized what it calls a **decimation** hunt and reported:

In January 2010, the majority of the 27 wolves were killed during the first day of the hunt. The atmosphere was very stressed during the hunt because there were many hunting teams that wanted to kill a wolf before the quota was full. This meant that many hunters shot at wolves without much control. An unacceptable amount of wolves were injured before being killed, and many more wolves were shot at without being hit. More than 25% of the wolves were shot before being killed at a later stage. In total 28 wolves were shot. (World Wildlife Fund [WWF](#), 2011, para. 6)

Here, wolves are not just treated as ecological variables to be manipulated for their own good. They are instead conceptualized as individuals. Thus discussions on what is just and proper treatment will ultimately account for their subjective experience. From the excerpt above, we can see that the moral framework used to evaluate the hunt includes considerations often left out of the bio-conservatist approach: wolves are individuals who can see the hunters, hear the gunshots, and are subject to suffer both physically and mentally.

As a result of complaints made by NGOs, in 2011, the EU launched a full review of the Swedish management of wolves. The EU commission questioned the legality of the hunt due to the fact that the wolf was listed as endangered. The concern eventually led to EU environmental commissioner Janez Potocnik to start formal proceedings against Sweden where he stated: 'A protective hunt must comply with EU legislation and must not become a disguised right to kill. Killing problem wolves is possible only if there are no other solutions' (TTELA, 2012). This statement contrasts sharply with the ESA statement that policy must take into account the interests of people who 'live and work in areas with a concentration of predators' (Sulli-

van, 2013, para. 5, 6). There is a fundamental difference in how the EU evaluates whether there is a moral right to kill a wolf. It could be that the EU simply recognizes that wild wolves pose no statistical threat to humans in Sweden. However, as is argued in this paper, it is more likely that this statement reflects a degree of moral sentiment that is unique to the speciesist position held by the EU. From within this position there is no inherent right to kill a wolf, and it would seem that the human-animal relations model, which underlies this statement, does not share the cultural and ecological characteristics employed in justifying a protection hunt in Sweden. Killing wolves for their own good makes much less moral sense for the EU. This is not because the manner the EU comes to address questions of justice in human-animal relations is any less speciesist, but rather because it lacks the territorial and cultural conditions that would allow it to derive a similar kind of utility from killing wolves through acting out a role of ecological stewardship. Instead, the EU mostly functions as a representative and principle organizer for the collective economic interests of a variety of states. Thus, lacking the territorial and cultural spaces from which an ecological based speciesism can be mobilized, the EU's own approach to instrumentalizing animal life is largely restricted to what has come to be referred to as the welfarist approach. The welfarist approach can be defined as a moral framework that acknowledges that animals have interests, and that even on the individual level, the fact that they have an ability to feel pain and suffer both mentally and physically should be taken into account in our dealings with them (Steiner, 2007; Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011). Likewise, concern over the lived experience of the wolf is very much a motivator for opposing the wolf hunt on the basis that it involved not just the killing of the wolf but its suffering too. The EU considers animals to be sentient beings and states that this ability to feel pain makes animal sentience a fundamental component to its animal welfare strategy (European Commission, 2012a, 2012b). This EU policy is made to 'ensure that animals do not endure avoidable pain or suffering, and obliges the owner/keeper of animals to respect minimum welfare requirements' (European Commission, 2012b). The Lisbon treaty states that:

In formulating and implementing the Union's agriculture, fisheries, transport, internal market, research and technological development and space policies, the Union and the Member States shall, since animals are sentient beings, pay full regard to the welfare requirements of

animals, while respecting the legislative or administrative provisions and customs of the Member States relating in particular to religious rites, cultural traditions and regional heritage. (European Commission, 2012b)

However, within this moral framework, not all animals are subject to the same level of outcry over their death, nor are all animals subject to being sheltered from an unjust right to kill them, as was the wolf. Without much consistent rationale for doing so, we eat pigs, love dogs, wear cows, save wolves. So, while animal sentience and suffering do matter, humans constitute themselves at the top of this moral hierarchy, with the rest of the living beings ultimately being provided a level of moral standing relative to their placement within this speciesist moral scale (Horta, 2010). So in practice, the interests of the animal, and thus the frame in which its welfare is often defined, are inherently constituted by the function its body serves for advancing human interests. For inter-governmental organizations like the EU, this welfarist approach would seem highly commendable because the industrialized countries which make up its membership all have research, agricultural, and manufacturing sectors which depend on obtaining and processing an unthinkable amount of animal bodies for these industries to prosper economically.

