BOOK REVIEWS

The Culture of Zoocide

A View to a Death in the Morning. Hunting and Nature Through History. MATT CARTMILL. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1993. xvi, 331 pp., illus. $29.95 or £23.95.

There is every reason to believe that animal rights will become increasingly central to our political discourse in the next century. As this issue moves toward center stage, *A View to a Death in the Morning*—the title comes from a traditional fox-hunting song—will figure prominently. In this delightful example of cross-disciplinary thinking and analysis, anthropologist Matt Cartmill has weighed in on the side of those who oppose hunting, setting his sights on deeply rooted cultural values and received scientific wisdom that have had the effect of naturalizing hunting, making it seem an ordinary part of human existence. In the course of challenging the "hunting hypothesis," he provides a richly textured history of anti-hunting thinking and its relationship to our understanding of human nature.

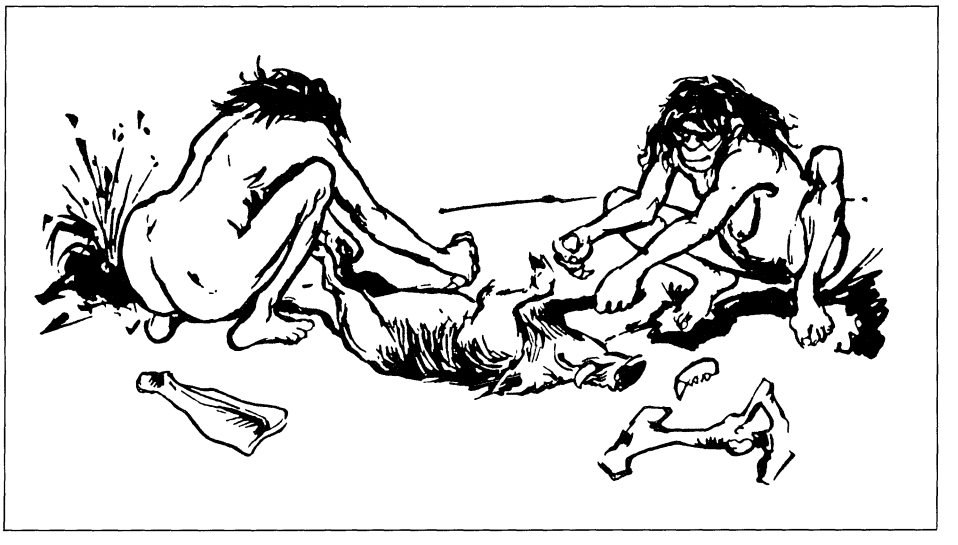
Cartmill sums up the "hunting hypothesis," a concept popularized by Robert Ardrey, as follows: "Hunting was what had turned apes or man-apes into people, and man's need to become an ever more effective hunter had governed the whole course of human evolution until the invention of agriculture" (p. 9). This is a familiar belief—too familiar and too readily assumed to be true, according to Cartmill. His book opens by calling the anthropological underpinnings of the hunting hypothesis into question, summing up recent research that has documented meat-eating among chimpanzees and led to the conclusion that our remote ancestors are more appropriately considered scavengers than hunters. The significance of these discoveries, as Cartmill explains, is that "predation by itself cannot explain why our ancestors evolved into australopithecines and chimpanzees did not" (p. 17).

If the scientific footings for the hunting hypothesis are shaky, so too is the misanthropy built upon it. Citing an impressive array of anthropologists and zoologists (Raymond Dart and Konrad Lorenz), novelists and poets (William Golding and Robinson Jeffers), Cartmill documents how a way of thinking about human beings as natural-born hunters has become inseparable from a deep pessimism about human nature that attained paradigmatic stature among intellectuals right around the Second World War. No less than those of poets and artists, scientists' views of human nature were colored by the mass destruction occasioned by world war. According to Cartmill, the hunting hypothesis with its attendant misanthropy was rooted less in science and nature than in culture and politics. It turns out to be nothing more than another myth about human origins that cannot be privileged over other stories and myths about hunting.

