

Joachim Heinrich Campe, “Fatherly Advice to My Daughter” (1789)

Abstract

The author, pedagogue, and publisher Joachim Heinrich Campe (1746–1818) represented the contradictions of German middle-class culture. He welcomed the French Revolution—at least initially—but also embraced modern, dichotomous thinking about the sexes. In the following text, originally published in 1789, Campe defines gender as a natural or essential phenomenon: it was not social status, but rather the female body itself that led women to be regarded as dependent beings as opposed to independent actors. That this opinion was not self-evident is betrayed by the forcefulness with which Campe recommends that women internalize self-denial in order to accept society and its constraints.

Source

II. On the Unfavorable Relationship of Women to Human Society

The first and most important thing that I have to tell you here, if you have not already noticed it yourself, is that the sex to which you belong lives, according to the present condition of our world, in dependent circumstances that aim for intellectual and physical enfeeblement, and must necessarily live there as long as the condition of the world remains the same. This is admittedly not pleasant news, but it is necessary news, which I could not conceal from you without deceiving you to your great detriment.

But do not let yourself be depressed by this, my child! Know that, with some strength of soul and self-denial, it will nevertheless be possible for you to be a happy exception in many regards to the fate of your sisters, and to establish a sphere of activity just as worthy, honorable, and happy as we other so-called lords of creation are always able to carve out and appropriate for ourselves. First understand what this dependent situation, so unfavorable for your overall education, consists of: then we will try to find the means by which you can, if not completely remove the unpleasant and harmful aspects of it, at least greatly reduce them and make them more agreeable to you.

Every human society, even the smallest, which consists of a man, a woman, and children, is one body, and a head and limbs belong to every body. God Himself wanted, and the entire constitution of human societies on earth, as far as we know them, is so designed that not the woman but the man is to be the head. For that reason, the Creator as a rule gave the man strong muscles, steely nerves, fibers that are flexible for us, and a more rugged bone structure; for that reason, greater courage, a bolder spirit of adventure, distinctive firmness and coolness, and—I mean as a rule—also the unmistakable tendency to have a greater, farther-sighted, more encompassing intelligence. For that reason, the entire kind of education and lifestyle of the two sexes was set up in the case of all educated peoples such that the woman would become weak, small, delicate, sensitive, fearful, and small-minded—the man, in contrast, strong, firm, bold, persistent, big, noble, and powerful in body and soul. The quiet lifestyle and sedentary existence to which you are now for the most part condemned from early youth on, your unnatural clothing that prevents any free, quick movement, your morals, most of your activities, and your very ordinary way of living and being, all focus on the former. Our own freer lifestyle, in contrast, our youthful games, practices, and activities—to the extent that they are ordered by an intelligent educator—have the latter as their goal. It is thus the coinciding will of nature and human society that the man is to be the protector and head of the

woman, the woman on the other hand, the loyal, thankful, and obedient companion and helpmate of his life who clings and conforms to him—he, the oak; she, the ivy that draws part of its life force from the life force of the oak, which with her grows up to the sky, with her defies the storms, with her stands and with her falls—without her a lowly bush that is stepped on by every passer-by.

[...]

Source: Joachim Heinrich Campe, “Ueber die ungünstigen Verhältnisse des Weibes zur menschlichen Gesellschaft,” in *Väterlicher Rath für meine Tochter: Ein Gegenstück zum Theophron / Der erwachsenern weiblichen Jugend gewidmet von Joachim Heinrich Campe'n* (1789). Fifth legal edition. Braunschweig: Schulbuchhandlung, 1796, pp. 21–23. Available online at: <http://www.digibib.tu-bs.de/?docid=00000588>

Translation: Kathleen Dell'Orto

Recommended Citation: Joachim Heinrich Campe, “Fatherly Advice to My Daughter” (1789), published in: German History Intersections, <<https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/germanness/ghis:document-303>> [April 23, 2024].