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John Cabot University

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Bachelor of Arts in Classical Studies
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Omnia Mutantur, Nihil Interit: Pythagorean Ideas of Vegetarianism and
Metempsychosis in Antiquity

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Abstract

Pythagoras was the first known advocate to voice a claim of moral rationale in opposition to the religio-political structure of the ancient world in defense of vegetarianism. Pythagorean vegetarianism started a shift in consciousness and new perspective of animal life in comparison to human life that persisted largely unchanged throughout the Greco-Roman world, despite its deep subservience of the religio-political system upon which the states of Greece and Rome functioned. The concept of metempsychosis was carried through antiquity from Pythagoras to Ovid, and the adoption of vegetarianism based on transmigration of the soul is seen strongly into the early Roman Empire.

In this thesis I investigated the scope of vegetarian thought in antiquity and concluded that the Pythagorean view of vegetarianism, based on the concept of metempsychosis, continued persistently through different philosophers such as Empedocles, Porphyry, Plutarch. I looked at the works of these authors in comparison to each other and in comparison to the social climate in which they were writing their works to compare their practices of vegetarian philosophy on grounds of morality and the ways in which it largely remained the same from the years 600BCE-100CE.

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1. Introduction

There is a particular moment in the life of everyone who has converted to vegetarianism when they realize that eating meat is wrong. Maybe it comes after seeing how a slaughterhouse operates, or interacting with an animal, but anyone who made the conscious choice to abstain from meat can tell you about the moment when the philosophy overcame them. I started my research in the hopes of arguing that Pythagoras was the progenitor of vegetarianism in the Western world, but it became clear very fast that the moral rationale for vegetarianism has remained unchanged for the entirety of human consciousness. At its very core is empathy, a belief that taking the life of another conscious being is wrong. But this type of self-reflection is only possible to a person part of a larger, well-sustained community, a person who has the free time to stop and reflect on the meaning of existence, and consciousness, and being. The practice of vegetarianism may stem back to prehistory, but the way in which the consciousness of animals has been perceived by its practitioners and the ultimate reason for their abstinence from eating animals has gone through cycles of change. In the Greco-Roman world, the pervading philosophy for vegetarianism was the concept of metempsychosis.

In 600 BCE Greece was flourishing. The Greco-Roman world was to a point of comfort. At the time life was built around of smaller communities, central to which was the domestication of livestock and the practice of agriculture. Society was centered around livestock, to the point where livestock became an integral part of their religious practice. But the comfort of this time lent itself to reflection, and the concept of vegetarianism made its way into Greek philosophical

thought. Pythagoras was the first known advocate to voice a claim of moral rationale in opposition to the religio-political structure of the ancient world in defense of vegetarianism. Pythagorean vegetarianism started a shift in consciousness and new perspective of animal life in comparison to human life that persisted largely unchanged throughout the Greco-Roman world, despite its deep subservience of the religio-political system upon which the states of Greece and Rome functioned. The concept of metempsychosis was carried through antiquity from Pythagoras to Ovid, and the adoption of vegetarianism based on transmigration of the soul is seen strongly into the early Roman empire.

2. The Culture of Slaughter and Eating Meat

The act of slaughtering and eating animals as sacrifice was central to the social, religious, and political spheres of the Greco-Roman world. All aspects of the community's function were hinged on the rituals of sacrifice—politicians headed the events, priests ensured the appeasements of the gods, auguries divinated, farmers produced animals and grain to be used in ceremony, and of course, the community gathered in procession and celebration of the deity whom they honored. Sacrifice was such a part of the society's function that the city's calendar of working days and rest days was itself the sacrificial schedule. Sacrifices represented community solidarity: One of the rites of sacrifice was processions. However small the processional, the support and inclusion of the community was integral to the process of animal sacrifice.¹ The slaughter of animals under the guise of religious worship was a means of meat distribution to the inhabitants of the city. The ouranic gods had no need for meat; their interest in the rite of sacrifice was in the blood spilled on the altar, the smell of smoke that came from the burning corpse of the victim, and afterwards, they demanded the bones of the animal. The organs of the victim were divinated, boiled, and distributed as food among the hungry crowd participating in the ceremony. This celebration was a type of welfare in the ancient world, a state-sanctioned source of free food, which was likely the only source of protein available to the average citizen.

¹ Pfuhl via Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, 3.

Free men in Athens could expect to receive nine or ten of these sacrificial meals every month.² The entire religio-political system and the hierarchy of the community was determined by one's role in the process of sacrifice; the act of slaughter in the name of a god was the most essential rite of Greco-Roman society.³

Bloodshed was an act of piety to the gods. Burkert traces this meat worship back to the Iliad, the most ancient record of Greek culture available. In the time when men and gods interacted more freely, meat was a heroic necessity. Humans were only allowed to approach the gods after they performed a rite of animal sacrifice.⁴ Howe links the high occurrence of references to meat in the Iliad with the general cultural trend of power: Meat eating was a marker of status, and the amount of cattle owned among the rich and upper class determined how much power one had in society.⁵ Domesticated livestock were perceived as valuable for several reasons: firstly, due to the monetary cost of raising cattle and providing their feed in the decade before their sacrifice. Unlike modern times, where the average cow is reared to three years old before her slaughter, archaeological evidence of cattle bone caches shows the average age of the sacrificed cattle to be

² Ekroth, "Animal Sacrifice in Antiquity." Ekroth specifies 5th century Athens.

³ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 55.; Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, 3. Burkert draws special attention here to the vocabulary for the action of performing sacrifice.

⁴ Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, 2

⁵ McInerney, "Civilization, Gastronomy, and Meat-Eating."; Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, 2; Howe, "Value Economics: Animals, Wealth, and the Market."

around ten years old.⁶ Cattle were also regarded as investment equipment to farmers, equal workers to humans on the farm. On a more general level, ownership of cattle represented a constant source of food and way for humans to sustain life. To have cattle was also a way to sponsor a sacrifice. Animal sacrifice in the form of bulls and cows was the standard and most expensive way to prove submission to the gods.⁷ Cattle were a form of political currency; sacrifices were offered by those who held authority.⁸ To deny the ritual of sacrifice “would be not simply a criticism of meat-eating, but a criticism of power.”⁹

Refusal to participate in these rites was not only seen as an affront to the gods, but also as means for ostracism from the community. In a state where religion and politics are so intimately tied, a refusal to participate is a subversive act because it goes against the core practices and beliefs of that society.¹⁰ Eating meat was central to the idea of community. The only reason in which its abstinence would be regarded with validity in the eyes of the Greeks and the Romans would be for reasons of a religious practice which forbade it; one was forgiven in breaking the social code of society so long as it was for the adherence of a moral one, for “to

⁶ Groot, *Animals in Ritual Economy in a Roman Frontier Community*, 31.

