

## Vegetarianism

It seems highly plausible that many people (perhaps even the overwhelming majority of the population) in the Graeco-Roman lands surrounding the Mediterranean would have existed upon a predominantly vegetarian diet.<sup>1</sup> By this is signified not a diet from which animal flesh had been deliberately omitted, but rather one in which meat or fish would have been a rare occurrence owing to its relative scarcity and perhaps elevated price. The terms ‘meat’ and ‘fish’ should be used with a measure of caution. This thesis will look at each separately, regarding them as distinct and separate categories. Wilkins argues for the scholar to consider the separation between land and sea creatures in antiquity, as they each possess diverse and independent statuses:

Fish are part of the wild, which is distinct from the tame and the farmed. The wild is divided into fish, birds and animals for hunting... Farmed animals were sacrificed; wild animals were not.<sup>2</sup>

He goes on to assert:

If fish were outside this order and were part of the raw nature with which mankind was always struggling, then there was no need for fish sacrifice, no need for equal distribution of flesh. In other words, fish were part of the secular world.<sup>3</sup>

For Vernant, fish cannot be a part of the sacrificial ritual:

the ox slain and carved by Prometheus at the first sacrifice is the domestic animal closest to man, the animal best integrated into his sphere of existence,

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<sup>1</sup> See previous chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Wilkins (1993), 192. I am not sure whether the division is as bold and as clear-cut as Wilkins states. Puppies were sacrificed to Hecate; Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* LII; LXVIII (also for the sacrifice of dogs during the festival of the Lupercalia). Should one regard a hunting dog in antiquity as a wild or domesticated animal? It lives in close proximity to humans, so perhaps should not be regarded as wild.

<sup>3</sup> Wilkins (1993), 192.

especially when it is harnessed to the plow to open the furrows of the earth. The ox is thus the very opposite of the wild animals that men hunt like enemies rather than sacrifice. In principle, domestic animals are sacrificed with their consent, as beings that can, by their proximity to men, if not represent them directly, at least serve as their delegates.<sup>4</sup>

Burkert sees importance in the area of biological difference:

Significantly, the victims which are pleasing to the gods are warm-blooded animals, mostly large animals; fish, though much more important for everyday sustenance, are rarely if ever sacrificed.<sup>5</sup>

If we accept Wilkins' categorisation of marine life, then fish cannot be treated with meat as a single entity. They will need to be treated separately.

If there existed a dearth of meat in quotidian diet, it seems reasonable to suppose that, given the opportunity to consume it, such an occasion would have been anticipated avidly. Poverty of resources and environmental constraints, rather than an aversion or distaste for animal flesh, would surely have accounted for its paucity in the diet. Again, prudence should be exercised when attempting to generalise about some hypothetical 'average' consumer in the ancient world.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps, at this stage, the only way that this 'average' consumer may be defined is that he or she was neither completely destitute nor hyper-wealthy. The former may have been so close to absolute penury as to almost completely discount the possibility of them exercising any form of consumer purchase power (meat would have been entirely beyond their fiscal resources).<sup>7</sup> The latter would have possessed an almost limitless access to resources,

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<sup>4</sup> Vernant (1989), 37. See also Vernant (1991), 298-9: 'We know that in Greece wild beasts were not normally sacrificed. They were killed without scruple like enemies in the hunt. The meat, therefore, from this ritualised slaughter-sacrifice-belongs exclusively to domestic species: pigs, goats, sheep and cattle'.

<sup>5</sup> Burkert (1985), 59.

<sup>6</sup> 'Consumer' in this instance is not meant to be equivalent with the term as used within modern capitalist economies.

<sup>7</sup> One should also not discount the system of bartering or 'services rendered' in transactions; monetary exchange would not have been the only form of commerce. Also, some (perhaps even most) access to a

making the question of the local price or availability of meat products almost meaningless (meat could be imported from elsewhere and from greater distances).

This is not to imply, of course, that there did not exist individuals or groups who chose to pursue a diet free from the flesh of animals. This would be misleading. There were some who espoused an anti-carnivorous diet (be that in actual practice or through the medium of literary texts). It is not entirely clear whether those who refused to eat meat also objected to any product that came from the utilisation of animals, living or dead. Many modern foods have a substantial amount of additives in them, often derived from animals. The modern vegetarian is required to be eternally vigilant, scanning the labels on food packaging for these substances. Dalby highlights this in the case of the use of rennet (enzymes derived from the stomachs of calves) in cheese, and *garum*.<sup>8</sup> For ancient peoples, the latter may have been particularly problematic, as it was probably one of the principal methods of adding saltiness to the flavour of foods. Honey may also have posed problems if it were felt that honey was the result of the exploitation of bees, rather than the collection of a natural product.<sup>9</sup> These obstacles may have proved less insurmountable than first appears; if the purpose of these substances was to improve the palatability of foods, such considerations may have been thought of as irrelevant for those vegetarians of an ascetic bent.

It would be fair to say that those advocating a vegetarian diet were not numerous, and that frequently, those that attempted to argue for the utility and merits of such a diet were probably viewed, at the very least, as oddities or religious eccentrics, isolated and often operating at the very margins of society. As Osborne notes:

...refusing meat may not be difficult in practical ways, but yet profoundly cranky as regards the social, cultural and religious expectations of the community.<sup>10</sup>

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meat source would have come from public sacrifice, however limited or intermittent this access may have been.

<sup>8</sup> Dalby (2003), 341.

<sup>9</sup> The exploitation of bees may not have been an issue if the honey were collected from the wild, rather than being the product of bee-keeping.; Porph. *Abst.* I. 21. See Wilkins and Hill (2006), 160-161.

<sup>10</sup> Osborne (1995), 222.

They may have even been regarded with suspicion and hostility, with their beliefs being perceived as a threat to established systems of ideology. Their unconventional views may have carried a whiff of exoticism, and thus may have come across as somehow 'unpatriotic'. The fact that many of those writers and thinkers who espoused a vegetarian credo were from territories that were predominantly Greek speaking will have important ramifications for this study of cultural identity. It makes connections between what was regarded as constituting 'normal' behaviour and what was 'other'. Eating meat (or rather *not* eating meat) would have had deeply emotive connotations. The act of sacrifice to the god was an absolutely integral part of Graeco-Roman religion. This is not to say that the sacrificial offering always had to be an animal. Sometimes a beast was not available, or a choice was made to sacrifice some other item. Sometimes the rites of a particular god did not demand a blood sacrifice. Iamblichus refers to the altar of Apollo on Delos as ὄς μόνος ἀνάιμακτός ἐστιν.<sup>11</sup> The implication is that animal sacrifice is the norm. From Diogenes Laertius, citing Aristotle's *Constitution of Delos*, we learn that this altar is one of two shrines to Apollo on Delos, only one of which is dedicated to bloodless sacrifice (Ἀπόλλωνος τοῦ γενέτορος).<sup>12</sup> Iamblichus goes on to recount Pythagoras' exhortation to the women of Croton as to the manner and the content of their religious sacrifices. He wishes them to sacrifice flat cakes (πόπινα), ground barley cakes (ψαιστά) and honeycombs (κηρία). He stipulated that the gods should not be honoured by slaughter and death (φόνω δὲ καὶ θανάτῳ τὸ δαιμόνιον μὴ τιμᾶν).<sup>13</sup>

Animal sacrifice held immense symbolic importance, particularly for the Greeks. The butchery of the animal and its division into offerings for the gods, and what is appropriate for man made concrete the hierarchical triptych of god-man-animal. This ritual was a continual replaying and renewing of the covenant that existed between mortals and immortals. Vernant acknowledges the weight of the establishment of the act of sacrifice as laid out in Hesiod's *Theogony*.<sup>14</sup> :

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<sup>11</sup> Iambl. *VP* 8.35: 'which alone is unstained in blood'.

<sup>12</sup> Diog. Laert. *Pythag.* VIII.13.

<sup>13</sup> Iambl. *VP* 11.54. For Greek bloodless sacrifice, see Bruit (1983).

<sup>14</sup> Hes. *Theog.* 535-565.

the ritual sets the incorruptible bones aside for the gods and sends them, consumed by the flames, on high in the form of fragrant smoke and gives men the meat of an already lifeless animal, a piece of dead flesh, so that they may satisfy for a moment their constantly awakening hunger. Normally, meat cannot be eaten except on the occasion of a sacrifice and by following its rules. The presence of the gods sanctions this feast of fleshly food, but only to the extent that what truly belongs to the gods is set aside for them: the very life of the animal, released from the bones with the soul at the moment the victim falls dead and gushing forth in the blood splattering the altar- in short, those parts of the animal that, like the aromatics with which they burned, escape the putrefaction of death. By eating the edible pieces, men, even as they reinvigorate their failing strength, recognise the inferiority of their mortal condition and confirm their complete submission to the Olympians whom the Titan believed he could dupe with impunity when he established the model of the first sacrifice'.<sup>15</sup>

A rejection of meat was, in effect, a gross act of impiety; a repudiation of the sacred act of communion between mortals and gods. If ancient religious ritual may be interpreted predominantly as a communal act, a public covenant between man and deity, in which the former seeks guidance or protection from the latter in order to ensure the continued survival and prosperity of the body politic (or at least protection from adversity and manifestations of divine malevolence), a dismissal of its significant ritual act could be interpreted as a renunciation of the gods, even a betrayal of the whole community. The refusal to consume the meat may have acted as a very real catalyst for alienation from the community. As Vernant notes:

Society always acts as the mediating link between the faithful and the god. It is not a direct link between two individual personalities but is rather the expression of the relationship which links a god to a human group-a particular household, a city, a type of activity, a certain place in the land. If

the individual is banished from the domestic altars, excluded from the temples of the town, and proscribed from the territory of his fatherland, he is thereby cut off from the world of the divine. He loses both his social identity and his religious essence: he is reduced to nothing.<sup>16</sup>

Burkert also sees in sacrificial rites a method of ensuring group cohesion, with the roots of ritual in the practices of hunting.<sup>17</sup> Animal sacrifice involves the approximation of the wild in the domestic, and an expiation of a shared sense of shame about animal slaughter.<sup>18</sup> The act of animal sacrifice is the crucible for forging community bonds in Greek religion:

From a psychological and ethnological point of view, it is the communally enacted aggression and shared guilt which creates solidarity.<sup>19</sup>

The assumption that has been made so far is that, whilst the nature of human diet within the geographical and chronological scope of this thesis was essentially a vegetarian one, man was not necessarily ‘hardwired’ in this way. He possessed carnivorous impulses, and if these were given free rein, then he would eagerly obey their dictates. At a later stage, this thesis will examine some of the arguments that were advanced for the negative effects of meat ingestion upon the body.<sup>20</sup> Many of them stressed the detrimental moral and ideological implications of a meat diet. Medically, few objections were raised about meat *per se*, only concerning the flesh of certain animals. Galen spends considerable time in examining the various types of animals that he knew were eaten throughout the empire.<sup>21</sup> Galen’s objections to the consumption of the flesh of beasts such as camels and donkeys stem predominantly from questions of nutrition, but

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<sup>15</sup> Vernant in Detienne and Vernant (1989), 25.

