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A HISTORY

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OXFORD PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS

Edited by PETER ADAMSON & G. FAY EDWARDS

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A HISTORY



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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press  
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Adamson, Peter, editor; Edwards, G. Fay, editor.

Title: *Animals: a history* / edited by G. Fay Edwards and Peter Adamson.

Description: New York : Oxford University Press, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017036011 (print) | LCCN 2018004743 (ebook) |

ISBN 9780199375998 (online course) | ISBN 9780199375981 (updf) |

ISBN 9780199375967 (cloth : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780199375974 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: *Animals* (Philosophy)

Classification: LCC B105.A55 (ebook) | LCC B105.A55 A74 2018 (print)  
| DDC 113/.8—dc23

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Paperback printed by Webcom, Inc., Canada  
Hardback printed by Bridgeport National Bindery, Inc.,  
United States of America

## CHAPTER TWO

# Reincarnation, Rationality, and Temperance

### PLATONISTS ON NOT EATING ANIMALS

*G. Fay Edwards*

**“Platonists” refers to a thinker who bases their approach to reality significantly on Plato’s worldview or that of other Platonic philosophers. This included, among other things, Plato’s view that actual entities or phenomena (ball, goat, love, red) are imperfect instances of perfect transcendent ideas (ballness, goatness, loveness, redness, etc.)**

**Platonist views can vary greatly, with individuals adding their own interpretations and values over time. Aristotle was a student of Plato’s for about twenty years, so you can think of the figures here—Plutarch and Porphyry—as drinking from the same well as Aristotle, but coming later in history and making their own claims from Plato’s worldview.**

**Notice too, how the Platonist views here are often emerging in debate with others. There is a real competition for which ways of living (not just thinking) are most conducive to pursuing the supreme and best philosophy?**

The two figures that come most immediately to mind when considering what Platonists have to say about animals are Plutarch and Porphyry.<sup>1</sup> Like many philosophers before them, both of these Platonists were vegetarian, but unlike their predecessors, each sets out numerous arguments in favor of the practice in their writings.

These arguments are many and varied. We are told that we should be vegetarian because killing and eating animals makes us more likely to kill and eat human beings, because human beings may reincarnate as animals, because animals are rational creatures that are owed moral consideration from humans, and because meat-eating has negative effects on the bodies and souls of human meat-eaters. Notably, while in some cases meat-eating is presented as wrong because of what it does to animals, in others it is so only because of what it does to human beings. The different arguments thus paint quite different pictures concerning the place of animals in Platonist thought.

In this chapter I analyze several core arguments for vegetarianism that are given by Plutarch<sup>2</sup> and Porphyry and suggest that these thinkers are, in fact, more concerned about the effect that meat-eating has on human beings than they are about the effect that it has on nonhuman animals. If I am right about this, it means that although their position certainly results in practical recommendations surrounding the treatment of animals, it is wrong to suppose, as some have, that these Platonists are particularly sympathetic toward the animals themselves.

**Starting here: Pay attention to the various Platonist arguments for not eating animals.**

#### REINCARNATION: VEGETARIANISM FOR THE SAKE OF OTHER HUMANS

By the third century AD, vegetarianism seems to have become something of a hallmark of Platonism, with several prominent Platonists—including Xenocrates, Polemo,<sup>3</sup> Plutarch, Plotinus,<sup>4</sup> and Porphyry—having adopted a vegetarian diet on philosophical grounds. In adopting this diet, they consider themselves to be continuing an ancient and pious tradition, which goes right back to the first humans in the “golden age” of humankind.

This mythical period of human history, first mentioned by Hesiod in *Works and Days* (lines 109–20),<sup>5</sup> is said to have been a time, long ago, during which people lived an idyllic existence in peace and harmony and the earth produced food for them in abundance without the need for labor on the land or competition for resources. The people of this time reportedly neither killed nor ate animals and offered only bloodless sacrifice to the gods (Plutarch, *On Flesh-Eating*, 993ac; Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 1.13.1–5, 3.27.10, 4.2.1–6; Plato, *Laws*, 782c).<sup>6</sup> Since these ancient people are regarded as models of piety by later thinkers, their adoption of a vegetarian diet is taken to be a strong point in its favor (Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 1.13.1–5). Yet little in what is said suggests that these people were vegetarian out of a concern for animals. Instead they seem to have been vegetarian because the abundance of plant food made it unnecessary for them to eat animals to survive,<sup>7</sup> and to

have avoided animal sacrifice because they regarded blood as unsanitary and thus not fit as an offering to a deity (Plato, *Laws*, 782c; cf. *Cratylus*, 397e–8b).

Although not part of the golden age themselves, the pre-Socratic philosophers Pythagoras and Empedocles are presented as having returned to its ancient and pious ways by refraining from eating, and discouraging the killing of, animals.<sup>8</sup> Again these thinkers are so revered by the Greeks of antiquity that their mere adherence to a vegetarian diet is regarded as a point in its favor (Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 1.26.2–3). Their names repeatedly arise in Plutarch’s and Porphyry’s texts as philosophers whom the Platonists take themselves to be emulating.

We are given more information about why these philosophers were vegetarian than we are about the people of the golden age. One reason, which is attributed to Pythagoras by both Plutarch and Porphyry, is the belief that killing and eating nonhuman animals makes humans more likely to kill and eat their fellow human beings and, conversely, that abstinence from these actions toward animals makes abstinence in these actions toward humans more likely. There is a sense, in our texts, that humans may become desensitized and/or habituated to behave toward humans in the ways that they persistently behave toward animals.<sup>9</sup> We should be vegetarian, on this line of reasoning, simply because it makes us more likely to treat our fellow human beings with respect.

Notice, then, that the wrongness of killing and eating animals, in this case, comes from the wrongness of killing and eating other human beings, and that it is really *humans*, and not animals, that are of moral concern here. Indeed, if we knew that human actions toward animals really had no impact on human actions toward other humans, then this argument would give us no reason at all not to kill and eat nonhuman animals.

Another, better known reason for vegetarianism that is attributed to both Pythagoras and Empedocles in our texts is a belief in the doctrine of human-animal reincarnation.<sup>10</sup> According to this doctrine, human

souls can come to dwell inside the bodies of nonhuman animals after the death of their human bodies (and vice versa). Plato too sometimes appears to ascribe to this doctrine,<sup>11</sup> though it is never invoked as a reason to avoid eating animals in the dialogues.

One way to understand reincarnation as a reason to avoid killing and eating animals is to suppose that it makes animals, for the purposes of moral consideration, count as humans, insofar as there is (or might be) a human soul within every animal body. The thought would then be that, since it is wrong to kill and eat human beings, it will also be wrong to kill and eat animals *qua* reincarnated human beings.<sup>12</sup> This makes one's actions toward animals wrong not because such actions make one more likely to behave in a certain way toward human beings, as on the previous line of thought, but because they really *are* actions toward human beings—that is, bodies with human souls.

