

failures still make clear that children deserve to be raised by both biological parents. Furthermore, children who have been conceived through donor sperm or donor eggs often desire to know their biological fathers or mothers. Such children can suffer a sense of deprived identity, because no matter who their birth certificates list as their parents, their biological mothers and fathers are in fact their parents, from whom they receive many of their most fundamental traits (50). Thus, a crucial aspect of male–female marriage is its ability to form and sustain bonds rooted in natural relationships. Although advocates of same-sex marriage argue that they are promoting love, they are not in fact advocating for what is loving toward children.

Cowen concludes with a chapter on the ways in which proponents of same-sex marriage have sought to influence childhood education, most seriously “by suggesting alternative identities to [children] at the stage of their greatest fluidity of identity,” generally through sex education (75). As he notes, sex education, even at Christian or Jewish schools, is not infrequently monitored by groups that seek to confirm “whether ‘diverse sexualities’ are ‘celebrated’ by the school” under the guise of driving out anti-homosexual bullying and without concern for

psychological maturity or for the danger of unintentionally encouraging promiscuity (76). In sex-education programs, no place is generally given to the religious perspective on homosexual desires, which Cowen summarizes as “if a person felt an overwhelming homosexual impulse of the deepest nature, that would be viewed with compassion but it would not constitute permission to indulge homosexual activity in practice” (85).

Written in simple and accessible language, Cowen’s book serves as an excellent introduction to two especially fundamental points: First, humans should not be defined by their physical desires, as though our strong desires must be affirmed and acted on in order for us to be actualized and respected in our humanity. Second, marriage cannot be separated from procreation and the raising of one’s own children, and it is the ethical task of each generation to ensure that, insofar as possible, children are raised by their biological parents. I commend this book as a clear and powerful exposition of what love requires in response to the promotion of same-sex marriage.

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***Adam and Eve after the Pill:
Paradoxes of the Sexual Revolution***

by Mary Eberstadt

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Birth control has been largely accepted as such a basic good that many advocates speak of it as a fundamental right. Mary Eberstadt challenges this widespread assumption, arguing that the pill and its partner, the sexual revolution, have harmed women, men, and society, particularly its weakest members, children. Eberstadt not only marshals a broad variety of cultural and academic sources to

defend this position, but she offers a glimmer of hope by proposing compelling comparisons to other lifestyle choices whose moral status has changed in the public eye over the last fifty years, namely, smoking and mindful eating.

Eberstadt defines the sexual revolution as “the ongoing destigmatization of all varieties of nonmarital sexual activity, accompanied

by a sharp rise in such activity, in diverse societies around the world,” a state of affairs made practically possible by means of the birth control pill, which enables “optional and intentional sterility in women” (12). Her book aims to shed light on the “human fallout of our post-Pill world” (15). Eberstadt served as a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution from 2002 to 2013. An author with her finger on the pulse of contemporary culture, she supports her arguments with observations from the messages—and often the hurt, cynicism, and despair—in articles appearing in outlets like *Time*, the *Atlantic*, and the *Nation*. She surveys news and novels and gathers evidence from research in the social sciences and medical literature. Her footnotes are a treasure trove of sources for those interested in these cultural questions, and her writing style weaves together these various sources in thoughtful chapters that move swiftly.

The heart of the book examines what the sexual revolution is doing to women, men, children, and young adults. In the chapter on women, subtitled “What Does Woman Want?,” Eberstadt examines how women thought they wanted sexual license free from the risk of childbearing, just like men, and the sexual revolution gave it to them free of social stigma. However, after a survey of contemporary articles by women dissatisfied with the absence of lasting romance in their lives and a lack of sex in their marriages, possibly caused by husbands’ pornography use, which is permitted under the new moral code, Eberstadt concludes that “perhaps some of the modern misery of which so many women today so authentically speak is springing not from a sexual desert, but from a sexual flood—a torrent of poisonous imagery, beginning now for many in childhood, that has engulfed women and men, only to beach them eventually somewhere alone and apart, far from the reach of each other” as they experience a “lack of sexual intimacy in a world awash in sexual imagery” (53). Eberstadt also documents women’s frustration that “having it all” in terms of career and husbandly help with housework has not made them happier than women in previous generations.