⁷ Schultz, “Roman Sacrifice, Inside and Out,” 62.

⁸ Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, 79.

⁹ Spencer, *Vegetarianism: A History*; Preece, *Sins of the Flesh: A History of Ethical Vegetarian Thought*, 29.

¹⁰ This is a unanimously agreed upon point in academia, but authors who explain this subject in great depth are Spencer, *Vegetarianism: A History*, 29.; Detienne, *Dionysus Slain*.

change one's diet is to throw into doubt the relationship between gods, men, and beasts upon which the whole politico- religious system of the city rests.”

3. Pythagoras

Pythagoras is a figure that has gained almost legendary status throughout history with his reputation of mysticism and the vast ideologies either attributed to him or claiming to derive from his teachings. As the first self-proclaimed *φιλόσοφος*, Pythagoras' ideas came to permeate the rest of western thought and opened up the field of philosophy with his ideas on the concept of being. Pythagorean ideology was religicized in his cult, and the rites of Pythagoreanism were comparable to its contemporary mystic sects with features such as vows of silence, degrees of initiation, and secretive practice. In part due to his secrecy, and perhaps to the innate charisma ascribed to him, Pythagoras gained a reputation as a superhuman being or intermediary between divine and human; liked to Apollo by the Croton during his lifetime.¹¹ The mystification continued as a part of Greek history as Aristotle, centuries after the death of Pythagoras, wrote about the beliefs of the Pythagoreans that among rational beings there exists three types: τὸ μὲν ἐστὶ θεός, τὸ δὲ ἄνθρωπος, τὸ δὲ οἶον Πυθαγόρας.¹² As is the nature of mystery religious, no original literature remains from Pythagoras himself. Information about his life and his practices

¹¹ Empedocles, “Fragments of Empedocles.”

¹² Aristotle via Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*.

has been transmitted through fragments of those influenced by his thoughts and by the two extant biographies of his life by Iamblichus and Diodorus Siculus, both of whom also wrote their works centuries after Pythagoras' death. Through these we have secured two of the basic tenets of Pythagorean thought: the belief in the transmigration of the human soul in the process of metempsychosis, and the doctrine of non-violence as a means to keep the soul purified. The practice of vegetarianism in the Greek world at this time was not exclusive to Pythagoras and his cult; it was practiced by other mystic sects such as Orphism and later, Zoroastrianism. There are accounts that Pythagoras was introduced to the practice of vegetarianism in the course of his travels to Egypt, by a priestess at Delphi, and through other mystic religious traditions at the time, of which Pythagoras had already been initiated into. No matter the ultimate inspiration of Pythagoras' philosophy, he was the figure that introduced into larger Greek society the cosmological theory for the abstinence from meat. Pythagorean views on the cosmological necessity of vegetarianism at its core embodied the base human notion of empathy and morality through his abstinence of meat, and in so was subversive to the greater socio-religious structure at the time. This was remarked on by the ancients, Iamblichus going so far as to say that Pythagoras created his own distinct religion, "τὸν περὶ θεῶν λόγον."¹³

At the core of Pythagorean philosophy is the belief in the immortality and the finitude of the soul. Pythagoras' concept of a harmonic soul was entangled with and dependent upon his theories of numerology, through which he believed in numbers as the determinative force in the structure of the universe and in keeping its order. To Pythagoras, number was the force of harmony that kept the immortal soul and the universe balanced. He believed that there were a

¹³ Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, VP 146.

fixed number of souls in order to keep this balance, souls which transmigrated into beings with divine potential: humans, animals, and the plants that were deemed sacred to the gods.

Pythagorean belief that all things ensouled (ἔμψυχα) are of the same kind (ὁμογενῆ) defined his view of the fundamental equality of humans and animals based on the concept of metempsychosis.¹⁴ The Pythagorean philosophy of the harmony of souls stated that the *ψυχή* was immortal and that upon corporeal death the soul migrated into another other living creature. Because of the fixed balance of the number of *ψυχές*, it was determined that all souls follow this trans-species migration (νέον δ' οὐδὲν ἀπλῶς ἔστι), making humans and animals one on a cosmological level.

The interspeciality of the doctrine of transmigration is best explained by Diogenes Laertes and Plutarch. Diogenes Laertes quotes Pythagoras' own experience with transmigration as “the wandering of the soul, how it had wandered and all the plants and animals it had been in.”¹⁵ Plutarch, whose own personal beliefs of vegetarianism followed those of Pythagoras, omits the mention of plants in his explanation, stating simply that “the soul passes into other species of animals.”¹⁶ The divine aspect of this doctrine and the balance of soul in the *κόσμος* “establishes some sort of fellowship not only among humans and between humans and gods, but also between humans and animals” deeming animals as equals to mankind, and to kill and eat an animal was

¹⁴ Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*.

¹⁵ Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum*,. 8.4-5.

¹⁶ Plutarch, “De Esu Carnium I & II.”

just as morally reprehensible as killing and eating a fellow man.¹⁷ The Pythagorean diet reflects his belief of the soul and those following the Pythagorean way of life were abstinent from any being, fauna or flora, which had the capacity to hold the human soul. Iamblichus says in his *Life of Pythagoras* that only animals into which the human soul does not enter are okay to sacrifice.¹⁸ The restrictions on which animals were deemed permissible are not clear to us, but Herodotus speaks of a fixed cycle of transmigration patterns of the soul and the order of beings which the soul inhabits:

ὡς ἀνθρώπου ψυχὴ ἀθάνατός ἐστι, τοῦ σώματος δὲ καταφθίνοντος ἐς ἄλλο ζῷον αἰεὶ γινόμενον ἐσδύεται· ἐπεὶ δὲ πάντα περιέλθῃ τὰ χερσαῖα καὶ τὰ θαλάσσια καὶ τὰ πετεινά, αὐτὶς ἐς ἀνθρώπου σῶμα γινόμενον ἐσδύνειν· τὴν περιήλυσιν δὲ αὐτῇ γίνεσθαι ἐν τρισχιλίοισι ἔτεσι..

