

# Moral Philosophy and Deer Hunting

Set aside the ethics of hunting itself, and you find that *within* the act of hunting, there's a whole world of right and wrong.

Tonight I sat in a tower stand for hours without seeing any activity from the deer population. Then, right as darkness fell, three deer came out. All of a sudden I had some decisions to make.

Whatever your opinion of the moral agency of animals, you'd probably agree if you were there with me that the decision I had to make was a moral one. I had life and death power (in the form of a rifle) in my hands – and that lends a gravity I don't normally have in my decisions.

Should I shoot even if I don't have a clear visual of the target? On one hand, I could see pretty clearly that I was dealing with deer. On the other hand, I couldn't tell how large or how old they were. This is a question of responsibility and due diligence. Is it appropriate to act before I know the full details?

Should I shoot if it's a doe? On one hand, does are great for meat provision. On the other, this doe was taking care of two yearlings. My answer was no.

There are more questions that extend beyond a single hunt:

Should you pay your local government for permission to hunt? On one hand, you don't want to have to lie. On the other, your local bureaucrats don't own you, your land, or the animals that live on it.

To what extent should you feed and attract animals to your land and to certain spots on it? On one hand, this removes only some of the randomness from hunting and supports local wildlife. On the other hand, this may unfairly reduce the hunter's workload relative to the animal's riskload.

It's interesting that so many non-vegans take such care to these questions. The hunting community operates from a code of honor – which applies very much in how we relate to animals. Many of us feel a certain sense of obligation to the creatures we're hunting.

How those obligations emerge and where they start and stop is a topic for a much longer post, but it's interesting to see just how complicated the decision to hunt (and to shoot) can be. And it's powerful to have the live test of making these life and death decisions of ethics.

*Originally published at [JamesWalpole.com](http://JamesWalpole.com).*