In the chapter on men, subtitled “Peter Pan and the Weight of Smut,” Eberstadt documents the harmful effects of pornography on relationships and on the brain of the user, highlighting a body of evidence that has grown since the publication of her book and that the US Conference of Catholic Bishops draws from in its 2015 pastoral letter “Create in Me a Clean Heart: A Pastoral Response to Pornography.” The rise in divorce among those who use pornography, the self-loathing and depression associated with pornography addiction, users’ high rates of erectile dysfunction when it comes time to make love in real life with their wives, the massive damage to the personal lives of users and those who are tragically lured into the industry, the wide exposure of adolescents to pornography and the correlating increase in their sexual activity with all its cultural costs, and the addicted user’s inevitable slide into more extreme and disturbing types of images are not news to anyone familiar with the literature. It is laudable that Eberstadt brought these findings to light somewhat early—many people are just now awakening to the harms of pornography, even as the industry extends its reach to more users and younger populations every year. Eberstadt’s most valuable contribution to the discussion, however, is her ability to draw striking and brilliant parallels between the pornography epidemic and other public-health crises. These similes are so spot-on that they could possibly capture the attention of those on the other side of the culture wars.

In her discussion of the sexual revolution’s effect on men, she claims, “Pornography today, in short, is much like obesity was yesterday—a social problem increasing over time, with especially worrisome results among its youngest consumers, and one whose harms are only beginning to be studied with the seriousness they clearly deserve” (57). Later, in a provocative and compelling chapter dedicated solely to exploring the topic, she suggests that pornography consumption could very possibly become commonly regarded as harmful to health as tobacco is now. Just as public-health activists pressured the tobacco industry and educated the public in the face of widespread cigarette

smoking, she proposes that the same could occur with pornography. It is encouraging to remember that smoking was once practically universally accepted. It was considered an inevitable and ubiquitous part of life, and it happened everywhere—in the movies, in front of children, in the car, at stores and restaurants: “In 1950, almost half the adult American population smoked; by 2004, just over a fifth did. Though still in common use and still legally available, cigarettes somehow went from being widely consumed and accepted throughout the Western world to nearly universally discouraged and stigmatized—all in the course of a few decades” (121). It is encouraging to think that the same process could happen with pornography consumption now that evidence of its harmful effects is beginning to accumulate.

Another of Eberstadt’s provocative parallels examines the irony of “mindful eating and mindless sex” (96). Moral opinions about food abound. They underlie nutritional philosophies like macrobiotics and vegetarianism, and their evangelists impress on others the categorical moral goods for the individual, animals, and the planet of choosing to eat local, to eat organic, or to juice. Yet alongside all this intentionality and discipline regarding what one puts in one’s mouth, a *laissez-faire* attitude toward sexual consumption approves what Eberstadt calls “junk sex” (114). What one chooses to do sexually has simply become a matter of taste. Words like “guilt,” “pure,” and “clean” are much more likely to appear in popular culture when discussing food than when discussing sex. This is a fascinating observation: society has become “puritanical about food and licentious about sex” (119). Again, Eberstadt offers a ray of hope that this “transubstantiation” of values could shift again in the future, given the mounting evidence that the *laissez-faire* morals of the sexual revolution are harmful and that traditional sexual morality serves the greatest well-being of the individual and society. Here, she refers to studies by researchers like Linda Waite, Maggie Gallagher, Kay Hymowitz, W. Bradford Wilcox, David Blankenhorn, and Elizabeth Marquardt on the benefits of marriage and the damage

of family breakup. Eberstadt spends much of the chapter drawing conclusions, but this phenomenon would be a valuable starting point for discussion and reflection in a college course in philosophy, ethics, theology, or sociology.