<sup>16</sup> Vernant (1965), 324.

<sup>17</sup> Burkert (1983), 35-48; (1985), 58.

<sup>18</sup> Gould (1985), 18: ‘Walter Burkert...has pointed out how much of sacrificial ritual makes sense only by assuming a deep-seated sense of anxiety over the taking of animal life’.

<sup>19</sup> Burkert (1985), 58. See also Burkert (1983), 38 for the frequent rule that he who performs the sacrifice should abstain from eating.

<sup>20</sup> See pages 81-82; 101-103.

<sup>21</sup> Gal. *De al. fac.* 6.660-742 K.

also from morality. The meat of camel and ass affect not just the body but the soul as well.<sup>22</sup> Garnsey notes that the only meat for which he (Galen) ethically had an aversion was human flesh:

Greeks and Romans were prepared to eat just about anything. Or, name something edible, and someone or other would not shrink from putting it into a recipe. This message is vividly conveyed by Galen's discussion of land animals as foods. The only sign of a taboo in the Galen passage involves cannibalism. People are sometimes fed human flesh, unknowingly, in a 'pub meal'. Galen tacitly recognises that 'eating people is wrong', but he is not upset about it.<sup>23</sup>

An alternative view did exist. It posited that man's consumption of animal protein was, in fact, an aberration from his vegetarian and fruitarian origins. This notion maintained that mankind's dietary default mode was that of a non-carnivore. In order to make sense of this, it is necessary to consider the two diverse ways in which the myths of the Greeks explained the genesis and development of humanity. One exegesis regards the path of human history as one of progression from brutish and primordial roots, the other as an inexorable slide into degeneration from an idyllic state of bliss:

The two key elements in understanding the ancient vegetarian age are the myth of the ages and the story of Prometheus. These two elements are often depicted in conflict, with degeneration away from the golden age being the point of the myth of the ages and progress from original primitivism being the point of the Prometheus story.<sup>24</sup>

The latter explanation proffers the genesis of mankind as being a condition of bestiality, man being compelled to forage for food in order to survive. Man's diet was a

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<sup>22</sup> Gal. *De al. fac.* 6.664 K.

<sup>23</sup> Garnsey (1994), 84; Gal. *De al. fac.* 6.663 K.

<sup>24</sup> Dombrowski (1984a), 19. Compare this with the Hesiodic version, where man originally feasts with the gods; *Op.* 109-126.

limited one; he was unable to utilise the flesh of animals owing to his inability to transform it from its raw inedible state into a product that was more easily assimilated into the human body. He lacked knowledge of fire, and thus, the art of cooking. This tale firmly rejects the idea that man's digestive system can process raw flesh.<sup>25</sup> This is not entirely true. One may cite modern dishes such as beef carpaccio, steak tartare or sashimi to prove the contrary. Some nutritionists actually extol the virtues of a 'raw' diet. For many in the ancient world, the consumption of raw meat may have conjured up mental associations with soldiers under siege conditions, forced by circumstance and lack of resources to consume almost anything in order to survive. Alexander the Great's troops, in pursuit of Bessus, were forced to eat the raw flesh of camels and pack animals.<sup>26</sup> Plutarch relates in his life of Brutus how shipwrecked sailors are forced to eat the sails and the tackles of their ships through hunger.<sup>27</sup> It is Plutarch who makes the indigestibility of raw flesh for humans one of the foundations of his arguments against meat eating. This inability to process a raw cadaver is combined with a lack of natural killing faculties such as sharp claws and teeth. In his tract *On the eating of flesh (de esu carnum)*, he makes this explicit in two passages:

ὅτι γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνθρώπων κατὰ φύσιν τὸ σαρκοφαγεῖν, πρῶτον μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν σωμάτων δηλοῦται τῆς κατασκευῆς. οὐδενὶ γὰρ ἔοικε τὸ ἀνθρώπου σῶμα τῶν ἐπὶ σαρκοφαγία γεγονότων, οὐ γρυπότης χείλους, οὐκ ὀξύτης ὄνυχος, οὐ τραχύτης ὀδόντος πρόεστιν, οὐ κοιλίας εὐτονία καὶ πνεύματος θερμότης, πέψαι καὶ κατεργάσασθαι δυνατὴ τὸ βαρὺ καὶ κρεῶδες.<sup>28</sup>

Man needs to alter the nature and structure of raw flesh before he is able (or willing) to consume it:

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<sup>25</sup> Hippoc. *De prisc. med.* 3.4.

<sup>26</sup> Ael. *VH.12.* 37.

<sup>27</sup> Plut. *Brut.* 47.

<sup>28</sup> Plut. *De esu carn.* 994 F: 'That the eating of flesh is not according to man's nature is made clear from the constitution of the body. In no way therefore is the body of man like those born to flesh eating. He does not have a hooked beak, nor sharp claws, nor jagged teeth. He does not have a strong belly nor warm breathe to cook and assimilate a heavy diet of meat'.

ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἄψυχον ἄν τις φάγοι καὶ νεκρὸν οἶόν ἔστιν, ἀλλ' ἔψουσιν  
ὀπτῶσι μεταβάλλουσι διὰ πυρός καὶ γεῦσις ἐξαπατηθεῖσα προδέξεται  
τ' ἀλλότριον.<sup>29</sup>

The Promethean incendiary gift presented mankind with the means to advance beyond the limitations of his restricted dietary palate. He was now able to consume something other than raw foods. He was able to hunt, cook and eat meat. The Hesiodic myth is just that, not a documentary account of early meat eating practices. It is unclear from Hesiod whether the abundance of fruit meant that man had no need to tend animals. Lonsdale sees an identification between pastoralism and Greek self-identity:

Epithets for regions and individuals, such as 'rich in flocks', and the memorable bucolic characters throughout Greek legend indicate that the Greeks liked to see one façade of their national identity in terms of animal husbandry. In epic and lyric poetry an epithet often accorded to the earth is simply 'mother of the flocks'. Greek myths and legends are so permeated by pastoralism as to convey the impression that virtually everybody, including gods, heroes, thieves, beggars, and even monsters put in his time as a shepherd.<sup>30</sup>

Dombrowski sees the situation as more one of peaceful coexistence between man and other animals:

It is important to note that these men did not even have to work for food, as they were fed out of a boundless cornucopia. Because the fecund earth bore them abundant fruit (*karpon*), they could live in ease and peace on the land *with* their flocks.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Plut. *De esu carn.* 995 B: 'But when it is lifeless and dead no one eats the flesh as it is, but they boil and roast it, changing it through fire and drugs, deceiving taste into admitting what is alien'.

<sup>30</sup> Lonsdale (1979), 148.

<sup>31</sup> Dombrowski (1984a), 20. This still does not explain the *nature* of the relationship between man and

Thus, in this scenario, a crucial stage of man's development from primitive to civilised being-the discovery of fire-is intimately connected with the transformation of his diet from an exclusively vegetarian to a carnivorous one.

The myth, as recounted by Hesiod, is not entirely without ambiguity. Man is punished for Prometheus' deception by being plagued with all manner of evils. Strife, fear and death are his rewards:

Πρὶν μὲν γὰρ ζωέσκον ἐπὶ χθονὶ φύλ' ἀνθρώπων  
νόσφιν ἄτερ τε κακῶν καὶ ἄτερ χαλεποῖο πόνοιο  
νούσων τ' ἀργαλέων, αἳ τ' ἀνδράσι Κῆρας ἔδωκαν.<sup>32</sup>

And yet, these ills may, in fact, be a blessing in disguise. They force man out of his indolent state of blissful idleness, and compel him to toil and endure hardship in order to ensure his survival. This labour and suffering may serve to bring him closer to the gods:

ἔξ ἔργων δ' ἄνδρες πολύμηλοι τ' ἀφνειοί τε·  
καὶ ἐργαζόμενοι πολὺ φίλτεροι ἀθανάτοισιν.  
ἔργον δ' οὐδὲν ὄνειδος, ἀεργίη δέ τ' ὄνειδος.<sup>33</sup>

Elsewhere, Hesiod recounts an alternative chronicle of the history of the world. Here man also begins from a utopian environment:

Χρῦσεον μὲν πρῶτιστα γένος μερόπων ἀνθρώπων  
ἀθάνατοι ποίησαν Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχοντες.  
οἳ μὲν ἐπὶ Κρόνου ἦσαν, ὅτ' οὐρανῶ ἔμβασίλευεν·  
ὥστε θεοὶ δ' ἔζων ἀκηδέα θυμὸν ἔχοντες

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animal. Hesiod is vague upon the subject; Hes. *Op.* 106-120.

<sup>32</sup> Hes. *Op.* 90-92: 'For previously tribes of men used to live upon the earth, removed away from evils and difficult labours and painful diseases, which Fate gave to men'.

<sup>33</sup> Hes. *Op.* 308-309; 311: 'From labours men become rich in sheep and wealthy: and working they are much more loved by the immortals. Work is not a disgrace, but idleness is'.

νόσφιν ἄτερ τε πόνων καὶ οἰζύος· οὐδέ τι δειλὸν  
 γῆρας ἐπῆν, αἰεὶ δὲ πόδας καὶ χεῖρας ὁμοῖοι  
 τέρπον ἐν θαλίησι κακῶν ἔκτοσθεν ἀπάντων·  
 θνήσκον δ' ὥσθ' ὕπνω δεδμημένοι· ἐσθλὰ δὲ πάντα  
 τοῖσιν ἔην· καρπὸν δ' ἔφερε ζείδωρος ἄρουρα  
 αὐτομάτη πολλόν τε καὶ ἄφθονον· οἳ δ' ἐβελημοὶ  
 ἦσυχοι ἔργ' ἐνέμοντο σὺν ἐσθλοῖσιν πολέεσσι.  
 Ὑφνειοὶ μήλοισι, φίλοι μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν.<sup>34</sup>

The gods create and then destroy generations of men. Humanity is forced into a spiral of decline. As time passes, men become ever more distant from their past. No longer is man able to freely pluck fruit from the trees. Fruit and vegetables need to be cultivated now. Thus, here, humanity's degeneration is characterised (at least in part) by the adoption of a carnivorous diet.

