

Seeking World Approval Will Lead to Hunting's Suicide

By Michael G. Sabbeth, Esq.

At this year's annual conference of the African Professional Hunters Association held at the 2017 Safari Club International Convention, a participant expressed the opinion that after the Cecil incident the world "will not tolerate unethical behavior." My blood pressure rocketed to 190 over 120!

I said I disagreed with that statement and explained why. I said that there is no "world" in any coherent meaningful sense of the word, especially as it applies to hunting. Thus, it follows that there is no world opinion on what the world will and will not tolerate, not only pertaining to hunting but pertaining to any human behavior. No consistent measurement enables anyone to judge what the world will and will not tolerate.

I went on to say that the world is incapable of distinguishing ethical from unethical behavior, and has no interest in trying to make the distinction, particularly as it applies to hunting.

World Opinion is Morally Bankrupt

I don't want to tip toe into the world's politics but I am compelled to write that the world's grotesque horrors and obscenities of human behavior, well-known to all of us, are ignored, evaded, suppressed and not universally condemned. They are all tolerated. What the world will tolerate, thus, is morally meaningless.

The assertion that the world will not tolerate unethical hunting behavior is not supported by any evidence. To the contrary, the world is drenched in unethical animal killing—poaching, absurd hunting bans and trophy bans and trade bans that kill substantial numbers of animals—which is not only tolerated but paradoxically supported by powerful organizations and governments. Particularly regarding the iconic big game—lions, elephants, black rhino, leopards—legal hunting kills relatively few. Legal hunting, does, however, provide millions of dollars for local populations, anti-poaching support and habitat development.

The Cecil situation did not prove the world will not tolerate unethical behavior. To the contrary, Cecil proved with exquisite unarguable clarity that the world willfully refuses to differentiate between ethical and unethical hunting and tolerates all of them.

Let's analyze the concepts of world opinion and what the world will tolerate in the specific context of Cecil. I won't rehash all the details of Dr. Palmer's hunt but mention a few key facts: the hunt was legal; Cecil was not induced or drawn out of the Hwange Park; no legal significance attached to the fact the lion was collared; Cecil was an aged lion and no longer reproduced; the hunt raised a lot of money for local populations and for conservation.

The world did not wait until these facts were determined and publicized. Rather, agenda-driven people instantly promoted and disseminated lies. We may recall Winston Churchill's astute comment that a lie will travel half way around the world before the truth gets out of bed. That was certainly the case with Cecil. But the world and its opinion, such as they were, responded to

these lies with the enthusiastic intensity of burning heretics at the stake. A dishonest narrative constructed by anti-hunting forces went viral. Truth did not matter; facts did not matter; reality did not matter. Driven by a delicious smug ignorance, with no interest in attempting to discern the truth, aspects of world opinion responded venomously like a viper's strike.

The Cecil situation demonstrated conclusively that the anti-hunting hysteria it generated was not based on evidence or truth. Drenched comfortably in ignorance, world opinion, such as it was, willingly was seduced by a simplistic notion of the hunting ecology. Seeing things simplistically facilitated a passion bordering, in some instances, on the fanatical. Passion and moral smugness create a toxic stew when one knows nothing.

Given what the world tolerates generally, as articulated through international institutions, and the cascade of constraints it imposes on legal hunting specifically, we may justifiably draw several conclusions about the morality and consistency of world opinion and the moral weight of what the world tolerates. The world tolerates barbarity and often condemns moral behavior. Often the world vilely makes a moral equivalence between the aggressor and the victim. Thus, world opinion is morally meaningless. World opinion is often morally bankrupt. The Cecil situation proves those conclusions.

Cecil and The Weaponizing of "World Opinion"

How does the world articulate what it does and does not tolerate? Who decides? How sanctimonious to say, "I am the arbiter of what the world tolerates!" Nice work if you can get it! If we are to judge the moral competence of the world based on the actions and pronouncements of the United Nations and the European Union, a strong argument can be made that the world is morally deficient.

"World opinion" is a mythical creature, like the tooth fairy. It can mean anything the speaker wants it to mean. Like pretzel dough, it can be twisted into any shape. Here's the key point: this ambiguity is the source of its power. Anyone can make the accusation no matter the facts. Yet, the rhetoric, the accusation, that the world will not tolerate unethical hunting, is powerful. How intimidating to charge that the world is against you! Not every person has the mental agility and knowledge to effectively fight back. Indeed, the accuser is counting on the inability to refute his attack.

The accusation that world opinion is against you is not an offer to discuss and debate the proposition. It is a rhetorical device used to shut you up; to prevent discussion; to make you submit to the abstraction that the world will not tolerate certain kinds of hunting although no facts are provided to support the accusation. Thus, saying the world will not tolerate a Cecil-type hunt or the black rhino hunt created under the auspices of the Dallas Safari Club, as examples, weaponizes the phrase. It transforms the concept of world opinion into a tool for attacking. I make it clear that the person at APHA did not have that intent. He was expressing what others would likely suggest.

What Can We Do?

First, we must reject any notion that the world will be reasonable or will be informed when it comes to certain types of hunting. Such thinking is delusional. Segments of the world have their own agendas. Many factors influence what the world seems to tolerate regarding hunting, among them cowardice, a perverse ideology, greed, corruption, narcissism, moral smugness and condescension toward indigenous populations. Ethical hunting and prudent responsible game management are, regrettably, not the most powerful factors that influence what the world appears to tolerate. Here is my key point: any tendency of our hunting communities to conform to and appease this abstraction of what the world will tolerate will lead to hunting's destruction.

Second, we must develop the skill to analyze the ethical and factual content of the accusatory rhetoric—what is world opinion? How do you identify it? —and use that analysis to refute the accusation.

Third, it is vital that we fight back; that the hunting community not allow the aggressive anti-hunters to frame the issue as us against the world and thereby enable it to capture the moral high ground. Hunters have the moral high ground.

Fourth, we must, at least, we should, grasp the reality that we are in the persuasion business as much as we are hunters and advocates for hunting. We must understand that truth is meaningless unless someone is persuaded that truth has meaning. We must understand that facts do not advance themselves. Arguments do not compel on their own. We must, therefore, persuade.

Finally, we must persuade the vast majority that the values and actions of the hunter, including hunting Cecil, is, in fact, in harmony with their opinions. We can do so because it is true.

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