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Porphyry on Justice towards Animals
Are Animals Rational and Does It Matter for Justice?

Riin Sirkel

The issues concerning vegetarianism or abstinence from animal food are sometimes considered to be contemporary issues, but they were already a feature of the philosophical landscape in Ancient Greece. The Platonists of late antiquity, in particular, take abstinence from animal food to play a central role in philosophical life. The focus of this essay is on Porphyry's account of the just treatment of animals in his treatise *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, which offers the most comprehensive surviving ancient discussion of this issue. More specifically, my aim is to examine Porphyry's views on justice and the rationality of animals, as they are presented in Book 3 of the treatise.

Porphyry begins *On Abstinence from Killing Animals* by presenting different arguments against abstinence from animal food, and responds to some of them in later books of the treatise. He devotes significant attention to the Stoic argument that justice extends only to rational beings on the assumption that only humans and gods are rational. His response to the Stoic argument is found in Book 3, where he introduces a number of considerations to show that other animals are to some extent rational. It is usually assumed that Porphyry thereby commits himself to the view that animals are rational, thus breaking from the tradition of treating rationality as distinctive of humans. This common assumption has been recently challenged in a series of essays by G. Fay Edwards (2014, 2016, 2018), who argues that Porphyry does not himself believe that animals are rational or that justice extends only to rational beings. Rather, Book 3 'constitutes a dialectical attack on the Stoic position, arguing that the *Stoics* ought to believe that animals are rational, given their theory of rationality, and that, because of this, the *Stoics* ought to believe that it is unjust for humans to eat animals, given their theory of justice' (2016: 263). Edwards distinguishes her interpretation from the 'consensus interpretation', according to which Porphyry believes that 'all animals are rational, and that the killing of rational beings for food by other rational beings (such as humans) is unjust' (2016: 265).

So the consensus interpretation, as Edwards presents it, maintains that Porphyry agrees with the Stoics that justice extends only to rational beings, but rejects their denial of reason to animals.¹ According to Edwards' interpretation, Porphyry agrees with the Stoics that animals lack reason, yet rejects their view that justice extends only to rational beings. I agree partly with both interpretations, for I will argue that Porphyry rejects both the Stoic view on justice and their view on animals: he takes animals to be rational to an extent, but does not think that rationality is the reason for treating animals justly. I will develop my interpretation of Porphyry's views on justice and animal rationality in the second and third parts of the chapter, respectively. To begin with, I will examine Porphyry's presentation of the Stoic argument, which sets the stage for his discussion in Book 3 of *On Abstinence*.

10.1 The Stoic Argument

Aristotle and the Stoics are commonly taken to be the central figures in the development of the tradition, according to which rationality is the distinguishing mark of human beings. As Richard Sorabji (1995) has argued, Aristotle's denial of reason to animals provoked a crisis for the philosophy of mind and for theories of morality. If animals lack reason, can they be treated justly? While Aristotle's own answer is sometimes viewed as non-committal, the Stoics make it clear that the denial of reason to animals has ethical consequences that exclude them from the scope of justice.² Contrary to the common understanding of Aristotle, Porphyry thinks that Aristotle takes animals to be rational to an extent (3.6.7), whereas the Stoics deprive animals entirely of reason.³

¹ It should be noted that there is less consensus over his views on justice than over his views on animal rationality, and some scholars have not ascribed to Porphyry the view that justice holds only among rational beings. See Goldin (2001), who anticipates Edwards' interpretation. He argues that the Stoic view 'has no place within Porphyry's own theory of justice' and that Porphyry aims to show the Stoics that 'their own principles entail ethical obligations to animals' (2001: 354). See also Dombrowski (1984), who proposes that sentience is sufficient for being treated justly. See also Tuominen (forthcoming), who argues that the just treatment of animals does not depend on their rationality or sentience: Porphyry does not assume that animals have to 'deserve' their moral status by exemplifying some characteristics with humans.

² Sorabji says: 'Aristotle, I believe, was driven almost entirely by scientific interest in reaching his decision that animals lack reason' (1995: 2). This idea is developed further by Newmyer, who argues that 'Aristotle stopped short of claiming that non-human animals, because of their supposed irrationality, stand outside the sphere of human moral concern' (2017: 53).

³ It should be pointed out that Aristotle's position is less straightforward than it is usually taken to be. Although he is considered to be the originator of the definition of humans as rational animals, we do not find him using this definition in his logical works, where his favourite example of a *differentia* that

According to Porphyry, the Stoics base their account of justice on appropriation (οἰκείωσις): '[T]he followers of Zeno make appropriation the origin of justice' (3.19.2). Roughly, appropriation refers to the process of extending the attitude we have towards our own family (οἰκεῖος) to all humans. What relates all humans is their rationality, and appropriation can only be extended to rational beings, thus leaving out other animals which the Stoics take to be deprived of reason. Accordingly, the Stoics hold that justice extends only to rational beings and excludes non-rational animals. Porphyry presents the Stoic argument in support of this view in Book I of *On Abstinence* as follows:

Our opponents, then, say that justice is at once confounded, and we move that which must not be moved, if we make justice extend (τείνωμεν) not only to the rational (τὸ λογικόν) but also to the irrational (τὸ ἄλογον); that is, if we reckon not only humans and gods as our concern, but also treat as family (οἰκείως) the other beasts which are in no way related to us, instead of using some for work and some for food . . . Someone who deals with such creatures as he would with human beings, sparing them (φειδόμενός) and not harming them (μὴ βλάπτων), imposes on justice a burden it cannot bear . . . For either we do not spare them and injustice becomes necessary for us, or we do not make use of them and life becomes impossible and lacking in resources, and we shall, in a sense, live the life of beasts by rejecting the use of beasts.⁴ (I.4.I 4)

This passage suggests that the Stoics defend the view that justice extends only to rational beings by showing that the attempt to extend it to non-rational animals has absurd consequences. For treating animals justly means 'sparing them' and 'not harming them' (I.4.3), but we cannot maintain our way of life without harming animals: we use some for work, some for food, etc. Consequently, we either harm animals and justice will remain unachievable or refrain from harming them and give up our way of life. This dilemma, then, 'destroys either life or justice' (I.5.3). Hence, animals fall entirely outside the scope of justice, which is to say that the way we treat them is neither just nor unjust.

