



# Gender Issues and Philosophy Education

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History – Theory – Practice

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*Edited by*  
Markus Tiedemann  
Bettina Bussmann

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Markus Tiedemann • Bettina Bussmann  
Editors

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History – Theory – Practice

With Contributions by Carolin Seyffert, Anne-Marie  
Leiblich, Juliane Köhler, Sophia Peukert, and Mario Kötter

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## Preface

Over the past decades, the subject area of gender has developed into a reservoir of very different research foci and questions. The spectrum ranges from concrete socio-political questions to forms of orthography to basic research on the underlying scientific and methodological concepts. Philosophy didactics has so far participated with only very few contributions. This is all the more astonishing since the central discourses are shaped by work from almost all areas of philosophy. Identifying the levels at which gender issues affect the central goals of philosophical education is thus no easy undertaking. This volume aims to contribute to intensifying the debate on as many levels as possible.

The relationship between these two poles of gender issues and philosophical education can be established on very different levels. On the one hand, gender issues themselves can become the object of philosophical reflection and inquiry. It is part of the nature of philosophy to take almost any object as an occasion for reflection. The design of philosophical-ethical education is also committed to life-world references and current needs for orientation. If gender issues are discussed in society, then philosophy and ethics education should respond to them. Furthermore, gender issues are interwoven in a special way with fundamental philosophical themes. These include, for example, the controversy about a constructivist or naturalistic concept of truth and science; about the normative understanding of tolerance, freedom and discrimination; about the relationship between power and language; and about anthropological questions of identity, love and sexuality.

On the other hand, philosophical education must ask itself what consequences are to be drawn for its own didactics and methodology. Has the genesis and use of central gender-relevant concepts been sufficiently explicated, evaluated and, if necessary, revised? Which stereotypes and distortions of perception (*biases*) about the nature and tasks of women and men can be found and addressed in the texts of the philosophical tradition and how can they be avoided in subject didactics? Should more women philosophers be specifically addressed in the classroom? Which language code is appropriate for philosophical treatises?

Discussions on these issues are still in their infancy, and where they are already being addressed, unreflected positions often clash. The present volume attempts to provide a basis for a variety of different aspects in this discussion. It is expressly intended as a contribution to improving the still thin literature. It is just as important to provide clear information on the central issues as it is to ensure that the concepts

selected for this purpose can be used in subject didactics and teaching practice for lesson planning. In view of the thematic context, it also seems particularly charming that four young researchers present their work in this volume, framed by an established colleague.

We hope that this volume will be followed by other treatises.

Dresden, Germany  
Salzburg, Austria

Markus Tiedemann  
Bettina Bussmann

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### About the Editors

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# Introduction and Sketch of the Problems

Bettina Bussmann

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## 1 Philosophical Foundations

The present volume on the topic of “Gender Issues and Philosophy Didactics” sets itself the goal of highlighting the importance and philosophy-didactical relevance of a historically very young, very controversial and quite elusive category: the category of *gender*. It offers teachers who want or have to teach this complex topic a better understanding by providing some basic historical texts, highlighting lines of development, identifying philosophical and life-world problems and presenting possibilities for classroom teaching. It also aims to provide impulses that enable teachers to independently identify central gender issues in society that make sense from a philosophical point of view and to develop their own material for their specific learning groups. In philosophy didactics, there are now a number of contributions that have addressed specific areas; however, there is a fundamental lack of shared understanding as to what is necessary and relevant if we want to include gender aspects in teaching. Even though the term ‘gender’ is now to be found in abundance in public media and there are heated arguments about its interpretation and meaning, and even though there have long been elaborated gender curricula<sup>1</sup> that offer ideas for implementation in universities and colleges, knowledge about this topic is often still very limited in the general population. Therefore, in the following some basics will be developed (1), central areas and questions for philosophical educational processes will be pointed out (2) and the state of research in philosophy didactics and its future tasks will be presented (3).

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., <http://www.gender-curricula.com/gender-curricula-startseite/> [01 May 2019].

