

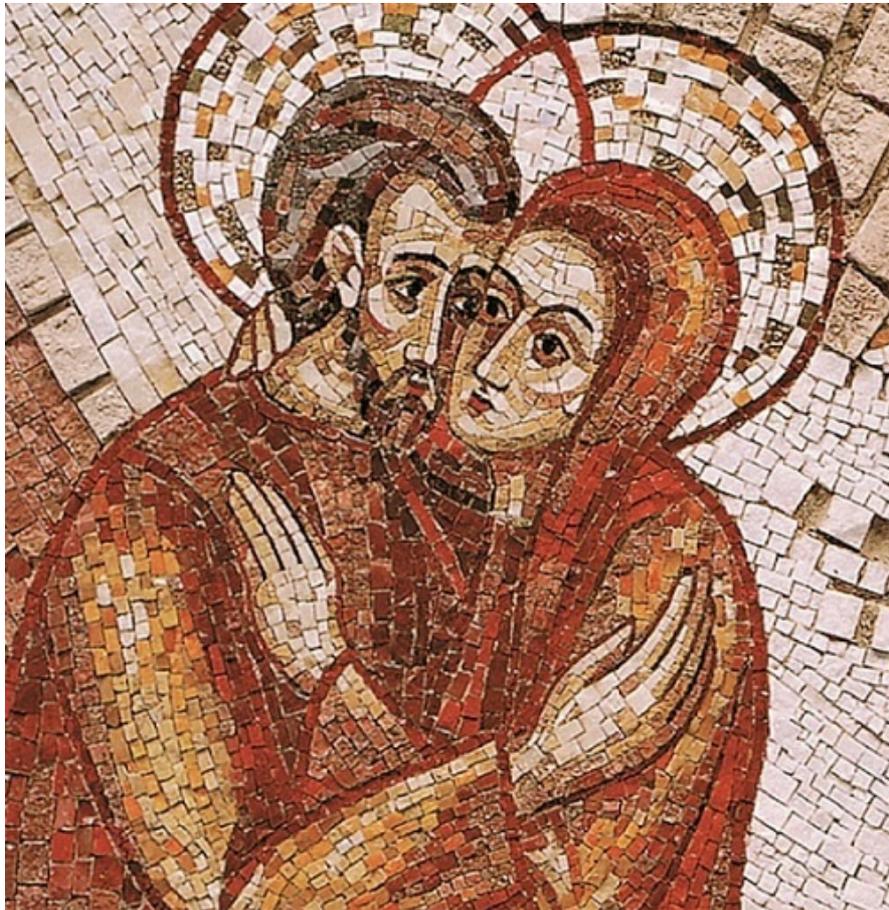


Humanum

ISSUES IN FAMILY, CULTURE & SCIENCE

ISSUE THREE

Sex and the Mystery of Being Human





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ISSUE THREE—SEX AND THE MYSTERY OF BEING HUMAN

Contents

	Page
EDITORIAL	
MARGARET HARPER MCCARTHY — The Inescapable Reality of Sex	3
RE-SOURCE: CLASSIC TEXTS	
AUGUSTO DEL NOCE — Why the Sexual Revolution is the Greatest Revolution	5
FEATURE ARTICLES	
MARY EBERSTADT — Is Food the New Sex?	10
KIMBERLY HENKEL & ANN KOSHUTE — Springs in the Desert: Infertility, Accompaniment and Fruitfulness	28
PAUL SULLINS — When Sex Becomes Cheap	35
WITNESSES	
MICHELLE CURRAN AND LUCA MARELLI — The Cleansing of the Temple: Casting Pornography Out of Marriage	43
BOOK REVIEWS	
COLET C. BOSTICK — Putting the Flintstones on the Pill	48
SOPHIE CALDECOTT — NFP: Hard Truths and Good Fruits	51
JOHN HENRY CROSBY — Approaching Sex with Reverence	55
CAITLIN DWYER — Free Love at the Price of Children's Well-being	59
SAMUEL FONTANA — Kitchen Table Theology: Opening Up the Theology of the Body	64
WILLIAM R. HAMANT — Making a Case for Humanae Vitae	69
MICHAEL ROESCH — Hitched Versus Hooking Up	74

The Inescapable Reality of Sex

MARGARET HARPER MCCARTHY

According to the late Italian political philosopher Augusto Del Noce in this issue's Resource section: "Sexual liberation is not desired per se, but rather as a tool to break down the family." The family, for its part, is fought against because it is the organ through which "a meta-empirical order of truth" is communicated. Indeed, the sexual revolution was considered to be the most revolutionary because it is "not only against civilization and values but also against the very principle of reality." The fruits of this are now evident to all. Indeed, things have gone even further.

"Gender," the topic of our last issue, seems to have come out of nowhere, like a tsunami, flooding everything in its wake, from curricula, to corporate standards, to public bathroom policy. And yet the sexual revolution has been preparing this ground for decades, chiefly by putting into the question the reality of the sexual act: its innate meaning and telos. By separating the "inseparable meanings"—as *Humanae vitae* puts it—mother was separated from child, woman from man and, finally, children from their mothers and fathers and with them the Creator.

This issue is about the inescapable reality of sex and the inseparable link between unity and children which always reasserts itself, even as we try to escape it. Addressing the question of contraception head-on, we republish here one of Mary Eberstadt's most piquant essays on the topic, "Is Food the New Sex?," where she observes how much food has taken the place of sex, in terms of importance (with its rules, regulations, moral opprobrium, universal expectations) and sex the place food had decades ago when it was just a matter of personal taste. We also review two re-issued classics by Dietrich von Hildebrand, who, in the era leading up to *Humanae vitae*, was influential in showing that openness to children was not next to love, but an essential ingredient of love. We also review the controversial apologist Patrick Coffin, someone who has a gift of communicating a deep argument to a wide public.

Realism, of course, is needed on both sides of the "inseparable" coin, for those whose cup seems to overflow (too much), and those whose cup (achingly) remains dry. This is what Simcha Fisher provides in her frank and humorous *The Sinner's Guide to Natural Family Planning*, as does our emotionally honest feature on the silent cross of

infertility.

The issue of contraception, of course, does not just play out in the privacy of the bedroom. Others, too, are affected, above all children—and not just those not conceived. This argument is made most powerfully by Helen Alvaré in her new book describing the development in recent American legal culture that has sidelined children with the adoption and promotion of “sexual expressionism,” which, being silent on the connection between sex and children, is by extension silent on the benefits of marriage where children are concerned.

Then, too, there are the “relationships.” The sheer volume of literature dealing with this issue is surely evidence for how deeply these have been undermined. We review some of the best exemplars of this literature, for example by sociologist Mark Regnerus, offering a sobering status quaestionis. We also review Timothy O’Malley’s alternative proposal to a generation trying to climb out of the rabbit hole of hook-up culture and on the other side, the influential *Sex at Dawn* by Christopher Ryan, who would like to keep them there.

Sexual mores affect more than just the social environment. They have ecological implications as well. Anthony Jay’s new book, *Estrogenation*, shows that the chosen infertility of some (many) is fast becoming the default for everyone, with all the dumping of estrogen from the Pill (among other things) in the environment. Returning to the cultural environment, we offer the stunningly honest though discreet witness of a married couple who experienced deliverance from pornography and have since dedicated their lives to helping others caught up in the same toxic trap.

But there is more to talk about than just sex. We stand in need of a renewed culture of embodiment, if we are to see and accept our sexual bodies and their inseparable meanings. To this end we review Emily Stimpson’s *These Beautiful Bones*: a much-needed Theology of the Body which deals with other aspects of the incarnate life, such as eating together, dancing, courtship, and the common life of the home.

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Why the Sexual Revolution is the Greatest Revolution

AUGUSTO DEL NOCE

Augusto Del Noce (1910–1989) was one of the most significant Italian Catholic intellectual figures after World War II. He came to prominence in the 1960s as a distinguished historian of ideas and as a political philosopher, and he is still widely remembered for his penetrating scholarship on Marxism, on Fascism and in general on secular cultural trends in the 20th century, including the sexual revolution. Del Noce regarded Austrian psycho-analyst Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957) as the most representative figure of the Freudo-Marxist school (a merging of Marxist ideas and psycho-analysis) which first advanced the ideas about sexuality that have become common in Western culture since the 1960s.

The following is an excerpt from a recent translation of Del Noce's *The Crisis of Modernity* (ed. and trans. Carlo Lancellotti [McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014], 144-45, 160-61). It is reprinted here with permission.

Shortly we shall see how the permissivist proposal of freedom is tied to anti-traditionalism pushed to its most radical consequences,^[1] and that this is precisely why it presents itself as revolutionary. Perhaps we could describe it as the spirit of libertinism taking over the revolutionary spirit.^[2]

Moving now to totalitarianism, we must say that it is explicitly endorsed and proposed in the last chapter of the book by Wilhelm Reich, the theoretician of the struggle against repression, which I am tempted to call the *Mein Kampf* of permissivism: *The Sexual Revolution*. The two books were chronologically close (*Mein Kampf* is from 1924, *The Sexual Revolution* from 1930) and they share the common feature of promising what they really intend to deliver.

Reich writes that the only ideas that should be tolerated are those that do not undermine “sexual happiness”^[3] and the process of disintegration of the traditional form of a family. Here we touch an important point about liberation from tradition as a crucial aspect of this type of revolution. If one reads carefully this book by Reich, one

realizes that sexual liberation is not desired per se but rather as a tool to break down the family. In turn, the family is fought against as the organ through which certain values—regarded as meta-historical—are communicated.

But there is more. Consider what he says about Christianity (these movements never fail to offer an outstretched hand): “Primitive Christianity was basically a communist movement. Its life-affirmative power became converted, by simultaneous sex-negation, into the ascetic and supernatural. By taking the form of the church, Christianity, which was striving for the delivery of humanity, denied its own origin. The church owes its power to the life-negating human structure which results from a metaphysical interpretation of life: it thrives on the life which it kills.”^[4] Without much effort, Reich can be definitely viewed as a precursor of the fight against post-Constantinian Christianity. I do not know if any new theologian has already pointed this out.

Thus we see how fraudulent is the idea, which is often proposed, that the permissive society is religiously neutral. Let us observe, first, in what way the agnosticism it professes is very different from the agnosticism of the old type of secularism.

Old-style secularism wished to preserve the traditional tablet of moral values, being convinced that they do not require any metaphysical and/or religious foundation. Therefore, it confined religion to the private sphere. The new secularism affirms a radical inversion of values.

One of the necessary features of totalitarianism is the persecution of all transcendent religions, because they propose an ideal of life that cannot be reconciled with ethical immanentism. And totalitarians know that it is difficult for a global persecution to be fully successful, especially if it is violent, and that the best type of support for their policies is a persecution of the traditional faithful organized and carried out by religious reformers. Therefore, the best line of action is to be intransigent about lifestyles, and to support progressive and modernist trends whenever possible.

...

The book’s rigorous consistency shows that no compromise is possible between traditional morality, taken in its entirety and without modifications, that is, fully recognizing its first premises, and thus without emphasizing unilaterally any particular aspect, and sexual liberation. Hence, we have to say that Reich is completely correct—apart from his form of expression and his judgment of value, which of course

is the opposite of mine—when he writes that the “concept of the sexual urge as being in the service of procreation is a method of repression on the part of conservative sexology. It is a finalistic, i.e., idealistic concept. It presupposes a goal which of necessity must be of a supernatural origin. It reintroduces a metaphysical principle and thus betrays a religious or mystical prejudice.”[5] We can translate this into slightly different words: in history we find, as constants, two typical structures in permanent conflict: the moral structure, which in the final analysis presupposes a metaphysical-transcendent, or actually supernatural, foundation, and the libertine structure, which, having denied this foundation, must identify the full realization of life with “sexual happiness,” taken as an end in itself and thus freed from the idea of reproduction. If Reich deserves any credit, it is for having pushed the practical judgment of the libertine type to its ultimate consequences.

Indeed, Reich’s thought is based on the premise, which of course is taken as unquestionably true without even a hint of a proof, that there is no order of ends, no meta-empirical authority of values. Any trace not just of Christianity but of “idealism” in the broadest sense, or of a foundation of values in some objective reality, like history according to Marx, is eliminated. What is man reduced to, then, if not to a bundle of physical needs? When these needs are satisfied—when, in short, every repression is removed—he will be happy. Nietzsche’s sentence about socialists comes to mind: “they wink because they have invented happiness.”[6] Few writers typify the character of the “inventor of happiness” as well as Reich does.

Having taken away every order of ends and eliminated every authority of values, all that is left is vital energy, which can be identified with sexuality, as was already claimed in ancient times and is actually difficult to refute. Hence, the core element of life will be sexual happiness. And since full sexual satisfaction is possible, happiness is within reach. Man will free himself from neuroses and will become fully capable of work and initiative through absolute, unbounded sexual freedom. His psychic struggle will be transformed and he will also be freed from militaristic and aggressive tendencies and from sadistic fantasies, which are typical of repressed people—as the example of de Sade supposedly demonstrates.

But, what is the repressive social institution par excellence? To Reich it is the traditional monogamous family; and, from his standpoint, certainly he cannot be said to be wrong. Indeed, the idea of family is inseparable from the idea of tradition, from a heritage of truth that we must tradere, hand on. Thus the abolition of every meta-empirical order of truth requires that the family must be dissolved. No merely sociological consideration can justify keeping it.

At the cost of repeating myself, I should insist on some truths that have been almost completely forgotten. The idea of indissoluble monogamous marriage and other ideas related to it (modesty, purity, continence) are linked to the idea of tradition, which in turn presupposes (since tradere means to hand down) the idea of an objective order of unchangeable and permanent truths (the Platonic True in itself and Good in itself). On top of everything else, the affirmation of these themes is one of the glories of Italian thought, because what else is Dante's Comedy if not the poem of order viewed as the immanent form of the universe? And who else was the great defender of the objective Order of Being, during the modern centuries, if not Rosmini?

But if we separate the idea of tradition from that of an objective order, it must necessarily appear to be "the past," what has been "surpassed," "the dead trying to suffocate the living," what must be negated in order to find psychological balance. The idea of indissoluble marriage must be replaced by that of free union, renewable or breakable at any time. It does not make sense to speak of sexual perversions; on the contrary, homosexual expressions, either masculine or feminine, should be regarded as the purest forms of love. Therefore, at the scientistic-materialistic level, on which Freud also operated, Reich is undoubtedly correct.

[1] The appropriate name of this radical break with the past, or even with yesterday, is Futurism. In fact, what we have today is a generalization of the theses of the Italian literary movement that bore that name, which fulfills today what was its original aspiration, by shaping practical life. Observe that the emancipation of women as understood by the various feminist movements conforms exactly to the model of the "futurist woman," which had already been proposed before the First World War. Keeping in mind the relationship between Futurism and Fascism, we can speak of a "futurist continuity" in our history, which achieves its final stage in today's permissivism. It is very peculiar that this fulfillment of Futurism is the outcome of a cultural attitude that until today has advanced under the banner of the most intransigent form of anti-Fascism.

[2] The rise of a form of true philosophical atheism can be observed starting with the libertinage érudit of the early seventeenth century. It was a negative and corrosive form of atheism, which must be distinguished from the later positive and revolutionary form, aimed at creating a new reality. Two opposite moral attitudes are associated with these two types of atheism: with the former, what used to be called libertine licentiousness, and is now called permissiveness; with the latter, austerity and the severity of the revolutionary, which is literally a secularization of Puritanism.

It seems that the historical development of atheism goes through a cycle, going through the revolutionary stage and coming back today to a radically expanded libertine form. And that the revolutionary stage plays the role of mediating the transition from what used to be aristocratic libertine atheism to what is today libertine atheism for the masses.

[3] Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*, trans. Theodore P. Wolfe (New York: Noonday, 1963), 265.

[4] *Ibid.*, 266.

[5] *Ibid.*, 51.

[6] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1995), 17.

Augusto Del Noce (1910-1989) was a distinguished philosopher, political thinker, and public intellectual.

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Is Food the New Sex?

MARY EBERSTADT

Ignatius Press has generously given the permission for this reprint of Mary Eberstadt's "Is Food the New Sex?" The essay was taken from *Adam and Eve after the Pill: Paradoxes of the Sexual Revolution* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012), 94-119.

As we have seen so far, the sexual revolution has profoundly affected the most fundamental aspects of human relationships, including the way women view and treat men; the way men view and treat women; and it has even undermined one of the deepest shared tasks of men and women, which is the protection of children from forces that would harm them. These are what might be called the empirical legacy of the revolution's impact on the ground. No less powerful, however, has been its legacy in the more rarified realms of mores and ideas.

Consider, for example, this fact: Of all the truly seismic shifts transforming daily life today—deeper than our financial fissures, wider even than our most obvious political and cultural divides—one of the most important is also among the least remarked. That is the chasm in attitude that separates almost all of us living in the West today from almost all of our ancestors, over two things without which human beings cannot exist: food and sex.

The desire for food and the desire for sex share a number of interesting similarities, as philosophers and artists from Aristotle onward have had occasion to remark here and there across the centuries. But perhaps the most important link is this: Both appetites, if pursued without regard to consequence, can prove ruinous not only to oneself, but also to other people, and even to society itself. No doubt for that reason, both appetites have historically been subject in all civilizations to rules both formal and informal.

Thus the potentially destructive forces of sex—disease, disorder, sexual aggression, sexual jealousy, and what used to be called “home-wrecking”—have been ameliorated in every recorded society by legal, social, and religious conventions, primarily stigma and punishment. Similarly, all societies have developed rules and rituals governing food in part to avoid the destructiveness of free-for-alls over scarce necessities. And while food rules may not always have been as stringent as sex rules, they have

nevertheless been stringent as needed. Such is the meaning, for example, of being hanged for stealing a loaf of bread in the marketplace, or keel-hauled for plundering rations on a ship.

These disciplines imposed historically on access to food and sex now raise a question that has not come up before, probably because it was not even possible to imagine it until the lifetimes of the people reading this: What happens when, for the first time in history—at least in theory, and at least in the advanced nations—adult human beings are more or less free to have all the sex and food they want?

This question opens the door to one more paradox attributable to the sexual revolution. For given how closely connected the two appetites appear to be, it would be natural to expect that people would do the same kinds of things with both appetites—that they would pursue both with equal ardor when finally allowed to do so, for example, or with equal abandon for consequence; or conversely, with similar degrees of discipline in the consumption of each.

In fact, though, evidence from the advanced West suggests that nearly the opposite seems to be true. The answer appears to be that when many people are faced with these possibilities for the very first time, they end up doing very different things—things we might signal by shorthand as mindful eating, and mindless sex. This essay is both an exploration of that curious dynamic, and a speculation about what is driving it.

The dramatic expansion in access to food on the one hand and to sex on the other are complicated stories; but in each case, technology has written most of it.