When the Stoics deny that justice extends to animals, they deny that animals are among those towards whom we act justly or unjustly, whom we harm or refrain from harming. As we will see, when Porphyry affirms that justice extends to animals, he similarly has in mind that animals are among

distinguishes humans from other animals is being two-footed. Further, Newmyer (2017: 46–51) argues that in zoological treatises Aristotle is willing to ascribe to animals a range of mental capacities which he denies to them in his political and ethical works.

⁴ All translations of *On Abstinence* are by Gillian Clark (2000), unless otherwise stated.

those towards whom we are harmless or harmful. This suggests that Porphyry, as well as the Stoics, as their view is presented in the above passage, think of animals as the recipients of justice or just patients, i.e. those towards whom our just or unjust actions are directed. As far as I can tell, Porphyry nowhere suggests that animals could be just agents, i.e. those who act justly or unjustly towards other agents and patients, and who are praised or blamed for their actions.⁵ Rather, he seems to hold that only humans are just agents, and his disagreement with the Stoics is over whether animals are among the recipients of justice. For our purposes, the question of whether animals are the recipients of justice can be seen as equivalent to the question of whether they have a moral standing, so that our actions towards them are morally right or wrong.⁶

10.2 Porphyry on Justice

Let me now examine Porphyry's views on justice, as they emerge from Book 3 of *On Abstinence*. I will focus on the question of whether Porphyry is committed to the view he ascribes to the Stoics, and defend a negative answer to this question, thus siding with Edwards against the consensus interpretation. As we will see, Porphyry makes it reasonably clear that he does not think that justice extends only to rational beings. Near the beginning of Book 3, he says the following:

Moving on, then, to the discussion of justice, since our opponents say that it should extend only to beings like us and therefore rule out the irrational animals, let us present the belief which is true and also Pythagorean, by demonstrating that every soul is rational in that it shares in perception and memory (φέρε ἡμεῖς τὴν ἀληθῆ τε ὁμοῦ καὶ Πυθαγόρειον δόξαν παραστήσωμεν, πᾶσαν ψυχὴν, ἣ μέτεστιν αἰσθήσεως καὶ μνήμης, λογικὴν ἐπιδεικνύντες). Once that is proved, we can reasonably, even on their principles (καὶ κατὰ τοῦτους), extend justice to every animal. (3.1.4; see also 3.18.1)

Porphyry starts his discussion of justice by referring to the Stoic view that justice extends only to rational beings, and purports to demonstrate that 'every soul is rational in that it shares in perception and memory'. If having perception and memory is sufficient for rationality, and animals can be

⁵ Porphyry notes that some animals 'observe justice towards each other' (3.11.1), but he does not develop it further, and nowhere says that animals act justly towards humans.

⁶ It is controversial how Porphyry's notion of justice is related to our notion of morality, but most authors assume the sort of equivalence mentioned above.

shown to have perception and memory, then animals too are rational. If so, then the Stoics would have to agree, following their own principles, that animals fall within the scope of justice. This way of setting up the discussion suggests that Porphyry's primary concern in Book 3 is to undermine the Stoic argument by showing that their theory of justice extends not only to humans but also to animals. That Porphyry himself is not committed to the Stoic theory becomes clear near the end of Book 3, where he indicates that this theory is misguided:

And indeed those who have thought to derive justice from appropriation (οἰκειώσεως) of human beings have, it seems, failed to recognise the particular character of justice: for that would be a kind of philanthropy (φιλανθρωπία), whereas justice lies in restraint and harmlessness towards everything that does not harm (ἡ δὲ δικαιοσύνη ἐν τῷ ἀφεικτικῷ καὶ ἀβλαβεῖ κῆρται παντὸς ὄτου οὖν τοῦ μὴ βλάπτοντος). This is how the just person is conceived of, not that other [i.e. the Stoic] way; so justice, since it lies in harmlessness, extends as far as ensouled beings (ἐμψύχων).⁷ (3.26.9)

Porphyry seems to be saying that in refusing to extend justice beyond humans, the Stoics confuse justice with philanthropy or love of humans. He emphasises that the just person is conceived of as someone who is harmless towards everything that does not harm, and not only towards other human beings, as the Stoics thought. This view of justice invokes two questions in connection with animals. First, Porphyry holds that while this view does not rule out killing animals in self-defence, it does rule out killing harmless animals for food (3.26.1–4). So what precisely makes killing them for food unjust? Second, the way he describes the recipients of justice ('everything that does not harm', 'ensouled beings', 'anything whatsoever') leaves it unclear what is the scope of justice. Specifically, does justice extend beyond animals?

Let us begin with the first question. Porphyry assumes that all tame animals are harmless and says that by killing them for food 'we are unjust in both respects: because we kill them, though they are tame, and because we feast on them, and their death is solely with reference to food' (3.26.4). Since Porphyry holds that killing tame animals is unjust, he must be assuming that killing them is harmful. Following Theophrastus, he says in Book 2 that 'when animals are sacrificed some harm is done to them, in that they are deprived of soul' (2.12.3). This suggests that the harm involved in killing is conceived of as a deprivation of some sort, viz. of one's soul.⁸

⁷ Here Clark's translation is modified, following Tuominen (forthcoming).