A different way of understanding the doctrine appears in Plutarch and Seneca, however. Both of these thinkers present reincarnation as grounds for vegetarianism, not because it means that animals have human souls but because it means that some animals have the souls of a special group of human beings—namely, one's former friends and family members. Thus Plutarch reports that the worry is that by killing and eating animals, you might end up killing and eating "your mother, or father, or some friend or child" (*On Flesh-Eating*, 997e; cf. 997f, 998f), while Seneca similarly claims that reincarnation makes people worry that they might be guilty of parricide (*Epistles*, 108, 19). This understanding fits well with a famous anecdote about Pythagoras, in which he stops someone from beating a puppy on the grounds that he recognizes the voice of a former human friend in its cries (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, 8.36).

On this understanding it seems that it is wrong to kill and eat not all human beings, as on the first understanding, but rather only our own human loved ones, and that it will be wrong to kill and eat nonhuman animals not *qua* reincarnated human but, instead, *qua* reincarnated friend or family member. This results in abstention from killing and

eating all animals, however, insofar as one cannot tell which animals have the souls of one's former loved ones and which do not (unless, of course, one is Pythagoras!).

Notice that, on either of these understandings of reincarnation as a reason for vegetarianism, the wrongness of killing and eating animals is dependent on the status of animals as reincarnated humans—be it any human or only humans to whom one bears a special relationship. As such, reincarnation also fails to make animals *qua* animals worthy of moral concern.

Despite its philosophical pedigree, later Platonists—like Plutarch,<sup>13</sup> Iamblichus,<sup>14</sup> Proclus,<sup>15</sup> and perhaps also Plotinus<sup>16</sup> and Porphyry<sup>17</sup>—appear to have been skeptical of the possibility of literal human-animal reincarnation. Nonetheless in *On Flesh-Eating*, Plutarch presents human-animal reincarnation as one of the central reasons for adopting a vegetarian diet.

Unlike many of Plutarch's other works, *On Flesh-Eating* is a treatise rather than a dialogue and purports to express Plutarch's own views. It is unique in his corpus in that it is the only work in which he expressly argues in favor of adopting a vegetarian diet. The work presents vegetarianism as the original and ancient diet of humankind, with the initial move to meat-eating being attributed to a lack of plant food produced by famine and war. Plutarch suggests that meat-eating in his time (when plant food is, once again, abundant and easily procured) is perpetuated by the gluttony of human beings, who eat meat purely for pleasure (993a–994a). Alongside these claims he offers human-animal reincarnation as a consideration in favor of adopting a vegetarian diet, but gives it only in the form of a "better safe than sorry" argument.

Imagine, Plutarch says, that a warrior who is about to kill someone in full armor is greeted by cries of "Hit him! He's your enemy" on one side and "Don't strike! He is your son" on the other (998e). The best course of action for the warrior, Plutarch argues, is to spare the individual, since he cannot be completely certain that it is not, in fact, his

son (however unlikely this actually is); far better, he thinks, to leave one's enemy alive than to risk murdering one's own son by mistake. Yet this, Plutarch argues, is precisely the situation that we find ourselves in with respect to animals. On the one side, we have philosophers, like the Stoics, exclaiming "Kill it! It's only a brute beast," while on the other, we have Pythagoras and Empedocles saying "Stop! What if the soul of some relative or friend has found its way into this body?" (998f). Just as in the case of the warrior, Plutarch argues, we ought to spare every animal, since we cannot be certain that any one animal does not possess the soul of a deceased human relative, however unlikely this may actually be (and Plutarch seems to think it is rather unlikely; 998df)—any risk at all that we could be accidentally murdering and feasting on our own human kin is, in Plutarch's eyes, simply too great.

Notice that Plutarch's concern here is again with how we are behaving toward other human beings, however, and not with how we are behaving toward the animals themselves. On this reasoning, if we could be certain that any particular animal did *not* possess the soul of one of our dead human relatives, then we would have no reason at all not to kill and eat that animal.

It is less clear what Porphyry makes of reincarnation as an argument for vegetarianism. Among Porphyry's works we find an entire treatise devoted to arguing in favor of the practice of vegetarianism, entitled *On Abstinence from Killing Animals* (henceforth *On Abstinence*).<sup>18</sup> This treatise is addressed to a fellow Neoplatonic philosopher, Firmus Castricius, who has reportedly begun eating meat again after a period of abstinence (1.1.1). In it Porphyry chastises Firmus for jettisoning "the ancestral laws of philosophy" (1.2.3) and resolves to prove to him that vegetarianism is an essential part of the philosophic life and that the many arguments that are given against vegetarianism by their opponents (such as the Stoics, Peripatetics, and Epicureans) can all be answered convincingly (1.3.2). This project leads Porphyry to cover huge swaths of material and to include arguments that proceed from a variety

of different philosophical commitments and that work in a multitude of different ways. Yet despite this, Porphyry never once argues that it is wrong to kill and eat animals on the grounds that they have (or may have) literally human souls. **Stop here; go to next page**

The closest we get to an appeal to the doctrine of reincarnation comes in Porphyry's attack on the Stoics in book 3, where he points to Pythagoras's belief that animals and humans have "the same soul" and are "kin" to one another (3.26.1; cf. 1.19.1) in his argument that animals are of moral concern for humans. These statements may be intended to recall the doctrine of human-animal reincarnation to which Pythagoras subscribed. Yet in his *Life of Pythagoras*, Porphyry presents Pythagoras's belief as being that reincarnation is made possible by the similarity of human and animal souls, and while he says that Pythagoras was vegetarian, he does not say that this was because of his belief in reincarnation (s.19). This difference in emphasis may make for quite a different understanding from what we have seen thus far. It may be that Porphyry thinks it is this similarity of soul that is supposed to make it wrong for us to kill and eat animals, on Pythagoras's view, and not the status of animals as reincarnated humans. That is, animals may be worthy of moral concern because they possess, not literally human souls, but rather the feature that makes human souls worthy of moral concern. Understood in this way, human-animal reincarnation itself does not give us a reason to abstain from killing and eating animals; rather the similarity of soul that makes reincarnation possible does.

Notice that, on this understanding, the concern for our kin that was present in Plutarch's use of the reincarnation doctrine is still a central factor, but in this case it is most certainly animals *qua* animals that are regarded as kin to humans and thus of moral concern. If this is the correct way to understand Porphyry's argument, then it may mark a move away from human actions toward animals being wrong solely on the basis of the effect they have on human beings, and toward a position in which animals are considered worthy of moral concern in themselves.