A human's soul is immortal, and when the body has been destroyed it enters each time into another living being that is being born; and after it has gone through all the animals, terrestrial, marine, and winged, it enters once again into a human body that is being born¹⁹

¹⁷ Mauro, “The Philosophical Origins of Vegetarianism: Greek Philosophers and Animal World.”

¹⁸Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*.

¹⁹ Herodotus, *Histories* 2.123. It is debated whether this passage is actually about Pythagoras due to the vague wording, but is usually attributed to Pythagoras. The other possible philosopher who

There is not much of a specification, citing the “all animals terrestrial, marine, and avian” as a part of the pattern of transmigration.

The act of sacrifice was central to Greek religious practice and to the relationship between humankind and the divine. There is no definitive literary source as to what the contents of these Pythagorean sacrifices were. Spencer and Preece both make mention that the most likely votive items given in honor of the gods were wax effigies shaped into the form of an animal, and food befitting the restrictions of Pythagoras’ diet, such as cakes and honey, or aromatics.²⁰ Pythagoras is said to have sacrificed only at the altar to Apollo in Delos, upon which fire and by extension, animal sacrifice, was not permitted. Without providing any sources, Johnson claims that this altar was solely for offers of grains and cakes.²¹

Humans sacrificed to the gods what they themselves ate.²² Authors such as Porphyry and Ovid describe a mythical Golden Age before man started eating animals and only vegetarian

said this was Empedocles, a pupil and follower of Pythagoras who held the same ideas on transmigration of the soul, as will be seen in section 4 of this paper.

²⁰ Spencer, *Vegetarianism: A History*; Preece, *Sins of the Flesh: A History of Ethical Vegetarian Thought*, 91.

²¹ Johnson, *The Unbloody Sacrifice, and Altar Unvail’d and Supported*, 75.

²² There is discourse to the claim; this point is contested by Schultz, “Roman Sacrifice, Inside and Out.”, 62 who argues that the first was that the idea of sacrifice was for a human to relinquish something of great personal value to the gods.

offerings were given to the gods, later to be changed to animal sacrifice when meat started to be consumed. Every sacrifice had its vegetarian elements of devotion to the gods in addition to the practice of slaughter. Grain was always present, sprinkled on the head of the animal victim. This was *mola salsa* in Rome, *ούλαί* in Greece. Offerings of vegetables came at beginning and end of ceremony along with libations.²³ Pythagorean philosophers followed rites of vegetarian sacrifice, still maintaining, though altered, a fundamental aspect of their community.

Porphyry gives a small description of food permissible to Pythagoras, stating that in the absence of meat he is content to eat honey or bread or his “principal dish” was herbs.²⁴ A diet mainly composed of aromatic plants. This action was in itself was a sign of divinity and ascension of the soul from human form to divine: while humans ate the flesh of the animals sacrificed in ritual, and traditionally ate meat for their survival, it was the aroma from the sacrifice which the gods lived off of. This diet can be framed as either extremely pious or extremely blasphemous: by eating like the gods, one is either showing indignation and mocking them by conveying their own divinity, or it can be framed as a practice of piety and status as an intermediary figure between mankind and the ouranic gods to whom they sacrificed.²⁵ There were instances of vegetarian priests in certain Egyptian sects who abstained from meat for reasons of wanting purity, and themselves being regarded as sacred figures in Egypt abstained from meat as a way to mimic the gods and show more solidarity to the divine than to the community they mediated messages of the heavens to. There is a third proposition, inspired by

²³ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 12; Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, 81.

²⁴ Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*.

²⁵ Spencer, 49.

Aristotle's *On Sensation*, in which he tells us that the Pythagoreans say that some animals are nourished by odor (τρέφεσθαι . . . ταῖς ὀσμάϊς.)²⁶ Eating the same food as the animals to whom he claimed equality may have been an act of solidarity between kin souls.

The philosophy of non-violence in Pythagorean belief, especially as a justification for living a vegetarian lifestyle, corresponds still with many modern arguments for vegetarianism.

Pythagoras believed that in order to maintain purity of the soul, one was to abstain from violence practices. The slaughter of any creature is a violent act, but the slaughter of a creature which was believed to be equal to a man was murder. Pythagoras not only believed that animals shared human souls, but also that they were capable of ethics and practicing moral behavior because of this. Iamblichus cites Pythagoras' abstention from meat not because of his belief in metempsychosis, but because eating an animal-free and therefore slaughter-free diet was conducive to peace. Nonviolence and abstaining from meat was the only way to attain Purity of the soul.²⁷

The infamous story of Pythagoras' legendary death is an example of how far his belief of non-violence went and his "mystic union with all living things."²⁸ While fleeing from an angry mob, Pythagoras was said to have come before a field of beans and paused. He refused to cross the field and trample them, even at the expense of his own life. The reason why beans were deemed a sacred plant and beholding of a cosmic soul is debated, but it is because either they held the souls of humans, or that which we are made from. One theory is that the stems of bean

²⁶ Aristotle, *On Sensation*

²⁷ Iamblichus.

²⁸ Spencer, 46.

stalks, unlike other vegetation native to Croton have no nodes, so the plant was connected straight from the air to below the earth. This biological aspect of the bean is also said to have made them a direct link between the living and the deceased, “instruments of metempsychosis” by nature of their appearance.²⁹

Pythagorean ideology derived from the cult of Orphism, a mystery religion under which Pythagoras had been initiated into in his earlier years. The influence by the orphic was doubtless: their philosophy wished to “awaken in humankind their divine origin” and believed in reincarnation until this enlightenment of the soul happened.³⁰ They abstained from eating meat for ascetic reasons, but unlike Pythagoras, did not carry any moral reasoning behind their abstentions. Animals under Orphic thought were considered impure and taint the human soul; they did not allow animal flesh into their bodies in order to be cleansed of the animalistic aspects of their humanity. Though they abstained from consuming meat, the Orphic lifestyle was certainly not vegetarian. Their Dionysiac practices included *σπαραγμός*, a sacrifice through dismemberment for certain religious occasions. Pythagoras was influenced by the orphic ideas of transmigration and the necessity to purify one’s soul, but himself believed that that purification required adherence to moral purity as well.

An overlooked aspect of potential Orphic impact on Pythagorean ideology is the role of Orpheus as the tamer of animals.³¹ This trait of Orpheus was perhaps manifested in the Orphic belief in purging the self of animalistic instinct. In surviving myth, Orpheus is able to subdue

²⁹ Spencer, 49.