⁸ Here he seems to anticipate the harm as a deprivation principle, used by some contemporary animal ethicists. See Regan (1983).

Further, Porphyry holds that killing tame animals ‘solely with reference to food’ does not lessen the injustice involved but increases it. It is his settled position that we do not eat animals out of necessity, but out of pleasure (esp. 3.18 and 3.26). Accordingly, killing harmless animals ‘solely with reference to food’ means depriving them of their souls with the aim of satisfying our desire for bodily pleasure. But clearly ‘to destroy other [creatures] gratuitously and for pleasure is total savagery and injustice’ (3.18.3; also 3.26.5).

The above considerations suggest that killing harmless animals for food is unjust in that it is harmful *to animals*: we deprive them of their souls, just for pleasure.⁹ Yet Porphyry thinks that killing harmless animals for food is unjust also in that it is harmful *to us*, or at least to us philosophers.¹⁰ He takes the highest end of human life to be happiness (εὐδαιμονία) and specifies in Book 1 that happiness resides in ‘the contemplation of that which really is’ (1.29.3). However, the contemplation ‘is not (as someone might think) a collection of arguments or a mass of learning assembled for that purpose’ (1.29.1), but includes exercises, among which is abstinence from animal food. This is important because eating animal food creates desires for bodily pleasures that distract the soul from contemplation, whereas ‘an inanimate, simple diet, available to all . . . offers peace for the reasoning power which provides us with security’ (1.47.2).¹¹ Accordingly, eating animal food is harmful to us, since it poses an obstacle to achieving the highest end of our lives. Indeed, Porphyry says that ‘abstinence from such foods is necessary for the end’ (1.48.1), which suggests that achieving happiness without abstaining is not merely difficult, but impossible.

As to the question concerning the scope of justice, Porphyry is not too concerned with determining its precise scope.¹² He holds that justice

⁹ We can find other claims in Book 3 that support the idea that harmful actions towards animals are harmful *to animals*. Porphyry says that animals, unlike plants, can feel the harm (3.19.2), which helps to explain why we should abstain from harming animals. Further, he says that ‘humans are naturally harmless and inclined to refrain from acquiring pleasures for themselves by harming others’ (3.1.3), where the emphasis is also on harming others.

¹⁰ At 1.27.1 and 2.3.1, Porphyry says that abstinence from animal food is not advised for everyone but for philosophers. This is puzzling since his arguments in favour of abstinence are perfectly general. I believe he means by this that he is addressing philosophers, and his aim is not to convince others to become philosophers and accept their way of life, where abstinence plays a crucial role. For a similar suggestion, see Osborne (2009: 231–2).

¹¹ That animal food creates perceptions and desires that disturb and distract the soul is offered in Book 1 as the main reason for abstinence. See 1.33, 1.38, 1.45. But eating meat is distracting also in that it is more difficult to provide than plant-based food (preparing it takes more time and effort), and it is more expensive (requires cooks, cookware, etc.). See 1.46.

¹² For more on this, see Tuominen (forthcoming). She argues that Porphyry extends justice to all harmless things, including plants.

applies to humans and other animals, but he is also open to the possibility of extending it to plants. This is suggested by his claims to the effect that we should avoid harming plants as far as possible, e.g. we should pick fruit without harming the tree or harvest grain that has fallen and died naturally (3.18.2; 3.26.12). Nevertheless, his theory of justice applies to plants with some reservations. Porphyry holds that while we can live, and live well, without eating meat (3.18.4), it is necessary for us to eat plants. Even so, we should refrain from harming them, for ‘taking necessities does not harm plants, when we take what they let fall, or crops, when we make use of crops from dead plants’ (3.26.12). Further, he thinks that plants cannot be harmed as animals can, since plants do not have sense perception, and so they cannot feel harm, whereas ‘it is the nature of animals to have perceptions, to feel distress, to be afraid, to be hurt, and therefore to be injured’ (3.19.2).¹³ Still, this does not mean that we should destroy plants unnecessarily.

An important consideration in favour of extending harmlessness to all harmless beings, whether they are sentient or not, is Porphyry’s view that philosophers aim to become like god who is completely harmless and self-sufficient (3.26.11). Indeed, contemplation (θεωρία) and becoming like or assimilating to (ὁμοίωσις) god are the two most often emphasised aspects in his account of the philosophical life. How these aspects are related is a difficult question in its own right, but for our purposes it suffices to say that Porphyry seems to identify devoting one’s life to contemplation with becoming like god.¹⁴ Since we are not self-sufficient and need many things to survive, we cannot be completely harmless, but we should nonetheless imitate the harmlessness of god as far as possible. Porphyry says that the person who is harmless towards both humans and animals is more like god than the person who is harmless towards humans alone, and adds that ‘if extension to plants is possible, he preserves the image even more’ (3.27.2). This suggests that assimilation to god requires us to refrain also from harming plants, as far as possible.

Porphyry’s discussion in Book 3 proceeds mainly on the assumption that justice lies in harmlessness towards harmless beings. He is concerned with

¹³ In Book 2, where killing animals is said to be harmful in the sense of depriving animals of their souls (2.12.3), Porphyry says that this does not happen in the case of plants, for ‘if we let them be, they themselves let fall of their fruits, and the taking of fruit does not entail the destruction of plants as when animals lose their souls’ (2.13.1). It is not clear how this reasoning would apply to vegetables that are destroyed.