Such stories exist in multiples, and much of Cartmill's book documents deep ambivalence about, if not outright opposition to, hunting in ancient myths and more modern philosophical traditions. Even the ancient Greeks, who had several gods associated with the hunt and would therefore seem to be exceptions to Cartmill's argument, positioned Artemis and Dionysus in "mirror image opposition" (p. 36) in an effort to clarify boundaries between human beings and the wild. By way of contrast, the Romans, according to Cartmill, did not value hunting—Virgil in the *Aeneid*, unlike Homer in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, evidenced decidedly mixed emotions about the hunt. And the Old Testament begins with an account of a "vegetarian paradise" (p. 38). By the Renaissance, ambivalence was giving way to condemnation as Erasmus and Thomas More expressed "distaste and outrage," as evidenced in this passage from *Utopia*: "The Utopians think that this whole business of hunting is beneath the dignity of free men, and so they have made it a part of the butcher's trade—which, as I said before, they foist off on their slaves" (p. 77). Like Erasmus and More, Shakespeare used the hunt as "a symbol of bloody oppression" (p. 78)—sentiments that Albrecht Dürer captured in his drawing of a stag shot through the skull with a crossbow arrow. What accounted for these changes? One contributing factor was the rediscovery of classical learning by Renaissance humanists; another was the rejection of aristocratic pleasures and privileges by a rising middle class anxious to define its own prerogatives.

By the 18th century, with growing concern about political rights, some influential thinkers like Maupertuis and Rousseau began addressing animal rights. Then, in 1780, Jeremy Bentham linked the movement to end slavery to animal rights. Over the next century, such reasoning contributed to the creation of animal welfare societies, anti-vivisection riots, and, by the close of the 19th century, to the thinking by some literati, notably Mark Twain, that hunting occupied the same rhetorical universe as imperialism.

These intellectual shifts were profound, according to Cartmill, but probably had limited effect on popular attitudes toward hunting. That situation changed in 1942 with the release of Walt Disney's *Bambi*. Based on Felix Salten's 1924 novel, which the young American Communist Whittaker Chambers translated into English four years later, Disney's rendition of the deer child—with "its erotic and oedipal symbolism, its



"A yahoo-like portrayal of *Australopithecus* from Dart and Craig (1959). In this depiction, the killer apes are female." [From *A View to a Death in the Morning*]

archetypal characters, its invocation of Christian and pagan mythology, its perfectly choreographed universal dances of all things not human, its A-B-A architecture silently preaching the Eternal Recurrence, its superbly executed and controlled animation, its occasionally breathtaking visual beauty, and its despairing subliminal consciousness of the implacable onrush of World War II"—carried "the force of a sledgehammer" (p. 178) and has battered the defenses of hunters ever since.

Where does Cartmill's argument lead? He concludes by insisting that since boundaries between humans and animals are cultural, not natural, constructs, they are subject to redefinition and must be redefined when they lose intellectual credibility. Just as hierarchical distinctions between masters and slaves and men and women collapsed, so with distinctions between human beings and animals. In the instance of ideologies of male and white supremacy, Cartmill writes, "A heavily marked status boundary ultimately had to be given up because it was intellectually indefensible. And if the cognitive boundary between man and beast, between the world of history and the world of nature, is equally indefensible, we cannot defend human dignity without extending some sort of citizenship to the rest of nature—which means ceasing to treat the nonhuman world as a series of means to human ends" (p. 223).

Cartmill's argument is bound to command attention. Some will wish for more data refuting the hunting hypothesis. I, for one, wish the author had addressed in greater detail conservation-based arguments that regard hunting as an ethical and environmentally sound means for controlling population imbalances among some species. These arguments, articulated by Aldo Leopold and several generations of wildlife managers, deserve more attention if only because they have laid the basis for specific state and federal wildlife policies and illustrate the power of institutions to translate philosophical and science-based positions into practice and to shape popular belief systems. The chapter on the "Bambi syndrome" might have been accompanied by a chapter on the intellectual underpinnings of wildlife policies at the state and federal level. But this matter aside, *A View to a Death in the Morning* is a razor-sharp analysis that succeeds in raising doubts about deeply rooted and widely shared assumptions concerning the position of human beings in nature. Like Keith Thomas's *Man and the Natural World*, this book will interest anyone curious about what it means to be human and how, as Cartmill puts it, we can reconcile our universalistic principles of equal rights with eating sausage for breakfast.