³⁰ Detienne.

³¹ Preece, 87.

animals with his song, but there is no record of interaction beyond that, much less anything that could be seen as the basis for the Pythagorean concept of a shared soul. In *The Frogs*, Aristophanes mentions to Dionysus that “Orpheus taught us rites and to refrain from killing.”³² Orpheus himself is attributed with stopping the slaughter of animals, and it is from this unknown belief that the concept of Pythagorean unity with animals may have derived. Both Orphism and Pythagoreanism held the same views on the rite of sacrifice as an act of murder.

His unique perspective on the harmonic of the human soul blended with Orphic ideas to create the uniquely Pythagorean idea of abstention from meat based on cosmology and morality. Pythagoras practiced a human-centric approach to the concept of vegetarianism, not believing in rights of animals not to be eaten, but rather using the concept of a human soul to paint eating animals as a moral cannibalism. This idea that it is fundamentally wrong to kill another being for sustenance continued to influence philosophers, who traced their line of thought back to Pythagorean ideals.

4. Empedocles

Empedocles was a student of Pythagoras in Croton and is the closest writer we have to Pythagoras chronologically. His fragmental poems, *On Nature* and *the Purifications* are centered on cosmology and within them, Empedocles writes the oldest full writings on the concept of

³² Aristophanes, *Frogs*, line 1031.

vegetarianism, taking a firm stance on the immorality of consuming meat on the basis of metempsychosis. He believed in the model of organic matter of the universe in his views that

ἄλλο δέ τοι ἔρέω· φύσις οὐδενὸς ἐστὶν ἀπάντων θνητῶν, οὐδέ τις οὐλομένου θανάτιο τελευτή, ἀλλὰ μόνον μεῖξις τε διάλλαξις τε μιγέντων ἐστὶ, φύσις δ' ἐπὶ τοῖς ὀνομάζεται ἀνθρώποισιν.

There is no substance of any of all the things that die, nor any cessation for them of baneful death. They are only a mixture and interchange of what has been mixed. Substance is but a name given to these things by men.³³

He related this concept of immortal mutable matter specifically to the soul:

οἱ δ' ὅτε κεν κατὰ φῶτα μιγὲν φῶς αἰθέρι <ΐκη> ἢ κατὰ θηρῶν ἀγροτέρων γένος ἢ κατὰ θάμνων ἢ κατ' οἰωνῶν, τότε μὲν τὰ λέγουσι γενέσθαι· εὔτε δ' ἀποκριθέωσι, τὰ δ' αὖ δυσδαίμονα πότμον, ἢ θέμις ἐστὶ, καλοῦσι, νόμῳ δ' ἐπίφημι καὶ αὐτός.

But when in man, wild beast, or bird, or bush,
These elements commingle and arrive
To the realms of light, the thoughtless deem it "birth"
When they depart, 'tis "doom of death;" and though
Not this the Law, I too assent to use.

³³ Empedocles, "Fragments of Empedocles."

Empedocles shares exactly Pythagoras' views on the concept of cosmology and the universal transmigrating soul. More explicitly than Pythagoras, are the Empedoclean views of animal welfare and within his works he makes explicit points about the welfare of animals and the injustice of killing them for any reason on the basis that from a cosmological level we are all *δαίμονε* who are exiled to earth upon committing bloodshed or succumbing to “raging hate”.

He shows Orphic influence in his belief of life on earth as a punishment for having a tainted soul, and that the act of purification of the soul would end the cycle of metempsychosis and allow his *δαίμων* to return out of the exile of life on earth and return to its divine nature. He claimed, as did Pythagoras, to have retained memory of his previous lives and to have been working to return to his divine state by purging his soul of the defilement incurred “raging hate”, among which was the act of murder by eating fellow creatures that contained *δαίμονε*. Empedocles, contrary to Pythagoras, did not keep his philosophical opinions private, and instead published treatises to share among the non-philosophers. On the topic of eating meat he addresses omnivores directly,

οὐ πάυσεσθε φόνοιο δυσηχέος; οὐκ ἔσορᾶτε;

ἀλλήλους δάπτοντες ἀκηδείησι νόοιο ;

Will ye not cease from this harsh-sounding slaughter?

Do you not see that you are devouring one another in the thoughtlessness of your minds?

He abstained also from eating plants that contained δαίμονε and were sacred to the gods, among which are named beans and laurel leaves. These ideas clearly show their derivation from Pythagoras. However, his view of transmigration differs slightly in his usage of δαίμον rather than ψυχή. While Pythagoras believed in the unchanging ψυχή, Empedocles used δαίμον to emphasize the supernatural origin of his idea of the soul and perpetuate the idea that life on earth is a kind of exile from the divine plane. ψυχή is one with the Earth, while δαίμον was sent as a punishment for wrong-doings in a former body. Empedocles details an expansion of the cycle of transmigration later explained by Heraclitus, which is traditionally attributed to Pythagoras:

ἔστιν ἀνάγκης χρῆμα, θεῶν ψήφισμα παλαιόν, αἰδίων, πλατέεσσι κατεσφρηγισμένον
ὄρκοις. εὐτέ τις ἀμπλακίησι φόνω φίλα γυῖα μίγη ἀίματος ἢ ἐπίορκον ἀμαρτήσας
ἐπομόσση δαίμων, οἷτε μακρᾶϊωνος λελάχασι βιοῖο, τρίς μιν μυρίας ὥρας ἀπὸ μακάρων
ἀλάλησθαι, φυόμενον παντοῖα διὰ χρόνου εἶδεα θνητῶν, ἀργαλέας βιότοιο
μεταλλάσσοντα κελεύθους. αἰθέριον μὲν γὰρ σφε μένος πόντονδε διώκει, πόντος δ' ἐς
χθονὸς οὐδας ἀπέπτυσσε, γαῖα δ' ἐς αὐγὰς ἡελίου ἀκάμαντος, ὁ δ' αἰθέρος ἔμβαλε δίναις.
ἄλλος δ' ἐξ ἄλλου δέχεται, στυγέουσι δὲ πάντες. τῶν καὶ ἐγὼ νῦν εἰμι, φυγὰς θέοθεν καὶ
ἀλήτης, εἰκει μαινομένῳ πίσυρος.