¹⁴ For further discussion of Porphyry’s views on godlikeness, see Tuominen (forthcoming; manuscript). She argues that assimilation to god is the structuring principle of the whole of *On Abstinence*.

the question of whether justice can be extended to animals, and this is a question about whether animals are among those towards whom one is harmless. However, after saying that justice lies in harmlessness, he specifies that justice is, essentially, a certain state of the soul:

[S]o justice, since it lies in harmlessness, extends as far as ensouled beings. This is why the essence of justice is that the rational rules and the irrational follows (ἡ οὐσία αὐτῆς ἐν τῷ τὸ λογιστικὸν ἄρχειν τοῦ ἀλόγου). For when the rational rules and the irrational follows, it is absolutely necessary for a human being to be harmless towards anything whatsoever. (3.26.10)

Porphyry treats justice as a virtue of an individual human being (rather than as a political notion), and appeals to the Platonic notion of individual justice, which consists in each part of the soul doing its work: reason rules and irrational desires and appetites follow reason.¹⁵ But how does this notion of justice relate to justice as harmlessness? Porphyry's way of thinking about their relation is Aristotelian, given that Aristotle distinguishes between virtuous states of the soul and virtuous actions (or being virtuous and acting virtuously), and holds that virtuous actions result from virtuous states.¹⁶ Similarly, Porphyry seems to think of the relation between harmlessness and the soul ruled by reason as a relation between a just action and a just state of the soul from which the action results. Indeed, he holds that one cannot be just without acting justly, for he says that when the soul is ruled by reason, 'it is absolutely necessary for a human being to be harmless towards anything whatsoever' (3.26.10). Yet he does not make the converse claim, which leaves open the possibility that one can act in a way that appears just without being just, e.g. one may have an uncontrolled desire to eat animal food yet abstain from it since one lacks financial means to satisfy this desire. This may help to explain why Porphyry says that justice is, essentially, a state of the soul where reason rules, rather than harmlessness. If one can be harmless without being just, then justice should not be defined by harmlessness alone. But this does not mean that harmlessness is accidental to justice, so that one can be just without being harmless. As we saw above, Porphyry explicitly rules out this option. Rather, it seems that both the state of the soul and the resulting actions should be included in an account of justice: justice is a state of the soul ruled by reason that makes one be harmless towards all harmless beings.¹⁷

¹⁵ See Plato, *Resp.* IV.442C–444A ¹⁶ See *EN* 2.4.

¹⁷ The details of this general account are controversial. Should we think of harmlessness as a part of the essence of justice, or as a necessary consequence of its essence, i.e. in Aristotle's terminology,

Here some qualifications are in order. First, this account of justice applies to what we might take to be the maximal or highest degree of justice available to us. Porphyry says near the end of Book 3 that the person who is harmless towards all human beings is ‘more rational . . . and thereby also more godlike’ than the person who is harmless only towards family members but aggressive towards everyone else. In this person ‘the irrationality dominates’ (3.27.2), making them unjust, whereas the former person ‘keeps irrationality subjected’ (3.27.2) and is therefore just. Nevertheless, this person is less just than the one who does not restrict harmlessness to human beings, but extends it also to other animals and plants, as far as possible. The latter person is maximally just and rational, which presumably means that in this person reason does not merely keep the irrational desires in check, but reason rules to the extent that the person is free from such desires (cf. 1.31–2).

Second, it is reasonably clear that the above account of justice applies to human beings alone. Even if animals are to some extent rational, Porphyry nowhere suggests that they could cultivate a just state of the soul that disposes them to be harmless towards all harmless beings. Here it is helpful to invoke the distinction between just agents, i.e. those who have a just state of the soul, and the recipients of justice, i.e. those towards whom just actions are directed. Porphyry seems to assume that harmless animals can only be the recipients of justice, whereas humans can be both recipients and agents. Insofar as the just agents are rational beings, there is a sense in which justice requires rationality. Nevertheless, rationality is not required for being a recipient of justice, since Porphyry maintains that we should refrain from harming all harmless beings, regardless of their cognitive capacities.

To end the discussion of justice, it should be pointed out that although I agree with Edwards that Porphyry does not think that justice extends only to rational beings, our interpretations of his views remain different. Let me sketch out the main differences, leaving aside the subtle details.¹⁸ Edwards

a *proprium*? The relationship between essence and *propria* is usually conceived to be explanatory, so that essence explains why the thing has the *propria* it has, but not conversely. Accordingly, one may propose that a just state of the soul explains why a given action is just, e.g. harmlessness is just because it results from the soul ruled by reason. However, it is not clear that the converse does not hold. For if a just state of the soul is obtained through practising harmlessness, then there might be a sense in which harmlessness explains why a given state of the soul is just. This consideration might support the view that both the rule of reason and harmlessness are part of the essence of justice. For a view that harmlessness is a constitutive part of justice, see Tuominen (forthcoming). For a view that the essence of justice is a rule of reason alone, see Edwards (2016).

¹⁸ For further discussion, see Tuominen (forthcoming; manuscript). My disagreement with Edwards centres on animal rationality, whereas Tuominen’s disagreement centres on issues concerning justice.

does not address the question concerning the scope of justice, but assumes that justice does not extend beyond animals, whereas I have argued that Porphyry is willing to extend it to plants. Further, Edwards emphasises that Porphyry defines justice as a rule of reason, and that this definition has implications for an agent's motivations.¹⁹ If I understand her correctly, she suggests that our sole motivation for abstinence from killing and eating animals is our concern with our state of the soul: we do so in order to avoid to be ruled by bodily desires, to have 'a disordered soul-state, in which the rational part of one's soul is not appropriately in control of the lower, irrational parts' (2018: 44). Consequently, we do not abstain out of concern for animals. I have proposed to define justice as a rule of reason that disposes one to be harmless towards harmless beings. While one reason for abstinence concerns our state of the soul, viz. eating animal food distracts the soul from contemplation, another reason concerns animals themselves, viz. killing them for food deprives them of their souls.