This is how Hesiod recounts the remote past of man. Whether one views the introduction of meat to the human palate as a sign of progress or decline, the implication seems to be that man was *ab initio* a creature that did not eat the flesh of animals. This type of myth in which human origins are linked with purity and simplicity, and an absence of hardship, is not unique to Greek culture.<sup>35</sup> There is a desire to see the ills of the world as a direct result of the ineradicable stain or original sin or the wrath of the gods against archaic man, proceeding to pollution. By Hesiod's reckoning, man comes to meat either through transgression or through expediency. A comic fragment preserved in Athenaeus, from *The Samothracians* of Athenion, according to Juba, posits that primitive man existed in a state of cannibalism. The introduction of animal sacrifice and the subsequent roasting of the meat serves to lure man away from his diet of human

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<sup>34</sup> Hes. *Op.* 109-120: 'First of all, the immortals, living on Olympus, made a golden race of human men. They lived in the time of Cronos, when he was king in heaven. They lived as gods, without sorrow of heart, removed from both toil and misery. No miserable old age came upon them, with hands and feet never failing, they made merry in feasting beyond the reach of all evils. When they died, it was as if overcome by sleep. They had all good things. The fruitful earth bore fruit of its own accord, both plentiful and without envy. They lived willing and at ease, rich in sheep, loved by the blessed gods'.

<sup>35</sup> For Near Eastern predecessors of Hesiodic myth, see West (1969), 113-134.

flesh by offering something more appetising in its place.<sup>36</sup> Ovid, in the *Metamorphoses*, views the person responsible for this inaugural sacrifice not as an heroic figure, but as 'non utilis auctor'.<sup>37</sup>

All this, of course, relates to the remote and mythical past: the foundation myths of Greek civilisation from its creation by supernatural forces in distant times. The Romans, too, possessed their own myths of autochthonal integrity. These were often, though not always, located within their own historical period, rather than in the mists of some primeval era. As Purcell notes:

The most obvious historiographical element in Roman accounts of their diet is the elaboration of primitive Rome and the investigation of original, primeval, explanatory, and perhaps normative food ways. Note in passing that this way of thinking establishes the normality of *change*, which is not to be taken for granted in folk historicizing. As we have noticed, what Greece does with mythology, Rome does with early history...It makes a big difference. For Greek thought, changes in food ways are primeval, part of the origins of humanity. The Romans conceived of the changes that had happened to them as existing within a notably different kind of time, within a real history.<sup>38</sup>

Romans liked to see their origins as peasant soldier/farmers, untainted by the perceived corruption caused by the flow of wealth into the Republic as Roman territories rapidly expanded in the course of the second century B.C. This apparently was emphatically a culture that ate meat, if the agricultural writers are to be believed:

Siquidem cum parcius apud priscos esset frugalitas, largior tamen pauperibus fuit usus epularum lactis copia ferinaque ac domesticarum pecudum carne, velut aqua frumentoque, summis atque humillimis victum tolerantibus. Mox

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<sup>36</sup> Fragment 1 Kassel and Austin; Ath. *Deip.* 660e-f.

<sup>37</sup> Ov. *Met.* XV. 103. Also Hardie (1995), 204-14.

<sup>38</sup> Purcell (2003), 341. I feel Purcell perhaps makes too much of this, and I feel uncomfortable with his dismissal of the role of Roman myth-making.

cum sequens et praecipue nostra aetas dapibus libidinosa pretia constituerit,  
 cenaque non naturalibus desideriis, sed censibus aestimentur, plebeia  
 paupertas submota a pretiosioribus cibis ad vulgares compellitur.<sup>39</sup>

This myth of agricultural simplicity and purity eulogises a period when mankind is already making use of the flesh of animals. This is not to say that the Roman writers were averse to making reference to a mythical idyll at the very inception of their civilisation, from which man degenerates. Virgil portrays the primitive origins of Latium in this way:

Haec nemora indigenae fauni nymphaeque tenebat  
 gensque virum truncis et duro robore nata  
 quis neque mos neque cultus erat, nec iungere tauros  
 aut componere opes norant aut parcere parto  
 sed rami atque asper victu venatus alebat.<sup>40</sup>

Of course, there is a significant element of the Greek cultural tradition that eulogised the qualities of the aggressive carnivore. These may best be typified by the heroic warrior caste described by Homer in the *Iliad*, who seem to have existed on a proto-Atkins diet that appears to have comprised almost exclusively of meat. It seems clear that this was not intended to represent a realistic diet of the period (be that the time of the poem's composition or the supposed time of the poem's events). Such a diet would surely have been unsustainable economically, and the human body would have had difficulties in

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<sup>39</sup> Columella *Rust.* X. 1-3: 'Since among the ancients there was more thrifty frugality, the poor nevertheless had a more abundant diet, since the highest and the lowest sustained life on an abundance of milk and the flesh of wild and domesticated animals, as if on water and grain. Soon when following times and especially our own established extravagant prices for feasts, and meals are valued not for natural desires but for showing off wealth, the poverty of the plebeians, banished from more extravagant food, is driven to common food'.

<sup>40</sup> Verg. *Aen.* 8. 315-318 : ' These woods used to contain indigenous fauns and nymphs and a race of men born from hard and disfigured oak, who lived with neither custom nor civilisation, who could not yoke the bull,nor knew how to gather succour or to use sparingly what they had, but were nourished by what was caught from hunting and wild fruits from the trees'.

trying to survive on a diet deficient in other important nutrients. It seems rather more likely to have been a literary construct designed to separate the elite caste from the common herd. Meat represents a form of elevated diet, perhaps closer to the gods than to man.<sup>41</sup>

Meat, then, has had a mixed reception in the foundation myths of both Greece and Rome. It will be necessary to move away from myth and legend so that it will be possible to attempt to locate these questions within the chronological scope of this thesis. It will be necessary to look at the way in which animals were perceived within these societies, and how the unresolved and often ambiguous relationship between man and animal may (and did) provoke questions about the necessity of killing animals and even their position of subservience to man.

There are also economic objections to the raising of animals. The use of cereals for animal fodder is a wasteful and inefficient use of resources; these cereals, some believe, would be better employed being consumed directly by humans. Weight-related issues may also be a factor, in that meat is relatively calorifically high and its consumption may cause one to gain body fat. There is also my own reason: the use of vegetarianism as a badge of separation. Frey sees it as a fashionable posture to facilitate movement through elite groups in the United States. In this analysis vegetarianism gains some rather odd bedfellows:

Eastern religions, the occult, science fiction, black holes, yoga, mysticism generally, horror films, health food lunches, and books on the late Marilyn Monroe.<sup>42</sup>

Animals and humans enjoyed an uncertain relationship in antiquity, at least as revealed in the surviving texts.<sup>43</sup> Authors such as Porphyry and Plutarch who made earnest attempts to justify the impartial and equitable treatment of non-human animals stand out as relatively marginalized figures in the intellectual landscape (at least in their stance upon this issue). Platonic thought envisaged a strict hierarchy of existence, with man

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<sup>41</sup> See pages 147 -150.

<sup>42</sup> Frey (1983), 10. It is unclear how seriously Frey believes we should take this list.

<sup>43</sup> See Gilhus (2006).

placed at the top and the creatures of the sea at the bottom.<sup>44</sup> Across the Graeco-Roman world, animals were generally *not* afforded the same treatment as humans. They were seen either as being closely related to the manner in which deities revealed themselves to men (the transformation of god into animate form, sometimes in the guise of wild animals, at others in the form of a domestic animal, such as a bull), or else they were treated as things to be used: they were tools to be utilised, for the transportation of people or objects, for the pushing and pulling of farmyard machinery, for food and for skins.<sup>45</sup> In this role, their treatment could best be described as an attitude of consideration towards a functional utensil.<sup>46</sup> Wild animals could be slaughtered in the arena as a spectacle of entertainment. The value of this arena-based slaughter was not just founded upon visceral pleasure. It possessed a symbolic meaning:

Following Foucault's ideas on punishment as a confirmation of social order, some scholars see the games as symbolic demonstrations or performances, as rituals or 'shows' of power. Martial (Spect.5. 65) claimed that the games showed imperial power and control even over nature, and with the variety and multitude of species and races involved, the games were a microcosm of the territorial extent and imperial majesty of Rome. Like festivals, processions, drama, and games in other societies, spectacles were ritualised performances that communicated, restored, consolidated, and sometimes helped change the communal order. Not mere entertainments or distractions, they were systems of meaning or cultural performances by which socio-cultural orders (i.e. values, norms, status relationships) were formulated and reformulated.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Pl. *Ti.* 91d-92b; Gilhus (2006), 86.

<sup>45</sup> In Aristotle's view, it was acceptable for humans to hunt animals as the latter are by nature intended for use by humans; Arist. *Pol.* 1.8 1256b 15-26. Also Sorabji (1993), 116-119.

<sup>46</sup> Despite being a work of fiction, one may imagine that the relentless physical beatings meted out to the central protagonist, Lucius, of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, transformed through a magic spell into an ass, was not untypical of the lot of the pack animal in antiquity.

<sup>47</sup> Kyle (1998), 9.

Beast was placed in a position of submission to man in the arena.<sup>48</sup> This was an explicit display of power. A similar mentality is detected within Greek culture. As Lonsdale notes:

The hunt is an area where man asserts power over the animal through technical superiority. Hunting in Bronze Age and classical Greece was not so much a necessary activity as a pursuit of adventure and an educational experience.<sup>49</sup>

Pitting one's wits against wild beasts could be viewed as a complementary activity to military training, sharpening instincts, reflexes and observational skills, as well as contributing to physical fitness. As Sorabji points out:

It should not be thought that food was the sole purpose of hunting. The excitement of the chase is such that Montaigne describes it as more irresistible than sexual temptation, and Augustine gives it as an example of his subservience to curiosity that he cannot help watching, if he sees a dog chasing a hare while riding in the country. Equally from Xenophon's instruction in the care of hounds, if it is his, the excitement of controlling a pack is vividly apparent and modern opponents of hunting need a strategy which takes the excitement into account.<sup>50</sup>

Animals clearly were felt to occupy an inferior position hierarchically to man.<sup>51</sup> Yet, as was earlier mentioned, they were also sometimes believed to be held sacred, either being a god in itself, or the terrestrial manifestation of some deity.<sup>52</sup> The centre of

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<sup>48</sup> In the arena, man too could be placed in this submissive posture, as in the case of condemned criminals, slaves, prisoners-of-war or Christians.

<sup>49</sup> Lonsdale (1979), 153.

<sup>50</sup> Sorabji (1993), 172.

<sup>51</sup> See page 87-88.