## Start here; what are some competing views on animal rationality?

### ANIMAL RATIONALITY: VEGETARIANISM FOR THE SAKE OF NONHUMAN ANIMALS

The question of whether or not animals are rational arises in the ancient debate on vegetarianism because some theorists—most notably the Stoics—believe that animals are owed moral consideration from humans if and only if they are rational. What the Stoics mean when they say this is that animals must be rational in order to be capable of being wronged by humans and for there to be a demand on humans to avoid wronging animals in their actions. Since the Stoics also accept that, if animals were owed moral consideration from humans, it would be wrong for humans to kill and eat them, proof of animal rationality would commit the Stoics to vegetarianism on their own principles of morality. Yet, of course, the Stoics actually believe that animals are irrational and, therefore, not owed moral consideration from humans. This means that, on their view, nothing that humans do to animals—including killing and eating them—wrongs the animals themselves.<sup>19</sup>

In response to the Stoics, representatives from other ancient schools, including Plutarch, Porphyry, and Sextus Empiricus, present arguments in favor of granting rationality to animals—although only Porphyry explicitly uses this material as part of a wider argument in favor of vegetarianism.

The most extended treatment from Plutarch comes in his dialogue *The Cleverness of Animals* (henceforth *Cleverness*). The bulk of this work consists of a debate between the characters Aristotimus and Phaedimus, concerning whether land or sea animals are “cleverer.” Both characters present a vast array of examples of the behavior of land and sea animals, with Aristotimus arguing that his examples prove that land animals are highly rational and intelligent while sea creatures are irrational and stupid (965c–75c), and Phaedimus arguing exactly the opposite (975c–85c). In most cases the characters recount examples of animal behavior and move on without any reflection on what each example is supposed to show, and having so many varied examples makes

it difficult to understand what we are supposed to make of the evidence from Plutarch’s perspective. This problem is compounded by the fact that the characters often disagree with one another,<sup>20</sup> with what they themselves said previously,<sup>21</sup> and with what is said in Plutarch’s other works.<sup>22</sup> Although *Cleverness* ends with the question of whether land or sea animals are cleverer being left to the audience, Autobulus’s closing remark, “By combining what you have said against each other, you will together put up a good fight against those<sup>23</sup> who would deprive animals reason and understanding” (985c), has led most scholars to think that Plutarch himself believes these arguments prove that all animals are rational.<sup>24</sup> Occasionally scholars also take Plutarch to be committed to thinking that animal rationality makes animals worthy of moral concern,<sup>25</sup> and thus that it has implications for the behavior of humans toward animals.

Many of Plutarch’s examples in *Cleverness* are repeated, and added to, by Porphyry in his treatment of animal rationality in book 3 of *On Abstinence*. Earlier, in book 1 of this same work, Porphyry recounted the Stoic argument that we cannot wrong animals by killing and eating them because animals are irrational (1.4–6), and the argument of book 3 constitutes his reply to this—viz. that animals are rational, and thus that (on the Stoics’ own principles) we should not kill and eat them after all (3.1.4). As with *Cleverness*, a huge amount of empirical evidence is offered here with little reflection on what it actually shows, and as a consequence it is difficult to determine what Porphyry himself really thinks. Yet, as with Plutarch, most scholars have taken book 3 to commit Porphyry himself to the belief that all animals are rational, and since his argument appears as a part of *On Abstinence* they often take him to be committed to the further view that this rationality makes it wrong for humans to kill and eat animals.<sup>26</sup>

Among Plutarch’s and Porphyry’s evidence for animal rationality we find claims that animals employ syllogisms;<sup>27</sup> count;<sup>28</sup> perceive;<sup>29</sup> experience pleasure, pain, and other emotions (e.g., anger, fear, envy);<sup>30</sup> that they remember,<sup>31</sup> make meaningful vocal sounds,<sup>32</sup> employ and teach



skills,<sup>33</sup> live in groups and defend one another,<sup>34</sup> live with and defend humans,<sup>35</sup> love their offspring,<sup>36</sup> display virtue and vice,<sup>37</sup> go mad,<sup>38</sup> plan ahead,<sup>39</sup> and use the different parts of their bodies (e.g., teeth, hooves, and claws) appropriately.<sup>40</sup> It is not immediately clear, however, how the presence of each of these many behaviors and capacities is supposed to prove that animals are rational.

There are two questions that we might ask about Plutarch and Porphyry at this juncture: (1) Do they really believe that all animals are rational? and (2) Supposing that they do, does animal rationality provide us with a central reason for adopting a vegetarian diet, on their view? Let us take each of these questions in turn.

A thorough analysis of each piece of evidence in favor of granting rationality to animals and what it shows about our Platonists' attitudes on this matter is beyond the scope of this chapter. In answering the first question, then, I limit myself to a few general remarks about how we should approach these texts, followed by a more in-depth discussion of just two pieces of evidence: animal syllogisms and animal capacities for sense-perception and emotion.

To begin, the dialectical context of Plutarch's and Porphyry's arguments for animal rationality ought to make us cautious about accepting these arguments as a straightforward portrayal of their own beliefs. It is clear that at least some of the evidence given by our Platonists is supposed to attack the Stoics on their own grounds, by using Stoic (and not Platonic) tenets against them, and it may be that all of the arguments are supposed to work in this fashion. Such a strategy is employed by Plutarch throughout *On Stoic Self-Contradiction*,<sup>41</sup> so it would not be strange to find him employing a similar strategy here. The appeal to the fact that animals know how to use their body parts correctly (*On Abstinence*, 3.26.7–10), for example, is a clear reference to the Stoic doctrine of appropriation (*oikeiōsis*), which, in Stoic (and not Platonic) theory, forms the basis of justice. So too both Plutarch and Porphyry appeal to Stoic definitions of things like sense-perception, emotion, planning, memory, and even rationality itself<sup>42</sup>—the point

being that the way the Stoics (but perhaps not the Platonists) define these things makes animals rational. If the arguments make use of Stoic premises to which our Platonists are not committed, however, they will tell us little about our Platonists' own commitments with respect to animal rationality.

A further reason for caution is that our texts do not present one consistent position on what rationality is and what consists of convincing evidence that animals possess it. Thus, for example, the argument of Strato that sense-perception requires intellect, and is thus a rational capacity (which would make animals—who perceive—rational), is immediately dismissed by the phrase “but let us suppose that sense-perception does not require intellect to do its job” (Plutarch, *Cleverness*, 961b = Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 3.21.9). So too, immediately after offering evidence of mythical animals in conversation with humans as proof of their rationality, Porphyry suggests that we dismiss such stories “due to our natural trait of incredulity” (*On Abstinence*, 3.4.1). Similar shifts throughout our texts make it impossible to read them as mere straightforward statements of the Platonists' own beliefs concerning animal capacities.

In addition very similar evidence is offered by Sextus Empiricus in his *Outlines of Scepticism*, where it is purportedly argued—again, in response to the Stoics—that rationality should be granted to animals (1.65–77). Yet of course Sextus is a skeptic and thus cannot be committed to this position himself; his point (though not explicitly stated) must be merely that there is as much evidence in favor of granting rationality to animals as there is against it (and thus that we should suspend judgment). It may be that Plutarch's and Porphyry's arguments are part of a wider trend to attack the Stoic position on animal irrationality without thereby committing oneself to the position that all animals are rational.

