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During my childhood and school time, I always wanted to become a veterinarian because my wish was to help animals. But when I heard that in the study of veterinary medicine one has to take part in animal experiments, it was clear to me that I could not study this subject until this bad practice had been abandoned. For a long time, therefore, I did not know what to study at all, because to become a veterinarian had seemed to me to be the main purpose of my life. In 1987, after finishing school, I started to study biology and German philology in Karlsruhe. I had decided to become a schoolteacher and to teach my pupils how to treat animals in a friendly and ethically responsible way.

I knew that the study of biology also involved the performance of animal experiments and dissections, but I was sure that people who want to become school teachers would not be forced to take part in these 'exercises' because teachers in Germany are not allowed to carry out animal experiments at school. I was shocked when at the beginning of my study I tried to talk with my professors about conscientious objection and they told me that I would have to take part in all the dissection and animal experimentation practicals. I wrote a petition to the government and also letters to the Ministries of Science and Education, but it was all without success.

Fearing that a refusal to take part in the first practicals of my study would mean that I would not be allowed to go on studying biology at all (because you only have 2-3 years to do the first half of your study, and if you are too slow, you are not allowed to continue), and not knowing what else to study and to do with my life if I could not become a biology teacher, I acted against my conscience. I took part in the first practicals which involved the performance of animal experiments and dissections. The experiments were carried out in groups of three students, and if the animal was alive in most cases I did not touch him/her. But I did not leave the laboratory. I had not known before that it is possible to do something that is absolutely in conflict with your personal values and your sense of justice if you are fully aware of the fact that what you are doing is wrong.

I decided to start a lawsuit against my University after having finished the first half of my study, so I could be sure that the University could not throw me out of the study for formal reasons. In 1990, I told the university that I would not take part in the zoology practicals of the second half of my study, and in 1991 I went to court.

At the first level of the lawsuit, I lost, because the judges said that I would endanger the whole state! They said that if I would not take part in animal experiments and dissections then I would not be able to become a good schoolteacher and that the state needed good biologists as schoolteachers. For this reason my personal conscience was of lesser importance. Of course this is nonsense, because a schoolteacher should teach children respect for life and how to treat animals in a proper way, and if the teacher performs animal experiments in his/her study he/she will not be able to teach these positive values convincingly.

At the second level of the lawsuit, I lost for other reasons. Here the judges said that the professors would no longer be able to offer a well organized study if they allowed me to

do an alternative to animal experiments. (Of course this is nonsense, too.) The judges also said that watching films of animal experiments and performing animal experiments yourself would ethically be almost the same thing and so if I accepted looking at films, I would also have to accept taking part in the experiments. They did not see the obvious difference: when you use films you do not kill in practice!

At the third level I lost again. The judges now said that I should have presented more detailed alternatives than I did. They wanted a 'concrete' alternative for each part of each dissection and experiment. But this is impossible: some experiments just have to be abandoned; they are not worth producing a special alternative. I then took the case to the highest court in Germany, the Constitutional Court. The lawsuit has been going on for six years now, and nobody knows when the final judicial decision will be made. Even if I win, I probably will be too old to continue my study and then become a schoolteacher, anyway.

In the meantime I have been active in SATIS [German animal protection group] and EuroNICHE, I studied German literature and philosophy, I graduated and earned a Master of Arts (MA). Even though I like literature and philosophy very much and I am quite successful in these subjects, I had not thought originally that one day I would have to choose a profession as a philologist. I am writing a doctoral thesis now, hoping that I will find a teaching job at a university, maybe in Africa. This is the most similar thing to being a schoolteacher that I can imagine, and I like to teach.