<sup>52</sup> See page 163-164 for Syrian goddess Atargatis and sacred status of fish.

animal worship was seen by the Greeks to be Egypt:

Ἐοῦσα ἡ Αἴγυπτος ὄμουρος τῇ Λιβύῃ οὐ μάλα θηριώδες  
 ἐστί· τὰ δὲ ἐόντα σφι ἅπαντα ἰρά νενόμισται.<sup>53</sup>

Herodotus goes on to qualify this. In fact, not *all* animals were regarded as sacred. He relates the manner in which humans mourned for the death of dogs and cats, and states that the death penalty was mandatory for those who killed an ibis or a hawk.<sup>54</sup> However, he also draws to attention the ambiguous status of the crocodile:

Τοῖσι μὲν δὲ Αἴγυπτίων ἰροί εἶσι οἱ κροκόδειλοι, τοῖσι δὲ οὔ,  
 ἀλλ' ἄτε πολεμίους περιέπουσι.<sup>55</sup>

There appears to have been some regional variation to the character of these religious attitudes. The crocodile was worshipped in Thebes and at lake Moeris. Here they were adorned with trinkets and tamed. Whilst alive, they received special food; when they died, they were awarded lavish funerary rites and elaborate burial. However, in Elephantine, they were hunted and eaten.<sup>56</sup> He goes on to recount other Egyptian attitudes to animals. Hippopotami were sacred only in the province of Papremis and nowhere else in the land.<sup>57</sup> Various animals that dwelt in the Nile were held in reverence, the river being hailed as a potent deity of fertility. Thus, Egyptians revered otters, the eel, the phoenix and various snakes and fish.<sup>58</sup>

The interesting point about these Herodotean passages is not so much that they provide a snapshot of Egyptian social history, but rather that they offer a telling portrait

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<sup>53</sup> Hdt. II. 65. 2: 'Egypt has its border with Libya, but it is not full of wild animals. Those there are, all are acknowledged as sacred'. See Gilhus (2006), 95-100.

<sup>54</sup> Hdt. II. 66-67; 65.5

<sup>55</sup> Hdt II. 69.1: 'To some of the Egyptians the crocodiles are sacred; to others they are not, but are treated as enemies'.

<sup>56</sup> Hdt. II. 69.1-3.

<sup>57</sup> Hdt. II. 71.

<sup>58</sup> Hdt. II. 72.

of Greek cultural attitudes towards Egyptian religious practice.<sup>59</sup> Clement of Alexandria, writing over five hundred years later than Herodotus, detects a continuity of attitude towards animals amongst the Egyptians, and still sees evidence of animal worship in his own time:

Ἄλλ' οὖν γε Αἰγύπτιοι, ὧν νῦν δὴ ἐμνήσθην, κατὰ τὰς  
 θρησκείας | τὰς σφῶν ἐσκέδανται· σέβουσι δὲ αὐτῶν Συηνῖται  
 φάγρον τὸν ἰχθύν, μαιώτην δὲ (ἄλλος οὗτος ἰχθυς) οἱ τὴν  
 Ἐλεφαντίνην οἰκοῦντες, Ὀξυρυγῖται τὸν φερώνυμον τῆς χώρας  
 αὐτῶν ὁμοίως ἰχθύν, ἔτι γε μὴν Ἡρακελοπολίται ἰχνεύμονα, Σαῖται  
 δὲ καὶ Θεβαῖοι πρόβατον, Λυκοπολίται δὲ λύκον, Κυνοπολίται  
 δὲ κυνά, τὸν Ἄπιν Μεμφῖται, Μενδήσισι τὸν τράγον.<sup>60</sup>

The Christian theologian, anxious to condemn pagan religious behaviour, is contemptuous of what he perceives to be a primitive and superstitious awe of animals. Yet, he accuses the Greek peoples, who viewed themselves as less credulous than the Egyptians, of similar gullibility with regard to animal veneration:

ὕμεῖς δὲ οἱ πάντ' ἀμείνους Αἰγυπτίων (ὀκνῶ δὲ εἰπεῖν χείρους),  
 οἱ τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους ὁσημέραι γελῶντες οὐ παύεσθε, ποῖοί τινες  
 καὶ περὶ τὰ ἄλογα ζῶα ;<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Egypt is given as a particular example of a neighbouring culture which displays particular reverence for animals in a religious sense. One could also cite the Syrian attitude to fish; Lucian *Syr. D.* Also see pages 150, 162-164.

<sup>60</sup> Clem. Al. *Protr.*.II.34: 'But still at least the Egyptians, whom I just now mentioned, are divided according to their religious observances: the people of Syene worship the phagrus fish, the inhabitants of Elephantine another fish, the maeotes; the people of Oxyrynchus similarly worship one that bears the name of their land. Moreover, the people of Heracleopolis revere the ichneumon. The people from Sais and Thebes venerate sheep, those from Lycopolis the wolf. The inhabitants of Cynopolis honour the dog, those of Memphis the Apis bull, those of Mendes the goat'.

<sup>61</sup> Clem. Al. *Protr.*.II.34: 'But you, who are altogether better than the Egyptians (I hesitate from saying you are worse), you who every day do not cease from sneering at the Egyptians, what do you think about irrational animals?'

Clement proceeds to give examples of how several Greek communities are guilty of similar practices: they worship ants and mice, as well as flies, doves and fishes.<sup>62</sup> This cultural similarity may hold intriguing implications when this thesis proceeds to examine the vegetarian philosophy of Pythagoras, who his biographers relate spent time in Egypt studying esoteric doctrines. Iamblichus says that he spent twenty two years there, studying astronomy, geography and religious practice.<sup>63</sup> It has been suggested that Pythagorean ideas may have exerted some influence on the ideology of the Jewish Essenes in Alexandria.<sup>64</sup> Robert Renehan sees in animal worship practised in Greece the marginalized remnants of archaic superstition, and believes Greek culture to be one which sees its gods in predominantly anthropocentric terms:

Place theriomorphism and anthropomorphism in the scales and there is no doubt which would tip the beam. The contrast with Greece's neighbour Egypt, to go no further, is obvious. The Greek view of man as an intelligent being, set apart from the animals and even, in one or other sense, akin to the gods, created a climate most favourable to the development of anthropomorphism.<sup>65</sup>

It is difficult to say with certainty whether these animals are believed to be gods *per se*, or merely certain terrestrial manifestations of gods who may adopt many different guises.<sup>66</sup> Graeco-Roman culture contains numerous references to myths of immortal ethereal beings that reveal themselves to humans disguised as animals. These scenes are sometimes of the rape and impregnation of human females, the divine seed becoming the progenitor of demigods and heroes.<sup>67</sup> These scenes of forcible intercourse between god and mortal were to become, mimetically, frequent staples of entertainment for

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<sup>62</sup> Clem. Al. *Protr.* II.34.

<sup>63</sup> Iambl. *VP* IV. 19. Much of what is related of the life of 'Pythagoras' must be treated as almost myth.

<sup>64</sup> Lèvy (1927); Joseph *AJ* 15, 371.

<sup>65</sup> Renehan (1981), 257. Also Burkert (1985), 182-189.

<sup>66</sup> See Gilhus (2006), particularly 78-92 on animal-human transformations, and 93-111 on animals in religion.

<sup>67</sup> See Burkert (1985), 119-179.

spectators at the arena: the so-called ‘fatal charades’.<sup>68</sup> It is possible that those animals engaged in these mythical re-enactments were viewed differently by the spectators than beasts that were simply savaging condemned prisoners or that were fighting other beasts or humans. Their role in the former may have (briefly) elevated their status.

Zeus is a prime example of a god who fathered offspring by lying with mortals in a number of different guises. He appeared to Europa in bovine form:

Εὐρώπην τὴν Φοίνικος Ζεὺς θεασάμενος ἔν τινι λειμῶνι μετὰ  
 νυμφῶν ἄνθη ἀναλέγουσαν ἠράσθη καὶ κατελθὼν ἥλλαξεν  
 ἑαυτον εἰς ταῦρον καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ στόματος κρόκον ἔπνει· οὕτως  
 τε τὴν Εὐρώπην ἀπατήσας ἐβάστασε καὶ διαπορθμεύσας εἰς  
 Κρήτην ἐμίγη αὐτῇ.<sup>69</sup>

From this coupling are produced Minos, Rhadamanthys and Sarpedon. He appeared as a swan to impregnate Leda, fathering Helen and Polydeuces, and as a satyr to lie with Leda.<sup>70</sup>

Zeus did not always assume the form of an animal. To the imprisoned Danae, he appeared as a shower of gold.<sup>71</sup> To Callisto, he revealed himself in the likeness of Artemis.<sup>72</sup> He also had occasion to impersonate mortals. He presented himself to Alcmene as her own husband Amphitryon.<sup>73</sup> This gift of physical transformation was occasionally bestowed upon mortals, as was the case with Periclymnus, eldest son of Neleus, king of Pylos, who was bestowed with this ability by his grandfather, Poseidon:

Περικλύμενον τ' ἀγέρωχον ὄλβιον, ᾧ πόρε δῶρα Ποσειδάων

<sup>68</sup> Kyle (1998), 9; 54-55.

<sup>69</sup> Scholiast on Hom. *Il.* II. xii. 292: 'Zeus, having seen Europa, daughter of Phoenix, in a meadow with some nymphs gathering blooms, fell in love with her and going down, changed himself into a bull and breathed a crocus from his mouth. In this way, deceiving Europa, he carried her off, going across to Crete and there he lay with her'. Also Apollod. *Bibl.* III.1.1. and J. G. Frazer's note (4) in Loeb edition (1921).

<sup>70</sup> Apollod. *Bibl.* III.10.7; Ov. *Met.* 6.111. Also Burkert (1985), 128-129.

<sup>71</sup> Apollod. *Bibl.* II.4.1.

<sup>72</sup> Ov. *Met.* 2.428-9.

<sup>73</sup> Hes. *Sc.* 35 ff.

ἐνοσίχθων παντοῖ· ἄλλοτε μὲν γὰρ ἐν ὀρνίθεσσι φάνεσκεν αἰετός,  
 ἄλλοτε δ' αὔτε πελέσκετο, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι, μύρμηξ, ἄλλοτε δ' αὔτε  
 μελισσέων ἀγλαὰ φύλα, ἄλλοτε δ' αἰνὸς ὄφις καὶ ἀμείλιχος.<sup>74</sup>

The transformation of the insubstantial to the solid may indicate an acknowledgement that mortals had a need to interact with a tangible physical presence in order to be assured of its veracity. These myths point to the concretisation of the abstract, the impulse towards empiricism.<sup>75</sup> The terrible and inconceivable powers of the gods are rendered comprehensible by their manifestation as physical entities. Man may have thought himself to have been fashioned in the image of the gods, but is it really the case that man fashioned the gods in the likeness of man? Zeus and other immortals transform themselves into beasts in order to lie with mortals. It seems likely that the image of the animal represented several notions. It may have symbolised virility and physical strength.<sup>76</sup> It could also have stood for the sexual urge divorced from physical affection (if that is the way that the mating of animals is perceived). It could have indicated a sense of fear or awe that man felt in the face of an animal. It is noteworthy that immortals often (although by no means always) tended to make themselves known in the form of aesthetically pleasing, or physically intimidating creatures. The gods' supremacy and immense power meant that they did not appear to man as a kitten or a shrimp, or as domestic livestock. The animal represented something that was distinctly not like man, and which may have stood for the irrational and the untameable: man's fear of the wild beasts that had once threatened his very existence.