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From birth, every human being has a biological sex (*sex*), and is also assigned a role based on the sex (*gender*). The exclamation “It’s a girl!” made at birth in most societies also seals for the biological girl (or boy) a set of social expectations that they will have to fulfil in the future as women and men. What constitutes a woman and what constitutes a man usually does not need to be discussed at length, because we are *gendered* in a certain way by the society we live in, meaning that social, moral, political, and biological demands are placed on us based on our sex and its correspondent role expectations. In most cases, we usually aren’t even aware of them. “Women are bad at maths”, “men can’t listen”, “women should give birth” and “men have to take care of the family” are well-known beliefs or stereotypes that are passed on from one generation to the next, and in this way shape the social life, the coexistence of the sexes and consolidate present power and dominance relationships. The fact that all cultures gender the body and determine the roles that we as men and women have to fulfil in a society, has been systematically questioned and analysed by the *gender studies*, among others, on the basis of a large number of studies from different disciplines.<sup>2</sup> Long before this systematic research, a number of male and female thinkers from all eras took a stand on this question. Among them we find documentations of the humiliation and devaluation of people who do not conform to traditional role expectations or even defy them, in the majority of cases women. However, revolutionary and emancipatory reflections can also be found. Some essential historical texts are presented in this volume. Many other disciplines also deal with the topic of “gender”, for example sexology, biology, ethnology. In the feminist-oriented sciences, “gender” is one of the most important categories within a network of other classifications that structure social life and shape social identities, such as ethnicity, physical disability, or sexual orientation. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* contains over 30 essays dealing with feminist perspectives on a particular object of inquiry (e.g., “Feminist Perspectives on Science”), in which the distinction between “sex” and “gender” functions as the foundational distinction for the analysis in question. Countless other articles in this encyclopedia also consider gender aspects (e.g., “Parenthood and Procreation” or “Distributive Justice”).<sup>3</sup> Despite the diversity of these perspectives, however, all of these areas of research share the conviction that there is a hierarchical order of social gender and that this is produced by social practices and institutions. The central question to which the respective perspectives seek to provide an answer, and which also guides this volume, is thus: *By what mechanisms do gender ascriptions and gender relations control our personal, social, economic, and political world?* “Gender” thus becomes a *fundamental category of analysis and knowledge* that permeates all areas of life. Originating in the feminist-oriented women’s studies of the 1960s, research on gender and sexuality is currently experiencing a strong global expansion. In particular, many female academics are beginning to analyze the disciplines in which

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Degele, Nina 2008. Frey Steffen, Therese 2006. Bauer, Robin/Götschel, Helene 2006. Coates, Jennifer 2016. Landweer, Hilge/Newmark, Catherine/Kley, Christine/Miller, Simone 2014.

<sup>3</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu> [01.05.2019].

they work from a gender perspective: Do women research differently than men? Does research conducted by male-only groups exclude certain issues because women perceive and observe differently?<sup>4</sup> What does the exclusion of women from research mean for the content orientation of research?<sup>5</sup> Is rational thinking still mainly attributed to men and overemphasized, for example in philosophy, while other forms of thinking are neglected?<sup>6</sup> Should women all over the world simply adopt Western developments of emancipation and adopt the concepts of Western gender research, or do their cultures and historical developments give rise to entirely different questions?<sup>7</sup> How do gender differences manifest themselves in our language and what effects do they have on the way people live together?<sup>8</sup> Should gender-sensitive language be obligatory, and if so, in what way and why? How should we deal with the concept of women (and also men) in e.g. conservative religious countries we are increasingly confronted with due to cultural integration – and which is unacceptable for Western cultures?

This is only a small excerpt from a wide range of topics that are currently being discussed and that have already brought about social change. Shaping social life from a gender perspective means taking into account the diverse realities of life and needs of women, men, as well as people who do not fall or do not want to fall into these categories, and deriving demands for a more just and humane world.

However, these noble goals are under heavy fire. There are quite a few researchers and public figures who either no longer want to speak out on this issue because they believe they risk their reputation, or who go on the offensive and reject and fight feminist and gender studies. A dramatic example is currently the abolition of Master's degree programmes in "Gender Studies" by the Hungarian government under Victor Órban, as well as the plan of the Brazilian government under Jair Bolsonaro to financially cut or completely abolish<sup>9</sup> important disciplines in the humanities and to ban topics on sexuality and gender from school education.<sup>10</sup> In many European countries, there is a general tendency for national, religious and traditionalist parties, for example, to instrumentalise "gender" as an irritant term in cultural-critical debates in order to label the entire preoccupation with questions of gender as *ideology* or *indoctrination*. This can be seen in labels such as "gender mania", "gender mafia", "femi-Nazis" or "gender-gaga."<sup>11,12</sup> Why is this field confronted with such vehement criticism? What theoretical considerations and what

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Haraway, Donna 2000.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Hirschauer, Stefan 2004.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Haslinger, Sally 2008.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Oyewumi, Oyeronke 2005.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Pusch, Luise F 2015 and Coates, Jennifer 2016.

