

Vegetarianism as an Example of Dispersed Religiosity

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May the vegetarian movement be regarded as a field where a modern dispersed religiosity can manifest itself? This article presents a summary of my research, aimed to answer this question, at least in regard to the Polish case. A theoretical background will be outlined, together with the justification for the choice of material that was analyzed, and the Polish vegetarian movement will be briefly described. Then the results of my research will be presented, including a description of the values that are crucial for Polish vegetarianism. Most attention, however, will be focused on the process of the formation of a vegetarian worldview within individuals' biographies.

May the vegetarian movement be regarded as a field where a modern dispersed religiosity can manifest itself? This article presents a summary of my research, aimed to answer this question, at least in regard to the Polish case.¹ As a main research category the notion of “worldview” was accepted, which is understood according to Thomas Luckmann, as an all-inclusive system of meanings that makes it possible for individuals to have orientation in the world. At the base of this system lies the hierarchy of importance, which consists mainly of values (understood as meaningful points of reference), typifications and patterns of acting. As Luckmann sees it—and this is crucial here—the worldview is the basic form of religion, not because of its content, but due to its functions and structure (Luckmann,

1967). The notion of “worldview” enables us to preserve some neutrality here, as it is not assumed while using it that vegetarianism is a new form of religion. Vegetarianism is a field where so-called highly individualized religiosity may, but does not have to, be realized, especially in regard to the functions fulfilled.

The Polish vegetarian movement is difficult to penetrate from the outside, because of its high internal diversity, its weak organizational structure, and its dynamic growth since the year 1989. The number of vegetarians in Poland I estimate at around 1% of the population—whereas in the United Kingdom, for instance, there are around 9%.

To prepare a “balanced” image of the worldview researched, two of its aspects were taken into consideration: both the socially expressed and the individualized one. The vegetarian worldview which is socially expressed was researched by an analysis of the content of vegetarian publications: twenty individual books, the yearbooks of two magazines, ten web pages, and two films propagating vegetarianism, were taken into consideration. Meanwhile, the worldview of the vegetarians, which is individually expressed, was investigated by taking into account the biographical perspective, through the analysis of thirty autobiographies (fifteen spoken and fifteen written). The respondents were the people who had positively answered my advertisement (issued in the magazine *Wegetariański Świat* [The Vegetarian World] and on the web page www.vege.pl), containing a request to tell me during the interview a history of one’s life or to write it down according to the instructions given. The main instruction for the interview (or written autobiography) was: “Please talk about your life, taking into consideration what is important and what is the most important.” The respondents were between 22 and 72 years old: the average age was 35. They came from various parts of Poland, most of them lived in towns, three had moved to the country on purpose, searching—as they described it—for peace and a closer contact with the nature. The researched group varied greatly with regard to profession: among them were teachers, students, farmers, shop attendants, pub employees and an actress.

Throughout the analysis of the semantic field of the word “vegetarianism,” both in the pro-vegetarian publications and in the autobiographies of the vegetarians, the attempt was made to reveal which values are central² to the vegetarian worldview and to see whether some concrete patterns of acting are attached to those values. As a result, four main values were distinguished: Life, the Animals, Earth, Health—of these “life” is a general and superior value, to which the other values are referred.

Animals

According to vegetarians, animals are primarily creatures that have feelings, and so are able to experience both pleasure and pain. Therefore they deserve respect and care. Within the publications analyzed they are called: brothers, God's creatures, holy beings. Eating meat, which is interpreted as one's contribution to the animals' death, is called: animals' genocide and Gehenna, holocaust, murder, meaningless suffering, but also massive snob-bism, legalized killing:

For example, today I went to the shop to buy myself some wafer biscuits, because I like the sweets very much. I am standing there watching these wafer biscuits and right next to me there is a butcher's department, the smell is wafting around the whole shop, the men are standing there and choosing: oh, this sausage has a taste like this, and the other one like that, this one is with garlic and that one is made of donkey, the next one is with something else. Well, there is a whole spectrum of choice, but in fact all this is death. (Female 23;6)³

Likewise, a person who accepts treating animals' bodies as food is described as: a paid killer, a butcher, a monster, a murderer, an accomplice to murder, a Nazi, an executioner.

Often, opposition to any kind of activity in which the animals are treated as objects is underlined. The way in which animals are treated in various types of laboratories is negatively assessed. Also any show business in which the animal is a leading actor or a victim—such as circuses, zoos and hunting—is criticized. Emphasis is put on any lack of consistency in the attitude towards the animals, which may be seen in their division into animals that are eaten (or used in other ways) and those to be toys—domestic pets. The table (Figure 1) presents main evaluations connected with the animal regarded as a value.