This ambiguity of sentiment towards animals is significant. It is tempting to see the philosophy of vegetarianism espoused by the followers of Pythagoras and those later influenced by his teachings as occupying a contrary position to mainstream cultural norms. They may have been viewed as odd and isolated figures by their contemporaries,

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<sup>74</sup> Scholiast on Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.156: 'Brave and blessed Periclymnus, Poseidon the Earthshaker gave to him all kinds of gifts. At one time he would appear among birds, an eagle; at other times, furthermore, he used to be an ant, a marvel to see; at other times again a bright swarm of bees. Still on other occasions, a terrible relentless serpent'.

<sup>75</sup> See Burkert (1985), 182-189.

<sup>76</sup> What Burkert refers to as 'inexhaustible sexual potency'; Burkert (1985), 128.

or seen as advanced and prescient thinkers by later scholars, but it renders the matter too simplistic if these vegetarian ideas are viewed against a background canvas of monolithic and homogeneous ideologies of what constituted the ‘proper’ way to treat or to conceptualise animals. Just as Wilkins advocated the separation of terrestrial and aquatic creatures, there may have been a rudimentary system of classification (a hierarchy) regarding the suitability of animals for sacrifice.<sup>77</sup> Wilkins sees the selection as limited to domestic animals. Parker sees a further subdivision:

The ambiguity in the ancient interpretations, by which animals are spared for both good and bad qualities, should perhaps encourage us to look for a structural explanation, whereby two tabooed extremes mark out an area of the edible in the middle. In some societies, it has been argued, there is a correlation between an animal’s edibility and its ‘social distance’ in relation to man. The scale of social distance might in a typical case extend from house animals and labouring animals (inedible), via the domesticated but non-labouring animals (edible) and game animals (ambiguously edible), to the wild beasts (inedible). The scale, it is suggested, may be subconsciously perceived as analogous to that which determines permissible marriage partners, who have to be sought in the middle area between close kin and strangers.<sup>78</sup>

And, just as there were differing and sometimes conflicting ideas about the correct way to treat animals, so too there existed many diverse opinions as to why one should refrain from killing them.<sup>79</sup> Possibly the pivotal figure when considering ancient vegetarianism is Pythagoras. The problem faced by the scholar is that so much that is written about his life and teachings was composed hundreds of years after his lifetime. Much of what exists in the biographical material about him is heavily contradictory and often nothing more than vague unsubstantiated rumour or blatant myth-making. There are no extant writings (it was claimed that he had left none), although Diogenes Laertius refutes this

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<sup>77</sup> Wilkins (1993), 192.

<sup>78</sup> Parker (1983), 363-364.

<sup>79</sup> See Clark (2000) 8-15 for the arguments for vegetarianism advanced by Porphyry. Also Newmyer (2006) for discussions contained in Plutarch.

claim, maintaining that he wrote tracts on education, constitutional affairs and nature.<sup>80</sup> Much ‘knowledge’ of the life of Pythagoras and his philosophy is substantially derived from later biographies, principally those of Diogenes Laertius, Porphyry and Iamblichus, all writing in the third century A.D. There are discrepancies in the texts and some crucial points vary wildly between them.

One of the first problems facing the scholar when examining the ideology of the Pythagorean school is the confusion that arises in the ancient texts as to the exact identity of Pythagoras. This iconoclastic figure appears to have shared his name with at least eight other individuals, according to Diogenes Laertius.<sup>81</sup> The greatest confusion appears to arise between the fact that, despite the reputation of Pythagoras for austerity and abstinence from animal flesh, some believed him to have been an individual who had passionately advocated its consumption under certain circumstances:

Λέγεται δὲ καὶ πρῶτος κρέασιν ἀσκῆσαι ἀθλητάς.<sup>82</sup>

Laertius does however admit that it is unlikely that Pythagoras the athletics trainer and Pythagoras the philosopher were the same person:

οἱ δὲ Πυθαγόραν ἀλείπτῃν τινὰ τοῦτον σιτίσαι τὸν τρόπον, μὴ τοῦτον. τοῦτον γὰρ καὶ τὸ φονεύειν ἀπαγορεύειν, μὴ ὅτι γεύεσθαι τῶν ζῶων κοινὸν δίκαιον ἡμῖν ἔχόντων ψυχῆς.<sup>83</sup>

The biographies also conflict over the exact nature of the Pythagorean meat prohibition.<sup>84</sup> Some authors say that he abstained from all flesh, others that he renounced only certain animals, and still others offer a form of hierarchical arrangement of acceptable meats. Strabo makes reference to ἐμψυχῶν but fails to explain precisely

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<sup>80</sup> Diog. Laert. *Pythag.* VIII. 6.

<sup>81</sup> Diog. Laert. *Pythag.* VIII. 46-47.

<sup>82</sup> Diog. Laert. *Pythag.* VIII. 12: ‘He is said to have been the first to train athletes on meat’.

<sup>83</sup> Diog. Laert. *Pythag.* VIII. 13: ‘Some say it was some trainer called Pythagoras who fed them in this way, not our one. For our Pythagoras renounced the slaughter, let alone the eating of animals, which is common with us, share in possessing a soul’.

<sup>84</sup> See Dillon and Herschbell (1991) 6-14 for the Pythagorean biographical tradition.

what is meant by this term.<sup>85</sup> Iamblichus is self-contradictory upon this point. Firstly, he asserts that Pythagoreans were exhorted to abstain from all animal flesh.<sup>86</sup> However, just a little later, he lists the ingredients of the school's evening meal :

οἶνω καὶ μάζῃ καὶ ἄρτω καὶ ὄψω καὶ λαχάνοις ἐφθόῃς τε καὶ  
ὠμοῖς.<sup>87</sup>

In the following sentence, he says that meat was set before them, but rarely fish. Diogenes Laertius specifies fish abstention, specifically red mullet and *melanouros*.<sup>88</sup> He then says that it was reported that Pythagoras did, in fact, consent to animal sacrifice, but only cocks, young goats and suckling pigs but never lambs.<sup>89</sup> He also reports the opinion of Aristoxenus who believed that Pythagoras only abstained from oxen and rams.<sup>90</sup> The testimonies are confused, and render any sort of accurate appraisal of Pythagorean dietary rulers highly problematic. There may be a way to navigate through this mire of dietary perplexity. It may be possible to say that a vegetarian diet was not advocated for *all*, but only for some. Porphyry seems to have thought that the ascetic Pythagoras and the athletic trainer were the same person, and sees no contradiction in this.<sup>91</sup> For his part, Porphyry maintains that his own arguments in favour of vegetarianism are not to be applied to the population *in toto*:

Πρῶτον μὲν τοίνυν ἰστέον ὡς οὐ παντὶ τῷ βίῳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων  
ὁ λογος μου τὴν παραίνεσιν οἴσει· οὔτε γὰρ τοῖς τὰς βαναύσους  
τέχνας μετερχομένοις, οὔτ' ἀθληταῖς σωμάτων, οὐ στρατιῶταις,  
οὐ ναύταις, οὐ ῥήτορσιν, οὐ τοῖς τὸν πραγματικὸν βίον

<sup>85</sup> Strabo 15. 1. 65.

<sup>86</sup> Iambl. *VP* 68. See Clark (1989), 28-29.

<sup>87</sup> Iambl. *VP* 98: 'wine, barley bread, wheat bread, relish, raw and boiled vegetables'.

<sup>88</sup> Diog. Laert. *Pythag.* VIII. 19-21. Also Dillon and Herschbell (1991), 123, note 3.

<sup>89</sup> Diog. Laert. *Pythag.* VIII. 19-21.

<sup>90</sup> Diog. Laert. *Pythag.* VIII. 19-21. See Clark (1989), 98 for possible Aristoxenean bias: 'his preference appears to have been for an enlightened, intellectual P.'.

<sup>91</sup> Porph. *Abst.* I. 26. 2-3. He mentions that some reports state that Pythagorean religious sacrifice did, in fact, involve the killing of animals. Laertius also refers to this; Diog. Laert. *Pythag.* VIII. 20.

ἔπανελομένοις.<sup>92</sup>

Porphyry seems to be at pains to stress that a meat-free diet would be unsuitable for those individuals who are engaged in lifestyles that are physically strenuous, or that require them to be politically active. The former case seems logical; the implication being that meat is required by the physically active in order to maintain the necessary reserves of bodily energy. The latter is less clear cut. Was the life of a politician particularly physically arduous? One may perhaps think of the strains placed upon the body by the demands of oratory, but perhaps the tacit implication here is that the public life demanded a certain commitment to full and regular engagement in the social, cultural and religious activities of the community. The ritual of sacrifice would have been an integral ingredient of this, a prerequisite of office. A refusal to perform this ritual was, if this is indeed what Porphyry means, wholly inappropriate behaviour for a political man.<sup>93</sup>

Dombrowski suggests that the Pythagorean solution to this was to divide his followers into two categories, who committed themselves to his dietary regime in lesser or greater degrees. This was dependent upon the level of penetration by the disciple into the Pythagorean mysteries.<sup>94</sup> The ἀκουσματικοί were those who followed the teachings of Pythagoras but had not yet devoted themselves fully to the teachings. If we may use such terminology in this context, perhaps we could think of them as ‘lay’ followers. They are contrasted with the μαθηματικοί who pursued a path of far greater self-denial. The ‘lay’ adherents to the cult, who would have lived perhaps in the community at large, amongst non-believers (a Pythagorean Diaspora if you will), were permitted to eat a limited amount of meat, as part of animal sacrifice (although perhaps were required to undergo periods of abstinence). The inner core of adherents, more firmly devoted to the Pythagorean ideal, living together in a closed community, followed a diet that was

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<sup>92</sup> Porph. *Abst.* I. 27. 1: ‘First therefore you should know that my discourse will not offer advice for all of the lifestyles of man: to those pursuing the mechanical arts, to athletes of the body, to soldiers or sailors, or orators or to those who have chosen the life of public service’. Clark notes the contrast between physical athletes and athletes of the soul; Clark (2000), 132, note 88.

<sup>93</sup> See Clark (2000), 131, note 87.

<sup>94</sup> Dombrowski (1984a); Iambl. *VP* 108-109. Also Clark (1989), 47.

policed more rigorously. Detienne, writing earlier, saw no contradiction in the ideologies of the two groups, rather a cohesive and complementary synthesis:

The first have taken the path of renunciation: asceticism, mortification of the soul, and the intransigent rejection of any relationship to meat and blood. The others, engaged in the reform and the salvation of the city, come to terms with worldly dietary practice and develop a system founded on the separation between meat and non-meat, in which the status of fleshly food is assumed first by the working ox and then the sheep, while the comestible parts of minor victims are considered to be non-fleshly food.<sup>95</sup>

This all seems to militate against any sense of proselytising. Porphyry, and the Pythagoras of Iamblichus' account did not intend nor expect vegetarianism to become a universal standard, and they appeared to be willing to accept that it was not a credo to which all should aspire.<sup>96</sup> Dombrowski disagrees with the view that this was a somehow *laissez-faire* approach to vegetarianism, and asserts that Pythagorean vegetarianism 'was part of a revolutionary agenda'.<sup>97</sup> Only one particular group was urged to absolute abstinence, those engaged in a particular activity. Iamblichus states the nature of this activity:

Πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἐμψύχων ἀποχὴν πάντων καὶ ἔτι βρωμάτων  
τινῶν ταῖς ἐπεγρίαις τοῦ λογισμοῦ καὶ εἰλικρινείαις  
ἐμποδιζόντων κατέδειξεν ἐν τοῖς ἐταίροις.<sup>98</sup>

Diet is explicitly linked with its effects on the cognitive processes. There is a recognition here that the dietary requirements may vary from individual to individual,

<sup>95</sup> Detienne in Detienne and Vernant (1989), 5.

