

A New Kind of Vegetarianism: Porphyry on Animal Sacrifice

The second book of Porphyry's treatise *De abstinentia* is devoted to the problem animal sacrifice poses for those who wish to maintain a vegetarian lifestyle, specifically, those who, like himself, identify as philosophers who live in "imitation of God" (2.3). For Porphyry, the problem with animal sacrifice and the consumption of meat is that they work against the goal of the philosopher by involving him more deeply in the material world. Porphyry differs from earlier philosophers whose practices seem to have involved vegetarianism based on arguments against cannibalism (Pythagoreans) or for justice (Theophrastus). For Porphyry, the need to abstain from animate food derives from his overall philosophical agenda, defining the philosopher as one who disassociates himself from the material world to be re-assimilated into the world of the intelligible.

Porphyry's agenda thus distorts his use of other philosophers advocating vegetarianism, particularly Theophrastus. In the first half of the second book of *De abstinentia*, Porphyry recounts Theophrastus' arguments against animal sacrifice, taken from Theophrastus' now lost treatise *On Piety*, including an etiological myth of the Attic sacrificial rite known as the *Bouphonia*. A correct understanding of Porphyry's agenda and his use of Theophrastus then has important consequences for a general understanding of Greek sacrifice, because of the central importance placed on his account of the *Bouphonia* in the theories of Burkert and Vernant, two of the most influential scholars of Greek religion. Although Porphyry makes much use of Theophrastus, he does so only to acknowledge various views on a preexisting debate. When advancing his own views on sacrifice and meat eating, he uses none of Theophrastus' ethical arguments, but focuses wholly on the needs of the philosopher. He is not advocating a change in sacrificial

practices for the many, but rather he is defining a way of life for a few elite philosophers.