So the first step to be taken by the person who respects the life of animals is (according to the vegetarians) to stop eating dead bodies, and (in the vegan⁴ version) to stop using any products of animal origin. All activities leading to such a change of a lifestyle are positively judged.

The Animal as a Living Creature	The Animal as an Object
alive	dead
feeling	a machine
not a thing (a subject)	an object
a friend	a toy
loved	eaten

Figure 1. Chosen positive and negative evaluations referring to the main value of the Animal.

The earth as a mother	The earth as an object
pre-source	killed
life-giving power	destroyed
birth-giving	dying
sacred	exhausted
abundant	robbed

Figure 2. Chosen positive and negative evaluations referring to the main value of the Earth.

Earth

Parallel to the emphasis put on the significance of animals' life, the Earth is presented as an unalienable value. She is called: a source of life, a mother, Gaia, life-giving power, a feeder, the old Earth, the root and basis of life. Positively evaluated are those attitudes that manifest respect for the Earth, such as: eco-friendly housing construction and agriculture, establishing eco-villages, various types of pro-ecological workshops, meetings, and festivals.

As Figure 2 shows, negatively evaluated is the whole spectrum of activities that destructively affect ecological balance, which are described as: the exploitation of the ecosystem, insatiable consumption, infected consciousness, eating the planet, or cancer civilization: *The assessment of the situation on the Earth (its health) comes unfavourably, becomes we no longer even take a loan from her, we simply rob her!* (Koehler 1987:112).

Also some "apocalyptic" visions appear, which describe the end of the world, unless people change their behaviour. Therefore, looking at the attitudes criticized, we can find a person who unthinkingly destroys, pollutes and kills his base, the Earth. In the respondents' autobiographies there were sometimes descriptions of pro-ecological activities introduced into everyday life (e.g. water and electricity saving, using cloth bags instead of plastic ones) to relieve "the tortured Earth," "our dearest Mother." Vegetarian diet is indicated as a salvation, mainly because of its cost-effectiveness in terms of plant protein's production. The Polish vegetarian milieu also supports or co-creates many actions connected with the protection of life on Earth, which are initiated by groups of activists who refer to deep ecology and eco-philosophy (Skolimowski 1981) in their assumptions.

Health

The next value in the vegetarian worldview is health, understood (according to the assumptions of a holistic medicine) as a state of psycho-

Health	Illness
psycho-psychical balance	disturbed psycho-psychical balance
natural medicine	conventional medicine
Activity	Passivity
Homeostasis	disturbed homeostasis
long life	short life

Figure 3. Chosen positive and negative evaluations referring to the main value of the Health.

psychical balance. To be healthy means to be in harmony with oneself and with the surrounding world (see Figure 3).

It is thought that both eating meat and killing the animals, through contributing to their sufferings, disturbs this balance. The meat is treated as an unhealthy and toxic food that contains an excess of adrenaline and other substances harmful for humans. Consequently, the importance of appropriate food is underlined, together with the recommendation of mainly plant sustenance. Not surprisingly, positively judged are those activities that serve to improve health, i.e. diets, natural medicine techniques, relaxation methods etc.

It is noticeable that in this pro-health argumentation meat becomes “an object:” “I do not eat meat because it is full of poisoning toxins,” “I have always had a headache after eating meat,” “of course, from the biological point of view, the meat on the plate is a poison,” despite previously described justifications that negate instrumental attitudes towards the animals.

Life

In the majority of the publications analyzed, life was regarded as the most important. Value. The expressions that were commonly used in connection with it, were: care, respect, dignity and gift. Life is a value connected with other values, as it is shown in the Figure 4.

The animal becomes a value, because its life gains special significance for the vegetarians. The same concerns the Earth: it is positively valued because of the recognition of the value of its life (understood as an ecological balance). Meanwhile the value of health is related to the quality of both individual life and that of the surrounding world. Therefore, life may be regarded as the superior value, from which all other values derive and to which all of them relate, in a more or less visible way.