<sup>9</sup> See: <https://sites.google.com/g.harvard.edu/brazil-solidarity> [03.05.2019]

<sup>10</sup> See: [https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/rechte-brasilianische-schulpolitik-bolsonaro-will.680.de.html?dram:article\\_id=434449](https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/rechte-brasilianische-schulpolitik-bolsonaro-will.680.de.html?dram:article_id=434449) [03 May 2019].

<sup>11</sup> This is the title of Birgit Kelle's 2015 book of the same name.

<sup>12</sup> See for analysis of gender as a political battleground Siri, Jasmin 2019.



political demands make gender issues one of the most important but at the same time most controversial ones?

Two main lines of argumentation are presented below.

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## 2 Gender Equality

Gender issues affect the foundation of every society. The *natural order of the sexes*, unquestioned for centuries and in almost all societies, is doubted and scrutinized. This natural order is maintained, the critique goes, by the norm of bisexuality, the norms of uniqueness and naturalness of both sexes, and the norm of heterosexuality as the primary anthropological determination. Indeed, attributions of the form “women are naturally X, therefore they must not Y or must Z” are highly problematic. One can see here a naturalistic fallacy that invalidly infers *norms* from a fact without any other additional assumptions. The American bioscientist Anne Fausto-Sterling aptly states:

Once you believe that there is a biological explanation for a social phenomenon [e.g.: fewer women choose STEM studies, B.B.], then it is also natural to think that all efforts to change the existing situation are pointless.<sup>13</sup>

If one assumes that women have certain characteristics by nature, then all efforts to achieve gender equality will turn out futile. This is why it is also a popular strategy of patriarchal societies to postulate a certain nature of women in order to exclude them from participation in social processes so that existing power over them can continue to be exercised. For this reason, the term “nature” is a *concept of domination* for many gender researchers. For them, gender relations do not reflect a natural order, but are a contingent cultural system of rules. This system of rules – and not a natural disposition and order – decides which duties and rights are to be assigned, how property and inheritance are to be regulated, how professions and jobs are to be distributed, how sexuality and marriage are to be lived. Historically contingent cultural practices are responsible for the *social construction of gender*. The metaphor of construction, which is based on the epistemology of Immanuel Kant, argues that things are not as they appear and that we must use certain methods to identify, expose and thereby *deconstruct* these constructions. In our society, for example, social constructions have led to the conviction that only the couple “man and woman” is considered a socially accepted unit that is controlled by patriarchal rules, i.e. men determine how women may or may not live. In Western cultures, the rigidity of this system has long since become fragile. Other forms of life, and relationships, other forms of love and family are gaining more and more societal acceptance. But this development must not be taken for granted, for it is still too young, too controversial and too little understood. It must still be assumed that the majority of humankind lives in an *androcentric system of domination*. However, this system of

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<sup>13</sup>Fausto-Sterling, Anne 1988, p. 21.

rule lead to considerable injustice and unequal treatment, as can be seen, for example, in the different incomes of certain professions.

Why, for example, was resistance to monotony – the ability to perform a certain monotonous activity over a long period of time, which is particularly developed in women – less taken into account than physical strength, even though certain industries such as the confectionery industry could not exist without these skills? The first issue here is to develop criteria of *fair comparability and valuation* for different professional activities, and then to establish fair pay for all genders. A particularly topical problem area for many gender-conscious politicians at the moment is the lack of appreciation, the low payment as well as problematic hiring practice in the nursing and care professions, which are mainly carried out by women (care discourse). Nursing and care professions are poorly paid although psychologically very stressful. For this reason, they are unattractive to many young people. However, private households need support because they are overburdened with the care or supervision of their family members. In order to meet this need, in particular women from poorer countries are taken in. Poorly paid, they often leave their families behind in their own countries. In this way, Central and Western European countries are contributing to damage these countries both financially and in terms of family policy. Women who work in our countries are underpaid, they cannot look after their own families and they are not available for the labour market in their own countries. *Gender differences* thus contribute to significant social injustice, nationally and globally. Examining mechanisms of political decision-making from a gender perspective thus means moving closer to the *ideal of social gender justice*. *Psychiatrist and sexologist* Volkmar Sigusch puts it in a nutshell:

The moment the small child perceives gender difference, it learns that not all people are equal. However, it is not the bodies that say that the other is inferior, but the socialized people. The female feeling of inferiority, which Freud observed and naturalistically-patriarchally misunderstood as an anatomical “fate” [...], is still a social “fate”. Only when the woman is socially equal can the little child *perceive* its mother in *this way*.<sup>14</sup>

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### 3 Love, Sexuality, Family

Research and analysis on gender leads to questions that affect the very foundation of every society. They concern questions of personal identity, sexual desire, the idea of whether and with whom one wants live together, whether one wants to generate offspring and what normative role the state and society should take in all of these questions. These questions have always played a major role in the history of philosophy, but they were mostly discussed from the perspectives of men. This is not surprising, since sexuality was until the twentieth century understood exclusively as *male* sexuality. It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century, supported by the female emancipation movements that female sexuality was “rediscovered”, after centuries of being scientifically denied to exist at all. To deal philosophically with

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<sup>14</sup>Sigusch, Volkmar 2005, p. 141.

this subject was therefore not particularly attractive to academic philosophy. Even Bertrand Russell, who was one of the few philosophers in the twentieth century to deal with the topics of love, sexuality and marriage, and who even lost an American university position because of his emancipatory and religion-critical thoughts on women's sexuality (his reflections were immoral and lascivious), did not want to call his writings on these topics "philosophy". In particular, twentieth-century analytic philosophy was regarded as a purely logical-scientific and apolitical endeavor but when it comes to impact "Russell's thinking about love and marriage had a far bigger impact on the world than his thinking about logic and language", as Carrie Jenkins clearly puts it.<sup>15</sup> For a long time, these issues belonged to the art of living, counselling, or psychology. This situation has changed thoroughly in recent decades. A large number of philosophical works have been published that systematically examine the complex of topics of love and sexuality in a problem-oriented fashion.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the reappraisal and analysis of historical developments, the focus is put primarily on normative questions: (How) should we plan our love lives: with or without children? If the feeling of jealousy is bad for the stability of relationships, should jealous people take hormones to suppress this feeling and save the relationship? Should it be morally and legally permitted to prescribe hormones to pubescent adolescents who want to change their sex, and at what age? Such questions cannot be answered without including scientific evidence, i.e., one should philosophize empirically-informed. But doing so leads to the general question of how much evidence from the sciences is needed to answer these questions. If, for example, love and sexuality are only considered from a psychobiological point of view – what feelings are there, how do couples bond and what role do hormones play? –, then this knowledge is certainly helpful and necessary to explain and better understand certain phenomena. But it leaves out central *philosophical* problems. And it leaves out one problem that is currently among the most exciting: It concerns the fundamental question of how to combine *social constructivist* theories of gender with *biological* (hereafter: scientific) theories in a meaningful way. The representatives of both views are irreconcilably opposed to each other on many points and mutually insult each other as either "dogmatic" or "indoctrinating", which makes it particularly difficult for student teachers to acquire basic knowledge with which they can later teach the topic of gender appropriately and confidently. At the moment, many have the feeling they have to decide on a viewpoint "somehow". Here, philosophy didactics is faced with the task of providing professionally well-founded methods, core concepts and material if they demand from curriculum and textbook makers to integrate and convey certain educational contents. There is an urgent need for action to systematically outline this fundamental disagreement. In the following, the central theses of social constructivist and natural science theory are presented. In their extreme forms, the views of fundamental constructivism and fundamental scientism cannot be combined.

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<sup>15</sup> Jenkins, Carrie 2017, p. 56.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Mariano, Patricia 2019. Jenkins, Carrie 2017. Foster, Gary 2017. Halwani, Raja 2010. Soble, Alan 1998.