10.3 Porphyry on the Rationality of Animals

Let me now turn to the question of whether Porphyry is committed to the view that animals are rational or whether his sole aim in Book 3 is to show that the Stoics have to ascribe rationality to animals, given their theory of rationality. Porphyry addresses the Stoic theory near the beginning of Book 3, where he invokes the distinction the Stoics make between expressive and internal *logos*, and asks which *logos* they take animals to lack:

According to the Stoics there are two kinds of *logos*, the internal (ἐνδιάθετος) and the expressive (προφορικός) . . . Is it *logos* in all respects [that animals lack], both the internal and that which proceeds to the outside? They appear to predicate complete deprivation of *logos* . . . It is self love (φιλαυτία) which leads them to say that all other animals without exception are non rational, meaning by 'non rationality' complete deprivation of *logos*. But if we must speak the truth, not only can *logos* be seen in absolutely all animals, but in many of them it has the groundwork for being perfected. (3.2.1 4)

As their view is presented above, the Stoics take animals to lack both expressive and internal *logos*, thus depriving animals of all rationality. Much of Porphyry's discussion in Book 3 is intended to undermine this view and show that animals have both kinds of *logos*. According to what

¹⁹ It does not become clear what Edwards takes to be the relationship between the rule of reason and harmlessness, viz. whether she takes harmlessness to be a necessary consequence of the essence of justice, or an accident, or something else.

Porphyry claims to be a commonly accepted definition, expressive *logos* is an articulate utterance expressing that which is experienced internally (3.3.2). He defends the view that animal utterances are articulate or have meaning by appealing to the variety and complexity of their utterances (3.4.2–3), their ability to understand us (3.4.4–6; 3.6.1), as well as our ability to understand them (3.4.6–7). He defends the view that animals have internal *logos* or reason by appealing to anatomical similarities between us and animals (3.7.2; 3.25.3), their ability to perceive (3.1.4; 3.8.1; 3.19.2; 3.22.2), remember (3.1.4; 3.10.3; 3.22.1–2), feel pleasure and pain (3.22.2–4) and a variety of emotions such as fear, joy and envy (3.21.6–7; 3.22.3–5). He cites various examples of animal activities and behaviours that exemplify or imply reasoning (3.9.1–5; 3.14.1; 3.15.1–2), makes use of authoritative statements or myths ascribing reasoning to animals (3.16–17), and so on. It is reasonably clear that these considerations are primarily intended to convince the Stoics that animals are not deprived of either expressive or internal *logos*. However, it is far less clear why we should agree with Edwards that this is *all* Porphyry intends to do in Book 3, and that he himself does not believe that these considerations establish rationality in animals.

According to Edwards (2016), Porphyry does not believe that animals are rational because his theory of rationality is significantly different from the Stoic theory. It should be noted that in *On Abstinence* Porphyry does not specify what his theory of rationality is, as distinct from the one ascribed to the Stoics. Edwards reconstructs his theory on the basis of claims Porphyry makes in other works, and expands on the Stoic theory by appealing to other ancient sources. According to Edwards, the Stoics believe that ‘reason can be empirically acquired, and consists in a set of under-developed conceptions of kinds’ (2018: 282). Through obtaining such conceptions the human soul transforms from being completely non-rational at birth to being completely rational. Once the soul is rational, the Stoics hold that ‘*all* of its experiences – even its perceptions, memories and passions – are also rational’ (2016: 278), and define perception, memory and emotions as rational capacities. According to Porphyry’s theory, on the other hand, humans possess reason from birth, and ‘reason is presented as something which possesses complete and accurate knowledge of the forms that are imperfectly encountered in perception, *before* they are so encountered’ (2016: 280–1). Porphyry’s theory of what makes the human soul rational is thus more demanding than the Stoic theory: it is not the possession of sense perception, memory and emotions that makes the soul rational, but the possession of complete and accurate knowledge of

Platonic forms. Since Edwards finds no evidence in *On Abstinence* that animals are able to grasp forms, she concludes that Porphyry denies animals reason.²⁰

There are considerations in favour of Edwards' interpretation. Her reconstruction of the Stoic theory, in particular, has explanatory power in the context of Book 3. First of all, it helps to explain why Porphyry goes to great lengths to show that animals have sense perception and emotions: if animals really do possess these capacities, and these capacities are rational for the Stoics, then animals are rational. Second, it helps to structure Porphyry's reasoning. It is often complained – Edwards (2018: 36) too makes this complaint – that it is not obvious how the various considerations Porphyry lists are supposed to establish rationality in animals. One may now propose that at least some of these considerations are meant to show that animals really do possess the capacities that for the Stoics imply rationality. Take similarities in sense organs (3.7.2) and animal behaviour, e.g. 'lion shows by roaring that it is threatening' (3.5.7) or 'they [animals] show jealousy and rivalry over females, and so do the females over males' (3.13.2). We may understand Porphyry as using an inference to the best explanation: animals' possession of sense perception and emotions offers the best explanation for our similarities in sense organs and their behaviour, e.g. animals display jealousy because they feel jealousy. Here we will not be able to delve into further details of this argument, but hopefully these remarks suffice to show how Edwards' reconstruction of the Stoic theory sheds light on Porphyry's reasoning.