In the autobiographies, beside the values already mentioned, some new,

Life	Death
conscious	unconscious
natural	artificial
respected	humiliated
balanced	disturbed
grateful	unreflective

Figure 4. Chosen positive and negative evaluations referring to the main value of the Life.

significant points of reference appeared, such as: consciousness, closeness, individualism and searching. Concerning consciousness (or, more precisely, self-consciousness), vegetarianism itself is called “a conscious choice,” and being a vegetarian is described as “a conscious life.” Also we may find such expressions as “consciousness of gratitude for the possibility of leading a vegetarian life:”

When I look at the fruits, I know that they used to be the flowers and they were growing. I mean, it sounds terribly exalted, but sometimes, while peeling a carrot, I thank somehow for this carrot. It seems to me that it raises the food to a higher level and it is very important, this consciousness. I think that previously I was not thinking about it. (Female 25: 9)

Consciousness is positively assessed as a gift of recognizing the truth about life, but also as a burden of lonely struggle with this truth: *I know it will sound bizarre, but sometimes I have a feeling that I live among the murderers. And it is not easy, because they do not know about it, but worse is the fact that it is my problem and not theirs, a problem of my consciousness (Male 27;10).*

Meanwhile, the significance of closeness is connected with emphasizing the importance of close family, partner and friendship bonds, both with the people and with other living creatures: *For me, the other person is a meaning, when I meet people, when I lean over them. This is a meaning for me, such coexistence (...) For me, the human being always comes first, and only later the job, the hairstyle... (Female 29;14).*

However, although the closeness is seen as a value in itself, in the case of concrete relationships the fact of being or not being a vegetarian often had significance for the respondents.

In the case of individuality, in the biographies we can see positive evaluation of what is unique in people: *I have always wanted to be somehow different from the others; I have not wanted to behave like them (...). I have wanted to distinguish myself from this society, from such a mentality. (Male 38;9)*

For me, it is funny that people treat a choice of this or the other diet as something

that threatens them, though I can understand it inasmuch as that is how the red-haired, left-handed used to be treated. The other is dangerous. Other means the worse (...). One should appreciate that everyone brings in something different and not compare it with the ruler. (Female 47;16)

Vegetarianism is indicated as a source of acceptance for various manifestations of life. Finally, searching is understood as an attitude of openness, of willingness to learn, and of continuous development. What is positively assessed is a process that gives meaning to one's life: *Life itself meaning, there is no such thing as we—the living—searching for its meaning. The searching is a life, so it constitutes the meaning, or development, constantly drawing from the unknown (Male 46;16).*

By the way, such an attitude—to a large extent—corresponds to “the quest orientation” as understood by Daniel C. Batson (Batson and Raynor-Prince, 1983).

Biographical formation of the worldview

Now, on the basis of the autobiographies gathered, the process of formation of the vegetarians' worldview will be briefly discussed. Using a formal division of the autobiographies, three phases were distinguished: initial, maturation, and relative stabilization.

Firstly, the initial phase. In comparison to other stages, this period occupies most space in biographical descriptions. The attempt to find in memory the beginnings of one's vegetarianism is associated with conscious decision. Two basic kinds of initial experience can be found: pre-event and contact with vegetarianism. The first type of experience is connected with witnessing the killing of an animal, for instance in the country or in a slaughterhouse. One of the respondents, for instance, saw pig-sticking at the age of seven, when she was at her grandmother's for a holiday. Even now, recollection of this event evokes strong opposition in her: *(...) I can remember being confused by the entire situation, and my terror. In the beginning it was my mum, aunt and uncle who told us to go somewhere far from home, but you could hear the squeals of this animal that was being killed, and I can remember my dread connected with this situation (Female 47;16).*

Sometimes, the pre-event also has an intermediate form, when it is connected with becoming aware of the fact (usually during the meal) that eating meat is associated with the previous killing of the animal, which results in reluctance to eat meat.

The second type of initiation into vegetarianism takes place due to some kind of contact with this worldview: both direct contacts (for instance, while

working with a vegetarian, or meeting vegetarians during an excursion or in a circle of friends), and indirect contacts (for instance through books, magazines, television or information heard). For example, a herbalist from Warsaw recalls his “vegetarian beginnings” in his autobiography: *It was still in the years of communism, I met beautiful, joyful, young vegetarians from West Europe. It aroused my interest and intrigued me (...). Some time later I thought: why not? And exactly since that autumn I have not eaten meat.* (Male 72;35)

In narrations of this initial period, apart from descriptions of the beginnings, an important role is played by reports on the environment’s reactions to one’s change of lifestyle. The majority of them concern the reactions of those who are closest, especially of parents, who—worried about their children’s health—try more or less firmly to persuade them to abandon their new convictions. Very often in those fragments the word “fight” appears; half of the respondents describe this period as a great battle. “New vegetarians” also experience concern, nasty remarks or disbelief, from their closest relatives, as happened with the family of one of the respondents, whose grandmother continuously asked her, with never-ending astonishment, *What do you mean, you do not eat those delicious sausages?* But it can happen that, influenced by their choice, vegetarians’ relatives or friends also become vegetarians themselves.

