The third and final section of the body of De humanitate presents Mosaic laws that Philo believes extend fairness (ἐπιείκεια) to plants (see §§ 148, 160). As with the discussion of animals, he refrains from explicitly applying the terminology of philanthròpia to describe the relationships and virtues thus fostered, though he clearly understands such relationships as having implications for how human beings learn to interact with one another (see the Analysis/General comments for chapter 17). In §§ 148–160, two illustrations are provided, both concentrating on the responsibilities Moses’ followers have towards cultivated (as opposed to wild) trees. The first illustration (§§ 149–154) is negative in its orientation (they must not be destroyed), while the second (§§ 155–159) is more positive (steps must be taken to ensure that they grow to maturity and bear fruit). The two units end on a similar note, indicating what Philo sees as the appropriate and intended outcome of Moses’ directives regarding plants, namely, that they offer their produce as a yearly tribute to the people (§ 154), who in turn give the produce of the fourth year as an offering to God (§ 159). The section as a whole is organized as follows.

(1) A brief transitional statement introduces the discussion: Moses extended fair treatment not only to living things lacking logos, but even to those lacking psychê (§ 148). Thus to the structural dichotomies stated at the beginning of § 125, we may add the categories of ensouled vs. soulless.

(2a) He opens the discussion of the first illustration by extrapolating from Deut 20:19 a general prohibition against the destruction of all food-producing plants, a rule that applies at all times and at all places. Such a ban respects the fact that the human race is dependent on the yield of these plants for its survival and thriving (§ 149).

(2b) Next Philo summarizes the law in Deut 20:19 itself, which is now seen as an extreme test of the generalizing interpretation he has just given it. Even trees on enemy territory are to be spared from ravaging (§ 150a). Three rationales are offered for the biblical injunction.
First is an argument from justice: it is unreasonable to inflict punishment on living things that have committed no crime (§ 150b). Second, from a pragmatic perspective the practice of total war is shortsighted, since the enemies that one attacks today may become friends and allies tomorrow (cf. § 109). Prudence would suggest, then, that one avoid creating unnecessary animosity. The argumentation here affords the Alexandrian an opportunity to articulate some ruminations of a more gnomic nature on the vicissitudes of human existence (§§ 151–153). The third reason is predicated upon the same sort of teleological anthropocentrism that was observed in the section on animals (see the Analysis/General comments for chapter 17). To destroy fruit-bearing plants frustrates the purpose that nature has established for them, namely, to serve humankind, much like the subjects of a realm serve their king (§ 154, cf. § 149).

(3a) Philo opens his discussion of the second illustration with what he sees as the unexpressed intention behind the commands in Lev 19:23, namely, that all newly planted trees are to be nurtured during their first three years so as to ensure that they reach maturity and bear fruit (§ 155). In summarizing the law, he replaces its injunction to purge the young plant of its “impurity” with instructions about pruning the tree and working the earth around it. Israelites are forbidden to partake of its fruit during this period not because such food is ritually unclean, but because allowing it to grow might damage the tree (§ 156). In this light, the law is now seen as supplying the reason for the agricultural practice of squeezing off any budding fruit as soon as it appears so that it will not sap the young tree of its energy (§ 157).

(3b) Thus properly cultivated, in its fourth year the plant reaches a level of strength and “perfection” that enables it to bear mature fruit (§ 158). In accord with the command of Lev 19:24, Moses’ followers are to dedicate this initial harvest in its entirety as a first fruit offering to God (§ 159), partly in the hope of being granted abundant yields in the years to come (cf. Lev 19:25).

(4) A final paragraph (§ 160) concludes both the section on plants and the entire survey of Mosaic laws promoting philanthrôpia, drawing on themes with which the survey had begun (cf. §§ 80–81). Those who obey the law are taught to extend kindness even to animals and plants, which by extension trains them to interact with their fellow human beings more humanely (cf. § 140).

In times of war it would have been routine to lay waste the fields and forests of one’s enemies whenever possible so as to weaken and demoralize the indigenous population (besides Spec. 2.191; 4.23; cf. Herodotus,