<sup>96</sup> See page 98, note 92.

<sup>97</sup> Dombrowski (1984a), 48. Dombrowski's assertion is at odds with the textual evidence which points to Pythagorean dietary doctrine adopting a seemingly conciliatory stance to mainstream culture. There are clear indications that it was not dogmatic, but allowed differing levels of abstinence.

<sup>98</sup> Iambl. *VP* 68: 'In addition, he taught his disciples abstinence from all animate creatures and besides from certain foods, which are an obstacle to attentive and untainted thinking'.

depending on their needs. The physical life demands a certain diet, and for this, the ingestion of meat may be acceptable (even efficacious). The contemplative existence requires a completely different regimen, and in this case, meat may prove positively deleterious.

It is already clear that a decision whether to eat meat or to abstain was intimately linked to structures of group hierarchical identities, at least within certain contexts. Vegetarianism, for Pythagoreans, was not an absolute, but a way of marking the depth of commitment and adherence to Pythagorean ideals. In spite of certain views of Pythagoreans as monolithically vegetarian, it looks as if there was fragmentation within the group itself.<sup>99</sup> Porphyry, too, sees vegetarianism as a tool of demarcation, to separate the intellectuals and the philosophers from the workers and the 'doers'.<sup>100</sup> If meat is an obstacle to clear thought, there is an implicit criticism of those who do not 'think clearly'. The intellectual asserts his superiority to the worker through his capacity for thinking. Vegetarianism is an essential aid to this.

These systems of categorisation, of inclusion and exclusion, with particular reference to Pythagoreanism, have been explored by Burkert.<sup>101</sup> This thesis will look much more extensively at Burkert's work on Pythagoreanism when it considers the problem of the bean taboo.<sup>102</sup> It will suffice to say at present that Burkert sees the Pythagorean precepts (vegetarianism is one, a bean taboo is another) as systems of differentiation and of control within the Pythagorean system. These precepts are not susceptible to logical justification, but are carefully coded for comprehension by those initiated into the cult. He also believes that such precepts are analogous to those found in earlier and contemporary mystery cults.<sup>103</sup> Diet, in Burkert's view, is a crucial element of identity, certainly for the Pythagoreans.

However, it would not be true to say that Pythagoreans, and other vegetarians, offered no justifications for following a vegetarian diet. The Pythagorean refusal to eat

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<sup>99</sup> Such inconsistencies are picked up by a number of comic writers, as is made clear by a number of fragments in Book IV of the *Deipnosophistae* 161-162; Antiphanes fr. 63; 87;158; 133; Alexis fr. 201;223; Aristophon fr. 9.

<sup>100</sup> See page 98, note 92.

<sup>101</sup> Burkert (1972).

<sup>102</sup> See pages 114-141.

<sup>103</sup> See pages 119-121; 129-131.

animal flesh hinges primarily upon the concept of purity:

Thus the strictest of the Pythagoreans, called the Pure, reject all fleshly food and respect only altars that cannot be stained by blood. They shun all contact with cooks or butchers as well as hunters. The only sacrifices they make to the gods are cakes made from grain, honeycombs, and incense, which are burned on their altars.<sup>104</sup>

A rigorous and unflinching commitment to achieve purity is combined with the belief that animal sacrifice violated fundamental religious sentiments, which, for Pythagoreans, included the belief in *metempsychosis*, the transmigration of souls from one body to another, including the possibility of a human soul inhabiting that of an animal. Pythagoreans also believed that eating meat was harmful to human health. Finally, they believed it to be an ethically unsound practice. The most noticeable feature here is the firm emphasis that is placed on reasons that are beneficial to man, rather than animals. The belief in the transmigration of the soul is one of anthropocentric self-interest. One should refrain from killing animals not because it is cruel and unjust *per se*, but because one may be inadvertently harming a friend or relative (or alternatively, one may be in a similar position at some point in the future, in which case a prohibition on the killing of animals may result in protecting oneself).<sup>105</sup> An animal is a potential housing for a human soul, and to harm an animal is akin to inflicting damage upon a human being. In fact, it may be somewhat like cannibalism.

The objection to meat on the grounds of health also seems to be largely anthropocentric. It is not just Pythagoreans that take this stance. Porphyry presents (in order to refute them) commonly held ideas about meat eating being beneficial for physical health.<sup>106</sup> Plutarch also deplores the effect meat has on the body:

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<sup>104</sup> Detienne in Detienne and Vernant (1989), 5. Compare this with Jewish food laws; pages 171-198.

<sup>105</sup> Although this surely then is an argument for the *absolute* prohibition of animal killing, rather than just a code for a particular group.

<sup>106</sup> Porph. *Abst.* 15. Also Clark (2000), 129-130, note 62. Note the importance of mental, as well as physical health.

Οὐ τοίνυν μόνον αἱ κρεοφαγίαι τοῖς σώμασι γίνονται παρὰ φύσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς ὑπὸ πλησμονῆς καὶ κόρου παχύνουσιν· “ὄινος γὰρ καὶ σαρκῶν ἐμφορήσιες σῶμα μὲν ἰσχυρὸν ποιέουσι καὶ ῥωμαλέον, ψυχὴν δὲ ἀσθενέα”. καὶ ἵνα μὴ τοῖς ἀθληταῖς ἀπεχθάνωμαι, συγγενέσι χρωμαι παραδείγμασι· τοὺς γὰρ Βοιωτοὺς ἡμᾶς οἱ Ἀττικοὶ καὶ παχεῖς καὶ ἀναισθήτους καὶ ἡλιθίους, μάλιστα διὰ τὰς ἀδηφαγίας προσηγόρευον.<sup>107</sup>

The point is reiterated that meat has its place in the diet of the physically active, but not that of the intellectual. The diet of the latter not only requires abstention from flesh, but moderation in all things. Appetite should be restrained as an act of will. Hunger sharpens the mind and its satiation may serve to dull the wits. This view was echoed later by Clement of Alexandria:

Μηδὲ λῦε τὸν τῆς ψυχῆς τόνον ἐν εὐωχίᾳ καὶ ποτῶν ἀνέσει, ἱκανὸν δὲ ἡγοῦ τῷ σώματι τὸ χρειῶδες. καὶ μὴ πρόσθεν ἐπείγου πρὸς τροφᾶς πρὶν ἢ καὶ δεῖπνου παρῆ καιρός· ἄρτος δὲ ἔστω σοι τὸ δεῖπνον, καὶ πόαι γῆς προσέστωσαν καὶ τὰ ἐκ δένδρων ὠραῖα· ἴθι δὲ ἐπὶ τὴν τροφήν εὐταθῶς καὶ μὴ λυσσωδῆ γαστριμαργίαν ἐπιφαίνων· μηδὲ σαρκοβόρος μηδὲ φίλοινος ἔσο, ὅποτε μὴ νόσος τις ἴασιν ἐπὶ ταύτην ἄγοι.<sup>108</sup>

The appeal of a restricted and meat-free diet to facilitate the cognitive processes is one

<sup>107</sup> Plut. *De esu carn.* 995 D-E: ‘Therefore not only is the eating of flesh physically against nature, but it also fattens and dulls the soul by repletion and satiety: “For wine and meat-eating makes the body powerful and strong, but the soul weak”. And so as not to be hated by the athletes, I shall use my kinsmen as examples. For the Attic people call us Boetians thick-witted, lacking common sense and foolish, especially because of eating to excess’. For comic stereotype of gluttonous Boetians, see Wilkins (2000), 98.

<sup>108</sup> Clem. Al. *Protr. Beb.* : ‘Do not relax the tension of your soul in eating sumptuously and revelling in drinking, but regard what is enough to be sufficient for your body. And do not hurry to meals sooner than is the right time for the dinner to be offered. And let your dinner be wheat bread, and the green herbs of the earth and the seasonal fruits of the tree be placed before you; go to your meal calmly and not displaying raving gluttony. Do not be a glutton for flesh nor fond of wine, when no disease leads you to this as a cure’.

that has appeal in both pagan and Christian traditions. The belief that the route to communion with the divine (whatever the perception of the nature of that entity) is through the exercise of pure intellectual activity, unencumbered by the concerns of the body, is a long-standing one, and we may detect strains of it in such diverse thinkers as Plato, the Roman Stoics and Christian hermits.<sup>109</sup> Concerns with the affairs of the body were symptomatic of a growing feeling among certain philosophical schools of the untrustworthiness of sense perception. The senses diverted one's attention away from the realm of pure intellect, impeding its optimal functioning, and the beguiling temptations of bodily luxury were regarded as little more than a trap for the unwary that distracted from a contemplation of the divine. The desires for food and drink were impulses that may be overcome by the exercise of the will. Health here is not thought of in holistic terms: the fitness of the mind takes undoubted precedence over that of the body (although this is not to say that the body should be neglected).<sup>110</sup> Seneca saw a preoccupation with the training of the body as often inimical to mental well being. Simple exercise sufficed for the body and no more was deemed necessary.<sup>111</sup>

The body becomes a battleground between instinct and the will. The desire for food, which excites the senses, and inflames bodily lust, becomes something to be strictly controlled, and thus we may see in the elaborate dietary rules of the Pythagorean school, a technique for exercising control over these natural urges. Iamblichus relates the varied criteria that Pythagoras is said to have applied to groups of foods when considering whether they should be rejected or not. Foods may be deemed either

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<sup>109</sup> Pl. *Resp.* 372-373, where the 'body' of the state may become unhealthy through the ingestion of superfluous foods (including meat) by its citizens. For the views of Stoics such as Musonius Rufus and Seneca, see Wilkins and Hill (2006), 204-207. Clement of Alexandria urges the pious Christian to exercise restraint in food and drink; Clem. Al. *Protr. Beb.*

<sup>110</sup> The development of ascetic thought, particularly in Christian communities in the east in the next few centuries, led not just to the assumption that the health of the soul took precedence over that of the body, but to the ultimate rejection of the body as a corrupt vessel whose sexual urges and impulses towards sensory pleasure chained man to an evil and depraved terrestrial existence and kept him from the bliss of heaven. Asceticism eventually leads to the horror of the mystics locked away in solitude, steeped in the extremes of bodily putrefaction and decay. See Vandereycken, W., van Deth, R. (1994); Grimm (1995), (1996).