A final reason to be cautious about attributing such a position to our Platonists is that it breaks with what has, by this time, become a long-standing philosophical tradition, whereby humans are differentiated

from animals by the human possession, and animal lack, of reason.<sup>43</sup> In particular the position that all animals are rational lacks a clear Platonic precedent, since Plato himself never says that animals are rational<sup>44</sup> and, in fact, often seems to assert the opposite.<sup>45</sup> In the *Republic*, for example, animals are appealed to as a way of distinguishing the spirited from the rational part of the soul, apparently on the grounds that they possess the former but not the latter (441ab). So too in the *Symposium* it is said that, while all animals go to great lengths to protect their offspring, only humans do so due to reasoning (207ac). Again the *Laws* says that courage can be seen in animals only because it does not require reason (963e), while the *Cratylus* says that “the name ‘human’ signifies that the other animals do not... reason about anything they see,” whereas humans do (399c). Finally, the *Philebus* (15d–17a) and *Protagoras* (321cd) suggest that reason and wisdom (respectively) are a gift from the gods to humans alone, while the *Phaedrus* says that animals cannot possess language because they have not seen the forms (249b).

With this in mind, let us turn to an examination of two pieces of evidence that are given in favor of attributing rationality to animals by Plutarch and Porphyry—animal syllogisms and animal sense-perceptions and emotions—and try to determine what our Platonists are really committing themselves to in the course of these arguments.

### *Syllogisms*

The most famous example of an animal syllogizing is that of the so-called dialectical dog. Originally put forward by the Stoic Chrysippus, the story goes that a hunting dog is pursuing prey and comes to a three-way junction in the road. Sniffing for the scent of its prey down two out of the three available routes and finding none, the dog is said to proceed down the third route *without sniffing*. This example appears in texts on both sides of the animal rationality debate,<sup>46</sup> with everyone apparently agreeing on the facts of the animal’s behavior.

**What do you think about these examples of animals’ using syllogism or cleverness?**

When the example appears in Plutarch’s *Cleverness*, the character Aristotimus tells us “the dialecticians” assert that the dog is employing a “multiple disjunctive argument,” reasoning that “the prey went either this way or that way or the other way, but it did not go this way or that way, so it went the other way” (969b) (that is, “either  $p$  or  $q$  or  $r$ , but not  $p$ , and not  $q$ , therefore  $r$ ”). A similar account of the dog’s syllogism appears in both Porphyry and Sextus.

The point, Aristotimus explains in *Cleverness*, is that sense-perception is responsible for supplying only the “minor” premises—that is, “not  $p$ ” and “not  $q$ ” (no scent here, no scent there)—while *reason*, which is here treated as a distinct and higher-level capacity than sense-perception,<sup>47</sup> provides the major premise “either  $p$  or  $q$  or  $r$ ” and deduces that  $r$  on the basis of this plus the information provided by sense-perception (969b).

Other, less well-known examples of the same sort also appear in *Cleverness*. The Thracians, for example, are said to use foxes to determine whether a frozen river is safe to cross, since foxes will put their ear to the ice and proceed to cross only if they cannot hear the noise of the water running beneath—a behavior that signals to the humans that the ice is, or is not, thick enough to take their weight. The foxes are said to reason that “what makes noise must be in motion; what is in motion is not frozen; what is not frozen is liquid; what is liquid gives way” (969ab). This, Aristotimus explains, is not due to “the irrational action of sense-perception; it is, rather, a syllogistic conclusion developed from the evidence of sense-perception” (969a). As with the dialectical dog, the point is that sense-perception tells the fox only that there is, or is not, noise coming from under the ice—it is reason’s grasp of the relationship between noise and stability, combined with this perceptual observation, that determines the fox’s behavior.

Another example of the same thing is that of dogs and crows that drop stones into pots of liquid in order to raise the level of that liquid so they can drink it (*Cleverness*, 967ab; cf. 972b). Aristotimus explains that this behavior is due to the animal’s “knowing that lighter substances are

forced upwards when the heavier settle to the bottom” (967b). Again the thought is that reason grasps the relationship between heavy and light and puts this together with perceptual observations (that these stones are heavy and this liquid light) to determine the animal’s behavior.

Notice that in these examples reason is responsible for a creature’s grasp of general logical or conceptual truths,<sup>48</sup> as well as its ability to apply logical rules to deduce valid conclusions from these truths combined with information provided by the separate and irrational capacity of sense-perception. These high-level capacities of recognizing and applying genuine logical and conceptual relationships look likely to be definitive of rationality for both the Stoics, for whom an empirically acquired collection of concepts constitutes reason, and the Platonists, for whom an innate knowledge of the transcendent Platonic forms (such as Motion and Rest) may do so. It seems as though the understanding of relationships between concepts for the Stoics, or forms for the Platonists, is regarded as necessary for enabling an individual to see relationships of entailment that make inference and argument possible. It seems, then, that both schools will have to admit that animals are rational if they agree that animals do indeed employ the sorts of syllogisms that are attributed to them in the preceding examples.

It is well known that the Stoics deny that animals employ syllogisms. In the case of the dialectical dog, Sextus says that the Stoics claim it is only “as if” the dog syllogizes (*Outlines of Scepticism*, 1.69), while Porphyry records the Stoic retort that the dog behaves in the way it does “by nature” (perhaps, instinct) (*On Abstinence*, 3.6.4, 3.10.1). The other examples of animal syllogisms would, presumably, be dismissed in the same way. What is less well-known is that Plutarch’s *own speaker*, Aristotimus, denies that the dialectical dog syllogizes. Immediately after describing the dog’s syllogism, he asserts that, in fact, this description “is both false and fraudulent; for it is sense-perception itself, by means of tracks and changes, which indicates the way the creature fled, without bothering with disjunctive propositions” (*Cleverness*, 969b).<sup>49</sup> That is, there is no syllogism in the dog’s mind, and its behavior can

instead be explained by sense-perception (and not reason), since it notices perceptual—although nonolfactory—changes to the route (perhaps footprints, broken twigs, and moving undergrowth) that indicate which way its prey went. We can imagine a similar, perceptual explanation being given for the behavior of the other animals as well.

The thought here seems to be that syllogizing really is too advanced a capacity to be granted to animals and that the dog’s behavior can in fact be explained by the lower, irrational capacity of sense-perception. Add to this the fact that both Plutarch and Porphyry only ever say that other philosophers claim that the dog employs a syllogism, and it starts to look unlikely that these Platonists really intend to grant that animals syllogize and are rational—in the sense of understanding and employing conceptual relationships—on the basis of this kind of evidence.