As to her reconstruction of Porphyry's theory of rationality, there is no explicit mention of forms in *On Abstinence*, but Porphyry's description of philosophical life in the second half of Book 1 can be understood as referring to forms. There he emphasises that the goal of philosophical life

²⁰ Another reason Edwards (2014) has for holding that Porphyry is not committed to the view that animals are rational is that it conflicts with his claims in *Isagoge* and *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories*, where he uses 'rational' as a *differentia* that distinguishes humans from other animals. I am not sure how much weight one should give to this consideration. It is not clear why we should assume that Porphyry is committed to examples he uses in works devoted to expounding Aristotle's views. Even if the examples are not selected solely with Aristotle in mind, one might still wonder whether Porphyry is committed to all the examples he uses. Edwards (2014: 38) considers this possibility and dismisses it by appealing to Porphyry's claim in *To Gedalios*, where he recommends using examples in introductory works which are 'known to all and agreed by all in common' (2014: 38). However, this claim can be used also to explain why Porphyry does not apply 'rational' to other animals, for the view that non-human animals are rational was clearly not 'known to all and agreed by all in common'. Indeed, Philoponus uses the idea that *Categories* is an introductory work where Aristotle aims to make himself understandable to ordinary people to explain why not all of Aristotle's claims reveal his true commitments. See Sirkel (2016: 360). Thus, the use of examples 'known to all' need not imply the author's own commitment.

is the ‘contemplation of that which really is’ (1.29.3), and there is little doubt that the objects of contemplation are forms. This relates to the theory of rationality Edwards ascribes to Porphyry, or at least it would seem that the philosophers, in devoting their life to contemplation, exhibit the sort of rationality which consists in complete and accurate knowledge of forms.²¹

Nevertheless, there are also considerations against Edwards’ interpretation. Importantly, the proposal that Porphyry does not believe that animals are rational is difficult to reconcile with some of the claims he makes in Book 3. First of all, he says that in proving or demonstrating that animals are rational he speaks the truth. Consider the claims in passages cited earlier: ‘[L]et us present the belief which is true and also Pythagorean, by demonstrating that every soul is rational in that it shares in perception and memory’ (3.1.4); ‘But if we must speak the truth, not only can *logos* be seen in absolutely all animals, but in many of them it has the groundwork for being perfected’ (3.2.4). Edwards does not comment specifically on these claims, but she proposes that when Porphyry purports to demonstrate that animals are rational, he is saying that ‘his arguments demonstrate that animals are rational . . . *when reason is understood as the Stoics understand it*’ (2016: 288). Perhaps one could understand in the same way the second claim cited above: ‘But if we must speak the truth *about reason as the Stoics understand it*, not only can *logos* be seen in absolutely all animals, but in many of them has the groundwork for being perfected.’ Yet it is difficult to understand in this way the first claim that the belief that every soul is rational in that it shares in perception and memory is ‘true and Pythagorean’. As Tuominen (manuscript) emphasises, Pythagoras is an authority figure in the context of this treatise, which suggests that Porphyry would accept rather than reject this belief.

Further, Porphyry says that ‘Aristotle and Plato, Empedocles and Pythagoras and Democritus, and all who have sought to grasp the truth about animals, have recognised that they share in *logos*’ (3.6.7). Porphyry is known to adopt a position that the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle are in harmony (‘harmony thesis’), and here he says that Plato and Aristotle

²¹ It should be pointed out while Edwards’ reconstruction of Porphyry’s theory of rationality is plausible, it does not rule out alternative reconstructions. In the scholarship of Plato, there is a divide between those who hold that the grasp of forms is required for rationality, and those who hold that it is required for knowledge. In the latter case, one may be rational without grasping forms, though not have knowledge. A bulk of evidence that Edwards (2016: 279–83) cites in support of her reconstruction is compatible with both interpretive options, and more work should be done to rule out the second option.

among others agree that animals have reason.²² This claim invokes questions in its own right, since it is not obvious in what way these different philosophers would consider animals to share in reason.²³ But what is important for our purposes is that Porphyry holds that Plato too agrees that animals share in reason, and so he does not think that the recognition of rationality in animals conflicts with the view that rationality in humans resides in knowledge of forms.

Another consideration against committing Porphyry to the view that only humans are rational is that it makes him vulnerable to the same kind of objections he levels against the Stoics. Porphyry says that ‘it is self-love which leads them to say that all other animals without exception are non-rational. . .’ (3.2.4). He seems to contrast claims based on self-love with claims based on evidence. Since there are strong considerations supporting the view that animals have expressive and internal *logos*, and ‘a well-informed person concedes understanding [to animals] on this evidence’ (3.6.6), the Stoic claim that *only* humans are rational must be due to self-love, a sort of bias in favour of humans. Hence, Porphyry seems to accuse the Stoics of what Tuominen (manuscript) has characterised as speciesism: privileging humans and their cognitive capacities over those of other species, solely on the basis of species membership.

This accusation is implicit also in a line of reasoning that is frequently used in Book 3.²⁴ Porphyry argues that if we do not understand animal utterances or their reasoning, it does not follow that animal utterances lack meaning or that animals do not have reason (3.3.4–5; 3.4.4; 3.5.2; 3.II.3). The denial of meaningful utterances to other animals on the grounds that we do not understand them is another expression of self-love: ‘[I]t is as if ravens claimed that theirs was the only language, and we lack *logos* because we say things that are not meaningful to them’ (3.5.3). Furthermore, to infer that other animals are completely deprived of rationality because they lack human rationality begs the question; if the notion of being human is built into the notion of rationality, then the question of whether non-humans are rational is decided in advance. Indeed, if rationality depends

²² For further discussion of the harmony thesis, see Karamanolis (2006a: ch. 7).

²³ It is reasonable to suppose that in the case of Pythagoras and Empedocles their belief that animals share in reason is connected with their belief in transmigration of human souls into other animals. See Osborne (2009: 43–54). Plato’s views are less straightforward, but it is reasonably non-controversial that Plato too accepts this belief. See, e.g., Osborne (2009: 54–7), Sorabji (1995: 10). Porphyry’s views are highly controversial, and several scholars think that he does not believe in transmigration. See Edwards (2018: 32–3), Tuominen (manuscript).

