

EXAMINING SOME IDEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF VEGETARIANISM

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Examining some ideological aspects of vegetarianism. – Csabai J., Szabó B., Kosztyuné Krajnyák E., Hörcsik Zs.T., Nagy Makszim Györgyné T. – Many people think that vegetarianism is a recent fad, which is a feature of welfare societies, but the appearance of the diet has serious historical, cultural, and philosophical implications. Many ancient Greek philosophers, later religious orders, artists, and scientists chose a vegetarian lifestyle. In our literary analysis, we seek an answer to the main reasons for early vegetarianism. We discovered that the early motivations for vegetarianism were: nonviolence, diets with lower meat content as a method of societal harmony, and belief in equality between man and the animal world. In our research, we examined that in today's society, there is a correlation between someone being a vegetarian and not separating animals and humans hierarchically. Our research shows that regardless of the fact that the reasons for dietary choices of contemporary vegetarians may vary, such as vegetarianism for environmental, health or animal welfare reasons, the more extreme the meat-free diet an individual follows, the more likely it is that they do not give humans a prominent role in the living world.

Keywords: vegetarianism, belief, reasons, diet.

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Експертиза деяких ідеологічних аспектів вегетаріанства. – Чобой Й., Собо Б., Костьуней Крайняк Е., Горчік Ж.Т., Нодь Моксім Дьордьней Т. – Багато хто вважає, що вегетаріанство - це нещодавнє захоплення, яке є особливістю суспільств загального добробуту, але поява цієї дієти має серйозні історичні, культурні та філософські наслідки. Багато давньогрецьких філософів, пізніших релігійних орденів, митців та науковців обирали вегетаріанський спосіб життя. У нашому аналізі ми шукаємо відповідь на основні причини раннього вегетаріанства. Ми виявили, що ранніми мотивами вегетаріанства були: ненасильство, дієта з меншим вмістом м'яса, як метод суспільної гармонії, та віра в рівність між людиною і тваринним світом. У нашому дослідженні ми дійшли висновку, що в сучасному суспільстві існує кореляція між тим, що людина є вегетаріанцем і не розділяє тварин і людей ієрархічно. Наше дослідження свідчить, що незалежно від того, що причини дієтичного вибору сучасних вегетаріанців можуть бути різними, наприклад, вегетаріанство з міркувань захисту навколишнього середовища, здоров'я або добробуту тварин, чим більша екстремальності безм'ясної дієти дотримується людина, тим більша ймовірність того, що вона не відводить людині помітної ролі у світі живого.

Ключові слова: вегетаріанство, переконання, причини, дієта.

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Introduction

The term "Vegetarianism" is derived from the Latin word "vegetus," which means "vigorous" (Chavan 2015). According to research, the main motivations for a vegetarian lifestyle are health, environmental and ethical considerations. Health reasons were mentioned by some researchers as the most central cause for choosing a vegan diet (Coelho 2019; Corrin, Papadopoulos 2017; Dyett et al. 2013). Since their inception, major religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism have advocated for a vegetarian lifestyle (Leitzmann 2014). In Europe, we can look for non-religious rather philosophical reasons. Many of the ancient Greek philosophers preached vegetarianism.

Four arguments for a vegetarian diet are presented in medieval philosophical texts:

1. Ascetic-religious theory is a term coined by the Orphic tradition and later adopted by various authors, most notably the Pythagoreans. Due to Pythagoras's influence, vegetarianism was known as the "Pythagorean" diet over many centuries, a name that lasted until the middle of the 19th century in Europe and the Mediterranean region (Savage 1996; Spencer 1996; Leitzmann 2014).

2. Plato (428-347 BC) and Socrates both advocate a simple life, including a diet low in meat. Greedy possession and meat-eating are among the factors in the deterioration of the state and values, and the development of an unjust system. Plato

seeks to emphasize the importance of reason at the expense of sensation or perception. His magnification of the role of reason might seem to increase the gap between humans and other animals, but Plato's frequent reference to the migration of souls across species lines reduces the psychic space between man and beast (Salkever 1994).

3. Theophrastus (372-287 BC) was a Greek biologist and philosopher. argued that killing animals for food was wasteful and morally wrong (Mauro 2017). In hypothesizing the origins of flesh eating, he contended that war must have forced humans to eat meat by destroying crops that they would otherwise have eaten (Morgan 2010).

4. Plutarch (46-120 AD). Greek philosopher, one of the earliest advocates of animal issues. He wrote many essays in favour of vegetarianism and argued that animals are rational and deserve attention. He emphasised the dignity and values of the animal kingdom (Newmyer 2013).

5. Porphyry's was a Phoenician author and philosopher. His treatise relates abstinence from meat to the need of the soul to elevate itself to the divine and be purified of any element linking it to the body (Mauro 2017).

The "philosophic diet" reached its pinnacle during the prosperous centuries of the Pax Romana, when Stoic ethic slogans were incorporated into Platonic theology. By the time of the empire, most philosophic schools saw their mission as teaching how to live the "good life" and to attain an aristocracy, not of birth, money, or political power, but of virtue (Grimm 2006; Habinek 1992).