Up until just about now, for example, the prime brakes on sex outside of marriage have been several: fear of pregnancy, fear of social stigma and punishment, and fear of disease. The Pill and its cousins have substantially undermined the first two strictures, at least in theory, while modern medicine has largely erased the third. Even HIV/AIDS, only a decade ago a stunning exception to the brand new rule that one could apparently have any kind of sex at all without serious consequence, is now regarded as a “manageable” disease in the affluent West, even as it continues to kill millions of less fortunate patients elsewhere.

As for food, here too one technological revolution after another explains the extraordinary change in its availability: pesticides, mechanized farming, economical transportation, genetic manipulation of food stocks, and other advances. As a result, almost everyone in the Western world is now able to buy sustenance of all kinds, for

very little money, and in quantities unimaginable until the lifetimes of the people reading this.

One result of this change in food fortune, of course, is the unprecedented “disease of civilization” known as obesity, with its corollary ills. Nevertheless, the commonplace fact of obesity in today’s West itself testifies to the point that access to food has expanded exponentially for just about everyone—so does the statistical fact that obesity is most prevalent in the lowest social classes and least exhibited in the highest.

And just as technology has made sex and food more accessible for a great many people, important extra-technological influences on both pursuits—particularly longstanding religious strictures—have meanwhile diminished in a way that has made both appetites even easier to indulge. The opprobrium reserved for gluttony, for example, seems to have little immediate force now, even among believers. On the rare occasions when one even sees the word, it is almost always used in a metaphorical, secular sense.

Similarly, and far more consequential, the longstanding religious prohibitions in every major creed against extramarital sex have rather famously loosed their holds over the contemporary mind. Of particular significance, perhaps, has been the movement of many Protestant denominations away from the sexual morality agreed upon by the previous millennia of Christendom. The Anglican abandonment in 1930 of the longstanding prohibition against artificial contraception is a special case in point, undermining as it subsequently did for many believers the very idea that any church could tell people what to do with their bodies, ever again. Whether they defended their traditional teachings or abandoned them, however, all Western Christian churches in the past century have found themselves increasingly beleaguered over issues of sex, and commensurately less influential over all but a fraction of the most traditionally minded parishioners.

Of course this waning of the traditional restraints on the pursuit of sex and food is only part of the story; any number of nonreligious forces today also act as contemporary brakes on both. In the case of food, for example, these would include factors like personal vanity, say, or health concerns, or preoccupation with the morality of what is consumed (about which more below). Similarly, to acknowledge that sex is more accessible than ever before is not to say that it is always and everywhere available. Many people who do not think they will go to hell for premarital sex or adultery, for example, find brakes on their desires for other reasons: fear of disease, fear of hurting children or other loved ones, fear of disrupting one’s

career, fear of financial setbacks in the form of divorce and child support, and so on.

Even men and women who do want all the food or sex they can get their hands on face obstacles of other kinds in their pursuit. Though many people really can afford to eat more or less around the clock, for example, home economics will still put the brakes on; it's not as if everyone can afford pheasant under glass day and night. The same is true of sex, which likewise imposes its own unwritten yet practical constraints. Older and less attractive people simply cannot command the sexual marketplace as the younger and more attractive can (which is why the promises of erasing time and age are such a booming business in a post-liberation age). So do time and age still circumscribe the pursuit of sex, even as churches and other conventional enforcers increasingly do not.

Still and all, the initial point stands: As consumers of both sex and food, today's people in the advanced societies are freer to pursue and consume both than almost all the human beings who came before us; and our culture has evolved in interesting ways to exhibit both those trends.

To begin to see just how recent and dramatic this change is, let us imagine some broad features of the world seen through two different sets of eyes: a thirty-year-old housewife from 1958 named Betty, and her granddaughter Jennifer, of the same age, today.

Begin with a tour of Betty's kitchen. Much of what she makes comes from jars and cans. Much of it is also heavy on substances that people of our time are told to minimize—dairy products, red meat, refined sugars and flours—because of compelling research about nutrition that occurred after Betty's time. Betty's freezer is filled with meat every four months by a visiting company that specializes in volume, and on most nights she thaws a piece of this and accompanies it with food from one or two jars. If there is anything "fresh" on the plate, it is likely a potato. Interestingly, and rudimentary to our contemporary eyes though it may be, Betty's food is served with what for us would appear to be high ceremony, i.e., at a set table with family members present.

As it happens, there is little that Betty herself, who is adventurous by the standards of her day, will not eat; the going slogan she learned as a child is about cleaning your plate, and not doing so is still considered bad form. Aside from that notion though, which is a holdover to scarcer times, Betty is much like any other American home cook in 1958. She likes making some things and not others, even as she prefers eating some

things to others—and there, in personal aesthetics, does the matter end for her. It's not that Betty lacks opinions about food. It's just that the ones she has are limited to what she does and does not personally like to make and eat.

Now imagine one possible counterpart to Betty today, her thirty-year-old granddaughter Jennifer. Jennifer has almost no cans or jars in her cupboard. She has no children or husband or live-in boyfriend either, which is why her kitchen table on most nights features a laptop and goes unset. Yet interestingly enough, despite the lack of ceremony at the table, Jennifer pays far more attention to food, and feels far more strongly in her convictions about it, than anyone she knows from Betty's time.

Wavering in and out of vegetarianism, Jennifer is adamantly opposed to eating red meat or endangered fish. She is also opposed to industrialized breeding, genetically enhanced fruits and vegetables, and to pesticides and other artificial agents. She tries to minimize her dairy intake, and cooks tofu as much as possible. She also buys "organic" in the belief that it is better both for her and for the animals raised in that way, even though the products are markedly more expensive than those from the local grocery store. Her diet is heavy in all the ways that Betty's was light: with fresh vegetables and fruits in particular. Jennifer has nothing but ice in her freezer, soymilk and various other items her grandmother wouldn't have recognized in the refrigerator, and on the counter stands a vegetable juicer she feels she "ought" to use more.

Most important of all, however, is the difference in moral attitude separating Betty and Jennifer on the matter of food. Jennifer feels that there is a right and wrong about these options that transcends her exercise of choice as a consumer. She does not exactly condemn those who believe otherwise, but she doesn't understand why they do, either. And she certainly thinks the world would be a better place if more people evaluated their food choices as she does. She even proselytizes on occasion when she can.

In short, with regard to food, Jennifer falls within Immanuel Kant's definition of the Categorical Imperative: She acts according to a set of maxims that she wills at the same time to be universal law.

Betty, on the other hand, would be baffled by the idea of dragooning such moral abstractions into the service of food. This is partly because, as a child of her time, she was impressed—as Jennifer is not—about what happens when food is scarce (Betty's parents told her often about their memories of the Great Depression; and many of the

older men of her time had vivid memories of deprivation in wartime). Even without such personal links to food scarcity, though, it makes no sense to Betty that people would feel as strongly as her granddaughter does about something as simple as deciding just what goes into one's mouth. That is because Betty feels, as Jennifer obviously does not, that opinions about food are simply *de gustibus*, a matter of individual taste—and only that.

This clear difference in opinion leads to an intriguing juxtaposition. Just as Betty and Jennifer have radically different approaches to food, so do they to matters of sex. For Betty, the ground rules of her time—which she both participates in and substantially agrees with—are clear: Just about every exercise of sex outside marriage is subject to social (if not always private) opprobrium. Wavering in and out of established religion herself, Betty nevertheless clearly adheres to a traditional Judeo-Christian sexual ethic. Thus, for example, Mr. Jones next door “ran off” with another woman, leaving his wife and children behind; Susie in the town nearby got pregnant and wasn't allowed back in school; Uncle Bill is rumored to have contracted gonorrhea; and so on. None of these breaches of the going sexual ethic is considered by Betty to be a good thing, let alone a celebrated thing. They are not even considered to be neutral things. In fact, they are all considered by her to be wrong.

Most important of all, Betty feels that sex, unlike food, is not *de gustibus*. She believes to the contrary that there is a right and wrong about these choices that transcends any individual act. She further believes that the world would be a better place, and individual people better off, if others believed as she does. She even proselytizes such on occasion when given the chance.

In short, as Jennifer does with food, Betty in the matter of sex fulfills the requirements for Kant's Categorical Imperative.

Jennifer's approach to sex is just about 180 degrees different. She too disapproves of the father next door who left his wife and children for a younger woman; she does not want to be cheated on herself, or to have those she cares about cheated on either. These ground-zero stipulations, aside, however, she is otherwise *laissez-faire* on just about every other aspect of nonmarital sex. She believes that living together before marriage is not only morally neutral, but actually better than not having such a “trial run.” Pregnant unwed Susie in the next town doesn't elicit a thought one way or the other from her, and neither does Uncle Bill's gonorrhea, which is of course a trivial medical matter between him and his doctor.

Jennifer, unlike Betty, thinks that falling in love creates its own demands and generally trumps other considerations—unless perhaps children are involved (and sometimes, on a case-by-case basis, then too). A consistent thinker in this respect, she also accepts the consequences of her libertarian convictions about sex. She is pro-abortion, pro-gay marriage, indifferent to ethical questions about stem cell research and other technological manipulations of nature (as she is not, ironically, when it comes to food), and agnostic on the question of whether any particular parental arrangements seem best for children. She has even been known to watch pornography with her boyfriend, at his coaxing, in part to show just how very *laissez-faire* she is.

Most important, once again, is the difference in moral attitude between the two women on this subject of sex. Betty feels that there is a right and wrong about sexual choices that transcends any individual act, and Jennifer—exceptions noted—does not. It's not that Jennifer lacks for opinions about sex, any more than Betty does about food. It's just that, for the most part, they are limited to what she personally does and doesn't like.

Thus far, what the imaginary examples of Betty and Jennifer have established is this: Their personal moral relationships toward food and toward sex are just about perfectly reversed. Betty does care about nutrition and food, but it doesn't occur to her to extend her opinions to a moral judgment—i.e., to believe that other people ought to do as she does in the matter of food, and that they are wrong if they don't. In fact, she thinks such an extension would be wrong in a different way; it would be impolite, needlessly judgmental, simply not done. Jennifer, similarly, does care to some limited degree about what other people do about sex; but it seldom occurs to her to extend her opinions to a moral judgment. In fact, she thinks such an extension would be wrong in a different way—because it would be impolite, needlessly judgmental, simply not done.

On the other hand, Jennifer is genuinely certain that her opinions about food are not only nutritionally correct, but also, in some deep, meaningful sense, morally correct—i.e., she feels that others ought to do something like what she does. And Betty, on the other hand, feels exactly the same way about what she calls sexual morality.

As noted, this desire to extend their personal opinions in two different areas to an “ought” that they think should be somehow binding—binding, that is, to the idea that others should do the same—is the definition of the Kantian imperative. Once again, note: Betty's Kantian imperative concerns sex not food, and Jennifer's concerns food not sex. In just over sixty years, in other words—not for everyone, of course, but for a

great many people, and for an especially large portion of sophisticated people—the moral poles of sex and food have been reversed. Betty thinks food is a matter of taste, whereas sex is governed by universal moral law of some kind; and Jennifer thinks exactly the reverse.

What has happened here?

Betty and Jennifer may be imaginary, but the decades that separate the two women have brought related changes to the lives of many millions. In the sixty years between their two kitchens, a similar polar transformation has taken root and grown not only throughout America but also throughout Western society itself. During those years, cultural artifacts and forces in the form of articles, books, movies, and ideas aimed at deregulating what is now quaintly called “nonmarital sex” have abounded and prospered; while the cultural artifacts and forces aimed at regulating or seeking to regulate sex outside of marriage have largely declined. In the matter of food, on the other hand, exactly the reverse has happened. Increasing scrutiny over the decades to the quality of what goes into people’s mouths has been accompanied by something almost wholly new under the sun: the rise of universalizable moral codes based on food choices.

Begin with the more familiar face of diets and fads—the Atkins diet, the Zone diet, the tea diet, the high-carb diet, Jenny Craig, Weight Watchers, and all the rest of the food fixes promising us new and improved versions of ourselves. Abundant though they and all their relatives are, those short-term fads and diets are nevertheless merely epiphenomena.

Digging a little deeper, the obsession with food that they reflect resonates in many other strata of the commercial marketplace. Book reading, for example, may indeed be on the way out, but until it goes, cookbooks and food books remain among the most reliable moneymakers in the industry. To scan the bestseller lists or page the major reviews in any given month is to find that books on food and food-thought are at least reliably represented, and sometimes even predominate—to list a few from the past few years alone: Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*; Eric Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation*; Gary Taubes’ *Good Calories, Bad Calories*; Bill Buford’s *Heat*, and many more titles feeding the insatiable interest in food.

Then there are the voyeur and celebrity genres, which have made some chefs the equivalent of rock stars and further feed the public curiosity with books like *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly* or *Service Included: Four-Star*

Secrets of an Eavesdropping Waiter or *The Devil in the Kitchen: Sex, Pain, Madness, and the Making of a Great Chef*. Anywhere you go, anywhere you look, food in one form or another is what's on tap. The proliferation of chains like Whole Foods, the recent institution by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger of state-mandated nutritional breakdowns in restaurants in the state of California (a move that is sure to be repeated by governors in the other 49): All these and many other developments speak to the paramount place occupied by food and food choices in the modern consciousness. As the *New York Times Magazine* noted recently, in a foreword emphasizing the intended expansion of its (already sizeable) food coverage, such writing is “perhaps never a more crucial part of what we do than today—a moment when what and how we eat has emerged as a Washington issue and a global-environmental issue as well as a kitchen-table one.”^[1]

Underneath the passing fads and short-term fixes and notices like these, deep down where the real seismic change lies, is a series of revolutions in how we now think about food—changes that focus not on today or tomorrow, but on eating as a way of life.

One recent influential figure in this tradition was George Ohsawa, a Japanese philosopher who codified what is known as macrobiotics. Popularized in the United States by his pupil, Michio Kushi, macrobiotics has been the object of fierce debate for several decades now, and Kushi's book, *The Macrobiotic Path to Total Health: A Complete Guide to Naturally Preventing and Relieving More Than 200 Chronic Conditions and Disorders*, remains one of the modern bibles on food.^[2] Macrobiotics makes historical as well as moral claims, including the claim that its tradition stretches back to Hippocrates and includes Jesus and the Han dynasty among other enlightened beneficiaries. These claims are also reflected in the macrobiotic system, which includes the expression of gratitude (not prayers) for food, serenity in the preparation of it, and other extranutritional ritual. And even as the macrobiotic discipline has proved too ascetic for many people (and certainly for most Americans), one can see its influence at work in other serious treatments of the food question that have trickled outward. The current popular call to “mindful eating,” for example, echoes the macrobiotic injunction to think of nothing but food and gratitude while consuming, even to the point of chewing any given mouthful at least fifty times.

Alongside macrobiotics, the past decades have also seen tremendous growth in vegetarianism and its related offshoots, another food system that typically makes moral as well as health claims. As a movement, and depending on which part of the world one looks at, vegetarianism predates macrobiotics.^[3] Vegetarian histories

claim for themselves the Brahmins, Buddhists, Jainists, and Zoroastrians, as well as certain Jewish and Christian practitioners. In the modern West, Percy Bysshe Shelley was a prominent activist for the movement in the early nineteenth century; and the first Vegetarian Society was founded in England in 1847.

Around the same time in the United States, a Presbyterian minister named Sylvester Graham popularized vegetarianism in tandem with a campaign against excess of all kinds (ironically, under the circumstances, this health titan is remembered primarily for the graham cracker). Various other American religious sects have also gone in for vegetarianism, including the Seventh-Day Adventists, studies on whom make up some of the most compelling data about the possible health benefits of a diet devoid of animal flesh. [4] Uniting numerous discrete movements under one umbrella is the International Vegetarian Union, which started just a hundred years ago, in 1908.

Despite this long history, though, it is clear that vegetarianism apart from its role in religious movements did not really take off as a mass movement until relatively recently. Even so, its contemporary success has been remarkable. Pushed perhaps by the synergistic public interest in macrobiotics and nutritional health, and nudged also by occasional rallying books including Peter Singer's 1975 *Animal Liberation* and Matthew Scully's *Dominion*, vegetarianism today is one of the most successful secular moral movements in the West; whereas macrobiotics for its part, though less successful as a mass movement by name, has witnessed the vindication of some of its core ideas and stands as a kind of synergistic brother in arms.[5]

To be sure, macrobiotics and vegetarianism/veganism have their doctrinal differences. Macrobiotics limits animal flesh not out of moral indignation, but for reasons of health and Eastern ideas of proper "balancing" of the forces of yin and yang. Similarly, macrobiotics also allows for moderate amounts of certain types of fish—as strict vegetarians do not. On the other hand, macrobiotics also bans a number of vegetables (among them tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, and others that are said to be too "yin"), whereas vegetarianism bans none. Nonetheless, macrobiotics and vegetarianism have more in common than not, especially from the point of view of anyone eating outside either of these codes. The doctrinal differences separating one from another are about equivalent in force today to those between, say, Presbyterians and Lutherans.

And that is exactly the point. For many people, schismatic differences about food have taken the place of schismatic differences about faith. Again, the curiosity is just how recent this is. Throughout history, practically no one devoted this much time to

matters of food as ideas (as opposed to, say, time spent gathering the stuff). Still less does it appear to have occurred to people that dietary schools could be untethered from a larger metaphysical and moral worldview. Observant Jews and Muslims, among others, have had strict dietary laws from their faiths' inception; but that is just it—their laws told believers what to do with food when they got it, rather than inviting them to dwell on food as a thing in itself. Like the Adventists, who speak of their vegetarianism as being “harmony with the Creator,” or like the Catholics with their itinerant Lenten and other obligations, these previous dietary laws were clearly designed to enhance religion—not replace it.

Do today's influential dietary ways of life in effect replace religion? Consider that macrobiotics, vegetarianism, and veganism all make larger health claims as part of their universality—but unlike yesteryear, to repeat the point, most of them no longer do so in conjunction with organized religion. Macrobiotics, for its part, argues (with some evidence) that processed foods and too much animal flesh are toxic to the human body, whereas whole grains, vegetables, and fruits are not. The literature of vegetarianism makes a similar point, recently drawing particular attention to new research concerning the connection between the consumption of red meat and certain cancers. In both cases, however, dietary laws are not intended to be handmaidens to a higher cause, but moral causes in themselves.

Just as the food of today often attracts a level of metaphysical attentiveness suggestive of the sex of yesterday, so does food today seem attended by a similarly evocative—and proliferating—number of verboten signs. The opprobrium reserved for perceived “violations” of what one “ought” to do has migrated, in some cases fully, from one to the other. Many people who wouldn't be caught dead with an extra ten pounds—or eating a hamburger, or wearing real leather—tend to be laissez-faire in matters of sex. In fact, just observing the world as it is, one is tempted to say that the more vehement people are about the morality of their food choices, the more hands-off they believe the rest of the world should be about sex. What were the circumstances the last time you heard or used the word “guilt”—in conjunction with sin as traditionally conceived? Or with having eaten something verboten and not having gone to the gym?