Whenever one of the daimon, whose portion is length of days, has sinfully polluted his hands with blood, or followed strife and forsworn himself, he must wander thrice ten thousand seasons from the abodes of the blessed, being born throughout the time in all manners of mortal forms, changing one toilsome path of life for another. For the mighty Air drives him into the Sea, and the Sea spews him forth on the dry Earth; Earth tosses

him into the beams of the blazing Sun, and he flings him back to the eddies of Air. One takes him from the other, and all reject him.”³⁴

While Pythagoras believed that the body you would come to inhabit on your next iteration on earth was dependent upon the actions taken in life and the purity of the actions taken in one’s mortal body, Empedocles adhered to the idea of a fixed progression of transmigration that repeats for a set amount of time as punishment for violating the natural laws of the universe.

Empedocles believed that one’s *δαίμων* could only return to the divine if the soul was purified completely, and that any act of violence against a fellow *δαίμων* caused an imperfection on the soul and would cause that *δαίμων* to reiterate into an earthly being.

Empedocles was perhaps more radical than Pythagoras in the aspect of his of religious life, not only equating himself to a god, but openly denouncing the practice of sacrifice for all humans. Pythagoras spoke only of himself and his followers in his instructive teachings, and on these topics referred to practices of sacrifice taken by other people who did not follow his doctrine. Empedocles however resolved to share his teachings with all his fellow to all of his fellow *δαίμονες*. and in his mission to do so framed the act of sacrifice as an evil:

μορφήν δ' ἀλλάξαντα πατὴρ φίλον υἱὸν αἰείρας σφάζει ἐπεύχομενος, μέγα νήπιος· οἱ δὲ
φορεῦνται λισσόμενοι θύοντος· ὁ δ' ἄρ νήκουστος ὁμοκλέων σφάζας ἐν μεγάροισι
κακὴν ἀλεγύνατο δαῖτα. ὧς δ' αὐτῶς πατέρ' υἱὸς ἐλὼν καὶ μητέρα παῖδες 485 θυμὸν
ἀπορραΐσαντε φίλας κατὰ σάρκας ἔδουσιν.

³⁴ Empedocles.

And the father takes up his own son who has changed form and slays him with a prayer. How foolish! And they run up to the sacrificers, begging mercy, while he does not hear their cries, slaughters them in his halls and gets ready the evil feast. It is in this way the son seizes his father, and daughters and their mother, and eats the kindred flesh after they have died.³⁵

In his public shaming of the practice of sacrifice on the basis of its immorality and injustice, Empedocles brought ideas of Pythagoreanism out of the shadows and into public thought; through the reiteration of the idea of universal transmigratory souls, Empedocles began to publicize Pythagorean philosophy and its teachings to the people of Magna Graeca.

5. Plutarch

In the first century CE Plutarch wrote his *Ἠθικά*, more famously known by its Latin name, *Moralia*, a series of essays concerning the *mores* of Roman and Greek society. *Moralia XII* begins a series detailing the evolution of rational thought in Greek philosophy, with epistemological essays “On the Principle of Cold” and “Whether Fire or Water is More Useful,” a reflection of Thales’ argument of water as the arche of all things and Heraclitus’ refutation.

³⁵ Empedocles.

Naturally, following the line of philosophical thought in Greek history, he created a series of essays inspired by Pythagorean *mores*, in which he argues in favor of the rationality of animals and shares a doctrine “On the Eating of Flesh,” explaining the reasons why humans should abstain from the practice of eating meat.

Plutarch’s essays, inspired by his own experience following a vegetarian diet (and undoubtedly his experience debating against those who question this choice) step away from the cosmological reasoning used hitherto in the defense of vegetarianism and instead uses an argument based on his views of morality and empathy for animals, using his personal perspective in his defense. The *Moralia* is a pivotal point in the view of vegetarianism in antiquity: it begins a view of vegetarianism as a choice of personal morality as opposed to a universal cosmological argument. In the essays are the very beginning thoughts of animal agency discrete to their relationship to humans as Plutarch shifts his defense of vegetarianism away from the basis of metempsychosis.

His first defense for the practice of vegetarianism comes in his work “Whether Land or Sea Animals are Cleverer.” The Platonic influence on his work is not lost; this dialectic is titled ironically as he makes the assertion that all animals are intelligent. Schuster believes that the “land animals” referred to in the title are meant to represent humans, further emphasizing Plutarch’s message on the equal intelligence of all living creatures.³⁶ Through the character of Autobulus, Plutarch defends the value of animal life and the Pythagorean idea of spiritual equality between man and animals by calling into question the validity of the practice of distinguishing the two. He does not refer to metempsychosis directly, but rather the equality of

³⁶ Schuster, *Plutarch’s Moralia*, 312.

the soul instead of the sameness of it. He uses the classic Platonic rhetoric of concession and defense, of which here he chose to refute the anti-vegetarian claim that animals are of inferior intelligence because they do not have a means to practice self-improvement as philosophers did:

παρατιθέναι ἄλλην τε πολλὴν ἐνορῶν φλαυρότητα καὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς, πρὸς ἣν ὁ λόγος
γέγονε, μηδέν' ἐμφανῆι στοχασμὸν αὐτῶν μηδὲ προκοπὴν μηδ' ὄρεξιν, ἀπορῶ πῶς ἡ
φύσις ἔδωκε τὴν ἀρχὴν αὐ τοῖς, ἐπὶ τὸ τέλος ἐξικέσθαι μὴ δυναμένοις.

They do not explicitly aim at virtue, for which purpose reason itself exists; nor do they make any progress in virtue or have any bent from it; that I fail to see how Nature gave them even basic reason, seeing as they cannot achieve its end.