While it may seem bizarre for our Platonists to include in their argument claims that they think are fallacious, a possible explanation for this is that they are employing an argumentative strategy, common in the Stoic school, whereby the inclusion of more arguments (however weak) is supposed to increase the persuasiveness of one’s overall case.<sup>50</sup> It may be that the Platonists believe that whereas they can, themselves, explain the special psychological capacities of humans, as opposed to animals, by appeal to the former’s special acquaintance with the Platonic forms, the Stoics cannot, on account of their denial of the existence of these entities.

### *Sense-Perception and Emotion*

Another argument for animal rationality we find in Plutarch’s and Porphyry’s texts—and one that should strike us as surprising given what we have just seen—appeals to the fact that animals possess the capacities for sense-perception and emotion. Animals, we are told, see colors, hear sounds, taste flavors, smell scents, and so on, as well as growing angry, afraid, envious, delighted, distressed, and other things of that nature. All of this is supposed to be demonstrated by the characteristic

**Which of these examples of animals’ sense perception and emotion do you find most compelling?**

behaviors of animals, such as their ability to navigate their environment (sense-perception), their propensity to stand and fight (anger) or run away when threatened (fear), their competition for mates (envy), their being summoned by music (delight) and corrected by punishment (distress), and so on (Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 3.8.1–6; Plutarch, *Cleverness*, 961df = Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 3.22.3–5). Porphyry, for his part, also appeals to the expert testimony of Aristotle in support of his position (*On Abstinence*, 3.6.5–7, 3.7.1, 3.8.6, 3.9.5, 3.12.4), since in numerous passages Aristotle grants that animals possess genuine sense-perception and emotion.<sup>51</sup> Both Porphyry and Plutarch are clear that animals have exactly the same capacities for these things as humans do, and not mere analogs of the human capacities, and the point is said to be that sense-perception and emotion are themselves rational capacities, and thus that animals, since they possess these capacities, must also be rational.

Yet there is something decidedly odd about sense-perception and emotion being given as proof of animal rationality by our Platonists, since the usual school line is that such capacities belong to the lower, irrational soul-part, as opposed to the higher, rational soul-part that is in contact with the Platonic forms. Thus while Plutarch and Porphyry seem genuinely committed to the position that animals have the very same capacities for sense-perception and emotion as humans do, their own position appears to be that these capacities are irrational—even in humans (see, for example, Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 1.30.1–7, 1.33.3–6, 1.34.7, 3.19.3; Plutarch, *On Common Conceptions*, 1058ef). **Stop here; go to next page**

Furthermore, as we have just seen in our analysis of animal syllogisms, some arguments in our texts actually rely on exactly this kind of opposition between reason and sense-perception in order to make a case for animal rationality. The same can also be said of emotion, which in these arguments is presented as a rational capacity but elsewhere appears as a distinct irrational force that opposes reason—as in *Cleverness* when the crocodile is said to act on the basis of reason, as opposed to emotion, when it protects only the bravest of its offspring while destroying

the rest (982d; cf. Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 3.19.3). Thus some of the arguments for animal rationality require the irrationality of sense-perception and emotion to go through, while others depend on the rationality of these very capacities. Since these positions are contradictory, Plutarch and Porphyry cannot be committed to both at once.

In fact this is symptomatic of the dialectical nature of Plutarch's and Porphyry's arguments. What is going on here is that they are responding to the position of some Stoics, who denied that animals possessed genuine sense-perception and emotion, and granted them instead only analogs of these human capacities.<sup>52</sup> This is because, on their Stoic view, these capacities are rational, and thereby inaccessible to irrational animals.<sup>53</sup> It is this position that Porphyry and Plutarch are complaining about when they state, "Some people foolishly say that animals are not pleased or angry or afraid, but that... the lion is 'quasi-angry' and the deer 'quasi-afraid'... that neither do they see or hear, but 'quasi-see' and 'quasi-hear'... these assertions, as any sensible person would be convinced, are... contrary to the obvious" (*Cleverness*, 961f = *On Abstinence*, 3.22.5). In response to this Stoic position, Plutarch and Porphyry argue simply that animals really do possess exactly the same capacities for sense-perception and emotion as humans do. The point is that, since these are, according to some Stoics, rational capacities, and since animals really do possess them, then animals too must be rational beings. Thus Plutarch and Porphyry claim that "because every animate creature is perceptive by nature... it is also not plausible to require that an animate creature should have... an irrational aspect—not when one is debating with people who think that nothing shares in sense-perception unless it also shares in understanding" (*Cleverness*, 960de = *On Abstinence*, 3.21.4).<sup>54</sup> That is, when one is in conversation with the Stoics, who hold that sense-perception is a rational capacity, one must conclude that all animals are rational, since all animals possess the capacity of sense-perception by definition. Exactly the same analysis can be given of the arguments concerning the animal capacity of emotion.

### WHAT DOES THIS TELL US ABOUT PLATONISTS' VIEWS ON ANIMAL RATIONALITY?

In answer to our first question concerning whether the Platonists really believe that all animals are rational, what we have seen in the preceding passages should make us quite cautious. Indeed it seems to me that they are more likely to be trying to trap their Stoic opponents into having to admit that animals are rational, while thinking that they, as Platonists with the forms at their disposal, can allow animals to have many capacities in common with humans, without thereby needing to grant them rationality.

This brings us to our second question, whether animal rationality provides us with a central reason for adopting a vegetarian diet, according to our Platonists. If I am right that they do not believe that animals are rational, then the answer to this question will be negative. However, for the sake of argument, we might still ask whether animal rationality *would* provide us with a reason for vegetarianism, on Platonist principles.

Taking Porphyry first, the point of his argument for animal rationality in book 3 of *On Abstinence* is certainly that it has vegetarian consequences for some understandings of ethics. Porphyry himself says as much, arguing that once animal rationality is proven, his “opponents” (i.e., the Stoics) will be committed to granting that animals are of moral concern (3.1.4, 3.18.1), thereby making them vegetarian. However, in the same book Porphyry tells us that, as far as he is concerned, the Stoic approach to ethics is wrong. Porphyry’s opposing view, as I understand it, is that one’s killing and eating of animals is wrong whether or not animals are rational, because it brings about, or results from, a disordered soul state, in which the rational part of one’s soul is not appropriately in control of the lower, irrational parts (3.26). What this means, in straightforward terms, is that it is the relationship between an agent’s action and his or her motivations and desires that makes an action ethical or unethical, on Porphyry’s view. Porphyry’s

point, in making an argument for animal rationality in book 3 of *On Abstinence*, is, I suggest, that animal rationality would have vegetarian consequences for the Stoic approach to ethics.<sup>55</sup>