The maturation phase is the next period, which lasts from their environment’s relative acceptance of the respondents’ decision to become a vegetarian, until the moment when vegetarianism becomes something obvious in their life.

At this stage, the majority of vegetarians intensively look for any information on vegetarianism: in books, on the internet, and in thematic magazines. They cultivate “vegetarian acquaintances,” and involve themselves in pro-ecological activities.

Usually, a search for various ways of health improvement also appears; for instance, a few persons talked about fasting and experiments with their diet. Moreover, the majority of respondents show some interest in veganism throughout this phase.

The other dominant tendency is a change of attitude towards people who eat meat. The respondents underline that they feel less hostility and have more understanding for non-vegetarians:

I do not feel like fighting any more, or like being in favour of either side in this battle—to eat or not to eat meat. And it is not because I stopped caring about the animals’ fate. I simply consider this to be the most superficial matter and I think that it is man’s heart which is the most important, and from it all the decisions

derive, and the issue of eating or not eating meat does not define who is good and who is wrong. (Female 26;7)

Also, accounts of spiritual development appear. The respondents were interested in Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, meditation techniques and Eastern martial arts. A few times detailed descriptions of experiences treated as supernatural were recalled. In some of the biographies the subject of reincarnation was mentioned. More or less firmly, the respondents expressed their conviction that a man has more than just one life and that his existence spreads far beyond the biographical memory of one life. Moreover, the general perception of religion and of its role in spiritual development changes in this period. In the majority of the cases, respondents expressed their respect for all denominations. In three interviews, the religion in which the respondents grew up was referred to as “one’s root.”

Often vegetarianism itself was treated as a stage on the way to internal self-betterment. In one of the biographies it was explicitly called “a religion”—as in the case of one of the respondents, who believed in God by looking at the animals and feeling admiration for their diversity.

Also in the maturation period, a change of attitude towards Catholicism often takes place. Catholics’ acceptance of a universally binding attitude towards animals was negatively assessed by my respondents. For instance, one of them did not agree with the view that animals do not have souls and that this could justify exploitation of their bodies: *What do you mean? A soul gives the right to bully the being that is said not to have a soul? Listen, if we have a soul, and those millions of murderers also have one, then this dog that rescues the man, then this bird that also wants to live, then every creature has a soul. (Female 80;34)*

Two respondents were convinced that they had been harmed by the Catholic Church personally. In four interviews the people described themselves as Christians, but not Catholics.

It seems that in the majority of cases, the respondents’ attitudes towards religion and spiritual development have the characteristics of subjective religiosity, as they put great emphasis on their individual choice of their own way of spiritual growth and on drawing from various traditions rather than being attached to just one of them. As Steven Rose—a promoter of vegetarianism—argues, an encouragement to vegetarianism may be found in the majority of the world’s religions (Rosen, 1999), but rarely are these hints made explicit, so the choice is usually left to the individual. None of the religions seems to be favoured in the analyzed material.

The last stage, relative stabilization, closes the autobiographical narra-

tions and is the period that gives the vegetarians of many years' standing the perspective to talk about their life. However, the expression "relative stabilization" must be used here, as the formulation of the worldview is a never-ending process.

At this stage, respondents underline the significance of the changes that were introduced into their life by vegetarianism, as in the following statements:

Vegetarianism? It is a way of living, because it is not only a diet, it is thinking, these are very subtle things which have changed in my head, and also it is some kind of respect for myself and for the world. Something through which I can express my stand on things I do not like and that I want to be different.

(Male 2;9)

It is the best thing that has ever happened to me until now, really. It is something very, very important... I cannot define and describe it, but it soothed me, calmed me down. Let's even leave aside the fact that I owe to vegetarianism the disappearance of persistent tonsillitis and colds. (Female 44;26)

Vegetarianism is my answer to what is happening around. Well, I will not take part in a demonstration; I have no intention of persuading anyone. I do not eat meat and this helps me to express my protest. (Female 26;7)

My way of life has gained other dimensions. I have changed from a hen into an eagle, which ascends and glides above... (Male 24;7)

Becoming a vegetarian was followed not only by a change of lifestyle, but also by a transformation in their perception of the world, which influenced, among other things, attitudes towards the closest and numerous choices concerning partner relationships, places of residence, interests, job performed etc. Four respondents already bring their children up in a vegetarian way.