This was a refutation against vegetarianism which had not never been used against prior philosophers. Pythagoras' original concept of the shared soul doted on the consciousness of being and the shared plane on which the souls reside; it is only after the Platonic theory of forms made its way into the philosophical canon that this argument against vegetarianism on the grounds of rationality vs. irrationality was formed and marks the first instance of the aim for *ἀρετή* used as a criterion for rationality. While Pythagoras believed firmly in the identical consciousness of humans and animals, fueled by our shared souls, Plutarch adjusts this view with the argument that the initial rationality of humans and animals are the same, but that this

rationality manifests in different ways in each species, ἤττον παροῦσα, and that humans have greater developed consciousness which we share with animals.³⁷

The entire next section of *Moralia XII* is dedicated to this thought: *bruta animalia ratione uti*, the concept that all beasts are rational. For this point he proposes an alternate scene of *The Odyssey* wherein Odysseus asks Circe to turn his men back into their human forms after she had transformed them into pigs. Circe agrees on the condition that Odysseus can convince them to return to their original human bodies. In this essay he argues a radical stance regarding the supposed hierarchy of rationality of beings: while Pythagoras and all of his successors hitherto have viewed animals as kindred souls of wretched station, put in an animal body as penance for a past wrongdoing, Plutarch proposes that animals are more virtuous than men, and that “The soul of wild beasts (θηρίων) has a greater natural capacity and perfection for the creation of virtue.”³⁸

The basis of this argument is that animals develop reason naturally, and that “bravery is an innate characteristic to beasts,” whereas humans are not able to come by these skills naturally and philosophers must be taught virtue and courage. While this point may have been part of a sophistic exercise (Odysseus calls out Gryllus for his use of sophism in the passage), this outlook frames animals in a way that was unique in the overarching debate of interspecies rationality and consciousness. This is the first time that the animal soul by itself, divorced completely from the concepts of humanity and metempsychosis are praised. This individualistic model of reasoning is of the ancients the most closely related to modern arguments for vegetarianism, which focus heavily on the innate rights of all beings as independent entities instead of focusing on animals’

³⁷ Plutarch, “Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti,” line 963.

³⁸ Plutarch, “Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti,” line 987.

relationship to humans. Through the characters of Autobulus and Gryllus, Plutarch proves in two opposite ways the rationality of non-human animals and the reasons why they deserve human respect.

6. Porphyry

Porphyry's treatise *On the Abstinence of Ensouled Beings* (*Περὶ ἀποχῆς ἐμψύχων*), survives as the most intact piece of literature on vegetarian philosophy from antiquity. Porphyry asserts mankind's moral duty to vegetarianism according to the doctrine of Pythagorean transmigration, and expands upon the idea of a shared universal soul between man and animal. His cosmological view for the necessity of abstinence from meat is split into four books. *Περὶ ἀποχῆς ἐμψύχων* speaks of the obligation of the soul to elevate itself to the divine and to be purified of any corporeal elements, thereby advocating for a vegetarian diet.

Porphyry's argument for vegetarianism as a means to keep the soul pure begins in Book I, where he admits that he takes his succeeding arguments from "ancient and pious men," no doubt referring to the teachings of Pythagoras and Empedocles. He admonishes the "illegitimate conduct" of a philosopher who consumes flesh, echoing the Pythagorean idea that ingesting meat taints the soul and that a requirement for the attainment of wisdom or the true practice of philosophy is vegetarianism. Porphyry's idea of purification is verbatim the idea asserted by Pythagoras: that one must abstain from eating animal flesh as it taints the soul, and that one must practice a vegetarian diet in order to return to our *ψυχῆ* to its natural divine state. Unlike

Empedocles, Porphyry does not make it a point to include the average man in his philosophies, instead subscribes to the Pythagorean and Platonic beliefs in the nobility of the philosopher, who may one day “return to his proper kindred and associates.”

Porphyry does not contribute any new material or outlooks to the concepts of metempsychosis or to the general teachers of Pythagoreanism; instead his documentation of Pythagorean thought serves as one of the main sources whence we derive the “original” teachings of Pythagoras. He iterates the Pythagorean tenets of metempsychosis and

"it is necessary, if we intend to return to things which are truly our own, that we should divest ourselves of every thing of a mortal nature which we have assumed."

Here he shows belief in the underlying divine nature of the soul and the prospect of transmigration until a point of absolute purity has been reached. He goes so far as to refer to the practice of eating meat as an assumption of a “foreign nature,” which goes against the true nature of the divine philosopher.

Porphyry’s central argument for vegetarianism hinges on the idea of the shared soul on the basis of rationality:

“Let us exhibit the true, and at the same time Pythagoric opinion, and demonstrate that every ψυχή which participates of sense and memory is rational. For this being demonstrated, we may extend, as our opponents will also admit, justice to every animal.”

Porphyry upholds animals as rational beings comparable to humans which is a restructuring of Pythagorean views of animal consciousness through a Neoplatonic lens which amends Pythagorean thought with a new idea based on logical reasoning. He uses the Platonic logic of innate knowledge in his defense of the rationality of animals, defending their intelligence against humans under the pretense that reason is present in all souls, but the perfect reason of humans only comes about by the study of philosophy: “For reason, indeed, is ingenerated by nature; but right and perfect reason is acquired by study and discipline.” In this way he asserts that humans and animals are the same on a cosmological level, both are beings that retain rationality and the eternal soul; humans differ from animals in that their corporeal forms allow them to study and expand their skills of reason and philosophy and to work on the purification of their soul. The introduction of Platonic theory marks a shift in the use of morality to argue for vegetarianism: as opposed to the purely Pythagorean belief in complete equality of consciousness, Porphyry begins to move away from a human-centric view of vegetarianism and advocates for the rationality of animals based on their own displays of faculty instead of relying solely on the concept of metempsychosis as a justification for the cosmic equality of humans and animals.

7. Ovid

Unlike the other authors I have explored in this paper, Ovid is not a philosopher, and it is unclear whether or not he practiced vegetarianism in his personal life. There is no reliable

evidence to suggest that he abstained from meat, though his timeline coincides to the rise of Pythagorean ideas as popular sub-culture among the elite class beginning in the late Roman republic.³⁹ This brought about the resurgence of Pythagorean ideas on metempsychosis and general opposition to the practice of sacrifice for other issues of morality.

There is no evidence in his writings (in which he surely would not be foolish enough to outrightly state his support for an insurgent philosophical movement) of any form of cosmological or moral qualms with the practice of eating meat, but he surely would have been privy to its politically subversive nature. While others advocated for vegetarian lifestyle despite its nature of political subversion, it is quite possible that Ovid gravitated to the idea of vegetarianism just for this reason. His choice to speak primarily, of all things, on the concept of Pythagorean vegetarianism in Book XV of the *Metamorphoses* is very revealing his intentions. In a book with undoubted affronts to Augustus himself and the new political system of Rome, Ovid's use of Pythagoras and his doctrines in the *Metamorphoses* was a type of weaponized morality to used to undercut Augustus, the man who centered his identity and the new identity of the city of Rome around his morality.

