

THE ARISTOTELIAN CARNIVORE
DE ANIMA AND THE ETHICAL ASPECT OF ANIMAL RATIONALITY

Is an Aristotelian philosopher necessarily carnivorous? Does Aristotelianism lead to viewing animals as commodities, and especially as food? In the seminal *Animal Mind and Human Morals* (1993), Richard Sorabji suggested that Aristotle's refusal to ascribe rationality to animals was a turning point in the approach of the Western world to understanding the human-animal differentiation, including on the ethical level. If animals are considered irrational, an unbridgeable gap opens between them and us, the rational humans. According to this view, the exploitation of animals is based on such a gap: rational creatures can legitimately make use of irrational ones for their benefit, including as food. Yet, even if Aristotle does say that not all animals have the same powers of the soul, he does not appear to address directly the issue at stake, namely whether a difference on the level of psychology justifies a certain ethical approach. In contemporary ethics, nonetheless, the idea that rationality gives an advantage in ethical terms is still discussed. The common assumption is that it is just to eat irrational creatures, but not rational ones.

In my paper, I will reconstruct the afterlives of Aristotle's view of animal (ir)rationality, drawing a trajectory from Aristotle to the Middle Ages, and with a final excursus in the Renaissance. I will consider how the theories of animal rationality changed shape in the process, and became more and more invested with ethical meaning.

We will start by recapitulating Aristotle's view(s) on animal rationality, and will then consider four reactions to Aristotle: those of Porphyry, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Tommaso Campanella. We can identify two main branches within this trajectory: either animals are considered to be rational – this is the case for Porphyry and Campanella; or they are considered to be irrational – as for Augustine and Aquinas. Arguing in favour of animal rationality implies viewing the human-animal difference in terms of a gradation: animals can be considered to be more or less rational, but are not denied *a priori* the capability to think rationally. On the other hand, considering all animals to be irrational assumes a radical, qualitative difference between them and us. But what are the ethical consequences of both approaches? Is a view of continuity between animals and humans better suited to arguing in favour of a certain ethical approach to animals, and especially in favour of vegetarianism, than a psychology that assumes the exclusive acknowledgment of certain powers to some creatures? For Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, the animals' irrationality justifies their use, especially as food. But Porphyry and Campanella, on the other hand, offer two views of animal rationality that lead to opposite outcomes: for Porphyry, recognizing the animals' rationality must convince the philosopher to spare them, while for Campanella, on the contrary, it is a certain understanding of rationality that brings animals back onto the plate.