<sup>111</sup> Sen. *Ep.* XV.

unworthy of the gods or sacred to them; both may be grounds for rejection. His guiding principle was purity and the eradication of unnecessary items from the diet, and meat is symbolic of these items:

ἰδίᾳ δὲ τοῖς θεωρητικωτάτοις τῶν φιλοσόφων καὶ ὅτι  
 μάλιστα ἀκροτάτοις καθάπαξ περιήρει τὰ περιττὰ καὶ  
 ἄδικα τῶν ἐδεσμάτων, μήτε ἔμψυχον μηδὲν μηδέποτε ἐσθίειν  
 εἰσηγούμενος μήτε οἶνον ὄλως πίνειν.<sup>112</sup>

Again, it is significant that it was only that elite, operating at the very highest levels of consciousness, which were denied meat. We are reminded by Iamblichus that, at least dietarily, life was less stringent for those existing on the outer fringes of Pythagoreanism:

τοῖς μέντοι ἄλλοις ἐπέτρεπέ τινων ζώων ἀπτεσθαι, ὅσοις ὁ βίος  
 μὴ πάνυ ἦν ἐκκεκαθαρμένος καὶ ἱερὸς καὶ φιλόσοφος.<sup>113</sup>

The restriction of meat for this specific reason raises pertinent questions for the scholar concerned with matters of identity. It serves to produce a new manner in which mankind may be subdivided. Not only may he be separated into categories according to gender, race, age and class; he may now be divided into the ‘enlightened’, and those who are not.<sup>114</sup> In this way meat eating was the mark of the common herd, whilst abstention from it may have marked someone out as deeming themselves to be intellectually superior. It could also be argued that, apart from those who took ascetic practices to the extreme, the only people in a position to be able to reject meat were those who had the luxury of choice in the first place. *Deliberate* vegetarianism could, then, on occasion, be seen as the mark not just of the intellectual, but also of the wealthy.

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<sup>112</sup> Iambl. VP 107: ‘In particular, he took away altogether from the most theoretical of the philosophers, especially those at the highest level, meals that were unnecessary and unjust, instructing them neither to eat animate creatures nor to ever drink wine’.

<sup>113</sup> Iambl. VP 109 : ‘However, he permitted the others to continue eating certain animals, those whose life was not completely cleansed, holy and philosophic’.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Pl. *Ti.* 91d-92b with its hierarchy of species dependent upon the level of enlightenment of the soul.

It could be argued, and indeed has been, that the act of the killing of an animal is morally corrosive. It initiates a process in which the soul of man is brutalised. If one is willing to hurt or kill an animal, it may make that person more inclined to kill a person. Killing engenders killing, regardless of species.<sup>115</sup> It is precisely this point that Plutarch makes:

καὶ γευσάμενον οὕτω καὶ προμελετήσαν ἐν ἐκείνοις τὸ φονικὸν  
ἐπὶ βοῦν ἐργάτην ἦλθε καὶ τὸ κόσμιον πρόβατον καὶ τὸν  
οἰκουρὸν ἀλεκτρούνα· καὶ κατὰ μικρὸν οὕτω τὴν ἀπληστίαν  
στομώσαντες ἐπὶ σφαγὰς ἀνθρώπων καὶ πολέμους καὶ φόνους  
προήλθομεν.<sup>116</sup>

It is of course necessary to emphasise that by no means all in the ancient world would have believed killing to be wrong. The Pythagorean philosopher who believed killing to be wrong was poles apart from the prevailing and dominant ideologies of martial societies that passionately espoused the military virtues and would have been deeply suspicious of overt displays of militant pacifism. The defence of the state and the conquering of new territories were a direct result of the assiduous cultivation of these virtues. If there was disapproval expressed at killing, then it seems likely that it was opprobrium against bloodshed that was not sanctioned by political or religious authority. Killing outside officially approved avenues designed to channel such impulses would have brought with it a suggestion of anarchy. Common sense also tells us that people who eat meat do not routinely take it upon themselves to kill others, nor are all vegetarians free from murderous homicidal impulses. One also must consider the social context of ancient societies. Life expectancy was much lower than it is today.<sup>117</sup> The

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<sup>115</sup> The argument seems to run that the practice of killing sets up within the human soul a preponderance for that activity.

<sup>116</sup> Plut. *De esu carn.* 99B-C: ‘And when our murderous instinct had tasted blood and then grew practised on [wild animals], they proceeded to the working ox and the well-behaved sheep and the house-watching cockerel; little by little, our insatiable appetite hardened, we advanced to the slaughter of men and wars and murder’. This passage has been used to suggest that Plutarch was influenced by Pythagorean doctrines; Newmyer refutes this; Newmyer (2006), 90-91.

<sup>117</sup> See page 206, note 26.

exposure of unwanted children occurred (although it seems unlikely that it was a regular practice). Slaves were the bedrock of the ancient economy. Criminals, rebels and undesirables were tortured and killed in the arena. Death was omnipresent in ancient cultures. Other races, other classes could be viewed as alien to oneself and could not be expected to be treated in the same way as oneself. If slaves, children, errant wives, could be dispatched with impunity, what rights could animals expect? Animals, like slaves, wives and offspring were the property of the owner, who could do with them as he wished.

The reasons that have been offered so far have very much placed man at the centre of consideration. It seems that, so far, the welfare or status of animals has been little considered. This is far from being the case. Although vegetarianism may be considered to be beneficial to man (at least as far as his mental, and possibly physical health is concerned), the ancient writers did not neglect this other aspect. It is just that, for the most part, the welfare of the animal was not their only (and perhaps not even their prime) concern, and sometimes, as will become evident, the concern about cruelty towards animals was often as much a reflection on the potentially morally corrosive effects upon human behaviour, as it was for the animals themselves. It seems that vegetarianism is not a system that strives for egalitarianism; some sense of parity between all humans, or between animals and humans. It is but another tool to erect and reinforce ideological and cultural barriers and to create new hierarchies.

This is not strictly true. Some authors did at least recognise that there may be a justification for vegetarianism that considers the ‘rights’ and the interests of the animal. Plutarch in a number of works makes sustained and passionate pleas for the just and humane treatment of animals.<sup>118</sup> This is not to say that he does not consider the arguments that have already been discussed, but he often chooses to focus on the animal, not necessarily the human. He sought to convince his audience that animals were far from the senseless creatures they were commonly held to be. He argued that the ill treatment of animals by humans was wrong. He was not, however, arguing for the wrongness of their utilisation by man; it is judged acceptable for some measure of

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<sup>118</sup> The principal works are contained within the *Moralia: De Sollertia Animalium (On the Cleverness of Animals)*, *Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti (Beasts are Rational)* and *De Esu Carnum (The Eating of Flesh)*. For a discussion of these works, see Newmyer (2006).

animal husbandry to take place:

οὐ γὰρ οἱ χρώμενοι ζώοις ἀδικοῦσιν, ἀλλ'οἱ χρώμενοι βλαβερώς  
καὶ ὀλιγώρως καὶ μετ'ὠμότητος.<sup>119</sup>

Plutarch's arguments attempt to shock the reader out of his complacency. He talks of the shrieks and cries of animals begging not to be killed. Later, he speaks of the tortures inflicted upon animals to satisfy the appetites of gourmands. Some of the activities that he describes may be alien to us: thrusting red-hot spits down the throats of pigs to emulsify the blood, the jumping upon the udders of pregnant sows to produce abortions. Others, such as the forced-feeding of animals and their containment in darkness, bring to mind modern methods of intensive factory farming.<sup>120</sup> Plutarch's views are prescient of many of the arguments adopted by modern campaigners against animal cruelty.<sup>121</sup> They are certainly not part of the mainstream body of thought in antiquity.

Ritual activities, such as religious sacrifice, were techniques that made attempts to enable communities to achieve high levels of social cohesion. Rejection of such group activities inevitably led to exclusion, politically, socially and religiously. This would be fine if this ostracism was seen as a desirable end. If vegetarianism is meant to be viewed as an explicit statement of antagonism towards traditional thought, and a way of partially establishing a new identity that stands outside accepted ideological norms, this is not a problem. However, if hostility and suspicion from one's peer group is an unwanted result of following a vegetarian diet, and one does not necessarily desire to place oneself outside the community, identity itself may be called into question. The philosopher Seneca found himself facing such a quandary. If vegetarianism eventually became synonymous with Pythagoras, and in turn, with a form of cranky asceticism that stood obstinately outside mainstream thought, it was also, in the eyes of Roman political authority, to become linked with foreign religious rites. Suetonius notes how Tiberius

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<sup>119</sup> Plut. *de soll. an.* 965B: 'For it is not those who use animals who treat them unjustly, but those who use them hurtfully and contemptuously and with cruelty'.

<sup>120</sup> Plut. *De esu carn.* 994 E; II 996 F.

<sup>121</sup> See Singer (1990).

went as far as ordering the expulsion of all foreign cults from Rome.<sup>122</sup> In one of Seneca's letters, we find a discussion of a youthful passion for the teachings of Pythagoras.<sup>123</sup> Such is the effect such studies had upon him that he himself adopted a vegetarian diet, and he found it most congenial. In the same way as we have noticed in earlier and later writers, he remarks that it proved efficacious to his reasoning. However, he remarks that this period of his life coincided with this Tiberian religious suppression, and vegetarianism was regarded as being a characteristic of such cults. In particular, it seemed to have been somehow conceived of being a characteristic of the Jewish dietary laws.<sup>124</sup> Even though the Jews abstained only from certain types of animal flesh, perhaps a popular stereotype associated the unfamiliar dietary patterns of the Jews with a complete ban upon all types of flesh. He allows his father's fear of his being prosecuted to persuade him to renounce such a diet. Seneca duly does, and does so with little compunction. Clearly, in this case, either Seneca's nerve has failed him at the last moment, or more likely, he does not see vegetarianism as a particularly significant facet of his own ideology.

Let us conclude this section by looking again at how this anti-carnivorous ideology may have had some potentially important implications for matters of identity. There has been previous reference to the way in which there was an inclination (certainly among the writings that survive to us) of portraying the societies in which they lived as being defined by polarities and hierarchies.<sup>125</sup> Of course, an individual or group could assume multiple identities that may have existed simultaneously. Any facet of this identity could be emphasised depending on the context. A Greek man, operating as master of his house, was lord of his wife, children and slaves. He was part of his local community, which in turn was a component of the geographical territory that was Greece. This, in turn, formed a part of the greater Roman Empire. This man was simultaneously Greek and Roman. Identity existed on both the micro and macro levels, and to a certain extent was fluid. This Greek may have wished to ingratiate himself with

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<sup>122</sup> Suet. *Tib.* 36. See pages 194-195.

<sup>123</sup> Sen. *Ep.* CVIII.