The *Metamorphoses* is, at its most basic level of analysis, a collection of Greco-Roman myths on the nature of change. The mythological stories of which the work is composed are the foundations of Greco-Roman religion; they are stories of mortals interacting with gods to create

³⁹ See Green for a comprehensive view on practices and reception of animal sacrifice in the 1c CE Roman Empire Green, "Save Our Cows? Augustan Discourse and Animal Sacrifice in Ovid's 'Fasti.'"; Momigliano, "The Theological Efforts of the Roman Upper Classes in the First Century BC."

the contemporary world in which the book was written. The *Metamorphoses* is a collection of religious stories bound together to become a representation of the religion of Rome itself.

Ovid is challenging Augustus as the moral authority of Rome by showing off Pythagorean ethics as an alternative religious force. He takes the basic doctrines of Pythagoras, transmigration of the soul and vegetarianism, and transforms them from philosophical treatises into poetry wrought with philosophical discourse.⁴⁰ In doing so he is taking the teachings of Pythagoras and spreading them to the masses, taking Pythagoras' ideas and making them available to the broad public. Van Schoor comments that in essence, Ovid is to Pythagoras what Lucretius is to Epicurus.⁴¹

The ideology of vegetarianism is disastrous to the Roman state. Not only was Rome build around a sacrificial economy, but the new political structure of the Roman Empire was hinged around the idea of morality and religious piety.

The religious aspect of the *Metamorphoses* is ironically undercut with the Pythagorean notions of metempsychosis; Ovid is using the ideology of a religious subversive to that which was represented in the anthology to weave its stories together, connecting them and in doing so creating a fantastic advertisement for the philosophies of Pythagoras.

⁴⁰ Van Schoor and Segal both also speak of Ovid's reflection of Lucretian values in the *Metamorphoses* as well van Schoor, "Nec Me Mea Fallit Imago': Ovid's Poetics of Irony and Reflections of Lucretius and Pythagoras in the *Metamorphoses*."; Segal, "Intertextuality and Immortality: Ovid, Pythagoras and Lucretius in *Metamorphoses* 15."

⁴¹ Van Schoor, 128.

It is a widely accepted view that Pythagoras' speech in Book XV of the *Metamorphoses* is a "key to the whole work."⁴² Through his characterization of Pythagoras, Ovid is giving a hint to the basic idea of how this poem is connected aside from its mythological aspect. The reputation of Pythagoras as a mystic figure fits in well with the other works in the collection: Pythagoras joins all of the other legendary figures in teaching the people of Rome about their own morality and religion.

The exposition of Pythagoreanism in Book XV mirrors the structure of Book I, repeated after the reader has heard fourteen books on the nature of change. It is at this point where Pythagoras gives his speech which gives a summary on the basic view of Pythagoreanism.

This narrative framing device serves as an example the cosmogony which is represents: the beginning and the end are the same, and can repeat in cycle for as long as the reader wants. Pythagoras' speech in Book XV mirrors the "philosophically accented opening"⁴³ of Book I, setting the narrative in a circle.

Ovid's description of Pythagoras mirrors the way in which he organized the work itself: they both begin with the origin of kosmos. Book I of the *Metamorphoses* beginnings "Mundi origo" (1.2), at the origin of the world, and Pythagoras came "magni primordia mundi," at the

⁴² In his article, Little cites several authors' support of this theory. For a full list of arguments for this, read his work. While they agree that the mention of Pythagoras is the main point of the work, the reason why is largely contested and there currently exists no general consensus on the meaning of Ovid's insertion of Pythagoras into the *Metamorphoses*

⁴³ Segal, "Intertextuality and Immortality: Ovid, Pythagoras and Lucretius in *Metamorphoses* 15."

beginning of the great universe. These words are similar enough to set up a parallel structure in the poem, but their meanings differ enough to be able to analyze both sides with scrutiny. Ovid is giving a comparison of the traditional *religio* of the state to the ideas of Pythagoreanism. The *religio* is to Pythagoreanism what *origo* is to *mundi*; the idea of Pythagoreanism is held in higher esteem and made to seem bigger and better than Roman tradition.

After the introduction of both concepts, he starts a reflection on the nature of the universe. “Et rerum causas et, quid natura’ (xv.67), “the cause of things and what their nature is”, is the fundamental question behind the *Metamorphoses*. While Book 1 uses this question as a jumping off point to start the story, the question is answered in its repetition in Book XV.

Ovid answers this question through the speech of Pythagoras, in which he is the answer to the function of everything -- a man who, after the reader had experience fourteen books of change, answers all of the underlying questions proposed in the *Metamorphoses* with his philosophical theories. And as the embodiment of the answer to everything, the first thing mentioned when speaking of his knowledge of how the world should function is his thoughts on vegetarianism and the necessity of abstaining from meat. He begins with his belief on transmigration of the soul, examples of which have been presented to the audience in the previous fourteen books of the work. The immediate shift from stories of humans metamorphizing into animals to the explanation of vegetarianism on the grounds of a shared human soul is a whiplash which leaves the reader contemplating Pythagoras’ theories on metempsychosis.

The speech itself is written in a cyclical technique as well: it both begins and ends on the topic of consumption of the flesh and the necessity of vegetarianism.⁴⁴ Pythagoras explicitly mentions sacrifice, the animals, vegetarianism, and metempsychosis, summing up Pythagorean philosophy, and in doing creates a summary of the contents of the book itself as well.

Pythagoras' speech gives a recap of all of the transformations that the reader just witnessed in the book: human, vegetable, animal, and mineral.⁴⁵

The idea of mutability and non-distinct lines between humans, animals, and the divine, of which the *Metamorphoses*, are present in Pythagoras' speech as well:

ipsos inscripsere deos sceleri numenque supernum caede laboriferi credunt
gaudere iuveni!

They made the gods themselves partners of their crime and they affected to believe that the heavenly ones took pleasure in the toiling bullock!

More than just a commentary on the unnaturalness of sacrifice, he compares the gods the humans and the humans as to animals. He also skews the power dynamic between human and god, suggesting that humans forced the gods into the practice of sacrifice.

The phrase "omnia mutantur, nihil interit" (165) on talking about the soul is a reflection of both metempsychosis and metamorphosis, the transience and permanence of all perceived

⁴⁴ Ovid, lines 75-142, 459-478

⁴⁵ Van Schoor, 131.

beings. “Everything has changed, nothing dies” speaks to the overall philosophy of Pythagoreanism as well as the theme of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

The connection between metamorphosis and metempsychosis is obvious: in their basic form, both are forms of transmigration of the human psyche out of its original human body and into something else.