Perhaps the most revealing example of the infusion of morality into food codes can be found in the current European passion for what the French call *terroir*—an idea that originally referred to the specific qualities conferred by geography on certain food products (notably wine) and that has now assumed a life of its own as a moral guide

to buying and consuming locally. That there is no such widespread, concomitant attempt to impose a new morality on sexual pursuits in Western Europe seems something of an understatement. But as a measure of the reach of terroir as a moral code, consider only a sermon from Durham Cathedral in 2007. In it, the dean explained Lent as an event that “says to us, cultivate a good terroir, a spiritual ecology that will re-focus our passion for God, our praying, our pursuit of justice in the world, our care for our fellow human beings.”[6]

There stands an emblematic example of the reversal between food and sex in our time: in which the once-universal moral code of European Christianity is being explicated for the masses by reference to the now apparently more-universal European moral code of consumption à la terroir.

Moreover, this reversal between sex and food appears firmer the more passionately one clings to either pole. Thus, for instance, though much has lately been made of the “greening” of the evangelicals, no vegetarian Christian group is as nationally known as, say, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals or any number of other vegetarian/vegan organizations, most of which appear to be secular or anti-religious and none of which, so far as my research shows, extend their universalizable moral ambitions to the realm of sexuality. When *Skinny Bitch*—a hip guide to veganism that recently topped the bestseller lists for months—exhorts its readers to a life that is “clean, pure, healthy,” for example, it is emphatically not including sex in this moral vocabulary, and makes a point of saying so.[7]

C.S. Lewis once compared the two desires as follows, to make the point that something about sex had gotten incommensurate in his own time: “There is nothing to be ashamed of in enjoying your food: there would be everything to be ashamed of if half the world made food the main interest of their lives and spent their time looking at pictures of food and dribbling and smacking their lips.”[8] He was making a point in the genre of *reductio ad absurdum*.

But for the jibe to work as it once did, our shared sense of what is absurd about it must work too—and that shared sense, in an age as visually, morally, and aesthetically dominated by food as is our own, is waning fast. Consider the coining of the term “gastroporn” to describe the eerily similar styles of high-definition pornography on the one hand and stylized shots of food on the other. Actually, the term is not even that new. It dates back at least three decades, to a 1977 essay by that title in the *New York Review of Books*. In it, author Andrew Cockburn observed that it cannot escape attention that there are curious parallels between manuals on sexual techniques and

manuals on the preparation of food; the same studious emphasis on leisurely technique, the same apostrophes to the ultimate, heavenly delights. True gastro-porn heightens the excitement and also the sense of the unattainable by proffering colored photographs of various completed recipes.[9]

With such a transfer, the polar migrations of food and sex during the last half century would appear complete.

If it is true that food is the new sex, however, where does that leave sex? This brings us to the paradox already hinted at. As the consumption of food not only literally but also figuratively has become progressively more discriminate and thoughtful, at least in theory (if rather obviously not always in practice), the consumption of sex in various forms appears to have become the opposite for a great many people: i.e., progressively more indiscriminate and unthinking.

Several proofs could be offered for such a claim, beginning with any number of statistical studies. Both men and women are far less likely to be sexually inexperienced on their weddings now (if indeed they marry) than they were just a few decades ago. They are also more likely to be experienced in all kinds of ways, including in the use of pornography. Like the example of Jennifer, moreover, their general thoughts about sex become more laissez-faire the further down the age demographic one goes.

Consider as further proof of the dumbing down of sex the coarseness of popular entertainment, say through a popular advice column on left-leaning Slate magazine called “Dear Prudence” that concerns “manners and morals.” “Should I destroy the erotic video my husband and I have made?” “My boyfriend’s kinky fetish might doom our relationship.” “My husband wants me to abort, and I don’t.” “How do I tell my daughter she’s the result of a sexual assault?” “A friend confessed to a fling with my now-dead husband.” And so on. The mindful vegetarian slogan, “You are what you eat” has no counterpart in the popular culture today when it comes to sex.

This junk sex shares all the defining features of junk food. It is produced and consumed by people who do not know one another. It is disdained by those who believe they have access to more authentic experience or “healthier” options. As we saw in chapter 2, evidence is also beginning to emerge about compulsive pornography consumption—as it did slowly but surely in the case of compulsive packaged food consumption—that this laissez-faire judgment is wrong.[10]

This brings us to another similarity between junk sex and junk food: People are furtive

about both, and many feel guilty about their pursuit and indulgence of each. And those who consume large amounts of both are also typically self-deceptive, too: i.e., they underestimate just how much they do it and deny its ill effects on the rest of their lives. In sum, to compare junk food to junk sex is to realize that they have become virtually interchangeable vices—even if many people who do not put “sex” in the category of vice will readily do so with food.

At this point, the impatient reader will interject that something else—something understandable and anodyne—is driving the increasing attention to food in our day: namely, the fact that we have learned much more than humans used to know about the importance of a proper diet to health and longevity. And this is surely a point borne out by the facts, too. One attraction of macrobiotics, for example, is its promise to reduce the risks of cancer. The fall in cholesterol that attends a true vegan or vegetarian diet is another example. Manifestly, one reason that people today are so much more discriminating about food is that decades of recent research have taught us that diet has more potent effects than Betty and her friends understood, and can be bad for you or good for you in ways not enumerated before.

All that is true, but then the question is this: Why aren’t more people doing the same with sex?

For here we come to the most fascinating turn of all. One cannot answer the question by arguing that there is no such empirical news about indiscriminately pursued sex and how it can be good or bad for you; to the contrary, there is, and lots of it. After all, several decades of empirical research—which also did not exist before—have demonstrated that the sexual revolution, too, has had consequences, and that many of them have redounded to the detriment of a sexually liberationist ethic.

Married, monogamous people are more likely to be happy. They live longer.^[11] These effects are particularly evident for men. Divorced men, in particular and conversely, face health risks—including heightened drug use and alcoholism—that married men do not. While assistant professors across the land make tenure arguing over the causal vectors of these findings, researchers themselves connect the obvious dots often enough. As one for the Rand Corporation hypothesized about some 140 years of demographic evidence, for example,

The health benefits obtained by men who stay married or remarry stem from a variety of related factors, including care in times of illness, improved nutrition, and a home atmosphere that reduces stress and stress-related illnesses,

encourages healthy behaviors, and discourages unhealthy ones such as smoking and excessive drinking. Influences of this type tend to enhance a man's immediate health status and may often improve his chances for a longer life.[12]

As Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, among other scholars, have documented, married men earn more and save more; and married households not surprisingly trump other households in income.[13] As Kay S. Hymowitz, among other scholars has shown, marriage confers benefits beyond the partners themselves and onto the children.[14] Sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox, one more expert, has summarized the marriage benefit in this way: “[C]hildren who grow up in intact, married families are significantly more likely to graduate from high school, finish college, become gainfully employed, and enjoy a stable family life themselves, compared to their peers who grow up in nonintact families.”[15]

The list could go on, but it need not; the point is plain enough. Conversely and as we have also seen earlier, divorce is often a financial catastrophe for a family, particularly the women and children in it. So is illegitimacy typically a financial disaster. Children from broken homes are at risk for all kinds of behavioral, psychological, educational, and other problems that children from intact homes are not. Girls and boys, numerous sources including Elizabeth Marquardt and David Blankenhorn have also shown, are adversely affected by family breakup into adulthood, and have higher risks than children from intact homes of repeating the pattern of breakup themselves.[16]

This recital touches only the periphery of the empirical record now being assembled about the costs of laissez-faire sex to American society—a record made all the more interesting by the fact that it could not have been foreseen back when sexual liberationism seemed merely synonymous with the removal of some seemingly inexplicable old stigmas. Today, however, two generations of social science replete with studies, surveys, and regression analyses galore stand between the Moynihan Report and what we know now, and the overall weight of its findings is clear. The question raised by this record is not why some people changed their habits and ideas when faced with compelling new facts about food and quality of life. It is rather why more people have not done the same about sex.

When Friedrich Nietzsche wrote longingly of the “transvaluation of all values,” he meant the hoped-for restoration of sexuality to its proper place as a celebrated, morally neutral life force. He could not possibly have foreseen our world: one in which sex would indeed become “morally neutral” in the eyes of a great many people—even

as food would come to replace it as source of moral authority.[17]

Nevertheless, events have proven Nietzsche wrong about his wider hope that men and women of the future would simply enjoy the benefits of free sex without any attendant seismic shifts. For there may in fact be no such thing as a destigmatization of sex, as the events outlined in this essay suggest. The rise of a recognizably Kantian, morally universalizable code concerning food—beginning with the international vegetarian movement of the last century and proceeding with increasing moral fervor into our own times via macrobiotics, veganism/vegetarianism, and European codes of terroir—has paralleled exactly the waning of a universally accepted sexual code in the Western world during these same years.

Who can doubt that the two trends are related? Unable or unwilling (or both) to impose rules on sex in the wake of the revolution, yet equally unwilling to dispense altogether with the moral code that has traditionally afforded large protections, modern man has apparently performed his own act of transubstantiation. He has taken longstanding morality about sex, and substituted it onto food. The all-you-can-eat buffet is now stigmatized; the sexual smorgasbord is not.

In the end, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the rules being drawn around food receive some force from the fact that people are uncomfortable with how far the sexual revolution has gone—and not knowing what to do about it, they turn for increasing consolation to mining morality out of what they eat.

So what does it finally mean to have a civilization puritanical about food, and licentious about sex? In this sense, Nietzsche's fabled madman came not too late, but too early—too early to have seen the empirical library that would be amassed from the mid-twenty-first century on, testifying to the problematic social, emotional, and even financial nature of exactly the solution he sought. If there is a moral to this curious transvaluation, it would seem that the norms society imposes on itself in pursuit of its own

It is a curious coda that this transvaluation should not be applauded by the liberationist heirs of Nietzsche, even as their day in the sun seems to have come. According to them, after all, consensual sex is simply what comes naturally, and ought therefore to be judged value-free. But as the contemporary history outlined in this essay goes to show, the same can be said of overeating—and overeating is something that today's society is manifestly embarked on re-stigmatizing. It may be doing so for very different reasons than the condemnations of gluttony outlined by the

likes of Gregory the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas. But if indiscriminate sex can also have a negative impact—and not just in the obvious sense of disease, but in the other aspects of psyche and well-being now being written into the empirical record of the sexual revolution—then indiscriminate sex may be judged to need reining in, too.

So if there is a moral to this curious transvaluation, it would seem to be that the norms society imposes on itself in pursuit of its own self-protection do not wholly disappear, but rather mutate and move on, sometimes in curious guises. Far-fetched though it seems at the moment, where mindless food is today, mindless sex—in light of the growing empirical record of its own unleashing—may yet again be tomorrow.

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[1] “A New Way to Look at Food Writing,” the editors, *New York Times Magazine*, January 2, 2009.

[2] Michio Kushi, *The Macrobiotic Path to Total Health: A Complete Guide to Naturally Preventing and Relieving More Than 200 Chronic Conditions and Disorders*, paperback edition (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004).

[3] As defined by the International Vegetarian Union, a vegetarian eats no animals but may eat eggs and dairy (and is then an ovo-lacto vegetarian). A pescetarian is a vegetarian who allows the consumption of fish. A vegan excludes both animals and animal products from his diet, including honey. Vegetarians and vegans can be further refined into numerous other categories—fruitarian, Halal vegetarian, and so on. The terminological complexity here only amplifies the point that food now attracts the taxonomical energies once devoted to, say, metaphysics.

[4] See, for example, Gary Fraser, *Diet, Life Expectancy, and Chronic Disease: Studies of Seventh-Day Adventists and Other Vegetarians* (England: Oxford University Press, 2003), which examines data from the 1989 Adventist Health Study of over thirty-four thousand subjects.

[5] See Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Random House, 1975), the single most influential book of the animal welfare and animal rights movements. See also Matthew Scully, *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002), for the single most significant appeal to animal welfare based on Christian principles.

- [6] The Very Reverend Michael Sadgrove, "Terroir for Lent," Durham Cathedral, February 25, 2007.
- [7] Rory Freedman and Kim Barnouin, *Skinny Bitch* (Philadelphia, PA.: Running Press, 2005).
- [8] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, in *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York: HarperOne, 2004), 59.
- [9] Alexander Cockburn, "Gastro Porn," *New York Review of Books*, December 8, 1977.
- [10] For clinical accounts of the evidence of harm, see, for example, Ana J. Bridges, "Pornography's Effects on Interpersonal Relationships," and Jill C. Manning, "The Impact of Pornography on Women," in *The Social Costs of Pornography: A Collection of Papers*, ed. James R. Stoner Jr. and Donna M. Hughes (Princeton, N.J.: Witherspoon Institute, 2010), 69–88 and 89–110, respectively. For an interesting econometric assessment of what is spent to avoid or recover from pornography addiction, see also K. Doran, "Industry Size, Measurement, and Social Costs," in *ibid.*, 185–99.
- [11] This finding has appeared consistently. See, for example, Lee A. Lillard and Constantijn W. A. Panis, "Marital Status and Mortality: The Role of Health," *Demography* 33, no. 3 (1996): 313–27. See also R. M. Kaplan and R. G. Kronick, "Marital Status and Longevity in the United States Population," *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 60 (August 2006): 760–65.
- [12] Lee A. Lillard and Constantijn (Stan) Panis, "Health, Marriage, and Longer Life for Men," Research Brief 5018, Rand Corporation, 1998.
- [13] Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 98.
- [14] Kay S. Hymowitz, *Marriage and Caste in America: Separate and Unequal Families in a Post-Marital Age* (Lanham, MD.: Ivan R. Dee, 2006).
- [15] W. Bradford Wilcox, ed., *When Marriage Disappears: The Retreat from Marriage in Middle America* (Charlottesville, VA.: University of Virginia, National Marriage Project; New York: Institute for American Values, 2010).
- [16] See David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), and Elizabeth Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Life of Children of Divorce* (New York: Crown Books, 2005).

[17] Interestingly, Nietzsche does appear to have foreseen the universalizability of vegetarianism, writing in the 1870s, “I believe that the vegetarians with their prescription to eat less and more simply, are of more use than all the new moral systems taken together.... There is no doubt that the future educators of mankind will also prescribe a stricter diet.” Also interesting, Adolf Hitler—whose own vegetarianism appears to have been adopted because of Wagner’s (Wagner in turn had been convinced by the sometime vegetarian Nietzsche)—reportedly remarked in 1941 that “there’s one thing I can predict to eaters of meat: the world of the future will be vegetarian.”

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Springs in the Desert: Infertility, Accompaniment and Fruitfulness

KIMBERLY HENKEL & ANN KOSHUTE

In his play *The Jeweler's Shop*, Karol Wojtyła writes movingly, and with great perception, about the heights and the depths of love and marriage. The story follows three couples as they discover, and sometimes resist, the requirements of love within marriage. In each case, the spouses must navigate the dynamics of their families of origin as they struggle to reconcile their individual sense of identity with the demands of loving another. In Act One, Teresa reflects on what makes love exciting, and marriage such a challenge. Sexual attraction is mixed with fear of the unknown. Even before she and Andrew make their vows, Teresa knows that their dreams of how married life should unfold, and the reality of two becoming one, do not necessarily correspond: “I was thinking about signals that could not connect. It was a thought about Andrew and myself. And I felt how difficult it is to live.”

We need not be married ourselves to understand that marriage is hard. We all come from families with some level of dysfunction. We observe marriages in our extended families, among our friends and associates and, from afar, the endless coupling and un-coupling of celebrities. Just as Teresa and Andrew struggle to send and receive the individual “signals” that express both their love and their expectations of each other, married couples experience the challenges of “connecting” in a multitude of ways. This is part of what makes marriage so wonder-full, and even frightening. It’s also what binds the couple more closely together, allows for constant discovery of the mystery of the other, and makes the “Yes” of the vows—a “Yes” that takes a risk in promising what it cannot fully know, for a future that is always ahead of them—an opportunity to enter into the adventure together.

The daily work of “connecting signals” takes on an added challenge for the couple experiencing infertility. In a world that simultaneously prizes an autonomy that

embraces a “child-free by choice” lifestyle and indulges celebrations of baby bumps and clever “gender reveals,” it is the childless couple, longing to conceive, that often experiences “how difficult it is to live.” Such couples may find themselves frustrated and confused by the signals coming from family, friends and media about starting a family, while trying to remain tuned in to each other’s feelings, fears and desires. Faithful couples may perceive mixed signals coming from a God who commands them to “**be fruitful and multiply,**” promises fidelity and has proven to be the womb-opening miracle worker, from Sarah and Rachel to Anna and Elizabeth. They can feel mysteriously impeded in their ability to carry out the mission of parenthood, perplexed by which criteria they have yet to meet to qualify for their own miracle of Biblical proportions.

The signals received from the culture, and even from within our families, are equally mixed: don’t rush into marriage/don’t wait too long; don’t have a honeymoon baby!/when are you starting a family? The expectations placed on couples are often unrealistic, confining them to a view of marriage constructed by the perceptions of parents, in-laws, friends, and strangers. Daughters or sons dealing with infertility are asked (sometimes repeatedly) by parents when they will start “giving us grandchildren.” Many experience perfect strangers asking about their parental status, and are met with intrusive follow-up questions: “What are you waiting for?” “Does one of you have a problem?” Finally, the childless spouses have their own signals to deal with, each one trying to keep open with listening hearts. Even as they focus on each other, communication with each other can become strained, and it can be equally difficult to approach God with openness and trust.

While all marriages are called to model the love between Christ and His Church, which inevitably requires every couple to take up its cross, the couple struggling with infertility suffers a particular cross, one that can distort the very perception of their marital union. Infertility is indeed a “cross,” a lifelong burden for many, and a source of great pain and suffering. Yet salvation history is the story of God’s faithful accompaniment of His people through pain and suffering, and the transformation that is possible when we surrender to God’s providence and tender care (“Behold, I make all things new” [Rev 21:5]). For the infertile spouses, their union is far from incomplete: while unable to bear children, they remain witnesses to the fullness of a sacramental marriage that is always a participation in the fruitfulness of the Trinity. This, however, requires a shift in thinking whereby the concept of fruitfulness is not limited to the act of procreation. In Timothy O’Malley’s excellent article, “**Editorial Musings: The Charism of Infertility,**” O’Malley suggests that,

It is precisely the charism of the infertile couple in the Church to remind us that the fundamental end of marriage is not reproduction at all costs. Rather, it is the giving over of the entire life of the couple to God... [Through their struggle,] the couple is to love unto the end, to transform even this diminishment into an occasion of Eucharistic love. For in Christ's Cross and Resurrection, every dimension of human life can become a new occasion for fruitfulness.