### 3.1 The Social Constructivist View

What has been called “sexuality” or “love” for about 200 years is subject to constant social change. All cultural practices are subject to social change, and this includes scientific practice as well. Social constructivists usually share a *science pessimistic* view. If you look at what the sciences have said and believed about women, love, and many other categories such as “race” throughout history, you quickly find that (a) they have often been wrong and that (b) they have often misused their knowledge to legitimize a particular social system, usually an androcentric system of domination. That they were wrong is part of the practice of scientific research and cannot be criticised – science doesn’t detect the one and only truth, to err is part of the game. That scientists, if they do not have critical opponents or do not allow them into their community, misuse their knowledge for political purposes, on the other hand, is a problem worthy of criticism, and a double one at that. On the level of action, it shows that there are no “neutral” researchers, but that scientists carry the convictions of the world they live in into their research. This can hardly be avoided. What must be criticised, however, is that they are tempted to use their findings for political purposes. This is an ethical problem. On the epistemological level, it is apparent that scientific research works with classifications that run the risk of being believed to represent reality, represent nature. For example, Donna Haraway states, “Nature is constructed, historically constituted, and not discovered naked in the archaeological layer of a fossil or in a tropical forest,” referring to analyses of gender issues in primate research.<sup>17</sup> Related to gender issues, one could formulate: Love and sexuality are constructed and what we practice today is not a natural truth. Love and relationship practices are not objectively found in the beds of the people. Genetic factors, environmental influences, adaptive behavior, etc., can plausibly explain why the family has been considered the “natural basic unit of society”<sup>18</sup> up to now. But they cannot explain why (a) love, sexuality, and family have been lived so *differently* historically and culturally, and they cannot (b) legitimize that our society *should* continue to be guided by the role and relationship models that have emerged through natural adaptation. An apt example of the social construction of love is provided by Carrie Jenkins:

Consider a woman falling in love in Victorian England. The idea is that she will literally *go through a different process* compared to a woman falling in love in contemporary Canada. For the Victorian lady, falling in love is a matter of developing a deep and respectful (but probably rather distant) admiration for a man. Sexual desire is at best irrelevant to this process, at worst a shameful distraction. For the contemporary Canadian, however, falling in love is a matter of developing an intimate attachment that normatively includes sexual desire. If sexual desire is absent, that is at best noticeably unusual; at worst it is interpreted as showing that the feelings involved are not romantic but platonic.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Haraway, Donna 2000, p. 156.

<sup>18</sup>For example, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16.

<sup>19</sup>Jenkins, Carrie 2017, p. 43.

This example illustrates that it is difficult to objectively determine what is “normal” or what is “natural” without considering the cultural context. While people of Victorian times had hormonal release and reproductive drives just as we do, “genetics and environment don’t offer any obvious explanation for the differences between Victorian love and contemporary love.”<sup>20</sup> Labels such as “abnormal” and “unnatural” are social constructions of their times, its goal being to politically order and control certain phenomena, in other words: labeling certain sexual behavior as “pathological,” for example, in order to preserve the existing social system. If the Victorian lady had behaved in her time as the modern Canadian woman does, she would probably have been condemned as sick, immoral and dangerous. She would have been removed from social life – just as Bertrand Russell was not allowed to take up his university post lest his socially critical thoughts be disseminated. The distinction between classifications and categories (cultural constructs) on the one hand, and natural facts on the other, is thus a central one in epistemology and scientific theory. Ian Hacking gives two examples: A child is real, but “childhood” is a social construction. Child abuse is real, but what we define as child abuse is a social construction.<sup>21</sup> Applied to our subject matter, we can say: feeling love and practicing sexuality is real, but what we mean by love and sexuality is socially constructed.

However, people find it extraordinarily difficult to see and understand this distinction; self-attributions and external ascriptions often *feel* like natural states. Why is that? Studies show why our minds feel that their behavior is “all natural” behavior, even though it is socially constructed. As social beings, we depend on our group to accept us, because humans can hardly survive without social support. Classifications, categories and attributions help us in this process of adaptation to groups. Cognitive psychology has shown that people develop concepts, such as the term “mother”, on the basis of mental, prototypical characteristics and correlational observations. Accordingly, a mother has, for example, the characteristics “wife”, “has children”, “stays mainly at home” and so on, mostly characteristics that one observes. On this basis, one forms *idealized cluster models*. A mother is then classified as a “birth mother,” a “caregiver mother,” a “genetic mother,” a “homemaker mother,” and so on. Many people have internalized a the cognitive model of the “housewife-mother”, which is considered a the prototype of a “mother” in general, and against which mothers and motherhood are normatively evaluated.<sup>22</sup> In everyday life, these internalized classifications lead to the formation of stereotypes, and to standardizations which we accept without reflection and according to which we behave because we are exposed to social group pressure. Inner psychic conflicts occur when people do not conform to or resist the prototypical image. However, we usually adapt to these normative prototypes so that they change us and in the end make us feel as if they are part of our nature. These phenomena are currently being increasingly researched, for example, under the terms “embodiment” and “biolooping”.<sup>23</sup> They impressively show how the interaction between humans and

<sup>20</sup>Jenkins, Carrie 2017, p. 44.