²⁴ Newmyer (2017: 68) emphasises that this mode of argument is not encountered in Plutarch. This suggests that it may originate with Porphyry.

on species membership, then ‘the gods will be deprived of rationality by not being human, or else we will if the gods are rational’ (3.8.8).

Relatedly, Porphyry uses a version of the so-called argument from marginal cases. He mentions examples of capacities that are supposed to distinguish humans from other animals and points out that these capacities do not belong to all humans (3.15.4; 3.4.6; 3.19.4). He even considers the possibility that not all humans are rational: ‘We see that many people live only by perception, having no intellect or *logos*, and that many surpass the most terrifying beasts in savagery and anger and aggression’ (3.18.3). If justice applies to these humans, despite their lack of rationality or their harmfulness, then wouldn’t it be inconsistent to deny justice to ‘the ox that ploughs, the dog that lives with us, the creatures that feed us with milk and clothe us with fleece’ (3.18.3)? Porphyry also questions our ability to know that animals lack the capacities in question: ‘But, they say, animals do not deliberate . . . And how could anyone show that animals do not deliberate? No one can give proof of this, and those who have written about particular kinds of animals have shown the opposite’ (3.15.4). Presumably, he thinks that we cannot prove that animals lack a capacity in question in the sense of not being able to substantiate this claim with evidence (research, he says, might support the opposite claim). Again, if the claim that only humans have a given capacity is not based on evidence, then it seems to be based on self-love.

How would Porphyry be vulnerable to these difficulties, if he were committed to the view Edwards ascribes to him? As was said before, Edwards (2016: 281) emphasises that Porphyry’s theory of what makes humans rational is more demanding than the Stoic theory: it is not the possession of sense perception, but the possession of complete and accurate knowledge of forms that explains why humans are rational. Whereas sense perception is possessed by humans and animals in common, only humans have knowledge of forms. Thus, only humans are rational for Porphyry. Here one might worry about the circularity of the reasoning involved. For what follows from the premises that human rationality resides in knowledge of forms and animals lack knowledge of forms is that animals lack *human* rationality. It does not follow that they lack rationality altogether, unless it is assumed that human rationality is the only rationality there is. But if so, then it is hardly surprising that rationality is not found in non-human animals.

Further, we may ask whether all humans have complete and accurate knowledge of forms. Even if they do (say, latently), it would nonetheless seem that not all of them have access to this knowledge, as is suggested

also by Porphyry's sharp contrast in Book 1 (1.27–8) between philosophers and ordinary people (οἱ πολλοί), who devote their lives to chasing bodily pleasures, and whose 'concept of good and bad relates to external things and to bodily concerns' (1.28.4). Why should we privilege these people over animals, so that animals who lack access to knowledge of forms are deemed to be entirely devoid of reason? Indeed, how do we even know that animals do not have any access to forms? As Edwards describes Porphyry's position, 'reason is presented as something which possesses complete and perfect knowledge of the forms that are imperfectly encountered in perception. . . .' (2016: 280). This invites us to make a dialectical move similar to the one Porphyry uses against the Stoics: if forms are imperfectly encountered in perception, and animals possess perception, then animals have access to forms, even if it is imperfect. So why isn't Porphyry's restriction of rationality to humans any less self-serving than the Stoic restriction?

Thus, we face the following situation. There is textual evidence in Book 3 of *On Abstinence* in support of ascribing to Porphyry the view that animals are rational. There is textual evidence in his other works in support of ascribing to Porphyry the view that human rationality consists in knowledge of forms. Edwards (2016) holds that these views do not fit together, and her solution is to deny that Porphyry is committed to the view that animals are rational. Nonetheless, as we have seen, this denial runs into textual difficulties and makes Porphyry vulnerable to the same kind of objections he levels against the Stoics. In what follows, I will put forth another proposal, one that accommodates both of these views, and allows Porphyry to ascribe to animals a certain level of rationality without making his account of human rationality any less demanding.

Porphyry emphasises in Book 3 that rationality admits of degrees: one can be more or less rational. This is true not only of animals but of humans too. As we saw earlier, Porphyry holds that the person who is harmless towards all human beings is more rational than the person who is harmless only towards family members, and less rational than the person who is harmless towards all harmless beings. Most often Porphyry applies the idea that rationality admits of degrees to animals, holding that animals are rational, even if not as rational as humans:

Let it be agreed, then, that the difference is a matter of more or less (μᾶλλον καὶ ἥττον), not of complete deprivation, nor of a have and a have not. But just as in the same species one has a healthier body and another a less healthy, . . . so it is for souls: one is good, another bad. Among bad souls some are more so, others less so. Nor is there sameness among good souls;

Socrates is not good in the same way as Aristotle or Plato, and in people of similar reputation there is not sameness. So, even if we think more than they do, animals are not deprived of thinking, any more than partridges are to be deprived of flying because falcons fly more, or indeed falcons because the goshawk flies more than they do and all other birds do. (3.8.7 8; also 3.23.6 8; 3.7.1)