Unlike Porphyry’s, Plutarch’s arguments for animal rationality are not designed simply to make a wider point in favor of adopting a vegetarian diet. Nonetheless twice in *Cleverness* Plutarch’s characters point to a link between animal psychological capacities and the ethical treatment of animals. On the first occasion Autobulus suggests that animal rationality need not make it unethical to kill injurious animals, while taming and making use of gentler animals as human helpers (964ef). The implication appears to be that animal rationality may make it unethical to kill and eat gentle animals that do humans no harm. On the second occasion it is Aristotimus who claims that those who deny that animals are owed moral consideration from humans are correct with respect to sea animals, who, according to him, are irrational and stupid (970b). Again this suggests a link between the psychological capacities of animals and human ethical obligations toward them—which might extend to all animals if one’s belief is, in fact, that all animals are rational. Yet *Cleverness* does not present a consistent picture on this matter, since elsewhere in the same work Autobulus notes that animal rationality has been presented as a point in favor of the practice of hunting, since it makes animals harder to catch and thus makes hunting a better exercise for human wits (960a). It is this point that frames the whole discussion in this dialogue, with Aristotimus’s arguments for the greater rationality of land animals being presented as a defense of land animal hunters (965f–6a) and Phaedimus’s arguments being presented as a defense of fishermen (975c). **stop here; go to next page**

Plutarch’s other two works that are of relevance here are *On Flesh-Eating* and *Beasts Are Rational*, both of which—unlike *Cleverness*—contain extended arguments in favor of adopting a vegetarian diet. However, neither of these works argues against the human consumption of animals on the grounds that animals are rational. Instead their focus is on reasons for vegetarianism that concern the effect that meat

consumption has on human beings. On balance, then, it looks as if we would be going beyond our texts to think that a central reason for vegetarianism in Plutarch's philosophy is the rationality of animals.

If I am right so far, then Platonists like Plutarch and Porphyry do not themselves consider facts of animal psychology to provide a reason in favor of adopting a vegetarian diet. So too, while we have seen one argument against meat-eating from Plutarch, concerning human-animal reincarnation, we have not yet seen the arguments that constitute Plutarch's and Porphyry's core reasons in favor of adopting a vegetarian diet. Let us now turn, then, to considering what our Platonists' central reasons are for thinking that eating animals is wrong.

#### TEMPERANCE: VEGETARIANISM FOR THE SAKE OF OURSELVES

##### start here

In addition to Pythagoras and Empedocles, Platonist philosophers like Plutarch and Porphyry also believe that vegetarianism is endorsed by the ultimate authority figure: Plato himself (Plutarch, *On Flesh-Eating*, 996b; Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 1.36.1, 1.37.1, 1.39.3–6). Indeed in *On Abstinence*, Porphyry claims that being vegetarian is necessary for philosophers, especially Platonists (2.3.1), since one cannot achieve the goal of philosophic life while eating meat (1.48.1, 1.57.2). Nonetheless it is rare to find overt references to vegetarianism in the Platonic corpus.

One place in which vegetarianism does explicitly appear is *Republic II*, when Socrates first describes the life of the citizens in the ideal city. These citizens have a frugal and simple manner of living; they drink wine and have sex in moderation, sleep on uncomfortable-sounding beds, and consume a diet consisting of wheat and barley loaves, olives, cheese, boiled roots and vegetables, figs, chickpeas, beans,<sup>56</sup> myrtle, and acorns (372ad). They do not, however, eat any meat<sup>57</sup> or make use of other luxuries (*opsa*), such as “perfumed oils, incense, prostitutes and pastries” (373a). Socrates clearly approves of this manner of living;

he describes the city that adopts it as “healthy” (373b) and says that its citizens will live to “a ripe old age” in “peace and good health” (372d).

Unfortunately Socrates offers only a few frustratingly brief remarks as to why meat and other luxuries are excluded from this city. It is because, he explains, they (a) are not “necessary,” (b) are productive of bodily illness, and (c) require the provision of many resources; for example, meat requires livestock, animal handlers, chefs, and cookware (*Republic* 373c; cf. 404cd; *Gorgias*, 464d, 465a, 501ae, 521d–2a). This, however, is all the explanation we get. Socrates does not explain exactly what each reason means, why it matters, or how it relates to the other reasons. Notice, in particular, that no special reason is given for excluding meat from the city, and that any worries about the animals themselves seem very far from Socrates's mind.

This *Republic* passage is the only place in the Platonic corpus in which vegetarianism is explicitly recommended, and yet thinkers like Porphyry, and perhaps also Plutarch and Plotinus, seem to believe that the central tenets of Platonic ethics necessitate vegetarianism. Reading the *Republic* passage alongside other central ethical texts in the Platonic corpus, such as the *Phaedo*, enables us to understand why this is the case. In the *Phaedo*, philosophers are said to prioritize the needs, desires, and pleasures of their soul over the conflicting needs, desires, and pleasures of their body (63e–9d). As a part of this project they are said to avoid “the so-called pleasures” of food, drink, and sex (that is, all the “pleasures concerned with service of the body”), “except insofar as one cannot do without them” (64de)—that is, except insofar as they are necessary. While this may, at first, sound like a recommendation concerning only food quantity (such that one should eat as much as is required to remain alive and no more),<sup>58</sup> when read in combination with the *Republic* passage it sounds like a recommendation to avoid certain kinds of food as well. For, as we have seen, the *Republic* says that particular foods—such as meat and pastries—are unnecessary, and thus, in conjunction with the *Phaedo*, it seems that the person who aims to live well must avoid these kinds of foods.

All three reasons for abstinence from meat that appear in the *Republic* form central and recurrent themes in Plutarch's and Porphyry's arguments for vegetarianism (Plutarch, *On Flesh-Eating*, and *Beasts are Rational*, 991ad; Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 1.27.1–1.47.4). To begin with, both Platonists repeat the *Republic's* reason (a) when they claim that meat is eaten by humans (or, for Porphyry, just philosophers)<sup>59</sup> not out of necessity, since humans (or philosophers) can survive perfectly well on plant foods alone. Instead Plutarch and Porphyry claim that meat is really eaten out of a desire for bodily pleasure, being used as a relish (*opson*) on top of otherwise perfectly adequate food, simply to make a meal more enjoyable for the consumer (Plutarch, *Cleverness*, 959e, and *Beasts are Rational*, 991bd; Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 1.37.3, 1.38.2, 1.41.2, 1.45.4, 1.46.2, 1.54.2, 3.16.1, 3.19.1, 3.20.6, 3.26.5, 3.27.1). Yet bodily pleasure is regarded by the Platonists as something bad and (as far as possible) to be avoided, on account of its ability to distract one's higher soul from its proper activity of contemplating the Platonic forms. Since meat is not a necessary part of our diet, the additional pleasure that is brought to a meal by its inclusion is completely avoidable, and this makes meat-eating a matter of intemperance for Plutarch and Porphyry (Plutarch, *On Flesh-Eating*, 965a, 966ef, 998ef, 999b, and *Beasts are Rational*, 991c; Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 1.2.3, 1.45.4, 1.46.1, 3.16.1, 3.18.5).