<sup>124</sup> See 186-190. Also see Cohen, 1-45 in Cohen and Frerichs (1993) for the confusion that often seems to have arisen about Jewish behaviour and identity in the Diaspora.

<sup>125</sup> See pages 35ff.

local Roman officials, and therefore would feel inclined to imitate these people. The Roman part of his identity would then come to the fore.

Yet, for all this talk of fluidity, there were certain divisions and hierarchies in place in the Graeco-Roman world that were quite rigid. We may think of the Roman *cursus honorum*, ancient distinctions between the active and passive role in homosexual relationships, the separation between citizen and non-citizen, to be freeborn and to be a slave. The blurring or inversion of these boundaries could expose the essential fragility of constructed identities, inducing anxiety and threatening social stability. One may consider as an example of the embodiment of such tensions the boy emperor Elagabalus. This grotesque figure represented all the values and attitudes which were alien to the constructed Roman archetype.<sup>126</sup> Somehow, at the very apex of the empire, dwelt this eccentric creature that threatened to plunge it into entropy. He was a Syrian child, putative son of Caracalla, dominated (and thus metaphorically emasculated, although physical castration was not too far behind) by his mother, Julia Soaemis, and by his grandmother, Julia Maesa (sister of Julia Domna). His open bisexuality, his experimentation with gender boundaries, his indulgence in extreme forms of opulence and his commitment to a form of (pagan) monotheism managed to combine all the perennial spectres of eastern decadence, Sybaritic luxury and oriental tyranny.<sup>127</sup> Many of these were traits that had been associated with previous ‘bad’ (at least in the eyes of the senate) emperors, such as Caligula, Nero and Commodus. Unmanly vices, the failure to respect the appropriate boundaries of acceptable behaviour and the blurring and erosion of the limits of identity made him a fascinating but ultimately perilous figure. Dio maintains that his refusal to acknowledge accepted boundaries led him to

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<sup>126</sup> We may still refer to this ‘ideal’ Roman, even after the Caracallan enactment of the *Constitutio Antoniniana* in 212 A.D., which granted citizenship to all freeborn peoples of the empire. The cachet of citizenship may have become diluted, but there still remained vestiges of social snobbery and idealised concepts of what constituted a true Roman. See Southern (2001), 51. Dio believed that extension of citizenship was partly an act of magnanimity on behalf of Caracalla, but more probably had its roots in an imperial desire to swell the coffers of the treasury through increased taxation; Dio LXXXVIII, 9.5.

<sup>127</sup> Compare this with the discussion in Book XII of the *Deipnosophistae* of the luxurious excesses of eastern monarchs such as Sardanapalus. In a culinary context, Elagabalus is a particularly apt example of excess owing to his reported interest in gastronomic oddities; SHA *Heliogab.* For Elagabalus, see Kettenhofen (1979); Frey (1989).

attempt to blur the physical limits of gender through surgery:

Ἐς τοσαύτην δὲ συνηλάθη ἀσέλγειαν δι' ὧς καὶ τοὺς  
 ἰατροὺς ἀξιοῦν αἰδῶ γυναικεῖν δι' ἀνατομῆς αὐτῶ  
 μηχανήσασθηναι, μεγάλους ὑπὲρ τούτου μισθοὺς αὐτοῖς  
 προῖσχύμενος.<sup>128</sup>

If one were to see ancient doctrines of vegetarianism in terms of similar anxieties about constructed identity and concepts of self-visualisation, analogous currents may be discerned as being at play. The contemplation of the idea that animals should in some way receive consideration commensurate to that of humans in terms of rights to fair treatment (if not equal consideration) would have surely entailed a significant shift in both social attitudes and structures of political and economic power within societies. The issue hinges upon the question of marginality.<sup>129</sup> Animals are treated in a different way to human beings because, as may be argued by those in favour of meat eating, they are not judged to experience corporeal and mental experiences in the same manner as humans do. An animal that is on the receiving end of a physical blow makes noises and performs movements that, despite being unintelligible to the human ear, may be interpreted as expressing some form of distress. Plutarch is adamant that this is the case:

εἴθ' ἄς φθέγγεται καὶ διατρίζει φωνὰς ἀνάρθρους εἶναι  
 δοκοῦμεν, οὐ παραιτήσεις καὶ δεήσεις καὶ δικαιολογίας.<sup>130</sup>

However, some may take a Cartesian view and consider that animals have no sense of the anticipatory: that is, the fear of impending pain and possible death, regret for future

<sup>128</sup> Dio LXXX 16.7: 'He brought his licentiousness to such a point that he asked his doctors to contrive a woman's vagina in his body, having offered them great sums to do this'.

<sup>129</sup> For discussion of Porphyry's use of this argument, see Dombrowski (1984b), 141-143. Also Singer (1990), 265.

<sup>130</sup> Plut. *De esu carn.* 994 E: 'When it cries and squeaks we think it to be inarticulate sounds, not entreaties and begging and asking for justice'.

plans unfulfilled, grief for one's parents or offspring.<sup>131</sup>

However, if we concede that humans and animals possess differing levels of sentience, we should also acknowledge that human beings may experience different cognitive states.<sup>132</sup> I refer to those who are severely mentally disabled or new-born infants. Some would say that a well-trained dog or horse displays signs that it enjoys a richer cerebral existence than a small child or someone in a near vegetative state. This argument implies that if sentience is a guide to treatment, some animals should receive more consideration than some humans. In fact, in the ancient world, it does appear that Plutarch was fighting for a cause that had already in some senses been won. There did exist some parity of consideration between humans and animals. Unfortunately, it involved downgrading some humans to the level of animals, rather than elevating the latter up to the level of the former. Those who experienced degrees of social exclusion (slaves, foreigners) enjoyed a lowly status within the community, as did those who were stigmatised and rejected as non-conformities. The crippled and deformed were isolated figures, marked out as being cursed by the gods, and unwanted infants (particularly girls) were exposed to die. Domestic livestock and beasts trained for war could often be more valued, in terms of utility and aesthetics, than the 'dregs' of humankind.

Of course, these tensions and anxieties may not have manifested themselves at a conscious level, but may instead have operated on a more subliminal plane. Graeco-Roman society was founded on structures of power, designed to exert control and stability, based on clearly demarcated hierarchical boundaries. These were not rigidly monolithic. There was a certain amount of elasticity that allowed for the renegotiation of identity. However, once these boundaries were pushed too far, there was a danger of imminent collapse. As in all societies, the rights of the individual to self expression and assertion of personal identity are balanced against the collective will of the majority, who may feel threatened by unconventional behaviour and attitudes. An Elegebalus could be a symbol of ultimate personal liberation from the shackles of conservative conformity or could represent a dangerous threat to the structure and stability of society. If the emperor was somehow supposed to be the embodiment of the state, then it was perhaps meant to be one that represented its ideal, not the sum of its parts. If there did

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<sup>131</sup> See Newmyer (2006), 66-75 for a discussion of this issue.

<sup>132</sup> Arist. *Hist. An.* 588a ff; Newmyer (2006), 10-47.

exist the concept of ‘Roman identity’ (however nebulous such a term may be), it was likely that it would have been aspirational, not representational. Potency, militarism, piety and practicality were virtues that had been touted as Latin virtues back to the elder Cato and beyond. The contradictory, sexually-ambivalent ELEGABALUS perhaps personified the reality of a vast sprawling empire, comprising many creeds and ideologies, better than a desperate clinging to the idealised and increasingly outdated stereotypes of the archaic agrarian society of Roman myth and fable.

This chapter has attempted to explore the extent of the prevalence of vegetarian sentiments in Graeco-Roman societies and its possible implications for issues of identity. It is, of course, possible to hypothesise only in the broadest terms on such a grand scale. An examination of the subject on a micro level would undoubtedly reveal regional and local anomalies. However, a few general conclusions are possible. Firstly, it seems doubtful that a conscious and deliberate vegetarian credo was a popular or widespread phenomenon. Despite a tradition that could trace itself back to Orphism and the Pythagorean school, its recurrence appears to be sporadic rather than as part of a continuous unbroken narrative.<sup>133</sup> It is likely that a significant role may be attributed to external cultural influence in the evolution of vegetarian ideology. The Pythagorean biographical tradition is hopelessly vague and confused and cannot be relied upon to provide accurate detail of the genesis of Pythagorean thought. It may be better to disregard the tales of the time the philosopher was supposed to have spent in study in Egypt.<sup>134</sup> Nonetheless, the possibility of cultural transmission from Egypt to the Greek territories may explain the Pythagorean attitudes to religion, the sacredness of animals, as well as food taboos, such as those connected with beans. Burkert’s notion of the possible influence of mystery cults, and their systems of group cohesion and the exclusion of outsiders also has much merit. If Greek culture was not inclined to illuminate the possible source of these ideas, it may have been because of an amalgam of intellectual arrogance and unashamed xenophobia. The fact that those writing in imperial times were mainly writing in Greek invites the speculation that the authorities in Rome regarded this sort of dietary restriction as something that was peculiarly Greek

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<sup>133</sup> For the influence of Orphism on Pythagoreanism, see Burkert (1972), 125-133; Burkert (1985), 296-301; Parker (1983), 290 ff.

<sup>134</sup> Iambl. *VP* 19; Diog. Laert. *Pythag.* 3-4.

and was to be treated with some caution and perhaps with a healthy degree of scepticism. Its very foreignness immediately identified it as being slightly odd and untrustworthy.

To go beyond this hypothetical cycle of xenophobia (the rule of thumb being if it comes from the east, one must be wary), we may speculate that vegetarian ideas were banished into the intellectual wilderness for other reasons. Perhaps a rejection of meat was associated in people's minds with religions of an esoteric nature. Although eastern religions were to play an increasingly influential role in the spiritual life of the empire, those inclined to pay simple veneration to the *lares* and *penates*, or who offered prayer at the shrines of Jupiter or Apollo may have shied away from the more extreme rituals of the cults of a Cybele.<sup>135</sup> It is possible that thoughts about vegetarianism never entered the minds of the majority of the population. Unless religious taboos or legal sanctions prohibited it, it would seem strange if people who were forced to live on a subsistence diet through lack of resources, denied themselves a source of food which they probably would have found tasty and nutritious because of moral scruples.<sup>136</sup> It seems likely that, if arguments for and against the eating of meat were advanced in this period, it would have been between a relatively small group of intellectuals, who, by their own admission, saw it as an option for only a very limited number of people. However, if these ideas had received a wider airing, one may only conjecture as to how explosively revolutionary they may have been, and how they may have forced that society to indulge in an extended bout of self-reflective criticism.

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<sup>135</sup> The ritual castration of the male followers of Cybele, and the immersion in bull's blood that was known as the *taurobolium*; Catull. *Carmin.* 63; Burkert (1985), 177-179. Also Vermaseren (1977); Clark (2000), 122, note 9.

<sup>136</sup> Although perhaps one should consider the widespread poverty in the Indian subcontinent and the Hindu view of the inviolable nature of the cow.