So within the EU approach, the manner in which the concepts of sentience, undue harm, as well as the wide range of socio-cultural stipulations set out through the Lisbon Treaty, are all framed by a broader unquestioned right to use the animal as a commodity. For example, as noted by Calvo (2008), by complying with the Rome Treaty, European Union countries must adopt the same legal definition of a domesticated agricultural animal as being products. Here, ‘animals constitute standard units of “parity”’: “1 bovine, horse or deer, 0.33 swine and 0.15 sheep or goat will be equivalent to one livestock unit” (Calvo, 2008, p. 36).

It is clear that moral framework the EU when valuing animals, derives value not from the degree an animal fulfills a function for a broader ecological whole, but rather by the relative value it has through its commodification. It is not to suggest that Sweden does not also share in employing a welfarist approach when relating to chickens, pigs, cows, sheep, etc. In fact, it would be difficult to find any country that does not currently employ similar moral limitations on how justice towards ‘production animals’ are defined. The point here, however, is that the EU as an orga-

nization must exclusively use this type of speciesist moral framework when addressing moral questions to the treatment of animals. The natural landscape which falls within Sweden's domestic territory provides for a means to which a socially constructed view of nature can arise. It would be these tangible bodies, within the borders of a society, which allow for any possibility of a shared ecological imaginary and the moral frame to which human–animal relations become mediated through. Without this broader ecological imaginary, managing the objects, and in this case living objects such as the wolf, thus provides little to no cultural meaning or benefit for organizations such as the EU (See Anderson, 1983). Therefore, the EU lacks the political-moral language (Pocock, 2008) that would allow it the ability to manufacture the same level of legitimacy for hunting the wolf that is enjoyed by Sweden.

The EU's – and others' – critique of the Swedish wolf hunt can be understood as an ordinary sentimentalist reaction, a reaction that is anchored in the moral hierarchy constituted by welfare ethics. While Sweden and the EU may not disagree on the appropriate use of the pig as a commodity, they differ in how they approach the issue of the wolf. From within the moral frame employed by the EU killing a wolf becomes morally problematic because, unlike a pig, it has a position on the moral hierarchy that stipulates humans do not have a right to kill it.

Conclusion

EU policy distributes moral worth to animals in a very specific way which provides particular coordinates for discussions on moral issues. The moral worth of an individual sow is a point on which Sweden and the EU happily converge, not inspiring such debates about justice and the human right to kill. The conflict surrounding the wolf hunt, however, demonstrates it is much more difficult to establish a similar point of confluence over the treatment of wildlife. Questions regarding the science behind the rationale for the hunt did form the legal basis for opposition. Nonetheless, the advocacy and political force which has given rise to opposition towards the wolf hunt is firmly rooted in a sentimentalism that originates in a very different moral framework than the one used to justify the hunt.

Without having national borders, and other statist constructs that provide for a shared sense of domestic nature amongst its citizenry, the EU lacks a mechanism for a type of human centrism that would legitimize hunting animals like the wolf. The speciesist position generally associated with how the EU conceptualizes animal welfare does not provide a similar capacity to obtain human benefit through acting out a stewardship role. Thus, the political momentum needed to support the hunting of the wolf is absent because there cannot be the same desire to preserve that which is perceived to be the right state of nature, in nature. Further, the wolf in not being a production animal, is not subject to the sorts of moral truncations that usually guide welfarist deliberations over the right to kill – and thus, the EU is left to be outraged.

In one way, Sweden and the EU are similar in that both their respective models of human– animal relations provide for policy-making arenas that have very specific limitations for how justice is able to be conceptualized. The argument here has not been that the conflict between Sweden and the EU is consequential to one moral framework being more or less speciesist or adept at dealing with moral questions relating to the non-human. Rather, the assertion here has been that the conflict should be understood as being consequential to the two actors departing from two different, and in this case, conflicting sets of anthropocentric presupposition which, as a result, fail to provide uniformity in how moral inquiry is truncated along speciesist lines.

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