This is an important point, both for infertile spouses and for pastors and others who might accompany them on this path: infertility is not a “journey of hopelessness,” but a pilgrimage of Faith (in God, who provides, and does not abandon); Hope (growth in the knowledge that God is leading them, rather than “wishfulness” that the situation might change); and Love (the self-emptying presence to each other that brings new life in unexpected ways). With the help of spiritual and emotional accompaniment, the couple can learn to acknowledge and be with the suffering (never denying it or forcing themselves to “get over it”) and discern what God is calling them to, a fruitfulness that only they can fulfill. If the infertile couple can finally embrace the vocational aspect of their infertility, they can cultivate a strong marriage, a strong relationship with God, and become effective witnesses to other married couples, priests and religious, and to a world that is starved for true Love. The question for them—and for the Church—is: How best can this be done?

Answering this question cannot possibly be accomplished in one brief article, nor can we offer a solution to the mysteries surrounding infertility. What we propose here is the start of a conversation that accounts for the complexity of the emotional and spiritual difficulties surrounding infertility. While the infertile couple desperately searches for a solution to their infertility, what they need most from the Church is to be heard and understood and, most of all, to be accompanied on their path in order to discover a way of fruitfulness in what they may have come to view as the barren landscape of their marriage. While the Church has spoken on theological and ethical aspects of the issue, there is a need at this moment in history to consider more fully the practical and spiritual challenges of the experience of infertility. Because of the sheer scale of infertility, let alone the pervasiveness and destructiveness of the ‘fixes’ offered for it, there is a sense of pastoral urgency. By listening to the experience of infertile spouses, the Church can better learn to minister to these couples, to acknowledge the difficulty of their plight, and to help them move forward with hope. This is a moment for the Church to reach deeply into its own tradition and articulate more clearly to infertile couples the fruitfulness that every married couple already shares in, whether they have children or not.

While every couple experiences trials in marriage, infertility strikes at the heart of its identity, as “one flesh” created to “be fruitful and multiply.” What is the meaning of this desire to conceive and bear children, when this very desire is continually thwarted? It is commonly reported that **one in eight couples** experience difficulty conceiving: whether it is the total inability to conceive, or to bring a baby to term. The reasons are many, and range from genetic factors, disease and accidents rendering either spouse sterile; to environmental (pollution, water systems and food sources contaminated by medical waste, synthetic hormones, and pesticides); to the simply mysterious “no diagnosis.” This last is, in some respects, most trying for a couple’s faith, because there is no cause to pinpoint, no person or circumstance to “blame.” None—except for God.

Whatever the cause, the inability to conceive begins as an unexpected but more or less manageable obstacle. As time passes and new interventions are tried and fail, what seemed like a temporary setback gives way to frustration, anger, envy and desperation. Every month brings a physical reminder that no baby is coming. Friends and family members begin sending out their own birth announcements, and the pressure to “catch up”—along with the continuing intrusive questions—puts a strain on all of the couple’s relationships. Every exhortation to “just relax,” or “have fun trying” may be well-meaning, but exerts more pressure on the couple to “perform and produce.” Such words deliver a blow to the couple’s already fragile sense of masculinity and femininity and intensifies the crisis of faith their infertility engenders. In the search for answers, and for blame, they are tempted to point fingers at each other, to look inward with self-hatred, and heavenward in desperation.

Because the Church prohibits the use of Artificial Reproductive Technologies, it can seem that a couple is left to figure out how to deal with their situation on their own. So often it appears that the Church is giving them a “no” without providing any acceptable alternative. And there is a real danger of merely offering technical solutions to the problem of infertility—even **morally licit ones**. Obviously it is important for spouses to optimize their health so they might achieve pregnancy, but when the technical approach begins to endanger the well-being of a couple, it no longer becomes life-giving. A shift from achieving health to achieving a baby at all costs threatens not only the physical, mental, and spiritual health of the spouses, but also the health of the marriage. Besides the obvious physical risk of injecting hormones and surgery, there is the mental strain brought on by the constant monitoring of signs of fertility and timing sexual relations to coincide with the woman’s peak fertility. Stress can be a major contributing factor to infertility, and

trying to relax and be a generous, self-giving lover while optimizing fertile times becomes increasingly difficult. The question of how far a couple is willing to go with medical interventions must be faced, since there will always be couples for whom technical solutions don't result in having a baby. Beyond all this, there are the not-so-obvious risks of considering a child as a product or personal project. When a couple tries months or years to conceive, it becomes difficult to remember that a child is a gift. If they are not careful, the spouses' endless attempts to interpret possible pregnancy signs, as well as the continual focus on hormonal evaluations and interventions, can have the effect of esteeming the act of achieving pregnancy as a mission in and of itself.

While some may argue that those experiencing infertility are too sensitive, the language used to discuss infertility is important. Being compassionate toward the infertile couple, while helping them to integrate their physical, emotional and spiritual woundedness into a creative surrender to God, is a difficult balancing act. It embraces the unique and mysterious fruitfulness only they—in cooperation with God—can bring to fullness. Infertile couples must guard against internalizing unintentionally hurtful words of “advice” and intrusive questions, which may fuel their pain, rather than bring them through it. Well-meaning friends, can say things such as, “I can't even imagine how difficult it must be to not be able to conceive a child. You must be so strong. My children are my whole life!” Rather than feeling affirmed and understood, this can leave those struggling with infertility discouraged, isolated, and resentful. Should infertile couples just move on with life (and stop being “snowflakes”)? Or should everyone in their sphere (family, friends, social media) tip-toe around them? The answer lies somewhere in the middle: increased knowledge of the challenges of infertility and compassionate pastoral accompaniment.

The descriptive “infertile” itself is a point of contention when considering how to talk about the state of childlessness. Some—especially women—may recoil at being referred to in this way, since it marks them out as something other than whole, worthwhile persons. Irrational as such thoughts might be, they are reinforced by some Catholics who assume childlessness to be a voluntary “no,” resulting from of a lack of faith, or a failure to make exhaustive use of morally licit technical solutions to the problem. Women feel this most acutely, since it is their bodies that bear the brunt of side-effects from medications, hormone treatments and (sometimes repeated) surgeries. They feel the physical and emotional side-effects of treatments in their very being. This is not to mention the distinctive toll infertility takes on men, too often overlooked or underplayed.

Whether infertility is a temporary burden or a permanent state, the infertile couple's marriage takes the shape of the cross, with its dual meaning of suffering and salvation. Christ's Cross gives our suffering its paradoxical nature, proving that abundance and light can emerge from the depths of barren darkness. So it is with spouses who evidently carry their infertility as a cross, but which need not mean a burden that forever weighs down their relationship, or breaks (cf. Mt 11:30). The language of the cross is appropriate but often misunderstood as a pain from which there is no relief: wrenching, humiliating, inescapable death. The infertile spouses must seek the dual meaning of their particular suffering, and find in it God's fidelity to them, and the fruit that He desires to bring out of it. On Golgotha, Christ was stripped of everything, and poured Himself out completely. Similarly, the infertile couple feels stripped of their hopes for a family, and emptied physically, given the toll that medical interventions take on the body. Yet Christ, by handing Himself over to the will of God, brought forth the fruit of Salvation, the defeat of Death. His embrace of desolation and loss transformed suffering into a way of unleashing Love. Likewise, if the spouses can hand themselves over to Christ, will allow their wounds to be absorbed by His, new life will emerge from their union.

Though the cross of infertility diminishes with time, the scar it leaves remains tender. And yet this can be transformed by Christ's Cross into a path of Love and Life unique to the couple, bringing forth fruits that could only have come from their union and this particular suffering. *St. Josemaria Escriva* states: "God in his providence has two ways of blessing marriages: one by giving them children; and the other, sometimes, because he loves them so much, by not giving them children. I don't know which is the better blessing." This may be shocking to those who cannot imagine an inability to conceive as a blessing. Yet Escriva continues, "Often God does not give children, because He is asking them for something more." God does not abandon couples struggling with infertility. Even without a biological child, a husband and wife can find abundant fruitfulness in their marriage by remaining close to the Lord and allowing Him to guide them.

As a couple attempts to carry the cross of infertility, it is essential that others come alongside to help shoulder the burden. The Church can help a couple sort through the myriad of options, clarifying the moral alternatives available; but the fundamental task of the Church is to accompany the couple. Above all, the infertile couple needs spiritual guidance and support through the journey. It is easy for spouses to feel forgotten and isolated and to question why a good God would not bless them with children. Pastors, parishioners, people in ministry, family and friends must learn to

walk in a better way with the infertile couple; and infertile spouses must become docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in embracing a parenthood unique to them.

Priests are in a unique position to affirm the goodness of the struggling couple's marriage, encouraging them in knowing the presence of God. They must, of course, be aware of the impact infertility has on a marriage in the first place. One simple way that a priest might support those in his parish struggling with infertility is by offering a Mass specifically for infertile couples, that they might receive physical/spiritual/emotional healing and discern where God is calling them to be fruitful. This would allow couples to see that the Church is attuned to their situation and help them connect with other couples with similar struggles. Another way that a priest can be sensitive to this struggle is on "trigger days" like Mother's Day and Father's Day. These can be tortuous to those who long to be parents. He might give the blessings for mothers and fathers at the end of Mass when the entire congregation is already standing so as not to draw attention to those remaining seated, grieving anew—and publicly—that they have no children.

In the third act of *Wojtyła's play*, Christopher and his bride-to-be wrestle with the same excitement and uncertainty that his parents—Andrew and Teresa—faced when contemplating the unknowns in their married future. They've already experienced through their respective parents' marriages that every relationship is susceptible to circumstances that make it "difficult to live." Their future—like that of every couple who enters marriage with hope and expectation—is a mystery to be unfolded anew. The mystery of childlessness is unexpected, unplanned and unwanted; yet, it need not be without hope or fruitfulness. The journey into this mystery must be done together, but also accompanied by family, friends and the Church. The spiritual support offered by the Church not only gives meaning and purpose to the couple's suffering but leads them to discover the mission of every marriage to go together where God leads.

Spiritually uplifting and supporting infertile couples is a task in which the Church, as an expert in humanity (cf. *Pope Benedict*), must be engaged. The Church is in a unique position to mother infertile couples: not merely seeking for them technical solutions, but listening to them, learning from them, and discovering together the shape authentic and fruitful accompaniment must take.

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which will lend itself to individual as well as group study.

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When Sex Becomes Cheap

PAUL SULLINS

Mark Regnerus, *Cheap Sex: The Transformation of Men, Marriage and Monogamy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Cultural norms—the tacit, taken-for-granted expectations that structure human society—adapt to institutional and technological change. In our day, as the life tasks and realms formerly integrated within marriage—sex, intimacy, shared residence and meals, childbirth, raising children, economic sharing, and career planning—increasingly uncoupled from that institution, the related norms shift. When, as in America today, most children experience the dissolution of their parents' relationship, the norms of mating and parenthood implicitly shift from the prospect of stability to the prospect of instability. When less than ten percent of women experience sexual onset within a permanent relationship, the norm shifts from regarding virginity with admiration to regarding it with ridicule. When more than half of births to women under 30 occur outside marriage, the norm of “first comes marriage” shifts to “marriage comes second”—if marriage comes at all.

In his book *Cheap Sex: The Transformation of Men, Marriage and Monogamy*, University of Texas sociologist Mark Regnerus argues that this shift in marital and mating norms has now extended to sex itself. Bringing to bear an impressive array of data, including Regnerus' own large survey of over 15,000 Americans (called the Relationships in America [RIA] survey project) and over 100 interviews conducted for the book, he ably demonstrates that “cheap sex is plentiful—it's flooding the market in sex and relationships—and ... this has had profound influence on how American men and women relate to each other, which has in turn spilled over into other domains” (29). In case we need to be convinced, he presents detailed data and evidence that young Americans of marriageable age (ages 24–32) engage in sex relations more quickly, casually, frequently and with more variety than ever before. Waiting until marriage is becoming a rare option; many do not wait until the second date. Or even the first date. In the RIA data, Regnerus reports, over a third of men and a quarter of women reported that they had sex with their current or most recent partner before

the relationship actually began (97). Like text messaging has replaced, for young Americans, the intrusive investment of time and interpersonal energy in an actual phone call, Tinder and the hookup has rendered almost quaint the notion of investing time and interpersonal energy in an actual date. If you think that this is a description of the commodification of sex, you are beginning to get the idea.

Sex has become cheap, explains Regnerus, not because it leaves young people feeling cheap or is less desired by them—in fact, quite the opposite—but as a matter of hard-headed rational social exchange: “Sex is cheap if women expect little in return for it and if men do not have to supply much time, attention, resources, recognition or fidelity in order to experience it” (28). This definition follows the little-known branch of sociology known as “sexual economics,” which analyzes sex relations on the model of a transaction in which a man offers his resources—summarized above as “time, attention, resources, recognition or fidelity”—in exchange for sexual access to a woman’s body. The popular formula which says that men give love to get sex, while women give sex to get love, expresses roughly the same idea. But sexual economics goes further, analyzing the sum of these transactions as a kind of mating market, using the tools and concepts of classical economics to expose what many would call cultural insights.

In the mating market of young Americans, explains Regnerus, well-documented gender differences show that men are largely the source of demand for sex, while women function as gatekeepers controlling supply. Sex has become cheap not because demand has decreased—male sexual desire is reliably constant—but because supply has become much more plentiful. The key drivers of this change, he maintains, are not cultural or even sociological, but something more fundamental: technological change. Since the 1960s, and particularly since the turn of the present century, norms of sex and marriage have been upended by the confluence of “three distinctive technological achievements: 1) the wide uptake of the [birth-control] Pill as well as a mentality stemming from it that sex is “naturally” infertile, 2) mass-produced high-quality pornography, and 3) the advent and evolution of online dating/meeting services” (11). The Pill has eliminated the perceived risk of pregnancy, thereby greatly lowering risk which had formerly inhibited casual sex relations, particularly for women; Tinder and similar online meeting sites have increased the supply of willing short-term partners, particularly for men; and ubiquitous pornography allied with masturbation (“the cheapest sex” [107]) has made sexual experience available for men (and for women, but mostly for men) without even troubling to find an actual partner.

The result of these technologies is that women's gatekeeping power is largely undermined in the sexual exchange. If men give love to receive sex, and women give sex to receive love, then in today's mating market, young women must give much more sex in exchange for much less love.

The young women who do so, in the vast majority, are not reluctantly lowering their moral standards (though they may have other reasons for reluctance), but conforming to a new standard, a shift of norms, as abundant non-fertile sexual experience has become for them an assumed social fact. "[Cheap sex]," Regnerus observes, "is a presumption, widely perceived as natural and commonsensical, and hence connected by persons to expectations about their own and others' future sexual experiences (as similarly low-cost). It has become normative, taken for granted" (30). In the popular mentality and cognition of today's young Americans, sex is for fun, not for procreation.

Many of the developments Regnerus documents were predicted 25 years ago, in the influential analysis of modern sexuality presented in Anthony Giddens' 1992 volume *The Transformation of Intimacy*.^[1] Giddens, a pre-eminent Marxist sociologist who is the longtime Director of the London School of Economics, proposed that the emergence of "plastic sexuality," i.e., sexuality freed from the needs of reproduction, reflected a fundamental transformation in the constitution of sexual relationships. Sexuality, love and eroticism were increasingly being shaped by aspirations for personal fulfillment, sexual attraction (and repulsion), and psychic needs, and decreasingly by collective control imposed by the state, tradition or moral norms. The result was a restructuring of sexual intimacy, not around marriage and family or any social or moral norms, but around what Giddens called (ironically, to Catholic ears) the "pure relationship," which is "a social relationship which is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it."^[2]

Although marriage, through the rise of the romantic love complex, had played a major role in the rise of the pure relationship, eventually the connection between love and sex via the pure relationship would undermine marriage.^[3] Women tended to lead, while men lagged, in the present and future development of such relationships; they were therefore the most advanced, in many ways, among lesbian couples. Regnerus examines Giddens' predictions throughout the book, partly as a kind of guide, and partly as a foil to his own analysis. He finds that most of Giddens'

predictions and insights hold up well, although he is less positive about them than Giddens may have been, as evidenced by the fact that what Giddens called a “pure relationship” roughly corresponds to what Regnerus calls “cheap sex.”

For women, the Pill has reduced the ability to form a good marriage by splitting the mating market into parts: at one extreme, persons looking for casual sex with a minimum of strings, and at the other extreme, persons looking to marry. Consistent with the sex differences already noted, Regnerus notes, “there are more men in the sex corner of the pool than women, and more women in the marriage corner of the pool than men” (35). Due to the imbalance of males in the sex corner, although sex is cheap for men, it is still much easier, as we all know, for a woman to have casual sex, if she wants to, than it is for a man. As Regnerus points out, men looking for a no-strings sex partner often come up short, but “[w]hen women signal interest in [casual] sex, men pounce” (35). But at the other end of the pool, where there are far more women than men who are interested in the “expensive” sex of marriage, men dominate the exchange.

Since women are less likely to marry a man with lower education and earnings than themselves, the pool of men available to marry has grown even smaller as women become, on average, more highly educated and employable than men (another, less direct, effect of the Pill). The result is that women who want to marry struggle to find a marriage partner and some will fail to do so. Others may settle for a less than optimum partner, which contributes to increased rates of divorce—the large majority of which are initiated by women—and relationship churning. In this way, cheap sex directly lowers the quality and duration of marriage.

But the effect of cheap sex on women is dwarfed by its effect on men. A central concern of the book, pursued in a chapter with the same name as the subtitle, is that “cheap sex has transformed modern men ..., undermined and stalled the marital impulse, and stimulated critics of monogamy” (191). This is more than just a matter of the proverbial milk and cow effect. Shorn of the need to offer significant resources in exchange for sex, cheap sex has not just lowered men’s interest in marriage, but more importantly their marriageability: that is, their economic and social capacity to marry, or to attract a marriage partner. The rise of underemployed and underachieving young men in the past 15 years has been a widely observed trend, puzzled over by a spate of books across the ideological spectrum, from Hanna Rosin’s left-leaning *The End of Men* to Lionel Tiger’s right-leaning *The Decline of Males*. One largely overlooked reason for the lassitude of young men today, Regnerus argues, may be cheap sex. “Cheap sex, ...”, he writes, “does little to stimulate the [men] of our modern

economy toward those historic institutions—education, a settled job, and marriage—that created opportunity for them and their families” (154). Faced with no need to attain a higher education or well-paying job in order to attract a woman, many young men lose the motivation to attain a higher education or well-paying job at all.