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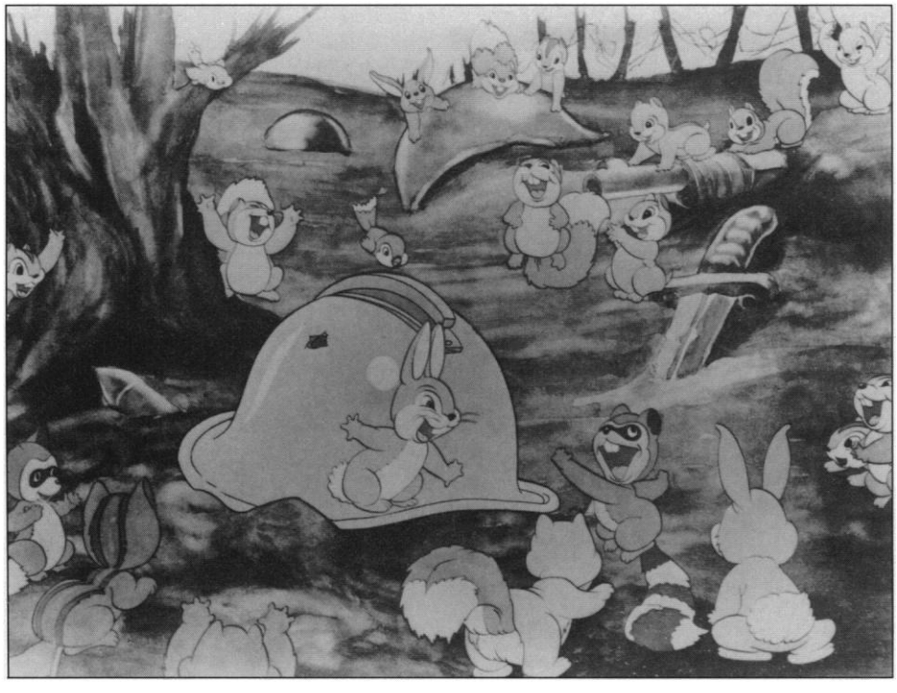
The Origins of Plagues

Emerging Viruses. STEPHEN S. MORSE, Ed. Oxford University Press, New York, 1993. xxiv, 317 pp., illus. $39.95 or £32.50. Based on a conference, Washington, DC, May 1989.

In early June of this year, reports appeared in the news media about a mysterious illness that had caused deaths among the Navajo nation in the four-corners area of the southwest United States (including parts of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah). Investigations by epidemiologists from state health departments and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) revealed the causative agent to be a hantavirus. Hantaviruses are endemic in rodents in many areas of the world. Throughout Asia and central Europe, they cause hemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome in humans. But the type of hantavirus found in the Southwest had not been previously recognized, and no hantavirus anywhere in the world had been associated with a clinical syndrome like the one seen among the Navajo.

The contributors to *Emerging Viruses* would find the events in the Southwest neither mysterious nor surprising. Indeed, the outbreak confirms their thesis that new diseases caused by viruses can emerge anywhere and should be anticipated. Originating in a landmark conference that was "the first to consider the question of emerging viruses," the book begins with several chapters that place viral emergence in historical context. It goes on to provide basic information on virus-host interaction and discusses methods for detecting and tracking emerging viruses. Case studies of monkeypox, seal plague, and canine parvovirus—three animal viruses that recently crossed species—are presented, followed by several chapters on viral evolution. Finally, prospects for the future are addressed. Resisting the temptation to present a doomsday scenario, the contributors have achieved a well-balanced account. The book is scholarly, thoughtful, and well written, and scientific jargon has been kept to a minimum, making it easy and enjoyable reading even for those with a limited background in biology.

The authors use the term "emerging" to describe viruses that either have just appeared in a population or have expanded their range, with a resulting increase in the incidence of



"Happy forest animals celebrating the end of the human race in Hugh Harman's 1939 cartoon *Peace on Earth*." Produced "during the same dark closing months of 1939" as *Bambi*, the "oddly parallel" film "opens with two baby squirrels asking their grandfather what 'men' were. He explains that they were 'uniformed monsters' who were continually at war with one another. After he tells his grandchildren the story of how men fought each other to extinction, the cartoon ends with the cute forest animals frolicking through a landscape of rusting weapons and bullet-ridden helmets." [From *A View to a Death in the Morning*; Turner Entertainment Co.]