Plutarch even complains about ancient practices that involve considerable animal cruelty on the grounds that they stem from human intemperance—that is, a desire for bodily pleasure—and not from necessity. He speaks, for example, of the practice of “thrusting red-hot spits into the throats of swine so that by the plunging in of the iron the blood may be emulsified and, as it circulates through the body, may make the flesh tender and delicate,” as well as the practice of jumping on the udders of sows about to give birth so that the offspring will be blended together with milk, and so too the practice of sewing up the eyes of geese and cranes in order to make their flesh more appetizing (*On Flesh-Eating*, 996f–997a). He complains not so much about the

suffering caused to the animals, however, as about the fact that humans are acting in these disgusting ways, not because they need to in order to stay alive but simply out of a desire to increase the bodily pleasure that they experience during a meal (997a).

In her examination of Porphyry's arguments for vegetarianism, Catherine Osborne complains that the argument from necessity “achieves too much.” Osborne points out that, since no particular foodstuff is necessary for health and sustenance, the same argument can be deployed against everything that we might eat, and thus, absurdly, leave us with nothing to eat. So, for example, one does not need to eat carrots in order to survive, therefore carrot-eating is an unnecessary pleasure that ought to be avoided. Repeat this argument for every possible food, and we are left to starve.<sup>60</sup> Yet Plutarch and Porphyry seem to be thinking in terms of categories of foodstuffs rather than individual foods, and to suppose that the argument from necessity rules out meat as a category, but not plant foods. Thus Porphyry says that “a meat-eater needs inanimate foods as well, but someone satisfied with inanimate food needs half as much” (*On Abstinence*, 1.48.4). When we consider the fact that the Greek diet in antiquity was largely made up of plant-based food, with a small portion of meat on top to serve as a relish, we can see how it seemed possible to Plutarch and Porphyry to survive on the plant-based food alone without the meat relish, but not the other way around.

Plutarch and Porphyry also agree that eating meat is not only unnecessary for a healthy life but that it is actually preventative of it, since meat-eating is the cause of illness and disease in human bodies (Plutarch, *On Flesh-Eating*, 998c, and *Beasts are Rational*, 991b; Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 1.47.1–2, 1.52.1–3)<sup>61</sup>—reflecting reason (b) in the *Republic*. Porphyry, conversely, claims that a vegetarian diet not only does not cause disease and ill health but that it causes and preserves health in the body and, indeed, cures illnesses where present (*On Abstinence*, 1.2.1, 1.52.1, 1.53.2–4). Although, as we have seen, good Platonists are supposed to fulfill the needs of the soul—as opposed to the body—first

and foremost, Plutarch and Porphyry are clear that disease-producing foods should be avoided and health-preserving foods taken instead, not because of their effect on the body as such but because a sick body makes the higher soul's characteristic activity—of contemplating the Platonic forms—difficult or impossible (Plutarch, *On Flesh-Eating*, 995f–996a; Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 1.53.2). Thus if one is going to live a good, philosophic life, one must take adequate care of one's body.

Porphyry also worries in *On Abstinence* about the many resources that are required for maintaining oneself on a diet that includes meat; one needs, he tells us, slaves and chefs to prepare and cook the meat (which cannot be eaten raw, unlike plant food), riches to pay for it (since meat was prohibitively expensive in ancient times), doctors to cure the diseases that are produced by meat consumption, and excessive belongings (such as pots, pans, and cooking utensils) (1.46.2–1.47.4). This reflects reason (c) in the *Republic*, but Porphyry also appears to think that it makes meat-eating incompatible with the recommendation in Plato's *Theaetetus* that we become “like god” (176b; cf. *Republic*, 613b), for one of god's primary qualities is self-sufficiency—that is, needing nothing outside of himself. The more external things we need, Porphyry thinks, the less true we are to this central, Platonic maxim (1.37.4, 1.54.6, 1.56.1, 3.27.1–4). Both Plutarch and Porphyry also echo the *Republic* in their banning of other luxuries, such as perfumes and pastries, for precisely the same reasons as they ban meat (Plutarch, *On Flesh-Eating*, 999ab; Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 1.41.2).

There are two prolonged presentations of meat-eating as an act of human intemperance in Plutarch's writings. In *On Flesh-Eating*, the gluttony of meat-eating is presented alongside human-animal reincarnation as a central reason for adopting a vegetarian diet, while in *Beasts Are Rational* the intemperance of human meat-eating appears as part of a wider (tongue-in-cheek) argument that nonhuman animals are more virtuous than humans. The two sections bear a striking resemblance to one another and appear to reflect Plutarch's own beliefs.

*Beasts Are Rational* depicts the mythical Odysseus in conversation with a human comrade who has recently been turned into a pig (named Gryllus) by Circe. Circe has agreed with Odysseus that she will restore his comrades to human form if this is what they themselves desire. Gryllus, however, turns out to be reluctant to change back. He argues that animal life is better than human life since animals exceed humans in virtue—for animal souls, he says, produce virtue “spontaneously and naturally,” while human souls produce it only with great effort and training (986f–987b). Gryllus provides empirical evidence of animal behavior, which is contrasted with the corresponding human behavior, to demonstrate that this is the case.

→ How does Plutarch use the figure of Gryllus the pig to describe how animals may have greater virtue than people?

A large section of Gryllus's argument concerns the temperance of nonhuman animals and the comparative intemperance of humans. In the course of this section Gryllus divides desires into the following three kinds<sup>62</sup>: (i) natural and necessary, e.g., the desires for food and drink; (ii) natural and unnecessary, e.g., the desire for sex (989bc); and (iii) unnatural (and unnecessary), e.g., the desire for luxurious items like gold, ivory, fine robes, tapestries, and perfumes (989cf, 990bc). Gryllus tells us that being temperate involves having no type (iii) desires at all, while having and fulfilling type (i) and (ii) desires only to a limited extent (989b).