This idea of migration of human consciousness into animal form by means of metamorphosis is well believed in Greco-Roman society, it's an abject fact of literary reflection. The trope of metamorphosis in Greek and Latin literature is reflective of general views of the relationship between man, animal, and god in the Greco-Roman world. Without the conventions or literature or philosophy, there lies in the ancient world a fluidity between gods, men, and animal souls that allows for the feasibility of change. A tenet of Greco-Roman mythology is the ability of the anthropomorphic and theomorphic to shape-shift and transform. There is an underlying connection between the three classifications, something shared between them in cultural thought which allows for this.

While Ovid may be describing Pythagorean thought with an agenda and using it his philosophy for an underhanded act of subversion, in doing so he captures perfectly the philosophy of metempsychosis and relates it in a way that elicits empathy with his readers and leads to a greater comprehension of Pythagoras’ way of thinking.

Thuminger defines two modes of transformation present in the tales of the *Metamorphoses*: the first is those changes imposed from an outside force and unperceived by its

subject, for which she cites the etiological myths of Narcissus and Daphne into plants,⁴⁶ and the second of which is the conscious experience of transformation where the subject is either changed by the hand of a god or acknowledged as a sentient being after the change has been completed. The metamorphoses undertaken in this category are mostly stories of humans being transformed into animals and make up the bulk of representation of stories in the metamorphoses.

An example of a conscious transformation is the story of Io in Book I, a woman whom Hera turns into a cow in an act of retaliation for her affair with Zeus. Upon the transformation she retains her full human consciousness. Thuminger brings up the troubling point that this experience of metamorphosis into an animal is “lived” in first person by the woman; Io takes on a new form retaining both her memories of the past as a human, and a new awareness of the present and her inability to transform back into her original form. In essence, Io never fully transforms into a cow and fundamentally Io is not a cow, but a woman trapped inside a cow.⁴⁷

The metamorphosis is, most basically, the transmigration of a human soul into an animal container, who retains all of the characteristics of being human. In this case Io was transformed into a cow as a punitive act; she upset the natural balance of the world and angered the god, leading to her metamorphosis. This also encompasses an exact parallel to Pythagoras’ idea of

⁴⁶ But, the Pythagorean idea of metempsychosis applied to certain plants as well. It is entirely possible that there was only one mode of transformation, a conscious transformation, but the feature of empathy is lost on a modern day audience. We have no comparable modern philosophies that believe in the consciousness of plants to relate to this.

⁴⁷ Thumiger, “Metamorphosis: Human into Animals.”

metempsychosis: that one must live a pure life, and that the souls of those who are morally impure come back as human souls trapped in animal bodies.

While the human soul remains the same, and its consciousness remains the same, perhaps retaining its memories of a past life, being trapped in an animal body is not viewed in a positive way. The reflection of Pythagorean ideology in the mythological stories of the *Metamorphoses* reflects the concept of the religion itself – the blending of Pythagorean thought and traditional Greco-Roman mythology transforms itself into a new work.

.Ovid’s focus on the aspect of the humanity retained in the victim to make his point: here she is not reborn but rather transformed; he is emphasizing her humanity while also saying that human and animal have the ability to become one; the containers our souls come in are interchangeable but our aspect of humanity remains the same.

On a psychological level, the *Metamorphoses* “explores the limits of individual minds” in their examples of transformation.⁴⁸ It is personal, psychological, and philosophical in nature because it makes the reader question what it means to *be*. In a culture where the emotional and cognitive functions of man and animal function parallel to each other, amplifying the challenges metamorphosis poses to a fixed definition of ‘human’ and human identity despite the transformation into a non-human container.⁴⁹ This is, at its core, the concept of metapsychology that Pythagoras ascribed to: the only difference between man and animal was physical appearance, the animal was once a human who went against divine, the transformed animal retains its sense of consciousness (and perhaps even its memories of the past), and is no longer

⁴⁸ Thumiger, “Metamorphosis: Human into Animals.”

⁴⁹ Ibid.

able to communicate with human beings through speech. When viewed through this lens, it is easy to see why the action of slaughter and consumption of animal flesh was morally repugnant under Pythagorean doctrine.

The *Metamorphoses* itself can be seen as a reflection of fundamental Pythagorean theories of metempsychosis, with an emphasized psychologically driven argument for the abstinence from meat. Ovid explicitly states the argument for vegetarianism and in his work sums up the morality of Pythagoras' argument for vegetarianism in his discourse of Pythagorean philosophy.

8. Conclusion

As the topics of vegetarianism and veganism become more popular in the present day and more accepted in the academic world, research on this subject is growing; but currently, with few published secondary sources on the practice of vegetarianism in antiquity, it seems that all research carried out on this subject so far follows the same primary sources through the same course of thought and come to the same conclusion. The subject has not been thought of by enough scholars to warrant a disagreement.

Of course, it is impossible to know the innermost thoughts and moral conflicts of a certain long dead individual, and many stances are taken either with projection of a later figure onto the previous, or with ambiguous and outdated support. When it comes to the fragments of

Empedocles, I have seen the same quote be used to support completely polar points: as it stands, the evidence of this thought is few and ambiguous, as it goes with all questions of morality,

It is difficult to translate our modern moral biases to the ancient world, but this has remained largely unchanged in the documentation we have stretching back to prehistory. In the western world, the necessity to practice vegetarianism on the grounds of righteousness and moral duty is one that has been in question since before documented time: a question that so goes against the foundations of all societies it has been present in, but yet still remains: maybe it remains as a manifestation of an ingrained sense of empathy in humans, or a recognition of the terms of our consciousness and the consciousness of other beings.

Not many sources on this topic remain, but I have my doubts that many of these thoughts were written down to begin with. In most historiographies the generally agreed upon trends of a society or civilization were written, but not often do we have the moral ideas of a single person, in dissent to the views of their society, deemed important enough to be preserved for posterity.

While research on this subject is in its infancy, just in recent years it has started to become an "acceptable" topic to approach. We have enough surviving evidence to show that the idea of vegetarianism for moral reasons was a present force in the Classical world. Maybe not a large one, and maybe, as in the case of Ovid, this moral justifications existed for immoral reasons, but it was present nonetheless.

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