In the history of the Christian Church, though the meatless diet has never been demanded of its adherents, we find many who chose it: James the Just, the brother of Jesus and first head of the church in Jerusalem after the death and ascension of Jesus, was a vegetarian. In fact, many early church fathers were vegetarian, including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Heironymus, Boniface, and John Chrysostom. Basilus the Great, in the 4th century, was a vegetarian who discussed the morality of eating meat (Davidson 2003).

The Benedictines are the oldest monastic order in the Roman Catholic Church and Western Christianity. The contemplative monks are named after their founder, St Benedict, who began to lead a more austere monastic life in Italy in the early 6th century and wrote his monastic code, or rule. The Benedictine Rule actually institutes a purely vegetarian diet, "let everyone, except the sick who are very weak, abstain entirely from eating the meat of animals" (Boysel 2009; Benedict, Fry 1982). However, the vegetarianism of the Benedictines

was a kind of pesco vegetarianism or felxitarianism, since it allowed the consumption of fish and fowl, which were not considered meat (Lutterbach 1999).

Later, abstaining from animal consumption lost its importance in Christianity. The greatest Christian thinkers, rather, sought to give an ethical explanation for the consumption of meat. One of these reasons is that man is a spirit being, so he is above other living beings. Human beings have souls and free will, and that animals are inferior beings, placed on Earth at the service of humans (Hargreaves et al. 2021). Vegetarianism remains only a form of asceticism in certain monastic orders. Throughout history, however, there have always been great thinkers and artists (Leonardo da Vinci, Lev Nykolajevics Tolsztoj Percy Bysshe Shelley) who have followed a vegetarian lifestyle, for philosophical or moral reason (Stuart 2007; Brang 2002; Kraig 1997).

India currently has the highest number of vegetarians in the world (35%) (Agrawal 2017). Buddhism and Hinduism have many similarities. Both originated in India, and both believe in karma and reincarnation. Hindus believe in many gods, reincarnation, and karma (understood as how one's actions in previous lives morally affect the current cycle of existence). Vegetarianism emerged gradually in Hinduism. Around the 7th century BC, some Hindu sages began to advocate a meatless diet. In the third century BC, the great Indian king Asoka converted to Buddhism and became a vegetarian. There is a very strong tradition of vegetarianism in Buddhism, since the Buddha commanded his followers not to kill animals. The violence of slaughtering animals for food and the restless craving for flesh meats reveal modes in which humans enslave themselves to suffering. The ethical doctrine of ahimsa, or non-injury to living beings, shared by both Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions, derives from the conviction that violence to creatures, whose forms and identities through reincarnation are fluid, has consequences for karma. Hindu vegetarianism received its strongest impress from the Krishna cult, from whom the revering of the sacred cow in Hinduism originated (Davidson 2003).

In Europe, the proportion of people who follow a plant-based diet varies between 42.1% (Germany) and 13% (Lithuania) (Csabai et al. 2022). Much research has been done on the factors that influence people's decisions to switch to a meat-free diet (Dilek, Fennell 2018; Mullee et al. 2017; Mathieu, Dorard 2016; Rivera, Shani 2013; Ruby 2012; Shani, DiPietro 2007), but not yet on

how their worldview, their belief in man's place in the living world, influences their decisions to do so.

In our research, we hypothesised that the choice of a vegetarian lifestyle is significantly influenced by the belief in the hierarchical equality of humans and animals and other living beings. As can be traced from ancient times to the present day. Therefore, vegetarians are likely to be more sensitive to the operation of institutions that keep animals.

Materials and methods

Data were collected by conducting a survey, in a questionnaire format. In evaluating the data, we looked for relationships between quantitative data, samples, and variables (Bryman 2011). The questionnaire was prepared on September 9, 2021 and was designed via Google Forms. It was anonymous. The questionnaire was completed in equal proportions online and on paper. Participants in the experiment were randomly selected. Besides demographic data (independent variable), the questionnaire contained research questions (dependent variable). Except for demographic questions, we usually offered the option of "other" answers everywhere (Lipták, Hajdú 2018). The centre of our research is Nyíregyháza, Hungary.

RQ 9: What do you think about the hierarchical (superiority and subordination) order of the living world?

Questions 1 - 8 have been addressed in a previous article (Csabai et al. 2022).

We distributed the questionnaire in internet groups independent of eating habits (such as dissertation writers, gardeners, retirees, etc.). The printed questionnaire was sent to different groups in society, in terms of different ages, places of residence, occupations, and qualifications, as well as various clubs, schools, and workplaces. The full range of the Hungarian population participated in the research in terms of age, gender, place of residence, and education (except under 7 years).