<sup>21</sup>Hacking, Ian 1999.

<sup>22</sup>Thanks to Sasha, S. Euler for this example, which refers to the work of Lakoff, George, 1987.

<sup>23</sup>See, for example, Seligman, Rebecca A. 2018 or Fuchs, Thomas 2016.

their cultural environment produces a reality that one could assume to be normal, natural, essential or God-given.

The most hotly debated thesis of many gender researchers is the thesis that *biological* sex and sexuality are also socially constructed. Judith Butler claims that this construction is based on three basic assumptions: First, that there are exactly two sexes (primarily in Western cultures); second, that these determine gender identity and thus gender roles; and third, that this bisexuality is made culturally visible through the primacy of heterosexual love and is thereby constantly reconfirmed.<sup>24</sup> Butler refers to this cultural practice as *compulsory heteronormativity*. It is, she claims, discriminatory and leads to abuse of power. The goal of social constructivist research is to recognize these heteronormative social structures in all their occurrences, to break them down, and to establish a multiplicity of gender identities.<sup>25</sup>

Biological sex, so the thesis, says nothing at all about whether one feels like a man or a woman and identifies with a certain gender role. No one is 100% man or 100% woman. It is even possible to be born “in the wrong body” – the most common statement heard when transgender people talk about why they cannot or do not want to live their biological sex. Currently, we are faced with a rapidly increasing number of children and adolescents who decide to undergo sex reassignment surgery. This topic is highly explosive and is fiercely debated in public and academic discourses.<sup>26</sup> Changing one’s sex at or even before puberty with the help of hormones and surgical interventions is an irreversible act. This raises a whole series of ethical, existential and legal questions for those affected, for their relatives, doctors and the legislature. However, this development shows one thing in any case: the social acceptance of *sexual diversity* has become greater, not least thanks to the contributions of social constructivist thinkers. In society, these thoughts have been taken up especially by artists, who have often experienced first-hand what it means to be forced into a normative corset that restricts their need for unimpeded artistic and personal development. In music, literature, film and the visual arts, these thoughts have been able to spread at a rapid pace, supported by digital media.<sup>27</sup>

## 3.2 The Scientific View

Social constructivists question why love and desire should only take place between a man and a woman, why love relationships are standardized monogamously and under reproductive aspects, and why one should live according to one’s sex at all. In doing so, they not only provoke the indignant opposition of conservative and

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<sup>24</sup> Butler, Judith 1991.

<sup>25</sup> In addition to “male” and “female”, there are close to 60 gender designations available to one today. See for example: [http://de.wikimannia.org/60\\_Geschlechtsidentitäten](http://de.wikimannia.org/60_Geschlechtsidentitäten) [28.04.2019].

<sup>26</sup> See the article in *Die Zeit* by Spiewak, Martin: <https://www.zeit.de/2018/48/transsexualitaet-jugend-transgender-modeerscheinung-psychologie> [30.12.2018].

<sup>27</sup> As one example: The LGBTQ community’s Advocate for Change Award in May 2019 was given to Madonna.

religious persons who see this as a program that destructs ideas of family, marriage, fidelity and other values based on traditional role models;<sup>28</sup> they also attract the rejection of some scientists who refer to evolutionary biology when they emphasize the fundamental role that hormones, neurotransmitters and hierarchical orders play in love, family and society. The mechanisms that regulate our love and sex lives have evolved over thousands of years of adaptation to the natural environment. That humans exist, that higher creatures exist at all, is subject to the necessity of sexual reproduction. Do social constructivist theories take these insights into account? Their answer is: No. And this, they claim, is not only due to different explanatory approaches, but also to an inadequate methodology. Gender research in particular is accused of having developed an “aversion to the logical-rational, physical-chemical life sciences”.<sup>29</sup> They simply ignore, so it is said, fundamental scientific findings. This ignorance and lack of scientific knowledge in general is accompanied, they argue, by a methodological deficit that has led to the establishment of poor and empirically uninformed research practices.<sup>30</sup> “Genderism,” in the words of Ulrich Kutschera, who is currently its harshest critic, is nothing more than “a pseudo-scientific religious substitute of certain women, mostly homoerotically inclined and childless, who have problems with their biological womanhood – millions of dollars of state money are spent on these activities of privileged ladies, which is truly a questionable investment in the future.”<sup>31</sup> Apart from the insulting generalizing sentences, which shall not be further considered here, a term is brought into the field which actually has to be taken seriously and which is especially relevant for philosophical education: the term *pseudoscience*. Kutschera may be one of the most aggressive academic opponents of gender research, but he is not the only one. Many other scientists and philosophers accuse gender studies of ignoring or distorting biological facts, of not engaging in open-ended scientific practice but in political propaganda. From their view, all questions concerning gender are seen as biological and psychological, but not as political questions. The increased preoccupation with a particular perspective – be it feminist, transgender or any other – would promote a narrow and flawed group view, which is harmful for the coexistence of people and for the individual concerned.<sup>32</sup>

