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Analysis of Interaction Between Philosophical Views and Animal Husbandry on Farms in The Culture Area of Today's Central Europe in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Times

The present thesis examines the interaction between philosophical views on man- animal relations and animal husbandry in practice or agricultural literature, respectively. The analysis refers to the area of Central Europe (of today) and the periods of antiquity, middle ages, and modern times.

Within the scope of doing research into literature, numerous works of noted philosophers were looked through, their different views on the relation between man and animal were extracted and listed in chronological order. In the same chronological order, a comparison was drawn between these philosophical texts and the guides to animal husbandry and economical use of animals found in the books on subjects of agriculture. To give a detailed insight into the practices of animal husbandry on farms each species concerned was depicted separately. The ancient and some of the medieval documents originate from the culture area of Southern Europe, that is by Greek and Roman authors. Reasons for this are the absence of written Teutonic estate as well as the fact that Roman and Greek culture as a result of changing territorial powers reached the Teutonic tribes in today's area of Central Europe and had a lasting effect on them. Additionally, contemporary literature dealing with the history of agriculture or philosophy was considered.

As for the age of antiquity, it was not possible to establish a direct interaction between philosophical views and animal husbandry in practice. The philosophers of that time focussed primarily on the issue of spiritual and mental abilities like rationality, intelligence, the animals' having a soul and the idea of a hierarchy among creatures. The majority of these philosophers shared the opinion that man, owing to his qualities, is higher than animals and close to the gods. The agrarian documents mainly were guides to the practice of animal husbandry and economical use of animals. Single aspects given by the philosophers were not made a subject of discussion in this thesis. The instructions for the keeping of animals raised the impression of careful nursing that seemed to place special emphasis on the animal's well-being. By way of contrast, the feelings animals had while being used for working or fattening apparently were of secondary importance. Most of the documents by philosophers and authors on agricultural issues clearly showed that they commonly perceived animals as being created for the benefit of man. Just as much, however, the authors seemed to acknowledge that animals do feel and perceive. Neither the philosophers nor the authors on agricultural matters made the rituals of immolation, animal games or hunt subject of their works.

The examination of interaction between philosophical views on the man- animal relation and practical husbandry and economical use of animals in the medieval period produced very dissatisfactory results. One problem was that there hardly is any literature on agrarian matters written in German. Moreover, most of the available documents appeared to be mere compilations by the ancient authors. On the other hand, there were lexicons of animals, which were, however, influenced by mystical elements, too. So, on the whole these books

were of only insufficient informative value. Even contemporary works on agricultural history fail to provide a complete description of the practical conditions in the husbandry and economical use of animals. They do, however, convey an impression of animal husbandry on farms that slightly differs from the one given by the chroniclers.

Philosophy in the Middle Ages attached fundamental importance to Christian dogmas and mystical elements. The majority of philosophers was preoccupied with contemplation on man and his position in the world. Many of them regarded man as ranking in a position somewhere between animals and God. Mostly, his position was far away from the animal's position as he is of upright build and outclasses the intellectual qualities of animals. Dealing primarily with instructions for the keeping and use of animals the documents on agricultural issues or lexicons of animals did not discuss Christian dogmas. The expositions of these authors led to the conclusion that animals were naturally subordinate to man.

In philosophical as well as in agricultural literature negative attributes were allocated to animals, such as envy, miserliness, or malice. In this respect, certain interactions between philosophical thinking and farming practice or lexicons of animals could be found.

Moreover, it was found that none of the authors dealing with these issues made the difficult living conditions of animals or man in the Middle Ages a subject of discussion. A motive could be the authors' lack of practical relation or their way of copying ancient works without reflecting on them.

In modern times, interactions between philosophical views on the man- animal relation and the practical conditions in agriculture could be found in some respects. The majority of philosophers shared the opinion that it was his intellectual ability that distinguished man from animals and that man was higher in hierarchy. Frequently, their views were based on old-established arguments, which were just rephrased.

Yet, many philosophers and authors of agrarian literature were aware of the deplorable states in husbandry and economical use of animals and complained about it. They also criticised the gradual introduction of a specific animal vocabulary into the German language, including terms like 'fressen' (to eat), 'saufen' (to drink), or 'werfen' (to throw), and the association of animals with machines. The philosophical as well as the agrarian authors demanded certain rights for animals. In fact, legal stipulations for animal protection were established in the 19th century.

None of the authors, however, reflected on the superstitious rituals in which animals often died a horrible death. A possible motive is that the authors did not perceive such practices as being cruel or they refrained from dealing with folk belief in their writings to keep the contents as factual as possible.

On the whole, the authors' reactions did reflect the prevailing spirit of the times. The present thesis, however, is not suited to verify whether the respective spirit of the times was dictated by philosophy.

In summary it must be said that this thesis can give no more than a partial answer to the question for interaction between philosophical views and actual conditions of animal life on farms or in agrarian literature, respectively.