In this final phase vegetarianism is described, *inter alia*, as a way of living, a kind of thinking, a form of respect for oneself and the world, a focal point of personality, life in another dimension, something very important and yet at the same time difficult to define, something obvious, the path of life, or, finally, the answer for the world.

To finish this part of my paper, I would like to indicate the strong impact of the initiation type, on the vegetarians' worldview. The two types that were described in the initial phase—namely pre-event and contact with vegetarianism—may influence the way of speaking about vegetarianism in further stages. It is connected with the domination of positive or negative valorizations within self-definitions. Pre-event becomes a negative initiation into vegetarianism and on the basis of it the worldview of opposition is usually formulated. The self-definitions that appear in this case begin

with the words of rebellion and protest: *NO, I DO NOT!*, which means: “no” to meat, “no” to causing the death of animals, “no” to the people who eat meat. Meanwhile, contact with vegetarianism becomes a positive initiation, which most often leads to an affirming worldview. In this case, self-definitions begin with a joyful *YES, I DO!* “Yes” to vegetarianism (as something interesting, different, as a lifestyle), “yes” to vegetarianism as an alternative culture, “yes” to vegetarianism as a way to self-fulfillment. So, the initial impulse to accept a given worldview and make it one’s own may have a strong influence on its further shaping.

On the basis of analyzed autobiographical narrations three main functions played by vegetarianism in respondents’ lives were distinguished:

- first, a communicative function, as vegetarianism enables “its followers” to express their convictions in speaking and in their behaviour;
- second, an integration function, as vegetarianism gives the feeling of living in harmony with the self and with the world;
- third, a function of giving meaning, as vegetarianism, being an important (or as the most important) value, gives meaning to one’s life, determining goals and patterns of acting.

To finish this summary presentation of some aspects of vegetarians’ autobiographies, it is worth mentioning biographical forecasts of the future: the plans, dreams and attitudes towards the inevitable future—one’s death. The plans of Polish vegetarians are very varied and to a large extent they depend on the job performed or on individual interests. However, the common dream for over half the vegetarians researched is to live in the countryside, near to woods, or at least far from the city’s hubbub. It is connected with a clear need for more intensive contact with nature. Sometimes, vegetarian dreams draft a vision of a better world and of return to a lost paradise:

I have a sincere hope that in the future, maybe not very far, people will come to their senses, they will see that the animals can also feel and they will stop torturing them for the needs of consumption. Then the world will be beautiful again, as it used to be, a very, very long time ago. (Male 23;6)

The experience of death is situated in a more or less far future, and—in most cases—is accepted. While talking about death, many times, apart from the death of the dearest persons, also the motive of dear animals’ death appeared. Indirectly, this underlines the significance played by animal life for the vegetarians and may indicate the “existential closeness” felt by the vegetarians towards animals.

Summary

Concluding, I would like to say a few words about the ways in which Polish vegetarianism could be characterized in wider categories. Disregarding the positive or negative experiences lying behind vegetarianism, it may be generally called a transformation worldview, because by changing attitudes towards concrete food, a change in an assumed judgment of the world takes place. For instance, if someone says: “For me, life is the value of the highest importance,” it will rather not influence significantly his relationship with others. But if someone says: “I do not eat dead bodies, because I am not a murderer,” then other people will usually take some evaluative stance towards this statement. Therefore, what is important in vegetarianism is the change in the valorization. A vegetarian who looks at the chicken lying on the table is likely to think: “It is a dead body,” rather than, “What a tasty dinner!”

To describe more precisely those differences in their outlook on life, in the tables above the main evaluations referring to the values and anti-values were collated, together with some additional attributes (Figures 1–4). The values and anti-values are not always simple opposites: they were put together to show that given values generally appear as a negation of contradictory categories.

The values distinguished throughout the research are, above all, autotelic in the vegetarian worldview, since they are acknowledged as meaningful by the vegetarians themselves and recognized as important for their self-realization and internal development (Kozielecki 1999). Nevertheless, the values that are important for vegetarians may also gain some instrumental characteristics: for instance, recognition of the significance of the animal’s life may have—according to the vegetarians—a concrete effect i.e. in rescuing the life of specific animals, or at least in not contributing to their death.