Eberstadt credits the sexual revolution with harming children and adolescents by exposing them to pornography’s destructive, brain-altering, and behavior-altering content and by exploiting them for its production. In a brief chapter, Eberstadt reveals how close pedophilia came to gaining blasé cultural acceptance when articles appearing in the popular press in the 1980s accepted pederasty without comment. What turned the tide? She points to the clergy sex-abuse scandal and the Polanski affair as events that galvanized public opinion against pedophilia. The most common harm that the sexual revolution deals children, however, is the breakdown of families; the separation of sex from marriage leaves increasing numbers of children fatherless and correlates with personal suffering, behavioral difficulties, and social consequences, not the least of which is a greatly increased risk of poverty. She refers to well-known social scientists like Waite, Gallagher, and Wilcox who have conducted research in the area of sexual mores and personal and social well-being.

Eberstadt also examines the university hookup culture, because it offers “the best petri dish we could want for observing what happens to young men and women when they play by the sexual revolution’s rules” (93). Eberstadt refers to the hookup and binge-drinking culture present on most campuses as “Toxic U” and points to the “drinking to oblivion, drugging, one-night sex, sexually transmitted diseases, and all the rest of the hookup-culture trappings” that form the common denominators of the alarming increase in mental-health cases on college campuses (83). She looks to telling admissions from young men who acknowledge forcing nonconsensual sex and who engage in drinking games for the purpose of sexual manipulation: “The evidence in this petri dish testifies to one overriding and commonly overlooked truth: Contrary

to the liberation it has promised (and still promises), the revolution instead empowers the strong and penalizes the weak." For the lie is that "men and women want the same sexual things and stand at the same sexual starting line" (92–93).

An especially interesting chapter for theologians and defenders of the Catholic magisterium is the conclusion, "The Vindication of *Humanae Vitae*." Eberstadt illustrates the fulfillment of Pope Paul VI's prophetic predictions about the consequences of widespread contraception. With a wry voice, she points out the contradictions and ironies in the promises of sexual liberation and its inability to fulfill individuals who give themselves over to it. The effects in the Church itself also give her cause for comment. Sympathetic readers can easily nod in agreement with her observation that the Church was weakened by massive disobedience, confusion, dissent, and division following the publication of *Humanae vitae*. However, they may not accede to her claim that "the scandals involving priests and underage boys is surely traceable at least in part to the collusion between a Catholic laity that wanted a different birth-control doctrine, on the one hand, and a new generation of priests cutting themselves a different kind of slack, on the other" (154). Regardless, the reflections in this chapter are quite timely as *Humanae vitae* celebrates its fiftieth anniversary. The recent Wijngaards Statement, submitted to the United Nations in an attempt to pressure the Church into changing its magisterial teaching on birth control, prompted a counterstatement signed by over a thousand theologians, philosophers, doctors, and lawyers, demonstrating that the birth-control

debate is certainly still alive and well and that acceptance of the Church's teaching may in fact be gaining ground with a new generation of Catholic thinkers and activists.

The strengths of this book include its rich documentation and relevant cultural examples. Although it is well written, at times its tone might be off-putting to those who do not share the author's assumptions. Systematic theologians will not find watertight arguments here but rather inferences and implications as well as rich illustrations of the harms of not following the basic moral teachings of the Church on sex and family.

This book would be an excellent supplement or selection on the reading list for a college or seminary course on Christian marriage or contemporary sociology. Since it is written in a fast-paced and accessible style, it would be equally valuable to cultural observers, high school teachers, concerned parents, and youth and marriage ministers in the church. The cultural landscape it illuminates provides valuable insight about the topography of the mission territory that those who wish to take up the call of *Amoris laetitia* will travel as they seek to share the good news of the Gospel of the family. The dark picture provided by the statistics and cultural observations shows just how urgently society needs the light of the Church's message about the authentic truth of sexual integrity and the meaning, purpose, and boundaries of sexual activity.

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