Here it would be difficult to understand Porphyry as saying that rationality admits of degrees, given the Stoic theory of rationality, since he makes it clear that the Stoics take animals to be completely deprived of reason (see 3.2.1–4).²⁵ They treat rationality as an all-or-nothing affair, in much the same way as they are commonly taken to treat virtue as an all-or-nothing affair.²⁶ In the above passage, Porphyry rejects both of these views, holding that just like some people are better or more virtuous than others, so also rationality admits of a more and a less. It is thus reasonable to propose that Porphyry is himself committed to the view that rationality admits of degrees. This view would accommodate both the belief that animals are rational in that they have perception and memory, as well as the theory of human rationality that Edwards ascribes to Porphyry. Assuming he is committed to this theory, he can say that philosophers' contemplation of forms is one (and presumably the highest) expression of rationality, whereas animals' ability to perceive, remember, etc. is another expression of rationality.²⁷ On this view, we give up the speciesist assumption that animals are completely deprived of rationality, unless they possess human rationality. Rather, we may think of rationality as a spectrum: at the one end are philosophers; at the other end, certain kinds of animals; and in the

²⁵ One could perhaps propose that Porphyry thinks that the Stoics should accept this view, once they realise that their theory of rationality applies to animals too. Yet, it is not obvious why he would think so. If he is successful in arguing that animals possess the capacities that are rational for the Stoics, then the Stoics would have to agree that animals are rational just like humans. Is the worry here that this view is counterintuitive? Why should Porphyry worry about that? Also, in the above passage he says that virtue admits of degrees, and here the proposal that the Stoics should accept this view seems *ad hoc*. Rather, it seems that Porphyry is trying to convince the Stoics that the lesser degree of rationality should not be taken as an indication of its complete absence.

²⁶ See 3.22.8, where Porphyry, following Plutarch, ascribes this view about virtue to the Stoics.

²⁷ Admittedly, Porphyry's discussion does not give us enough information about how to fill out the details of this claim. He might think of rationality as a set of capacities shared by both humans and animals but exercised in different ways. Accordingly, humans can be said to be more rational in that they are able to use rationality in ways animals are not. For example, one could propose that both humans and animals are able to grasp forms, but humans are able to contemplate, whereas animals grasp forms deficiently via senses (or due to transmigration, if this is the preferred theory). Alternatively, Porphyry might hold that animals do not need to have the same set of capacities as humans in order to count as rational: they share in common some capacities, but not all. Accordingly, humans can be said to be more rational in that they have certain capacities (say, capacity to grasp forms) that animals lack.

middle, various kinds of animals and non-philosophers. As a side remark, it should be pointed out that it is not unheard of for a Platonist to be committed to such a view. Even though Porphyry claims to take the view that rationality admits of degrees from Aristotle (see 3.7.1), Plutarch defends a similar view, and no one (as far as I know) has called into doubt his commitment to it.²⁸

If Porphyry is committed to the view that rationality admits of degrees and animals are to some extent rational, if this view expresses the truth, then it is easy to understand the claims he makes in Book 3. His commitment to this view would help to explain why he says that he speaks the truth, when claiming that animals are rational. It would also explain why he thinks that different philosophers, including Plato and Aristotle, would agree with this claim: they might agree that animals are rational to some extent, even if this is not all there is to rationality. This view would also minimise the seriousness of the charge of speciesism, for even if humans are able to express their rationality in distinctively human ways, it does not follow that animals are completely deprived of rationality by not being human.

In light of these considerations, we may propose that Porphyry is indeed committed to the view that animals are to some extent rational. This interpretation has explanatory power on two fronts. Since it takes on board Edwards' proposal that Porphyry is concerned to show that the Stoic theory of rationality implies that animals are rational, it has the same explanatory advantages as Edwards' interpretation, e.g. it helps to explain why Porphyry aims to show that animals possess perception and emotions. But since this interpretation rejects Edwards' proposal that Porphyry's *only* concern is to trap the Stoics into admitting that animals are rational, this interpretation is also able to explain why Porphyry makes claims to the effect that animals truly are rational.

Let me end by speculating about Porphyry's motivation for defending the rationality of animals. According to the consensus interpretation, the motivation for defending this view comes from Porphyry's commitment to the view that justice holds only among rational beings. If he does not think that rationality matters for justice, then why should he defend the view that animals are rational? Here two considerations are most relevant. First, Porphyry might accept the view that animals are to some extent rational

²⁸ See Plutarch's *On the Cleverness of Animals* 963B. Porphyry transcribes a long section of this work (959C–963F) in Book 3 (20.7–24.5). Even if Porphyry gets this view from Plutarch, this need not mean that he himself is not committed to it. Rather, it may be that this view was more common among the Platonists of late antiquity than we have so far realised.

as the view that is supported by the best available evidence.²⁹ He emphasises that one should grant rationality on the basis of evidence that he provides, and indicates that the Stoics ignore the evidence and deny animals reason due to self-love.³⁰ Second, although Porphyry's discussion in Book 3 is primarily intended to undermine the Stoic argument, some of the considerations he introduces in support of animal rationality relate to arguments offered by other schools of philosophy (such as Epicureans, see 3.13) and by ordinary people. In going through a long list of capacities and activities of animals, he might address all those who want to make justice dependent on some allegedly distinctively human capacity (e.g. language use, ability to make contracts, ability to learn skills, etc.). If animals too are capable of such things, then one cannot deny them justice on these grounds. So all in all, we may conclude that Porphyry's discussion in *On Abstinence* places him in the small yet vocal group of ancient thinkers who challenge the longstanding tradition in Greek philosophy of denying animals justice and rationality.³¹

²⁹ Similarly, some contemporary thinkers hold that animals are rational (or conscious), without taking this to have straightforward ethical implications for their treatment. See, e.g., Tye (2017).

³⁰ This point is also emphasised by Tuominen (manuscript).

³¹ I am grateful for discussion and suggestions to Miira Tuominen, G. Fay Edwards, participants of the Tartu Workshop in Ancient Philosophy (2018), and the UVM Ethics Reading Group. Above all, I am grateful to Justin Zylstra, my partner in life and philosophy. This was the last essay I was able to discuss with him, and this makes it a very special essay indeed.