Social constructivism turns into pseudoscience if one assumes that there are numerous other biological sexes in addition to man and woman or if one assumes that the choice of sex is freely selectable by individuals. Such ideas are incompatible with knowledge from the natural sciences. They define sex in terms of the gametes formed by individuals, which in turn presuppose the presence or absence of

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<sup>28</sup> Material for teaching practice is provided by the statements and posters of some parties. Links to the posters in the bibliography/material.

<sup>29</sup> Kutschera, Ulrich 2016, p. 327.

<sup>30</sup> See Buchholz, Günter 2014 and the Fake articles by Peter Boghossian, James A. Lindsay and Helen Pluckrose on the transfer of poor scientific practice in gender studies 2018. E.g., <https://science.orf.at/stories/2941111/> [15 May 2019].

<sup>31</sup> Kutschera, Ulrich 2016, p. 52.

<sup>32</sup> This is also the case with Meyer, Axel 2015.

certain genetic switches. In humans, there are only two types of gametes – eggs and sperm. The ability to produce these gametes corresponds not only to the associated specific sex organs, but also to numerous other characteristics (see Chapter “Biological Foundations” in this book). This *sexual dimorphism* counts as basic knowledge of evolutionary biology on which all other biologically oriented disciplines are based on. Since it is also taught in schools, it means a further difficulty for teaching this topic. The accusation of pseudoscience weighs heavily and is an increasingly important subject, especially for philosophical education that focusses on issues of societal relevance.<sup>33</sup>

So when Simone de Beauvoir says: “A woman is determined neither by her hormones nor by mysterious instincts, but by the way she grasps her body and her relationship to the world through the consciousness of strangers”,<sup>34</sup> she emphasizes some important aspects that result from glances and evaluations that (especially male) strangers put on them, namely body awareness, body knowledge and vulnerability. But it does so at the expense of erroneous statements about hormones and instincts, which equally shape women’s lives and behaviour.

American sex researcher Martie Haselton, who studies women’s menstrual cycles, considers herself a *Darwinian feminist*. She wants to find out how women are controlled by their hormones and what effects they have on mate choice and reproduction.

These hormonally triggered shifts in sexual behavior across the cycle are fascinating and complex, and the heart of much of my research. I believe a woman’s sexual behavior – her desires as well as her actions – serve clear purposes that can define her destiny, as well as the destiny of her potential offspring. [...] This was sexual behavior driven by hormones and it most likely evolved because of our increasingly big brains and the needy human offspring that resulted, dependent children who fared best when they received care from both moms and dads.<sup>35</sup>

To understand these processes is to be able to make an empirically-informed case for the needs and rights of (in this case) women. “What’s my advice for women? [...] *Know the science. Know yourself.* You will make the most informed decisions.”<sup>36</sup>

Scientifically informed people can respond to social constructivism in two ways:

- It is not so much the power structures that define our humanity within the gender matrix, but it is rather the *biological strategies* that our bodies have developed in response to environmental conditions in the daily struggle for survival. Phenomena such as love and sexuality, as well as cultural practices such as marriage and parenthood, maximize biological utility. However, these biological adaptive processes remain hidden from us. For this reason, only scientific research can reveal to us the true mechanisms that shape and control sexual

<sup>33</sup> See Bussmann, Bettina 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Beauvoir, Simone 1986, p. 675.

<sup>35</sup> Haselton, Martie 2018, p. 88.

<sup>36</sup> Haselton, Martie 2018, p. 238.



behavior. It is not man's culture that determines its nature, as many social constructivists claim, but the other way round. Our largely determined nature reveals our cultural practices which are strategies of adaptation.<sup>37</sup>

- Our terms and classifications may be socially constructed – but not the facts we discover. These facts include massive biological *sex differences*.