It gets worse. Because marriageability and productivity are closely allied, the decline of marriageability resulting from cheap sex has also reduced young men’s general social productivity. On this point Regnerus cites the sexual economists Baumeister and Vohs: “giving young men easy access to abundant sexual satisfaction deprives society of one of its ways to motivate them to contribute valuable achievements to the culture” (152). The Freudian idea here is that sexual deprivation energizes the development of civilization. Catholic thought arrives at the same place by a different route, affirming that as marriage (the only proper realm for sex) contributes to the common good, when men fail to contribute to marriage they also deprive the common good of valuable accomplishments. In this way, however understood, cheap sex beleaguers not only men and marriage, but society more broadly.

The overall effect of this book is like watching a train wreck in slow motion. Each well-documented fact, each clinical insight, contributes to the growing realization that marriage is in more trouble than is currently imagined, and in a way that is not likely to recover very soon, if at all. By the end of the book it has become clear that the analogy of market exchange, which has helped to explain male-female interactions throughout the book, has now become the defining reality of sex relations for young Americans. As Regnerus explains, it is not just that “marriage ... is in the throes of deinstitutionalization” (195) but that cheap sex is in the throes of mass-market commodification, becoming “a synthetic compound of our Western penchant for bigger, cheaper, better, diverse and more—an ironic postmodern intersection where Wal-Mart meets [explicit sex advice columnist] Dan Savage” (197).

Shed of transcendence and uniqueness, disconnected from larger life goals or relationships, cheap sex has become a rationalized commodity, discounted even further for being mass produced in bulk. Cheap sex has become junk sex. Like McDonald’s burgers—the prototypical rationalized commodity—it has become a kind of ersatz product which can be obtained ever more quickly, cheaply and reliably, and which is tasty and attractive, but not very nourishing as a steady diet. Regnerus, citing Wendell Berry, terms it “industrial sex”: “Industrial sex, characteristically, establishes its freeness and goodness by an industrial accounting, dutifully toting up numbers of ‘sexual partners,’ orgasm, and so on, with the inevitable industrial implication that

the body is somehow a limit on the idea of sex ...” (198). Regnerus sums up the accounts from his interviewees of “orgasmic experiences, partner numbers, time in pursuit, exotic accounts, one-night stands, regrets, pain, addictions, infections, abortions, wasted time, and spent relationships” as metrics “of an industrial sex whose promises consistently exceeded its deliveries” (198).

When sex becomes this cheap—affordable to all like a Big Mac—, marriage by comparison becomes prohibitively expensive, like a five-star dinner affordable only to the select few. The problem industrially cheap sex presents for marriage is not only that fewer young men will marry—that process is well advanced—but that fewer older ones will marry as well. The metrics of good industrial sex listed above by Berry and Regnerus omit, not by accident, the most important measure of good sex relations in Catholic and traditional thought: children. Older men, more than younger men, have typically eventually settled down to become more open to marriage for the sake of children and family. If, in their minds, sex is really for fun and not for children, and women can have and raise children without their lifelong commitment, there is little need for them ever to step up to parental responsibility, nor for women to demand of them that they do so. In the era of cheap sex, men (and women) who in the recent past may have married for these very reasons (and then perhaps divorced) are increasingly likely never to marry at all.

To make this point Regnerus presents the above figure (146), which shows, from Census data, the proportion of young Americans who have not married by the age of 35. Strikingly, just since the turn of the century, that proportion has risen by almost 20 percentage points, from a third of young Americans in 2000 to well over half of them today. At the turn of the century, by the age of 35, over half of young Americans had married; today, over half remain unmarried. For decades, even though younger Americans have increasingly deferred marriage, by the time of their mid-thirties the vast majority of Americans had eventually married. Figure 5.1 suggests that that cultural pattern no longer holds. Regnerus attributes this change to the fact that the new norms of cheap sex are still diffusing gradually throughout the population:

[M]any people are marrying because they are still following the cultural practices of their parents and grandparents, even though historically compelling reasons—like babies, financial and physical security, or the desire for a “socially legitimate” sexual relationship—no longer hold. ... The next generation, today no older than teenagers, will wonder why they should marry at all. (147)

The picture Regnerus paints is a grim one, not because marriage will fully disappear—marriage rates will remain high among the wealthy and the very religious—but because the rise of cheap sex and its consequences are the result of technological change, which is generally irreversible, rather than social or cultural trends which may recover. After several generations of predicating sexuality on effective infertility due to the Pill, as Regnerus points out, “a return to the patterns witnessed prior to the ‘sexual revolution’... is very unlikely” (8).

And yet. In a world of commodity sex, industrial sex is not just emotionally unsatisfying, as Regnerus observes, but may contain the seeds of its own destruction. Literally. The logic of the sexual economics which Regnerus deploys so well can be maintained only by treating children as an externality to coupled pleasure, the cost of which, like polluting smokestacks in an industrial market, is largely ignored. But children are not merely external to sex: they add distinct value to the exchange. Children, of course, do not negotiate or offer any exchange goods to the sexual partners who may produce them. But more than marriage, it is the prospect and eventual presence of children that, like religion, lifts the perspective of sex partners from the present experience to the future, not only a future state of society in which their children can thrive, but also the future beyond the horizon of their own lives. Children personalize sex and endow it with meaning, an exchange to be sure, though one that may be better understood in terms of gift, rather than a sexual economics based on transaction.

The value of children is pertinent, because what Regnerus does not address is that the Pill’s promise of reliably preventing conception, which he, like his study subjects, accepts largely at face value, is false. As a matter of simple fact, hormonal birth control fails to prevent pregnancy in actual use at a rate—between 10 and 20 percent of the time in most studies—unacceptably high to be reasonably considered a foolproof method of preventing pregnancy. The effect of the Pill, then, is not technological, as Regnerus holds, but symbolic, because as a technology, it clearly fails to deliver. Like mythology, young Americans believe in the efficacy of contraception because it enables and explains the hypersexualized world in which they have been socialized. More than a few discover, after much pain and regret, that that world is a lie.

The mythology of the Pill’s infallible bar to conception is maintained only by the prospect of the efficient elimination, through widespread legal abortion, of the children who slip past its provision. This is not a new social dynamic. Children

inconveniently resulting from illicit sexual liaisons have long been cheapened, considered “illegitimate” and denied the recognition and care of their natural parents. Today’s bastards are the “unwanted” children, who comprise about half of conceptions in America, who are denied both parental and social recognition before birth and are routinely subject to death. One could say—and many do—that the technology of abortion completes the technology of effective contraception, but this ignores the inconvenient externality even more blindly. Cheap sex is enabled only by cheaper children; and the low value placed on unwanted, unborn infant life is not a product of technology but of a culture, possibly reparable, that has forgotten what it means to be human.

[1] Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford University Press, 1992).

[2] *Ibid.*, 58.

[3] *Ibid.*, 154.

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The Cleansing of the Temple: Casting Pornography Out of Marriage

MICHELLE CURRAN AND LUCA MARELLI

Luca and I met in Ireland in the mid-80s. I was studying architecture in Dublin. In those years Ireland was changing in leaps and bounds. The music of that era was groundbreaking. We were listening to the Eurythmics, The Cure, Depeche Mode, and U2. It sounded so fresh, creative and melancholic and offered the perfect background to crazy parties. I loved it. However, the further I moved into this world, the less I was enamored by the endless late nights of loud laughter and drunken confessions. There was so much individual expression and little true comradeship among us. I craved meaningful friendships and a boyfriend capable of loving me and dealing with me fearlessly, warts and all. So, after a series of disappointing relationships, I began praying for a boyfriend who would love God more than me. That way I was less likely to be disappointed in the long run, and the relationship could avoid heading for a crash, like so many others around me.

In my final year at university Luca arrived on the scene. He may have arrived as a response to my prayers, but he didn't drop down from heaven: he came to Dublin from Lake Como in Italy to study English. Luca was a bit of an infiltrator. He signed up for the university climbing club in order to be in touch with the locals. Luca was invasive too; he would show up uninvited at events, filled with an almighty enthusiasm that contrasted with our "Depeche Mode" attitude.

Then there was this two-day jazz festival which Luca also invited himself along to! During the first evening, we began to dance, and when the music got slow I kissed him. It wasn't planned, it just happened. After the gig however, instead of driving back with the others, he became pensive and asked me to take a walk with him. That short stretch of road spent talking, sharing, questioning and laughing really sobered me up. Luca wasn't going to let me get away with using him. I had pulled the trigger of our

emotions: we now needed to name them, if we were going to tame them.

Once Luca was back in Italy, we began writing letters daily. What a lovely treat to find him waiting for me at the bottom of the stairs in the post every morning. As we continued to write it became clear that we shared the same vision, hope and belief in eternal love in marriage. When we met again face to face, nine months after our first encounter, in a moment of truth, Luca let me know that he was looking at pornography and that he was struggling to stop. Whilst I felt uncomfortable about it, I figured it was just a passing behavior most young guys struggle with at some stage and, relieved by his honesty and sincerity, in a sort of retribution, I admitted not being exactly immaculate after endless student party life.

Over the next two years we were given the opportunity to share our souls, as they flowed closer together. We would meet up every few months to discern our feelings. Both of us really believed that our bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit and aspired to God's blessing of marriage before celebrating the sexual act, if and when we would marry. Meanwhile, after Luca's initial disclosure, pornography seemed just a passing bad habit that he dealt with in the confessional where, without much questioning, the sole suggested remedy was "three Hail Marys and a prayer for purity." Neither of us, much less the confessors, had any idea how a man's porn use deeply affects the way he looks at the woman he loves.

We got married in 1991 in Como and were showered with expensive gifts—too many to fit into a very small apartment. Yet the greatest gift, God's gift of true sexuality, was ripped open like all the others, without any understanding or knowledge of what it really meant. The key to understanding it was there, but we really weren't interested in reading the instruction manual. We were still blinded by the world's take on relationships. God is love: but when it comes to sex, the couple is on their own.

In less than four years we had three baby boys to contend with. My understanding of my own fertility was a joke. I could hardly keep a shopping list, let alone a monthly record; and for Luca the bedroom was the place to let the lust flow free. In his words: "Years of looking at still and moving images of naked bodies and sexual acts had fueled my expectations of the nuptial bedroom as a free for all. And, in the event, it affected married life when the demands—which now I see unreasonable, unhealthy and against the plan of God for sexuality—were not met. Love and Responsibility was still on the bookshelf, unopened because it was perceived as a burden." Pornography made our intimacy stressful and moody. Having lost control of our family planning situation, we invited a priest friend to dinner, and shared our difficulty with him. He

didn't delve much into the cause of our anxiety but rather quickly suggested we use contraceptives. At first the initial sense of relief and the illusion that we now held the reins of our destiny in our own hands was sweet. But this quickly turned into a terrible emptiness, especially for me.

Despite the disordered intimacy between us, there was a real desire to remain intimate with God in our daily lives. Jesus and Mother Mary were welcome guests in our home. They were an integral part of the conversation with our boys. Simple prayers were a daily melody and going to Mass was an act of love. The boys saw no reason to consider it a bore. It was sincere, pure, explained and understood; and as they grew older they shared their inquisitive and often doubtful souls with us.

The new century came and with it came another son. Our family life was rich, but there was also tension, anger and resentment, for which there was no obvious reason. Yet honesty and sincerity helped Luca to admit that his struggle was still on-going. At this point I am turning the story over to him.

After trying in many ways to understand why I was unable to stop, in 2011 I came across an [article on *Humanae vitae*](#) by Stratford Caldecott, whom we had met in the UK before we were married. I was struck by his words "contraception is a way of trying ... to push God out of the bed." Hearing someone I had known personally talk about spousal love in a way that I had read about in books but not perceived to be possible in the flesh, reawakened in my heart the desire for a deeper Love. I had experienced that longing during engagement, but it had never become a reality in our marriage where "everything was all right" on the outside. So, instead of changing confessors constantly, to avoid shame, I started going to the same priest. He however did not realize that advice like "find in your spouse what you seek in pornography" was poison for a porn-addict.

I also asked Michelle to help me, by checking up on me whilst I was away on business. Then, after about a year, seeing no progress, I started to see a therapist. With him I finally realized that years of porn usage had turned something that was a weakness and a sin into an outright addiction. Therapy did help. I learned about the nature of addiction and how to regain sobriety. I learned how to apply strategies to avoid triggers. But the power of lust had crept into my head, and white-knuckling sobriety did not last. Soon enough I was on worse websites than ever, the urge to act out was tearing me apart, and my life was becoming unmanageable. In confession I would receive the same recommendations I had received in my twenties and which still failed to be helpful. By late spring 2014 I felt hopeless. Lust was the merchant I had

allowed into the temple of our marriage; and it would not leave until I was deeply purified.

On a July weekend of that year, while I was in Istanbul for two weeks on business, Michelle visited me and a series of unplanned events took us to a retreat of a small Catholic community. We were fascinated by how they prayed and sang with their hands lifted up, no matter how different it was from our more Benedictine style. The teaching about Nicodemus and being “born from above”—plain language, deep content—held our attention. We both ended up casually queuing up with others to receive ‘healing prayer’ in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Monday morning, waking up beside Michelle, a thought flashed through my head: “Behold I make all things new!” Michelle left to go back to Italy and I started my second week. On the last day of my stay I decided to go to confession. It was a beautiful sunny morning.

I walked to the nearest Church and entered the confessional. Who should be there but the very priest who had imparted to us the blessing at the retreat! He started with a warm prayer, expressing gratitude to Jesus for all He had done in my life. I had never heard a priest open confession in that way. After that, words came easily to me. I went through all the main aspects of my life; then I explained that since adolescence I had been unable to deliver myself of pornography and masturbation, and that I had started praying to St Michael. Upon saying the words “St Michael” I started to cry like a fountain welling up from my guts more than from my eyes. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before. The priest reminded me of the first reading at Mass the previous day,^[1] the healing of Hezekiah when the Lord turned back time; my time could turn back to purity. I felt happier than I had been in a long time. Walking back to the hotel—as if to confirm what had just happened—a summer storm literally washed me clean.

This is what happened in July 2014 to Luca. Back then we did not know we were about to discover what God’s plan in marriage really is: that what the world has to offer is just a shadow in comparison to what God has in mind for a married couple. Seeing Luca so happy upon his return made me realize just how much he had been suffering. It was like watching a baby lamb skipping across fields after having spent its life in a stable. His gratitude was abounding, his happiness uncontainable and our marriage found a new beginning. We decided to open the instruction manual that we had not bothered with on that first day of marriage.

In the following months and well into 2015 we sought to understand more and more the outpouring of grace, taking part in the “New Life in the Spirit” seminar, receiving

the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, as the Church calls it. It meant kneeling in prayer, getting to know Saint John Paul II's Theology of the Body, participating in healing seminars for couples. Love and Responsibility became engrained in the texture of our lives. Genuine intimacy was suddenly everywhere: in our words, our gaze, our listening and our waiting for the other. It wasn't just physical and emotional: it was spiritual too.

Many years ago, when the boys were learning how to ski, I wondered what I would do in the meantime. Somebody suggested I should make sandwiches and wait for them at the bottom of the slopes. I decided that wasn't my style, so I learned to ski too. What I didn't imagine was that by learning to ski I would get to see the mountain tops in all their glory. From the height of 3000 meters I could see of the whole of creation. Now in moments of intimacy, Luca and I experience the glory of God from the mountain top, together. After years of going through the motions we began to make love fully. The first time our bodies and souls connected I cried in gratitude, just as Luca had cried at his healing confession. In that moment Luca was completely my husband and I was completely his wife. We were reading the manual and cleansing the Temple of our Marriage.

[1] Is 38: 1-8;21-22.

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Putting the Flintstones on the Pill

COLET C. BOSTICK

Ryan, Christopher and Cacilda Jethá, *Sex at Dawn: Why We Mate, Why We Stray, and What It Means for Modern Relationships* (Harper Collins, 2011).

Sex at Dawn is a New York Times bestseller that claims to upend both traditional and contemporary perceptions regarding the sexual act, male-female relationships, and the biological and emotional nature of the human person. The authors' overarching argument is that sexual monogamy is not only untenable, but in fact antithetical to the very nature of man. The book is a call to the reader to throw off the shackles of religious, economic, philosophical, and societal oppression and embrace the proto-man who longs to copulate freely.

The book opens with a search for the human person in his essence, a desire to find the proto-man who is unencumbered by cultural influence, philosophical rationalizations, or religious tenets. The authors believe that biological truths can only be arrived at after stripping the specimen of the accidents of history and environment or, quoting Joseph Campbell, to "discern the cultural from the human." Surveying the research field, they caution against the intellectual trap of "Flintstonization," the tendency of people to project their own experiences, emotions, perceptions, and culture on to persons who lived long ago. Yet Ryan and Jethá seem unaware that their entire argument relies on their own version of a pre-historic human person who hunts and gathers everything from nuts to sexual partners with equal liberality.

On the evolutionary timetable, the real problem seems to have started with the advent of agriculture. Although they state openly that they do not believe in the possibility of a terrestrial Eden, the authors blame agrarian society for the degeneration of hunter-gatherer man from a being who, like the bonobos (emphatically not like Darwin's apes), shared resources without hesitation. Human

beings only began hoarding sexual activity (monogamy) when they began hoarding resources (farming). “The shift from foraging to farming was less a giant leap forward than a dizzying fall from grace” because it transformed altruistic men into oppressors and women from equal partners into grubbing slaves.

Ryan and Jethá regard Genesis and Darwin with equal disdain. Both advance different versions of the same lie: namely, that there is something in man which impels him to procreate, and that sex is the method that makes this possible. These lies, for their part, exist to hide from view the essential truth that “preconscious impulses remain our biological baseline, our reference point, the zero in our own personal number system” and that any attempt “to rise above nature is always a risky, exhaustive endeavor, often resulting in spectacular collapse.”

And all of this, they say, to maintain patriarchal power. As evidence that the “standard narrative,” is a construct, the authors cite case studies of a few aboriginal tribes who lacked a clear understanding of the connection between sex and reproduction.

Yet it turns out that the authors’ warnings against “Flintstonization” and “assumed narratives” are the very traps they fall into themselves. Instead of Fred Flintstone, they see Rousseau’s noble savage; rather than believing in Jesus or Darwin, they believe in Nietzsche and Marx. They label the understanding of human sexuality that has been held for millennia (i.e., that the sex act exists in large part to continue the species) as “fundamentalist” and assert that any and all arguments are valid—except the one they have labeled “fundamentalist.”

And so, the authors begin with a conclusion: sex and procreation have very little to do with one another; therefore, individual people and society as a whole will find happiness only when they accept the fact that the two are not inextricably linked. The methodology follows the same simplistic lines—make a broad, previously unreasoned statement (i.e., paternity didn’t matter until the introduction of agriculture), quote a case study of an obscure tribe (the Tubis of lowland South America), cite a research paper on the habits of a certain species of primates (usually bonobos), then repeat the original statement, but more broadly and with greater force (paternity has never mattered for mankind).