In my research the conception of Włodzimierz Pawluczuk played an important role. According to him, the worldview may take on a full or a disabled form. In full worldviews we can find both the obligations (like general truths or goals) and concrete “activating power” ascribed to them (like patterns of acting) that influence everyday life. Meanwhile, disabled worldviews are expressed only in some ways of life, some ways of being, with no clearly defined “obligation aspect.” Taking this into consideration, as the analyzed material shows, Polish vegetarianism usually takes on a full form. Above all, general truths may be found in this worldview, such as:

- The animal is a creature that has feelings.
- The Earth is the source of life.
- Health influences the individual's psycho-psychical balance.
- Life is an inalienable value.

Those vegetarian "axioms" imply concrete goals, in which the recognized values are to be realized; for instance, "I want to respect life," "I care about health," "The Earth should be respected." Furthermore, those goals shape concrete patterns of acting which influence everyday life, for example: "I do not eat meat," "I do not wear leather clothes," "I do practice yoga," etc.

The vegetarian worldview, creating the perspective oriented on the values mentioned before, which could be called "vegetarian values," neither necessarily need nor exclude religious perspectives (Borowik 1997). In the analyzed material the issue of religious backgrounds appeared.

Taking into consideration the results of the 1999 EVS (European Values Survey), the vegetarians' attitude matches best the "believing without belonging" category, to use Grace Davie's expression (Davie 2000). In particular, it concerns the belief in God as "some sort of spirit or life force," the view that the basic truths can be found in many religions, the practice of "parallel beliefs" through bricolage, and using the term "spirituality" rather than "religion" when defining one's own stance (Lambert 2004:38-41). Religious components of vegetarians' worldview are also well characterized by the notion of "fuzzy spirituality," proposed for research on contemporary, varied manifestations of religiosity by Brian J. Zinnbauer and Kenneth I. Pargament (1997:563). The majority of the respondents could be classified as members of the "spiritual but not religious" group, rejecting the institutional dimension of traditional religion, and preferring individual spirituality, including New Age beliefs and components of mysticism, referred to as private experiences (Zinnbauer and Pargament 1997, 561).

Throughout my research, attention was paid mainly to the functions played by those aspects of the worldview that were considered most important within the publications analyzed and by the vegetarians interviewed. However, some manifestations of the vegetarian worldview prove that also in its content and ritual behavior we may find expressions of religiosity—this issue was discussed for instance by Malcolm Hamilton (Hamilton, 2000). However, in-depth recognition of this occurrence would require further investigation and wider methodological apparatus. We can, however, indicate some further issues to be researched, which are connected

with the various manifestations of vegetarian religiosity. Of special interest can be subjects such as: formational experience as a type of conversion to vegetarianism, the tabooing of meat as food and its significance, vegetarianism as a form of asceticism used with some concrete purpose, having experiences that are close to mysticism while practicing vegetarianism etc.

The other question that is worth considering is how do the Polish vegetarians' worldviews compare to those of European vegetarians? The main values distinguished throughout my research were probably not coincidental, because many of the publications analyzed are translations of foreign literature. However, considering the individual worldviews of concrete vegetarians, the diversity seems to be much larger, so this issue requires further investigation.

To finish, I would like—at last—to answer the question asked at the beginning: can the Polish vegetarian movement be treated as an example of modern dispersed religiosity? In my opinion it can, as this worldview offers a way of living which reflects concrete values and—as the biographies' analysis revealed—could give meaning to one's life.

Notes

1. As a result of my research on the Polish vegetarian movement, the book *Światopogląd na talerzu. Wegetarianizm jako przejaw współczesnej religijności* (*The worldview on the plate. Vegetarianism as a manifestation of modern religiosity*) was published in 2006. In this publication, apart from a more in-depth presentation of the issues discussed in this article and some theoretical and methodological aspects, an analysis of vegetarian iconography was carried out.
2. In this article, central values are understood as meaningful points of reference within a given worldview. In the publications analyzed they were indicated by what is important and what is most important. Moreover, concrete patterns of acting were connected with them, which means they occupy a significant position within the hierarchy of importance within the worldview researched.
3. Numbers following the quotations denote respectively the respondents' age, and the number of years of being a vegetarian.
4. A vegan is someone who, for various reasons, chooses to avoid using or consuming animal products. While vegetarians choose not to use flesh foods, vegans also avoid dairy products and eggs, as well as fur, leather, wool, down, and cosmetics or chemical products tested on animals. (See: www.vegan.org/about_veganism)

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