To explore causal relationships, we used one-factor analysis of variance and cross-tabulation analysis. In the analysis of variance, the means of more than two factors are compared on a sample basis. The method is used to find out whether there is a difference between sample means based on a given criterion (independent variable) (Obádovics 2009). In our research, the dependent variable was age, while the independent variable was the opinion about the hierarchical system of living organisms. Cross-tabulation analysis, a method for examining association relationships, is used to measure the closeness of the relationship between two qualitative/spatial variables. Cramer's indicator is a

measure of relationship closeness (Hunyadi et al. 2001). Our analyses were carried out with SPSS statistical software at a significance level of 5%.

Results

When we read the history of vegetarianism, we find that throughout history, in addition to the ethical reasons for a meat-free diet, an ideological or philosophical approach has played a significant role. In most countries where the number of vegetarians is high, faith or religious reasons have a strong influence on the diet.

In Europe, different philosophical trends have defined man's place in the living world in different ways, which may have influenced the diet chosen. One of the questions in our questionnaire asked respondents about their perception of man's place in the living world and whether this perception influenced their dietary choices.

We were aware that the question was a very simplistic formulation of a terribly complex issue, which could be examined from a biological, ecological or philosophical point of view. However, a questionnaire of this kind, designed for people of all ages in society, with all levels of education, could not contain complex questions.

A very large number of responses were received in the "other" category, where respondents mostly wished to give a more nuanced or accurate answer to this simplified question. Regardless of this problem, the majority of respondents, accepting the trade-offs, ticked the option closest to their own.

As shown in the first figure, as we move towards a more meat-free diet, the more likely the respondent is to believe in the sovereignty of living beings. Consistent with this, omnivores have the highest proportion of respondents who place humans above other living creatures in the hierarchy of the living world. The more extreme the vegetarian diet one follows, the less likely one is to consider man as an entity above other living being (Fig. 1).

Conclusions

We have previously analysed whether the main reasons and motivations for vegetarianism are health reasons, compassion for animals or environmental reasons (Csabai et al. 2022). In this research we looked for motivations in the deeper layers of human personality and thinking.

Throughout history, vegetarianism has been part of many philosophical or religious movements. Our simple question, which lacked any philosophical or biological science, but was comprehensible to all participants, produced a clear

result. The defining element of vegetarianism as a lifestyle choice is the way in which the respondent

places human's place among the living beings of the world.

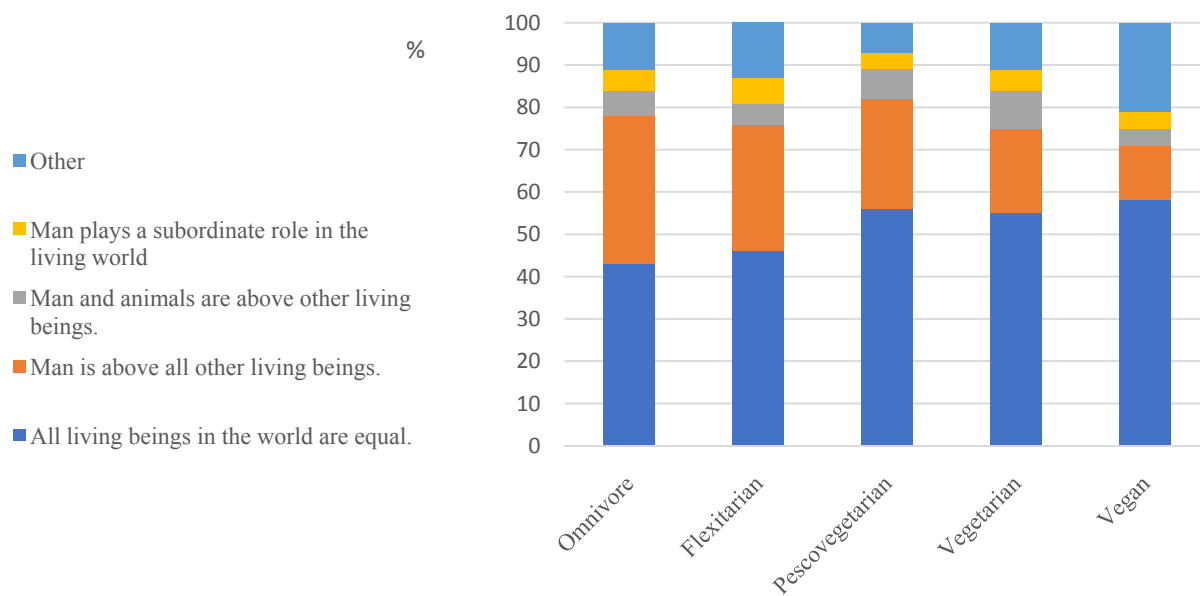


Fig. 1. Belief in the hierarchical order of the living world among the respondents

There is a significant correlation between the perception of the hierarchical order of the living world and age. There is also a significant correlation between gender and hierarchical order of living things. Women are more likely than men to believe that all living things in the world are

equal. There is no statistically significant difference between education and the hierarchical order of life. There is also no statistically verifiable correlation between place of residence and opinion about the hierarchical order of living things.

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