The book as a whole is structured in the same way. Part I (“On the Origin of the Specious”) asserts that the “standard narrative” of the interdependence of men and women for mutual physical and social flourishing (including the perpetuation of the

human race) is a myth which, if continued to be believed, will result in personal and large-scale frustration and disappointment. Parts II through IV (“Lust in Paradise,” “The Way We Weren’t,” and “Bodies in Motion”) weave together studies in primatology and anthropology to form a body of evidence which is more sensationalist than informative. For instance, an entire chapter is dedicated to measurement and meaning of the male anatomy of six species of ape (including human). A stick figure chart is included. Finally, Part V (“Men are from Africa, Women are from Africa”) restates the theme of freedom from extraneous limitations on the nature of our species. “There are an infinite number of ways to adapt a flexible and loving partnership to our ancient appetites,” they declare and encourage the reader to speak with his or her loved one(s) about how to move forward in their relationships armed with this new knowledge that one’s physical urges will, in the end, supersede any attempts to be faithful to any one individual outside himself.

Some reviewers have labeled *Sex at Dawn* as “pseudo-science,” a category which, at the very least, must be acknowledged if one wishes to address such broad topics as human sexuality with contemporary readers. True to much discussion in a post-digital world, what the argument lacks in scientific rigor or substance is supplemented with personality and social media marketing. The co-authors are a married couple; however, the book is really just Ryan’s online university PhD thesis. (One gets the sense that Jethá was brought into the project to lend the legitimacy of her psychiatric practice and World Health Organization research.)

Sex at Dawn was published seven years ago, but it was the stepping off point for Chris Ryan as a mini-celebrity with an air of academia. His website, www.chrisryanphd.com, links to his most recent TED Talk (2.1 million views), appearances on more than a dozen news and information shows, his ongoing podcast, and pre-order information for his forthcoming book, *Civilized to Death* (C2D for short). Given *Sex at Dawn*’s philosophical dead end, it’s not surprising to see that Ryan’s next work questions whether modern man can even experience happiness.

In the end, the popular success of *Sex at Dawn*—both as a book and as an argument for man as “sexual omnivore”—is due to Chris Ryan’s successful packaging rather than the strength of his argument. Yet this type of argument may be the primary source modern readers encounter, and those who wish to engage the culture in a serious way would do well to be aware of it.

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NFP: Hard Truths and Good Fruits

SOPHIE CALDECOTT

Simcha Fisher, *The Sinner's Guide to Natural Family Planning* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2013).

The *Sinner's Guide to Natural Family Planning* is not a textbook, and it doesn't teach you how to chart. It's also not a book of apologetics to explain the theological argument against contraception, or to help non-Catholics understand the Church teaching on family planning. Simcha Fisher is clear about that from the start: as she says, "I'm Catholic, and I write like a Catholic."

Fisher's writing speaks to an urgent and largely unmet need among the married laity, by ministering to the struggles, worries, and wounds of Catholic couples practising NFP. This book is a life-line for anyone trying to live out the teaching of the Church in a thoughtful, engaged way; it's written for someone who is already practising NFP, but discovering that doing so is very different from the rosy picture often painted by its proponents and marriage prep classes. It is written by someone who is intimately familiar with that struggle, because she has lived it herself.

In *The Sinner's Guide to Natural Family Planning*, Simcha Fisher tackles the three sides of NFP: the impact NFP has on our spiritual life, the impact it has on society, and the impact it has on relations between spouses. In a relatively short book, she manages to cover, with astonishing clarity, virtually every question a practising Catholic could ask about the theological implications of NFP: what it really means to be "open to life", what chastity in marriage looks like in practice, whether it's possible to use NFP with a "contraceptive mentality", and how NFP is different from contraception.

"Why doesn't the Church just make a list?" Simcha Fisher addresses this question head-on in the first; perhaps she knew that we all have a tendency to approach God's law with a legalistic, "show me the line so I can dance around it" kind of mind-set. "If

the Church seems distressingly vague, it's because she doesn't want to get in the way of the conversation you could be having with God," she explains. "He doesn't just want to talk to The Church as a whole: He wants to talk to you."

The difficulty is that, in their efforts to promote NFP to Catholic couples and the secular world as a viable alternative to contraception, fertility awareness advocates often end up implying that the two are more-or-less interchangeable. Focusing almost exclusively on the fact that NFP is just as effective as other methods of family planning is to miss the point, though. As any couple is likely to discover within the first month of marriage, you can't practise NFP without very quickly becoming aware of the inseparability of the unitive and procreative dimensions of sex. Yes, we can use NFP to responsibly space our children, but the fact that abstaining is hard and can put a strain on our relationship calls us to a thoughtful awareness of our reasons for delaying having a child. (Which is precisely why many experts in the field now prefer to use the term "natural fertility awareness" rather than "planning", so as not to imply that it is just another form of contraceptive family planning.)

It's all too easy to fall into the trap of trying to fit Catholic teaching about contraception and NFP neatly onto the secular world's vision of sex, when in fact the two perspectives are so different as to be almost completely incompatible. We need to approach the question of family planning from a different angle than the one that the world takes for granted. Instead of asking "How can I get what I want?", we need to ask a more radical question: "What is sex for?" Or, indeed, "How can I help my spouse get to heaven?"

Simcha Fisher tackles the realities of practising NFP within marriage with refreshing insight and humor, and most importantly, she provides much-needed advice for helping one's relationship and spiritual life to survive and during difficult periods of necessary abstinence. She also calls us to examine our own judgements of other couples and why they may or may not have children, reminding us that "Only one Person knows what's in another man's heart, and that person ain't you or me".

Not only that, but her exploration of NFP's impact on the relationship between husband and wife is a beautiful meditation on the practical application of St John Paul II's Theology of the Body. I came away from *The Sinner's Guide to Natural Family Planning* with a deeper understanding and appreciation of the complementarity between men and women; and a new awareness that our different struggles, desires, strengths, and weaknesses are an opportunity to grow in empathy and love together, to help us fulfill our mission as spouses to help each other grow in holiness and

ultimately get to heaven. As Simcha Fisher explains, the strain of abstinence—the mismatch of desire and nature—that often occurs when couples are working around a woman’s cycle to avoid pregnancy can either be seen as a burden, or “as God’s way of making sure we take care of each other—that we step beyond what is easiest, and look to our spouses first”.

She addresses difficult issues directly, such as the fact that the woman often feels less like having sex during the infertile period of her cycle, challenging couples to see things from the other’s perspective in an act of radical empathy. At every turn, she provides practical examples of how spouses can help each other through periods of necessary abstinence, without ever downplaying the struggle—because, as she says, “NFP is a genuine and significant cross”.

Simcha Fisher’s work is unique and much-needed precisely because of her realism and honesty: all too often in their eagerness to get couples to use NFP rather than artificial contraception, NFP instructors gloss over the difficult aspects of the practice. In the end, though, this does everyone a disservice; the Church’s teaching on marriage, sex, and family planning is beautiful in its fullness and authenticity, and we shouldn’t shy away from the more difficult issues connected with NFP. Fisher’s writing is a perfect example of how to engage these issues in all their complexity and nuance. NFP can indeed bring you closer to each other and to God, but it’s far from being a simple process.

The Sinner’s Guide is ultimately an uplifting and encouraging book because Simcha Fisher is at once real about the struggle and hopeful about its ultimate significance. And she doesn’t stop there: Fisher shows us how we can move beyond the hard work of a marriage that is open to life in a responsible way, to grow closer to our spouse and to God in self-sacrificial love and trust. She describes how, by honestly grappling with our spouse’s vulnerabilities, we are called to give ourselves more fully to the other: “Here is what the Church asks of us, beyond the mechanics of what our bodies may and may not do,” she writes. “A man should work with his wife to figure out what he can do for her so that she feels close enough to want to have sex, even when she isn’t biologically primed to seek it out. And the Church asks a woman to work with her husband to figure out what she can do for him so that he feels cared-for and desired even when the stars are not in their favor, whether they’re having sex or not”.

In *The Sinner’s Guide to Natural Family Planning*, Simcha Fisher gently leads practising Catholic couples to a better understanding of the Church’s teaching on NFP, helping us to see it less as a burden and more as a blessing that can help us to

“become expert lovers”, focused on the needs and desires of our spouse. As she shows, this particular cross bears the fruit of a deeper union and great spiritual growth in the long-run, if only we invite God into our relationship to help us.

Ultimately, NFP is not compatible with a secular vision of sex and what sex is for because it requires us to put the other person first, above our own desires, in an act of radical empathy. It acknowledges that men and women are fallen, and offers us a way to salvation: it brings us face-to-face with the needs of our partner, which will ultimately make us holier—if we let it. As Fisher puts it, NFP is hard because we’re in conflict with one another; but in a beautiful twist of fate that reveals the awesome creativity of our Creator’s design, it can also be the means of our salvation. “If men and women are divided, it is through this division that He will bring us back together, to restore us to the complementarity and harmony for which we were designed.”

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Approaching Sex with Reverence

JOHN HENRY CROSBY

von Hildebrand, Dietrich, *In Defense of Purity* (Hildebrand Press, 2017).

von Hildebrand, Dietrich, *Humanae Vitae: Sign of Contradiction* (Hildebrand Press, 2018).

Few works are extensively reviewed when they first appear, far fewer on the occasion of their republication. Dietrich von Hildebrand's *In Defense of Purity* (1927, 2017) and *Humanae vitae: Sign of Contradiction* (1968, 2018) are two of those rare books. The seminal influence of *Purity* on Catholic thought and even on magisterial teaching would justify its ongoing consideration. But it is the potency and evergreen character of both works that truly motivate reviews like the present one.

Formed in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and the personalism of Max Scheler, Hildebrand converted to Catholicism in 1914 at the age of 24. His early immersion in great works of art and music (his father, Adolf von Hildebrand, was an eminent German sculptor) proved to be a powerful driving force in the development of his life of faith. Not only did this sensitize him to see the infinitely greater beauty of the saints and of Jesus, it also sensitized him to the beauty of the virtues.

After his conversion, he spent nearly a decade immersing himself in the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. He also read widely in the Catholic thought of his day. On the theme of love and marriage he was troubled by the many books that approached purity in terms of prohibitions. So he set out in *Purity*—just as Karol Wojtyła did several decades later in his *Theology of the Body*—to develop a positive account of the beauty of purity.

The book is in fact an exploration of purity in married love and in consecrated virginity. This pairing is not accidental, for the inner key to both is the radical gift of

self. Purity is a response of love to the mystery of sex, either by enacting the conjugal union or by providing the basis of the special consecration to Christ in consecrated virginity.

Purity marked the start of what became a lifelong meditation for Hildebrand on issues of love, sex, and marriage, including his books *Marriage* (1929), *Man and Woman* (1966), *Humanae Vitae: A Sign of Contradiction* (1968), and *The Nature of Love* (1971), the latter being the study he considered his most mature philosophical work.

A striking feature of Purity is that Hildebrand lays a foundation for his discussion of purity (and impurity): he begins by reaching back to the personalist fundamentals, exploring the nature of the person, sex, embodiment, affectivity, love, and marriage. This need to “begin anew” surely reflected his dissatisfaction with the scholastic categories with which he was familiar.

Hildebrand begins by looking at sexual experience itself. He finds that sex is distinguished from other bodily experiences, like hunger and thirst, by the fact that it reaches deep into the life of the person. “Every disclosure of sex is the revelation of something intimate and personal,” he says. “It is the initiation of another into our secret.” Sex is thus structurally bound up with the inner life of the person. This explains why sex is linked to shame (in the positive sense of protecting our “mystery”) and why sexual violation (in rape to be sure, but also in lustful marital intercourse) degrades a person in a way that other affronts do not. All of this can only be understood if we approach sex with a particular reverence.

The essential depth, intimacy, and mystery of sex, Hildebrand says, are what give sex its natural orientation to love and self-gift. “We have here to do with an organic unity, deeply rooted in the attributes of wedded love on the one hand, and of the attributes of sex, on the other hand.” This is why he says that any attempt to trivialize sex, using it only for entertainment, inevitably defiles the person.

Hildebrand agrees with the Catholic tradition about the role of the will in sanctioning married love. But his phenomenological commitment to experience leads him to articulate a more explicit appreciation of the role of the heart in forming raw sexual energy into an expression of marital love. “The will by itself can never effect an organic union between sex on the one hand and the heart and mind on the other,” Hildebrand says. “Love alone, as the most fruitful and most intense act, the act which brings the entire spirit into operation, possesses the requisite power to transform thoroughly the entire qualitative texture of an experience.”

A critique sometimes made of personalist thinkers is that they open the door to a person-body dualism by giving such attention to the subjective experience of the person. It is hard to understand how this critique applies to Hildebrand. On the contrary, his entire analysis, beginning with his discovery of the depth dimension of sexual experience, brings to evidence just how deeply person and body are united. This is echoed by the eminent German theologian Leo Cardinal Scheffczyk in his foreword to *Purity*: “If ever the dualism opposed to the Christian conception of the body has been rebutted and completely dispelled, then it is in this work in which Hildebrand bears eloquent witness to the spiritual character of the body in both marriage and virginity.”

A particularly rich strand in *Purity* is its rebuttal of the claim that purity is just temperamental sexual “insensibility” (*Unsinnlichkeit*), that is, the disposition of a “person wholly deaf to the appeal of sex.” Not only does Hildebrand distinguish between a temperament and a virtue, he notes that, “insensibility does not even constitute an environment particularly favorable to the virtue of purity.” This is because purity is an attitude toward sex, so that to be insensitive to it is in a sense to make purity impossible. For Hildebrand, sensibility to sex, even a very powerful one, may permit a much deeper more integrated purity. “The pure man...is the only man who is truly complete. In him a central orientation of human nature is fulfilled.”

Purity also contains Hildebrand’s first articulation of the distinction between the procreative and unitive dimensions of the conjugal act. It is widely thought that Hildebrand was the first to make this distinction; certainly hardly any thinker before Hildebrand made the distinction so thematically. Hildebrand argues powerfully that the personal dimension of love between man and woman is so significant that it must have an intrinsic meaning (union) and not only be characterized by an “instrumental” relation to an end (procreation). In this point too, he is close to Wojtyła who argues the same thing in *Love and Responsibility*.

Hildebrand returned to the question of the ends of the sexual act in his 1968 defense of *Humanae vitae*. There he develops the idea of “superabundant finality” to capture the relation between conjugal union and procreation. Hildebrand is struck by the beauty and fittingness that a new person comes to be out of her parents’ conjugal union. The new life is not just instrumentally linked to the conjugal union, but rather is an overflowing from the inner abundance of spousal love. This inner abundance, says Hildebrand, is why even an infertile conjugal act can have great significance as the embodiment of the spouses’ love.

The centerpiece of his 1968 book is Hildebrand's critique of artificial birth control. He argues not against the interruption of the natural finality of the sexual act (an argument which he thought tended to eclipse the personal dimension) but from the idea that the sexual sphere is uniquely the province of God, who directly intervenes at every conception with the creation of a new human soul. Thus, actively to block conception when it would have occurred constitutes a profound kind of impiety against God as Creator.

It is easy to imagine that this sort of argumentation will fall on deaf ears today. Who still thinks that sex calls for reverence?

But maybe this is why Purity remains so significant precisely in our grave cultural moment. Hildebrand's vivid and experiential account of the depth of sex, its relation to the person's most intimate self, sex as privileged vehicle for self-gift, even his account of sexual defilement through casual sex, perhaps, just perhaps, can break through to those weary and wandering souls who long for more.

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Free Love at the Price of Children's Well-being

CAITLIN DWYER

Helen Alvaré, *Putting Children's Interests First in U.S. Family Law and Policy: With Power Comes Responsibility* (Cambridge University Press, 2017)).

Beginning in the 1960s, the widespread availability of contraceptives resulted in a new worldview in which marriage, sex and babies were no longer intrinsically related. With this came alluring promises of freedom, fulfillment and happiness. The 50th anniversary of *Humanae vitae*—St. Pope Paul VI's controversial reiteration of the Catholic Church's condemnation of contraception—provides a fitting occasion to question the legacy of this altered understanding of human love. Specifically, what are the legal and sociological effects of the U.S. government's promotion of this worldview through judicial decisions, laws, and executive orders?

Helen Alvaré, Professor of Law at George Mason University's Antonin Scalia Law School, addresses these questions as they pertain to child welfare in her latest book: *Putting Children's Interests First in U.S. Family Law and Policy: With Power Comes Responsibility*. Alvaré makes a compelling case that the American government's repeated decisions to value and protect adult sexual expression, without regard to marital status, have been detrimental to children's well-being in the United States.

The first and most substantive section of the book offers a detailed history of the U.S. government's adoption and promotion of the "sexual expressionist position": the "valorizing" of sexual expression while remaining silent on sex's connection to children and the benefits of marriage for children's welfare. Alvaré's expertise in family law is brought to bear as she relates the history of how the Supreme Court has enshrined this stance within the context of due process rights. The process began with *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) in which the high court established a right to contraception for married couples under the guise of a supposed constitutional "right

to privacy.” This right was quickly extended to single people in *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (1972). Both of these cases dissociated sex from both babies and marriage, and connected it to personal liberty alone. *Roe v. Wade* (1973) famously extended the right to privacy to abortion, further reinforcing this separation. *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992) deepened the sexual expressionist stance by connecting contraceptive sex with basic human goods: freedom, empowerment, and participation in society. *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003) granted a constitutional right to sexual expression outside of marriage. *United States v. Windsor* (2013) and *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) gave inherently nonprocreative sex the same legal status as procreative sex, determining that marriage is about adults’ desire for companionship and intimacy, and not at all about the cementing of the relationship of a man and a woman for the sake of the children that may come from their sexual union. Throughout these decisions and others, the court prioritized adults’ right to sexual expression over the child’s interest in having committed parents, thus communicating the unmistakable message that the paramount constitutional value is the sexual “freedom” of adults, not the welfare of children.

The Executive and Legislative branches have mirrored the high court’s stance by promoting expansive contraception programs, abortion rights, and agenda-driven sex education that is silent on marriage and its positive outcomes for children. By enacting these laws, the government has encouraged belief that it is reasonable to expect to have sex without marriage or babies. This has discouraged individuals from delaying sexual activity and undertaking the work of creating stable relationships—relationships that will allow children to thrive—before having sex. These policies have also contributed to a culture of irresponsibility in which unplanned pregnancies are blamed on “failed contraception” rather than deliberate personal choices. While, as Alvaré notes, the government cannot be assigned full responsibility for these trends, the law possesses a unique teaching authority—it enshrines and endorses a particular understanding of reality. These government-sanctioned sexual norms combined with contraceptive failure rates have led to a rise in nonmarital births. That is, births of children who were conceived, and not just born, out of wedlock) and—because a child’s family structure tends to be determined at conception—a rise in children living without married parents.

