

MEAT

SPORT

FOR FUN

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PRODUCT @ 89

S.G. To be fair though I believe you have received support from people that do actually participate in hunting. Isn't it true to say that the majority of these individuals are responsible members of society who will never consciously cause pain and suffering? I think it is also true that hunters may be among the most vociferous about the issue of conservation.

B.C. Yes but on that point, I would like to ask do the ends justify the means? Before the Second World War, Nazi doctors practiced euthanasia of human beings which to a certain extent was also being practiced in our society, and is practiced on a vast scale with pet cats and dogs. However, then came that edict from Hitler that pushed this one step forward, namely the extermination of the mentally retarded and the "gypsies". The doctors fell in line. The next step was the attempted extermination of Jewish peoples who were regarded by the Nazis as being sub-human. Again the Nazis doctors fell in line. In any situation, where do you stop when progressing on the principle of the ends justifying the means?

S.G. So if I understand you correctly, you are saying that the benefits afforded to conservation by the actions of the hunting lobby should not be used to justify what you regard as a archaic, barbaric practice?

B.C. Yes, the issues should be separated although I will concede that this could initially lead to a lot of confusion. Let me try to be

explicit about this. We need to pinpoint, first of all, any specific need to control population numbers in a given situation - dare I say including human numbers? - and secondly, to find the most humane, least violent solution to solve such problems. I do not consider that the solution includes killing for fun. Besides that, though, is the very real threat to the safety of landowners, farmers and people who simply enjoy being in the countryside. A walk in the country during the active hunting season is now quite a rare practice for obvious reasons, to do so often means risking your life. As you may know, a man was killed recently in MacAdam when his companion decided to hunt illegally on a Sunday. When this man approached the hunter, he was mistaken for a deer and killed. Normally this would have been considered to be manslaughter because a man was killed quite unnecessarily. Because it was a hunting incident, however, the man simply received thirty days in jail. This is a good example of how profoundly different the hunting ethos is to everyday life in the acceptance of a greater degree of violence.

S.G. Is there any legitimate use of hunting as a means of wildlife management?

B.C. In certain instances culling may be a legitimate means of control. But in New Brunswick, there is no adequate restriction on this process - the government is allowing this task to be performed by hunters when it should be their own responsibility, being predicted by need. Even if this need was a legitimate one, such control needs to be specific and backed by scientific proof. A similar situation exists pertaining to seal culling. The argument put forward by the fishermen and the government is that 'they (the seals) are eating our fish'. What these people are really saying is that they want all the fish they can get and that they don't want the seals to have any. What is being said, in effect, is we

have to exterminate those seals. If we could project, far into the future with this present attitude, we would end up (sharing the planet) with animals that could survive despite man's pervasive influence, together with those animal's that are carefully controlled and managed for our own exploitation. The deer is somewhere between these two extremes at the moment because of hunting. The population is in decline, but then this raises another question - is the only way that the deer can survive characterized by a situation where the animals are farmed like cattle?

There is no simple answer but I would like to see man showing more humility and modesty over these sorts of questions as we do with our own kind. If we can avoid killing then we should do so. Part of our own responsibility is to check our own numbers and we're certainly not doing that.

S.G. Given the wealth of tradition that hunting has brought to New Brunswick, is it worth trying to change the sort of mind set that exists here at all?

B.C. I would hope so, but such is the ethos at this time that it will be very difficult to change it. I would like to see much emphasis put on the teaching of environmental ethics at the university level so that teachers can be brought into the grade school system at a lower level and project the information needed to allow questions to be addressed to the practices such as animal and land abuse.

S.G. You mentioned religion earlier as instilling a set of beliefs into a young mind. Certainly you appear to be up against something very like religion where, if an individual has been presented with a set of beliefs and standards for the whole of his or her life, it is going to be very difficult for them to be able to entertain what is a substantially different point of view. You were recently subjected to a trial where you were essentially insulted perhaps because of your commitments.

(Editors note: Judge J.D. Harper referred to Doctor Cumming as 'stupid' and went on to deride his professional ability to teach during a case where two men had illegally shot a deer on Dr. Cumming's land. Dr. Cumming attempted to prevent the hunters from taking the kill from his property and was charged with assault. Dr. Cumming was found guilty of assault but given an absolute discharge.) Do you think that this is a good example of just how far this attitude can creep towards people who would/should be held on the highest authority; that any respect that might be given to the treatment of animals is regarded as superfluous and inconsequential?

B.C. To a large extent yes. Recently it has come to my attention that two men in Nova Scotia were habitually setting kittens on fire with lighter fluid. Once apprehended and brought to court though, the Judge's comments were along the lines of 'well this is not the sort of thing I'd do but why is the court's time being wasted on this matter?' As a result it was thrown out of court.

Psychologically the tendency is to discredit people who brought forward opposition to what's going on. If you discredit people you don't take them seriously. In my own personal experience it

S.G. It is quite possible then that any landowner, farmer, or even concerned citizen, could be subjected to the same sort of treatment?

B.C. Certainly yes. In that particular instance I had no right to detain them (the two hunters) against their will, or even to hold onto the illegally shot deer as evidence of what had occurred. To illustrate the arbitrary quality of the application of such laws: in a similar situation in Quebec recently where a landowner was charged with assault of a hunter, the judge dismissed the case and indicated that "the hunter was the author of his own misfortune."

S.G. In your opinion the animal protection laws are very lax then?

B.C. Indeed yes, but primarily because of the overall attitude of the people that enforce them. Recognition has to come first from the politicians and the Federal and Provincial agencies such as the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). They should be saying 'look... there are so many instances of animal abuse that we should really have real protection for animals under the criminal code of Canada'. Clearly this (abuse of animals) should be something which is reprehensible to hunters. One would have thought that the wanton infliction of suffering and pain would provoke a unanimous response of outrage, but clearly it doesn't. The system says that in trying to prevent animal abuse you may have a good point but I won't hold up in court, so we won't try and enforce it. When people are taken to court to be tried on such issues, it serves merely as an ineffectual warning more than anything else. Let me draw a parallel with an incident such as a car accident. Here, even if the accident is restricted to a small collision, one has to stay at the scene of an accident so that the authorities can be fully informed and the victims protected. If we attach that much importance even to inanimate property, why is it that wild animals, these beautiful creatures that are the products of millions of years of evolution, can be killed and injured, suffering any amount of pain before they eventually die, and have

absolutely no importance in comparison to material objects. I believe this a truly worrying comment on society.

I'm not condemning society. If I were, people might say I'm trying to be morally superior. I'm not. I just want to protect animals by means that should be provided by the law. I just want to see the law become less biased towards the hunters so that the animals that now suffer at their hands have more protection.

S.G. I know this is a very difficult thing to ask of you Dr. Cumming, but could you summarize your feelings as a final comment?

B.C. I would like to ask this -- Should we not reduce the level of violence to all living things and encourage people to be non-violent in all their relationships? The history of biological systems tells us that when a species becomes out of balance with its environment, when it becomes too powerful and too influential, then that species ceases to exist. We can even learn this lesson from human civilizations of the past. We are now seeing many disturbing signs of the malign effects on the biosphere brought about by the human species. Part of the positive solution is for human societies to turn from an anthropocentric attitude to a more biocentric approach - where we allow, as far as possible, all life to exist free of violence from humans. This is the most crucial long-term challenge facing our species, because we will have to develop and practice concepts and philosophies regarding the sanctity and balance of the life that will impose limits on our greed, selfishness and economic aspirations.