There is convincing evidence that, for example, girls and boys perceive and feel differently, and that knowledge about these differences is crucial for *gender-sensitive education*. The American psychologist Leonard Sax warns parents and teachers in particular against paying insufficient attention to gender differences and thus achieving precisely the opposite: reinforcing gender stereotypes. This *gender blindness* would lead to the fact that, for example, far fewer men study art in the USA. However, according to Sax, this is not because men cannot draw, but because the way they *want to draw* is different from that of girls. In school contexts, he goes on, a certain kind of drawing is encouraged, namely the colourful and descriptive one of girls and less the colourless and action-packed one of boys. Because teachers favour the girls' way of drawing and ask boys to draw similarly to girls, they enable the formation of the stereotype that girls can draw better than boys, which is not the case – they just give up.<sup>38</sup> The reverse is similar, for example, in attributing mathematical ability to girls. If boys hear, smell, feel, and perceive differently because of their hormonal makeup, then it is likely that this has implications for their preferences, because interests and abilities are largely based on what comes naturally to a person. Of course, one should not assume that all men and all women are fundamentally biologically endowed in the *same way*; that, of course, is not the case. The message is a positive one: By paying attention to gender differences – and precisely not demanding gender disappearance – social change can start that does more justice to the nature of men and women in their different realities of life than is currently the case. This ranges from the design of educational processes in schools, to professional aptitude tests, to gender medicine that takes biological differences into account in the treatment of diseases.

All in all, it can be seen how difficult it is to discern the natural and the culturally determined parts of the characteristics and behaviour of the sexes. However, once one understands the two extreme positions of reducing gender issues to purely biological facts on the one hand and to mere contingent social constructs on the other, a large area of interesting questions opens up.

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## 4 Two Central Tasks for Philosophical Educational Processes

The topic of gender offers a rich opportunity for the discussion of a whole range of philosophical subjects in nearly every philosophical discipline. The topic gives rise to discussions in ethics, anthropology, epistemology, and political philosophy. Here,

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<sup>37</sup> See for example: Voland, Eckart 2007, Seligman et al. 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Sax, Leonard 2005, p. 20 ff.

attention should be drawn to two tasks in particular – one new and one well-known – which have received too little attention so far in relation to gender issues.

- The first task is to analyse culturalistic and naturalistic misunderstandings. It serves to train and sharpen teachers' and students' *epistemic competence*, which is becoming increasingly important in our complex world.<sup>39</sup>
- The second task is to understand and analyse gender issues as a continuation of the *Enlightenment programme*.

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## 5 Analysing Culturalistic and Naturalistic Misunderstandings

Today, different *knowledge cultures* collide in many places of the world. Philosophy's task is that of a critical authority. It analyses and mediates between the humanistic-literary and scientific-technical cultures distinguished by C.P. Snow.<sup>40</sup> Philosophical education is increasingly engaged in the analysis of culturalistic and naturalistic misunderstandings.<sup>41</sup>

A culturalistic misunderstanding occurs when nature is regarded exclusively as a social construction or *merely an intellectual creation* (idealism). A naturalistic misunderstanding occurs when scientific statements about the natural are claimed to be valid independently of cultural practice (scientism). To know this tension and to avoid a one-sided partisanship is especially necessary when supporters of correspondingly narrowed theories want to enforce political measures. Therefore, the training of epistemic competence is necessary, for which the topic of gender is excellently suited. Epistemic competences are skills with which one can identify and critically reflect on the theories underlying social problems as well as their knowledge claims. The classical questions of epistemology and philosophy of science must be *applied* – this is the difficulty – to problematic cases in society, such as gender, climate or migration. This application goes beyond the currently still predominant teaching of classical historical texts from epistemology and philosophy of science.

Epistemically competent citizens have the tools to recognize exaggerated, false or one-sided knowledge claims. In the case of gender issues, these are particularly prevalent in political discourses. Here is one example: If people demand that the topic of sexual diversity should not be taught in schools because this would result in teaching homosexuality, then epistemically competent citizens will be able to critically question this misconception and prove it as such with appropriate empirical and historical studies.

In order to deal with the problems with which all genders are massively confronted today, from the personal to the global sphere, and to clarify the question of how we *want to* live with each other, there must be negotiating discussions in our

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<sup>39</sup> See in detail: Bussmann, Bettina/Kötter, Mario 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Snow, C.P. 1989. On the relevance of Dilthey to subject didactics, see e.g. Feldmann, Klaus 2019.

<sup>41</sup> See in detail Becker, Ralf 2016.