The second chapter of the book demonstrates why all of this matters. While the reasons are various and complicated, empirical data shows rather conclusively that children conceived outside of marriage are more likely to experience poverty and other economic, educational, emotional and cognitive disadvantages than children

with married parents, due in large part to scarcer financial and human resources. Alvaré references a plethora of books and peer-reviewed journal articles which detail adverse effects of nonmarital parenting (such as Nobel prize-winning economist James Heckman's work on the connection between early family environment and cognitive outcomes), and the benefits of married parenting (like Princeton scholar Sara McLanahan's research on the connection of marriage with increased parenting time and guidance, and extended family support).

As Alvaré shows in the third chapter, the government itself has implicitly acknowledged that nonmarital births are detrimental to child welfare. This acknowledgement is evident in the government's two-fold response to these births: (1) expansive "back door" efforts to provide material benefits to children of single-parent households, and (2) contraception programs aimed at eliminating unintended pregnancies. Alvaré provides an overview of these well-funded efforts, and evaluates their effectiveness. While lauding the government's desire to help children, she concludes, rightly, that despite heavy investment in social welfare programs for these at-risk children (much of the 471 billion dollars that the government spends on children annually is channeled into single-parent homes), these programs simply cannot substitute for an intact family. In the words of the aforementioned Heckman: "families...are the major sources of inequality in student performance." Regarding the second part of the government's child welfare campaign, the federal government has invested more than two billion dollars annually in contraception programs, yet despite this the non-marital birth rate has remained high. Though it is widely available, contraception fails (as a method or due to imperfect use) and many women do not want to use it for a variety of reasons. Thus, despite the government's extensive efforts to prevent pregnancy through contraception—and assist monetarily after children are born out of wedlock—nonmarital births persist and those children struggle to flourish in a variety of ways.

In chapter 4, Alvaré argues that the sexual expressionist position has not only failed many children, but it has hurt many adults as well, particularly women and the poor. She contends that this damage was inevitable since the sexual expressionist worldview is predicated on a false understanding of the human person. We are inherently relational and desire committed, loving relationships. Contraception encourages looser associations both between sexual partners and their children. This does not provide the authentic human love that is the deepest desire of the human heart.

While the typical government response to the problem of non-marital births is new

and better contraceptives, in her final chapter Alvaré offers other proposals. Her primary recommendation is so simple that it seems like common sense, and yet upon closer examination, it constitutes a radical idea: the government needs to reverse course and reconnect sex, babies and marriage on multiple fronts. Alvaré argues that wherever the government speaks about sexual expression, it should also “explicitly articulate children’s needs for stable, marital parenting,” and encourage adult responsibility. Knowing that children’s outcomes are so profoundly shaped by adult choices about sexual expression, we must do all we can as individuals and a society to choose and support healthy relationships that are good for children. We owe it to future generations to do this. The government could aid this effort through sex education which explicitly links sex with procreation and the marital bonds that benefit children, as well as through future judicial decisions, laws and executive orders which give children’s welfare first priority.

Despite being a scholarly text, *Putting Children’s Interests First in U.S. Family Law and Policy* is highly readable because Alvaré has skillfully constructed it as a cohesive narrative history of the development of the sexual expressionist position in law and its socio-cultural effects. A major accomplishment of the text is Alvaré’s re-framing of the contentious contraception debate in terms of child welfare, rather than feminist empowerment. In so doing, she adopts a thesis with broad-based appeal: society should put children first and do what is best for them. And the reality is that a growing body of evidence suggests that the policies currently in place are not what is best. Therefore, we need to change course. Alvaré’s proposals offer a starting point, but her book is not intended to be a detailed policy roadmap to success. Rather it is a clarion call to think more critically about good policy for children and an effective tool for scholars, family-law advocates, policy analysts, and anyone else looking to engage people of all backgrounds in a respectful dialogue about these issues.

The logic of *Humanae vitae*—that marriage, sex and babies inherently “go together”—is often rejected out-of-hand as an oppressive and out-of-touch religious belief. Alvaré makes a powerful legal, sociological, and anthropological case for the validity of the logic behind this teaching, and suggests that taking it seriously makes sense if we want to put children first in family law and policy. Some may criticize the idea of reconnecting sex, babies and marriage as “turning back the clock” on human progress, and women’s progress in particular. However, as C.S. Lewis put it in *Mere Christianity*: “We all want progress, but if you’re on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; in that case, the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive.”

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Kitchen Table Theology: Opening Up the Theology of the Body

SAMUEL FONTANA

Stimpson, Emily, *These Beautiful Bones: An Everyday Theology of the Body* (Emmaus Road Publishing, 2013).

Much has been written about how John Paul II's Theology of the Body allows us to understand the truth of sexuality and conjugal love in our present sex-confused culture. But perhaps our enthusiasm for an effective catechesis has led to an overemphasis that obscures the full purpose of John Paul's teaching. As Emily Stimpson writes in *These Beautiful Bones: An Everyday Theology of the Body*, "When we reduce the theology of the body to a theology of sex, we truncate the lessons John Paul II was trying to teach through those Wednesday audiences. We miss the point and narrow the scope. We end up with a theology with a rather limited application." Life is more than sex. And sex itself can only be understood against the full horizon of life. John Paul II intended his Wednesday audiences to equip us against the reductive tendencies of modern life, to open the full horizon that illuminates the everyday, revealing redemption in the "normal tasks and difficulties of human life." To help us experience this, Stimpson takes a simple and wise approach, focusing our attention not on the theology itself or its obvious immediate implications for conjugal life, but on the ordinary and everyday. Or as I described the book to a friend, it's "Theology of the Body for real life." The book is charming and approachable, but also deeply engaging and even provocative, the kind of read that generates more discussion than answers. It makes for an excellent introduction to the Theology of the Body for the uninitiated. But perhaps more significantly, Stimpson's approach exposes a common error in our practical catechetics: the confusion of culture with catechesis, and the fruitless attempt to substitute the latter for the former.

Before detailing the virtues of the book and showing how it can correct some catechetical one-sidedness. I must confess that my initial reaction to the book was skeptical. A friend had proposed it for a parish reading group. I thought, “Do we really need another popular take on the Theology of the Body?” Without passing judgment on the merits of any specific example, I can say I have never been satisfied with popular presentations or pastoral applications of the Theology of the Body, which tend to follow two courses, both of which leave something to be desired: either (1) they end up merely re-presenting sexual ethics in new language, usually more palatable to a particular audience, or (2) they merely re-present John Paul II’s anthropology, albeit in clearer, less technical language. Of course neither of these are unworthy efforts. Certainly, the Theology of the Body has immediate implications for how we understand *Humane Vitae*, teach sexual ethics, prepare couples for marriage, etc. And, to draw out these implications, John Paul’s language and methodology certainly require some careful analysis and explanation. But it is the “merely” that leaves me unsatisfied. Both approaches stop short of what we need to translate John Paul’s catecheses into lived experience. And this seemed to be what my friend was seeking in our parish reading group: not something to study, but something to help us live our faith. Stimpson’s book, as we found, certainly answered that need, but it also helped me to understand the problem prompting my skepticism.

The problem in attempting to make the Theology of the Body “livable” is not a lack of technical competence with John Paul’s thought, but a misunderstanding of how theology informs lived reality. It’s the confusion between science and art. To think that we can teach our way into more holistic living, we ignore the pedagogy that underlies the Theology of the Body in the first place. God reveals Himself through the living, embodied communion of persons. We receive the truth of ourselves, as it were, by living this truth. The truth of man is translated through a living human culture. This means that we need to shift the conversation from the classroom to the space in which we actually live and work and eat and pray. This is exactly Stimpson’s proposal in *These Beautiful Bones*. We need to shift from catechetics to inculturation, that is, from understanding the teachings to living them creatively and holistically. Of course, no book or study course can explain to us what the Theology of the Body should look like in day-to-day life. And Stimpson does not claim to be able to tell us either. But she does start a conversation (between faith and life) that we can carry on for ourselves. And she does so first by choosing the most provocative starting point: this is not a book about sex, but rather about everything else!

Even at first glance, the book is attractive and provocative. The title and cover art

themselves speak volumes and can help us understand the distinction between catechesis and culture. Both involve cultural artifacts: the title refers to the Capuchin “bone church” in Rome, where the remains of thousands of friars have been artfully arranged in the crypt, which Stimpson insists is not so macabre as “strangely and overwhelmingly beautiful,” signifying thus the truth of the human body and its eternal destiny; the book’s cover presents us with Van Gogh’s study of Jean-François Millet’s “First Steps.” Both the Capuchin crypt and the painting of Van Gogh immediately communicate the truths expressed in the Theology of the Body, but without words. Stimpson tells us that John Paul II’s catechesis makes explicit what was known intuitively by the anonymous architects of the Capuchin crypt: what he says in words, they say in bones. Van Gogh also communicates without words, showing us the body as a sacrament of personal communion and the ethical criterion of human labor. These are, however, works of art, not theology, and the difference cannot be overlooked. To say that John Paul II makes explicit the truths implied in these works of art is only partially true. The truth is explicit, but not embodied; it is clear and distinct as abstraction, but not a living reality. To use Augustinian terms, catechesis is moving from things to signs: making explicit in words what is hidden in reality itself. Inculturation is moving from signs to things: embodying in living forms what is signified in words—the “language of the body” is expressed in how we eat together, dress and groom, give our attention to one another in conversation, attend to children, exercise, work, sleep. Catechesis without inculturation is still waiting to be embodied, made flesh. And culture without catechesis becomes opaque, forgetful of the deep truths that underlie its various expressions. To Van Gogh, Millet’s paintings were prophetic because they revealed something that even in the early days of industrialization had become obscured. They made explicit what lay hidden in the ordinary tasks of life: the theological significance of the body and human labor.^[1] But they were works of culture, not theology. Much has been written over the past decades to help us to understand the biblical-personalist anthropology of the Theology of the Body, to de-mystify its language, and to draw out and apply its theological implications. But without a process of inculturation, we are ultimately left with only words, beautiful abstractions. Stimpson’s book is not a work of theology. But it’s not quite a work of culture either. It stands somewhere in between (between the theologian and the artist), in the space where theology becomes culture.

Theology doesn’t become culture by deduction. Inculturation takes place through a continuous dialogue between what we profess and what we live. *These Beautiful Bones* is an attempt to begin this dialogue. In the first two short chapters, Stimpson contextualizes and summarizes John Paul’s catechesis (an excellent digest in layman’s

terms): “The theology of the body points the way towards new life. It shows us how, even in the midst of a culture that denies the meaning and dignity of the body, we can live lives that anticipate the fullness of redemption.” But then she takes that sorely needed next step: “So the question for us becomes, what does that life look like?” What follows are seven self-contained essays that develop this question towards salient aspects of modern life: (1) labor and leisure, (2) natural and spiritual parenthood, (3) social etiquette, (4) clothing and habits of dress, (5) food, (6) prayer, and (7) technology.

Three things strike me as particularly wise and helpful about her essays. First, while the Theology of the Body provides the foundation, she makes liberal use of observations drawn from social science, literature, and even popular culture. If our theology is true, then it should be verifiable from all angles. And because our theology roots us in reality, it does not dismiss, but rather amplifies other voices in concert with truth. Second, it is clear that what she wants us to examine critically against the light of theology is our own life, not “kids these days” or “the media culture” or anything else that we might employ to distance ourselves from the culture in which we do live, even if reluctantly. Certainly the Theology of the Body arms us against a culture hostile to the truth of our humanity, but it need not make us culture warriors. To live the Theology of the Body means first to recognize that we ourselves must be educated in this new humanity before we can have anything beautiful to hold up against those with a different vision. And third, the conversation she begins is always only that: a beginning that must be continued on our own. Each essay ends with a “postscript,” as if in the course of the discussion we were already anticipating a follow-up question: “The Theology of the Body tells us how to work, how to love, and how to dress. But does it tell us how to decorate our homes or organize our cupboards? . . .”

Stimpson’s essays model the kind of conversation we need to have, a kind of “kitchen table theology,” where a comparison can be made between what we presently live, even in the most ordinary moments, and what we profess. I call it “kitchen table theology” because it is there, at that intimate but communal space that we find the intersection of the various tasks of life. “Kitchen table theology” may not generate immediate answers, but it does move in the right direction by presenting the relevant questions. It is the first step in inculturation, that is, in translating our faith into culture. A “kitchen table theologian” does not preach so much as provoke by laying before our eyes the difficulties and sometimes glaring dissonance we encounter in our attempt to live the Theology of the Body. Stimpson points particularly to a “crisis of distraction,” fed by the ever-expanding pressures of media and information technology, which shows itself even in what we consider the most meaningful spaces

of life:

Barely finding time to sit down and eat, let alone pray, exercise and spend leisurely evening in the company of family and friends, many of us feel as if we are sacrificing the most important things in life on the altar of perpetual busyness. And many of us are.

Is it possible for any of us live the Theology of the Body in times such as our own?
“Possible? Yes. Easy? No.”

In my present work in seminary formation, I see firsthand the tendency to engage the Theology of the Body in a reduced way, without seeing its fuller implications for life. Many of my students, understandably, avidly search the Theology of the Body for language and concepts to frame their understanding of “virginity for the sake of the kingdom.” And they are not disappointed. But for all their enthusiasm, I wonder if they are not coming away with what Stimpson calls a “theology of rather limited application.” I worry about the young man who speaks fervently about how those called to virginity for the sake of the kingdom can nevertheless make an integral gift of self while spending his own Saturday nights binge-watching Netflix like any other young adult. In other words, my seminarian’s most pressing need is not an adequate language for understanding human sexuality, but a more humane relationship with technology and more regular manual labor. He would do well to follow Stimpson’s lead, not beginning and ending with sex, but widening his view to the ordinary and mundane where the “language of the body” has become obscured. He, like the rest of us, needs a way to revive and relearn the language of the body in practice. The problem my students face is not so much moral or theological, but cultural incoherence. *These Beautiful Bones* speaks to that incoherence: even as it probes what is broken or dissonant, it helps us to search out and hold before our eyes what is beautiful.

[1] His first experience of Millet’s works was nothing short of mystical: “When I entered the room in Hôtel Drouot where they were exhibited, I felt something akin to: ‘Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground’” (*Letter to Theo van Gogh* [29 June 1875]).

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Making a Case for Humanae Vitae

WILLIAM R. HAMANT

Coffin, Patrick, *The Contraception Deception: Catholic Teaching on Birth Control* (2nd. ed.; Emmaus Road Publishing, 2018).

Patrick Coffin's approachable and engaging text, *The Contraception Deception*, is written not to develop new teaching, but to present the teaching of the Church to the broader culture. The text would also serve the educator well for use in the classroom. Coffin writes in language accessible to most undergraduates, with an organization that can be followed easily.

For those who struggle with the Church's teaching, or who reject it entirely, or who accept it but cannot articulate it, Coffin insists on the importance not only of the mind, but—perhaps even more so—of the will and the heart. “In this delicate arena [of Catholic sexual morality], intellectual arguments alone are generally useless in the persuasion department.” One could say that in this arena, conviction requires conversion. Coffin thus concludes many of his chapters with short prayers, to personalize what could otherwise be a mere academic exercise.

His first two chapters are historical, exploring how certain portions of the Christian world quite recently came to accept contraception as acceptable or even good, and how he himself came to recognize it as evil. Culturally and spiritually, he argues, the acceptance of contraception brought with it the worship of the “false god” of the “sterilized orgasm,” which steers the life-giving and unifying action of sexual intercourse away from the Author of life as it closes the couple off from the complete gift of self to the other.

The third chapter was, for me, the most surprising. I've taught *Humanae vitae* a great number of times; but paragraphs 4–6, which proclaim the authority of the Church to teach the requirements of the Natural Law, are not paragraphs that I have ever

focused on, let alone made the starting point of an exploration of the teaching. People should become convinced that the Church teaches what it does about sexuality because it is true, not that it is true because the Church says it. But for Coffin, the whole crisis over the acceptance of the Church's teachings on sexual morality is not at root a crisis about the Church; it is a crisis of accepting. The order inscribed in human sexuality is not something that is up for majority vote, determinable by consensus; it's an essential characteristic of our being, which is a gift from God. And because it is a gift, is it something that must be received to be lived.

Responding to the objection that Scripture is silent when it comes to contraception, Coffin's fourth chapter shows, first, that there are specific instances in which the Bible decisively condemns actions which can only be understood as "contraceptive." More than that, however, this chapter's main purpose is to lay out the worldview of the Bible, in light of which the abhorrence of contraception should clearly follow. With Scriptural passages that are abundantly and masterfully presented, Coffin shows how Scripture thinks "maximally," not "minimally," about the good of children, who are a blessing and whose ultimate Source is God.

Chapter five considers the ultimate theological grounding of the Church's teaching on contraception by arguing that human beings are called to love in a way that images God (Gen 1:26-27), Who is a Trinity of Persons. In its physicality—and not in spite of it—the sexual union of husband and wife is an intimate sharing in the creative power of the supreme Author of life. For this reason, Coffin refers to sexual union as a "natural holy of holies" in which God's presence dwells. Because of the sacredness of human sexuality, contraceptive acts are particularly evil. Indeed, he considers them a kind of idolatry. Why would this be the case? It is because in any human action, "pleasure" can never be the goal (the "end" or purpose, in the language of moral theology). Rather, human action must be directed towards a "good," which, when attained, then brings pleasure or joy. The pleasure that the husband and wife experience during the authentic gift of self is good precisely because it comes as a result of giving themselves. But contraception makes it impossible to give themselves completely, which by default makes pleasure the "end" of their action. Thus, if the true gift of self in marital union is a kind of imaging and worship of the Trinitarian God, the contraception becomes "the main liturgical action of worship of the false god" of our times.

The theological foundation and liturgical implications of contraception can be viewed Christologically, as well. Citing Augustine, who spoke of the Cross as the "marriage

bed” of Christ on which His act of total self-giving effected new life for His bride, the Church, Coffin asks, “What kind of grotesque sacrilege would contraception signify? It would be Jesus ensuring in secret that His death on the cross was faked, that it did not really save us.”

Marital love, in sum, is governed by the Trinitarian and Christological “law” of self-gift. And failure to live according to this truth has natural consequences: “a harvest of impotence, sub-replacement population levels, and a high divorce rate.” Upon this theological foundation Coffin builds his treatment of the philosophical concept at the heart of the Church’s condemnation of contraception: the Natural Law.

Behind the widespread dissent of so many theologians on sexual morality lies a rejection of the very notion of the Natural Law. Coffin does a fine job discussing the main philosophical causes of this dissent, but also recognizes that the roots of this dissent (e.g., the “indifferent” will of Ockham’s voluntarism, the Cartesian body as “pure extension,” etc.) have sunk so deeply into our worldview that they are hardly noticed. His defense of the Natural Law is particularly aware of this. But it also reaches surprisingly, into Scriptural territory, laying out the worldview contained in the Bible, especially its view of the human person as a unity of body and soul, and the sacrality of the body, which is spoken of in Scripture as a “temple.”