To prove that nonhuman animals possess temperance so defined, Gryllus points out that, in contrast to humans, animals have no type (iii) desires at all; pigs, for example, do not care for gold and riches and are content with mud to sleep in rather than handsome robes (989f). With respect to type (ii) desires, Gryllus tells us that animals indulge them only occasionally and “without irregularity or excess” (989f; cf. 990e). As proof of this point, he discusses the sexual behavior of nonhuman animals. Animals, he claims, do not have sex once the female is pregnant (990cd),<sup>63</sup> do not engage in homosexual behavior (990d),<sup>64</sup> do not have sex at all times of the year (but only in the spring, i.e., the mating season), and do not have sex with humans (991a, 988f).<sup>65</sup> Humans, by contrast, engage in sex even when the female is pregnant,



have sex at all times of the year, and indulge in homosexual activity (990de) and bestiality (990f). The point is that animals limit themselves to sex for the purpose of producing offspring and avoid sex that cannot achieve this goal, while humans indulge in sex that cannot result in offspring, thereby exceeding the limit that ought to be placed on this natural desire. They do so, of course, for pleasure and therefore act intemperately.<sup>66</sup>

Most important for us, however, is what Gryllus says about type (i) desires for food and drink. According to him, animals pursue only those foods that are “naturally suited” to them (by which he seems to mean foods that preserve their health) and go outside of this remit only when absolutely necessary—that is, when their survival depends on it. Thus, he tells us, animals like wolves and snakes eat meat simply because it is the diet that is proper to them and that preserves their constitutions (991d),<sup>67</sup> and while birds and dogs have sometimes gone beyond what is natural for them and consumed human flesh, they have done so only due to a scarcity of their natural foods (991a). Humans, on the other hand, are said to “eat everything” (991c), regularly indulging in foods that are not naturally suited to them (i.e., those that make them ill), doing so not out of necessity—that is, when their lives depend on it—but for the sake of the pleasure they enjoy as a result of it (990f–991c; cf. Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 3.20.6). Gryllus’s own example of such an unnatural food for humans is meat (991bc). Meat-eating is, then, clearly presented by Gryllus as an act of human intemperance.

This presentation reflects comments in Plutarch’s *On Flesh-Eating*, where meat-eating as an act of intemperance is the central concern. After presenting us with a potted history of how meat-eating came about as a result of food shortage, Plutarch laments the fact that meat-eating has now become a habit for human beings, who, despite no longer needing to eat meat in order to survive, continue to do so out of gluttony (993c–994a). Notably in this text, Plutarch allows that eating meat sometimes is necessary even for humans, and he is forgiving of meat-eating under these circumstances (966f), but since this is not

usually our situation nowadays, he presents animals as pleading with humans, “I do not ask to be spared in case of necessity; only spare me your arrogance! Kill me to eat, but not to please your palate!” (994e). In this work Plutarch makes clear that precisely the same reasons that ought to result in abstention from meat ought also to result in abstention from products such as perfumes and cakes (999ab).

All of this closely reflects Porphyry’s concerns in the sections of *On Abstinence* in which his own views are being expounded. In book 2 Porphyry presents the same historical picture as Plutarch, according to which humans, who are originally vegetarian, first began to eat meat as a result of hard times, but then carried on eating meat out of intemperance (2.5.1–2.14.3). In book 1 Porphyry argues that it is impossible to achieve the goal of the philosophic life while eating meat, on the grounds that meat is more productive of bodily pleasure than is vegetarian food (1.46.2) and that bodily pleasure distracts our higher soul from the contemplation that is characteristic of the philosophic life (1.41.1–5). He, like Plutarch, allows that people who need to eat meat in order to survive may do so, but he argues that philosophers, generally speaking, are not among them (4.21.1–2).<sup>68</sup>

Alongside his recommendations of vegetarianism in these passages, Porphyry, like Plutarch, makes other ethical recommendations that steer philosophers away from anything that is especially provocative of bodily pleasure. He recommends the avoidance of exciting sights and sounds, encountering attractive members of the opposite sex, sex itself, drinking wine, making use of perfumes, and overeating, all on the same grounds that he recommends abstinence from meat (1.33.6–1.34.3, 1.41.2–4, 1.46.1). His presentation of these precepts as stemming from the same Platonic ethical considerations suggests that there is nothing particularly special about the avoidance of meat in Porphyry’s mind; meat-eating is simply one of a number of things that makes philosophical contemplation difficult. As with Socrates in Plato’s *Republic*, worries about the animals that are being eaten seem very far from Porphyry’s mind.

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At least some of Porphyry's "ordinary man" opponents think it is a bad thing to be deprived of the bodily pleasure that meat-eating produces, apparently because they think—wrongly, in Platonists' eyes—that bodily pleasure is a good to be pursued (*On Abstinence*, 1.2.4.1). Yet the case is more complicated for the Epicureans, who think that only a certain type of pleasure is to be pursued, and for the Stoics, who regard pleasure as something morally indifferent and thus to be actively neither pursued nor avoided. Porphyry in *On Abstinence* argues that the Epicurean good is best achieved by the adoption of a vegetarian diet, since this causes least disturbance and fulfills only natural and necessary desires rather than desires for luxury, as per Epicurean principles (1.4.8.1–1.5.4.6). As a result, Porphyry claims, adopting a vegetarian diet is the best way to experience the particular kind of pleasure at which the Epicureans are aiming. Clearly not all Epicureans agree, however, since Porphyry himself records an Epicurean argument that human advantage is secured by the use of some animals as food (1.7.1–1.12.7, esp. 1.12.1).

Plutarch's report of the Stoic position tells us that at least some Stoics agreed with the Platonists that it was necessary to abstain from pastries and perfumes (*On Flesh-Eating*, 999ab). Although their reasoning is not explained, presumably the thought is that, since such things are consumed purely for the sake of pleasure, consuming them is incompatible with the Stoic belief that pleasure is indifferent and is a mark of intemperance. Plutarch complains, however, that the Stoic avoidance of pastries and perfumes is inconsistent with their continued consumption of meat, since the very same considerations that result in these items being banned ought also to result in vegetarianism. If Plutarch is accurate in his report that some Stoics avoided pastries and perfumes but continued to consume meat, then it seems that these individuals must have fundamentally disagreed with his Platonist line that meat was eaten purely for pleasure; the Stoics, after all, agree with him that gluttony is damaging for the soul of the glutton.<sup>69</sup> It may be that these Stoics believed that, in eating meat, humans were fulfilling

their role in the order of nature, since lower animals exist in order to feed humans,<sup>70</sup> and that any pleasure that came about as a result of that was unproblematic. Interestingly, however, some later Stoics are in complete agreement with the Platonists and recommend abstention from meat as part of a wider asceticism they believe accords with Stoic principles.<sup>71</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The upshot of all this is that, as I understand them, Plutarch and Porphyry are vegetarians not so much out of concern for the welfare of animals as out of concern for the welfare of human beings—and, in particular, ourselves. In the course of their arguments for vegetarianism, they offer all sorts of reasons that appeal to opponents with different kinds of philosophical assumptions. However, ultimately their main motivations for recommending a vegetarian diet appear to stem from the concerns they find in Plato, and these concerns have little to do with the experiences of the animals that are killed and eaten. Instead our Platonists' concerns are that one does only what one needs to do in order to maintain oneself in bodily existence, and no more. Meat-eating is thought to go beyond this remit in that meat (unlike plant food) can be done without and results in disturbances in the body that make our higher souls' contemplative activity difficult or impossible. While our Platonists' beliefs have clear practical implications for the treatment of animals, with both Plutarch and Porphyry supposing that it is unethical for (at least certain groups of) humans to kill and eat animals, these practical recommendations hinge on what these practices mean for human beings, not on what they mean for the animals themselves.