In light of the Natural Law, knowable through the voice of conscience, we are directed through the ordering of our nature to our ultimate perfection in the love of God. Coffin’s treatment of conscience is orthodox, yet brief. More than the meaning of conscience itself, he emphasizes the need for caution when appealing to this “inner room” in which the voice of God is meant to be heard. Conscience, he rightly warns, is not infallible, and the Natural Law needs the authority of the Church to be interpreted rightly. Nevertheless, some more space here could be given to developing a better overview of conscience itself. I can imagine some readers wondering what, precisely, conscience is, and why I should trust it if it is so wounded and needs so much help.

Little needs to be said here regarding his chapter discussing the claim that a “population explosion” threatens the planet. Against such a view, he offers a number of fascinating and compelling statistics, suggesting that not only is our planet more than capable of sustaining the present population, but also that we are facing immanent societal crises because of a collapsing birthrate. Of greater interest are the final three chapters, treating, respectively, surgical sterilization, assisted reproductive technologies, and the moral difference between Natural Family Planning and artificial birth control.

What should a couple do if they come to realize that a past sterilization procedure was wrong? How do they “repent,” if repentance means turning away from one’s sin and refusing to continue to “benefit” from it any longer; but they are unable to undo the procedure for medical or financial reasons? Coffin offers some prudent advice: Prayerfully consider whether a sterilization reversal is possible or feasible in one’s own situation. If so, undergo such a procedure, and welcome what children God may bless one with; if not, consider practicing periodic continence as if the procedure had not happened, so that the virtue that such discipline makes possible might also bless one’s marriage.

Most helpful in my view were the questions that Coffin suggests we might raise to a person who confides in us that he or she has undergone sterilization. Is their marriage really stronger after the sterilization? Did they consider the possibility that someday their financial situation might be better and that they might want to welcome more children into their family? Did they consider the possibility that their current spouse might die and that they would then enter any second marriage unable to give that new spouse the gift of children? Such questions are meant gently to help the person begin to face the full reality of what has been done.

While Coffin’s penultimate chapter is not directed towards contraception directly, it does treat of an issue that is built upon the same logic: the emergence of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs). If the two meanings of the sexual act are separable, he shows, then both contraception and ARTs follow. This chapter stands as an accessible introduction to those aspects of medical ethics relating to procreation, explaining some of the most common forms of ARTs, and why the Church teaches that they are immoral. In addition, it summarizes the basic tenets of Catholic medical ethics, such as the teaching that medicine should assist the natural order in achieving its ends, rather than replacing the natural order.

As with contraception, Coffin correctly identifies what exactly is wrong with assisted reproductive technologies: not the end of achieving a pregnancy, but the means employed to achieve that end. And the means, especially at present, have terrible consequences, particularly the discarding of “extra” embryos or the post-implantation abortion of “excess multiples.” One could object that such atrocities are caused by the inherent limitations of present techniques. But Coffin recognizes that the evil of ARTs that replace the natural order lies in the logic of the technology itself: the failure to receive the child as a gift. Children have a right to originate from a conjugal union.

In his chapter on Natural Law, Coffin had mentioned briefly the misapplication of the

so-called “principle of totality,” to which *Humanae vitae* alludes in nos. 3 and 17. Every sexual act, the Church teaches, must be “ordained in itself to bring forth new human life.” Yet many who believe themselves to be faithful Catholics are under the impression that their contracepted sexual acts don’t represent “closure” to new life, because these couples do, in fact, desire children in their marriages—just not at the present time. In the Natural Law chapter, Coffin had largely left unaddressed the question of why individual marital acts must remain ordained in themselves to new life, and not simply their marriage as a totality. His final chapter, however, provides that answer.

By using a series of analogies (dieting, speaking, praying, protesting, wedding planning), Coffin is able to show how the evil of contraception is located within the act itself, and not in the intention, or circumstances; and this, without ever invoking the technical language of the “sources” of the morality of an action. A further point that I found particularly commendable is that, although he uses the language of the “contraceptive mentality,” he never once implies that one’s “mentality” (or intention) can turn NFP into contraception. In other words, he recognizes that these are two fundamentally different types of moral actions, and that their “species” is not determinable by the mindset of the agents.

Coffin writes with the authority of one who has struggled with the question of contraception personally, and who has long experience presenting the teachings of the Church to audiences who may or may not be deeply theologically formed. Yet he can hardly be said to remain in the theological shallows. Indeed, Coffin brought to mind Josef Pieper’s praise for Aquinas, who, as a teacher, “sees reality just as the beginner can see it, with all the innocence of a first encounter, and yet at the same time with the matured powers of comprehension and penetration that the cultivated mind possesses.”^[1]

[1] *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 95. Emphasis in original.

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Hitched Versus Hooking Up

MICHAEL ROESCH

Timothy P. O'Malley, *Off the Hook: God, Love, Dating, and Marriage in a Hookup World* (Ave Maria Press, 2018).

It is news to no one that young adults approach relationships differently today than their counterparts did 50 or even 15 years ago. In the last half-century, the institution of marriage has suffered one blow after another, culminating in a society where fewer and fewer people seem interested in any committed relationship at all, let alone the sacramental union of husband and wife. Concerns about the rising divorce rate gave way to a rise in cohabitation before marriage, and then an increase in the average age at which couples marry. Now, though, as more and more young people opt to forgo marriage altogether, the rituals of courtship in our culture have eroded as young people choose instead casual sex or other forms of physical intimacy with minimal communication and no commitment: hooking up.

Nevertheless, for those of us who have spent time working with young adults, it is clear that there is still some attraction to marriage. In my six years working in campus ministry, one of the most popular events was the Newman Center's annual Valentine's Day tradition of hosting a retired professor who would tell the story of the love he had shared with his late wife and for whom he had left his career to become the primary caregiver as she was dying from ALS. This was not simply an idealized romantic story, but a glimpse into the real beauty of marriage, with all its struggles. Many tears were shed, and students came to trust and seek out the professor for advice on relationships, discernment, and all sorts of life questions. He was not there to preach or moralize, though of course he gave his frank opinion on things like chastity when asked, but he probably did as much to help young people with the struggle for purity as anyone I know. It was clear to anyone in the room at that Newman Center event: members of this generation, despite having access to all sorts of depersonalized pleasure at their fingertips, are still drawn to the sacramental reality of marriage at some deep level.

In *Off the Hook: God, Love, Dating, and Marriage in a Hookup World*, Timothy O'Malley takes this same approach of using the simple beauty and joys of marriage to draw people away from hookup culture. O'Malley relies on his own discussions with college students about the Sacrament of Marriage to propose to young people that marriage—and in a particular way the liturgical Rite of Celebrating Matrimony—is itself a medicinal “counter-liturgy” to hookup culture. Much like the wise professor at the Newman Center, O'Malley presents the full Catholic view of marriage simply but with an appealing tone, with an eye toward changing hearts as much as minds. While O'Malley does take time to discuss the state of things on the ground—alcohol abuse, pornography, Tinder, and so forth—and contrast it to the Christian understanding of love (with particular reference to the writings of John Paul II and Dietrich von Hildebrand), this book is not primarily a sociological study, nor a treatise on moral or sacramental theology.

Instead, *Off the Hook* can best be viewed as an introduction to the Sacrament of Matrimony for young Christians who have grown up immersed in today's culture. In addition to this audience, O'Malley proposes three others toward whom the book is aimed: engaged or recently married couples, longer-married couples seeking to enrich their own love and form their children in it, and those involved in marriage preparation at the diocesan or parish level. I would add one more: even among informed Catholics, the book could serve as a helpful discussion of the wedding liturgy. With the decline in the number of people being married in the Church, it is not at all uncommon for Catholics to grow up never having attended a Catholic wedding Mass. In all cases, O'Malley avoids anything approaching polemics, instead mostly letting the Church's ritual and understanding of marriage speak for itself as he proposes it in an engaging way to men and women weary of hookup culture.

O'Malley's work is very approachable, interspersing anecdotes from his own life as he moves through the marriage rite. He uses each point of the wedding Mass as a springboard to demonstrate the value of authentic married love, and often counters popular misconceptions about Church teaching. For example, in the chapter discussing some of the options for readings in the wedding Mass, he provides a simple yet effective discussion of Ephesians 5. But perhaps the most striking part of the wedding liturgy in contradistinction to hookup culture is the Act of Consent. O'Malley unpacks the Catholic wedding vows and exchange of consent with reference to communication and consecration, and to sexual intimacy in consummation. This is an especially rich explanation in layman's terms of what it means to say that marriage is a Sacrament, and why Catholics believe that it is indissoluble:

The act of consent shared by husband and wife is no ordinary promise. It is akin to the moment of Baptism when the human being enters into a new relationship with the triune God. It is akin to the Eucharist, when bread and wine are transubstantiated, consecrated, into Christ's Body and Blood. The love of husband and wife is sanctified, transformed in order to become an image of Christ and the Church.

This account of consent starkly contrasts with the discussion of "affirmative consent" that is ubiquitous in university freshman orientation programs and has become a watchword in the media coverage of sexual assault in the past several years. Whereas the consent of hookup culture is a contract for the pleasure of a single night, the consent of marriage unfolds the full proper end of sexual intimacy:

This sacramental account of intercourse in marriage is healing of the act of sex. For those reared in the creeds of hookup culture, sex is not a sign of anything at all. It is meant purely for pleasure, for enjoyment, for the sake of the orgasm alone....The act of consent in the Sacrament of Marriage is about a deepening of communion. In the hookup, sex and love are separated. Sacramental marriage not only unites sex and love through the communion of husband and wife, but it goes further, inviting the couple to see their love as participating in God's own communion.

An even deeper analysis and sharper contrast between hookup culture and marriage would have been welcome, especially on other issues similar to consent where the Church's ritual and language most directly provides an attractive counter-narrative. However, this would certainly take the book beyond the scope of a 130-page overview designed simply to lead young people to a greater love. Instead, O'Malley pushes readers toward further discussion with exercises and discussion questions at the end of each chapter, making it even more suitable for a book group with college students or those in proximate marriage preparation. This way, O'Malley sets the table and encourages continued conversation on difficult questions, perhaps with the guidance of a campus minister or retreat leader.

The cheapening of sex and the affront to human dignity perpetrated by hookup culture has left countless young people deeply wounded. *Off the Hook* offers them simply what Christ offers them as a healing balm: his own sacrificial love as communicated through the Sacraments of the Church. Timothy O'Malley has provided an important resource to reach into this destructive piece of our culture with a

glimpse of the reality of love that we all crave.

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Why Are There Sex Hormones in the Water?

MARY SHIVANANDAN

Jay, Anthony G., *Estrogenation: How Estrogens Are Making You Fat, Sick, and Infertile* (Tallahassee, FL: Pyramidine Publishing, 2017).

The motto of the publisher of Anthony G. Jay's book, *Estrogenation: How Estrogens Are Making You Fat, Sick, and Infertile* is: "We put the 'fun' in "functional." For this reader, these words are possibly misplaced, for the heavily documented message of this book is far from fun. The light tone used by the author, including in the account of significant events in his own life—such as fishing expeditions, courtship and marriage to his wife—belie the life-threatening nature of his conclusions.

Perhaps our society is not ready for the message that various estrogen products, not least the artificial estrogens used in hormonal birth control, are not filtered from the water we drink. Like secondhand smoke, they contribute to obesity, depression, cancer and infertility for all of us, not only in this generation, but in generations to come. This is not to say that Jay, who is currently a researcher with the Mayo Clinic, does not pull his punches. In the introduction, he says "estrogens"—i.e., artificial versions of estrogens which are the female sex hormones—"are a clear and present danger and estrogens relate to most of our modern health epidemics." Elsewhere he notes that "the problem is immense." Still, the catchy presentation may have the effect of minimizing the seriousness of the threat.

The first part of the book is called "Indecent Exposures." Here we get a sense of the author's methodology. First, he gives what he calls the "IRS 10 list" or the "Ill Reproductive System List." This list includes "something scientists call 'male feminization.'" Part Two treats of the rising disease in which estrogens are implicated. In Part Three he considers how estrogens "pass on" infertility, obesity and cancer to the next generation.

Estrogens bind or stick to estrogen receptors situated throughout the body. When an estrogen, a steroid hormone, enters the bloodstream the estrogen receptor cells will change. Jay's book does not give an exhaustive list of external sources of estrogen, but singles out weed killers, soap, fragrances, sunscreen, soy, red food coloring and plastics. Some of these substances contain natural estrogens, others artificial. Among the most egregious of estrogens is EE2, the artificial estrogen of the birth control pill. While all the other estrogens can be damaging, one of the problems with EE2 is that it "was intentionally designed to. . . activate the estrogen receptor and stay in the body longer than natural estrogen." As to the gravity of the influence of EE2, Jay notes that 100 million women worldwide use the birth control pill. While many are single, it is worth pointing out that a staggering 60% of married women use the birth control pill.

The issue arises as to how leading institutions in our society can endorse products that are so harmful. Here the author digresses to consider the influence of the funding for scientific research, which, at academic institutions, comes mostly from the U.S. government or large corporations. "Begging for money is literally a 40-hour week for most scientists," he charges. It is all about money, says Jay: "No money equals no research. And money is the elephant in the estrogenic room because selling estrogens generates massive profits." According to Jay, corporations and government are not solely to blame. Since consumers demand the products like EE2 or products made of soy, the "best" corporations merely provide what they want. Jay also delves into publication bias. Not only is there a climate of "publish or perish," but the peer review process is far from neutral. Jay describes scientific publication as "a vast marketing machine," because "everybody—and I mean everybody—has an agenda when writing scientific work." He himself is wary of published articles that promote or favor estrogens. He also notes that scientific errors are increasing, since many studies cannot be repeated, which calls into question the original research. Nevertheless, Jay does look at numerous studies on estrogens, albeit with the above caveats.

He goes on to list seven major health problems that can be traced back to the presence of estrogens, particularly in the water. This is important, he says, "because the health of your family. . . is on the line," especially with the continual rise of estrogenic usage over the past 20 years. The first negative effect listed is obesity, since estrogen loves to hide out in the fat cells of the body. Throughout this section Jay uses the term "man boobs." Secondly, Jay points out that "there is a strong connection between estrogens and depression." Thousands of studies have been done linking obesity with depression, arising from hormonal imbalance, not just from body image. For example,

Indian suicide rates have been skyrocketing, especially among farmers. Jay questions if that may not be due to the massive use of chemical sprays on crops. Other estrogens have also been linked to depression, such as phthalates and BPA, natural estrogens used in plastics and, of course, there is a strong link between birth control usage and depression.

Next on the list is what Jay calls the Estrogenic Sexual Assault, the first of which is “Low T”—that is, testosterone. Both estrogen and testosterone are steroid hormones built from cholesterol in the body. For thousands of years, he says, human T levels have been declining so that facial shape has changed, resulting in a more “feminine skull.” However, there has been a massive drop in testosterone levels in recent history, which coincides with the increased use of estrogens. For example, the T levels of a middle-aged male in the 1940s was double of the T levels of today’s male. As for women, low T levels decrease sexual desire. Another surprising result: the study found a significant drop of T levels in boys and men from drinking whole milk which contains cow estrogen. Sperm counts have also dropped more than 50 percent in the past 50 years.

The next negative effect may be implicated in society’s transgender challenges (this is the reviewer’s suggestion, not Jay’s). Scientists refer, on a regular basis, to the “feminization of males.” Estrogen exposure negatively affects both men and women. Puberty in girls is occurring at younger and younger ages with premature breast development. Jay ascribes the decline in college admissions of men mainly to estrogenic exposure: “In 1950 about 70 percent of undergraduate students were male. By 1970 this number was about 60 percent. Next by 1980 undergraduates were equally men and women. By 2006 undergraduates were very nearly 40 percent male and 60 percent female.” More boys today, he thinks, are apathetic due to changes in the brain as a result of estrogens. “To put it frankly, we males today are being ‘feminized’ via estrogens, especially in developed countries.” He concludes that the changes are especially noticeable in children and that their behavior is affected for life.

Other negative effect of estrogens are well known: cancer and blood clots. “Together with breast cancer. . . blood clots are generally the most common side effects of birth control.” The decrease in the risk of ovarian cancer, does not, according to Jay, offset the increased risk of breast cancer. Teenagers given oral contraception are particularly vulnerable to breast cancer.

Part Three of Jay’s book on Epigenetics is perhaps the most troubling part of all: it deals with future generations. “Epigenetics,” he says, “is the study of marks that are

made to your DNA.” For example, reproductive infertility begins in the first generation, but is higher in the second. It can even reach to the third generation. Similarly, a disposition to obesity and cancer can be passed down to offspring. The estrogen used in the birth control pill, EE2, has also been implicated in lower sperm counts. Jay concludes: “To sum it up, fertility is clearly at risk where estrogenic burdens are high and where estrogenic burdens are sustained. My fertility is at risk and so is your fertility. So is your children’s fertility.”

The final chapter is devoted to what you can do to protect yourself. Jay calls this the most important chapter. Estrogenic effects do not happen suddenly. Rather like the frog that does not notice the heat of the water until it boils, the damage to the body is slow. He lists three prime strategies: (1) increase intake of fish oil, (2) learn natural family planning (“The World Health Organization [WHO] is even raising a skull and crossbones flag here by certifying certain EE2 oral contraception drugs as ‘Group 1 Carcinogens’”) and (3) reduce the estrogens already stored in the body’s fat cells, especially through heat treatments like the sauna. Before introducing his three avoidance plans, he recommends the use of an “Estrogen free” label on products. Next, he recommends scientists get involved by flagging, for example, “corporate bias within studies and funding.” He adds, “For scientists and physicians, it should go without saying that promoting estrogenic products under the ruse of ‘science’ needs to stop.” A frequent practice that comes to mind here is advising patients that birth control pills reduce acne. Teenagers, he warns, should not be taking EE2, period.

Jay then proposes three avoidance plans: gold, silver and bronze. In the gold plan, there are 36 items to avoid, among them plastic toys, foods canned in metal, all lavender products, oral contraception (here again we find a plug for natural family planning), all soy products and red food dyes. The silver and bronze plans are still formidable, though less comprehensive. Personally, I would find using all these avoidance strategies a challenge, although I already avoid processed foods and buy organic whenever possible. As a result of reading the book, I now use paper instead of plastic to heat food in the microwave, and try to avoid more of the products that Jay highlights. To be effective, Jay’s proposed strategies would have to become a way of life. Our society has done much to reduce the negative effects of plastic but, it seems, for the most part, the birth control pill is off limits. Those who adopt natural family planning find many benefits to their marriage from monitoring their fertility, so that it truly becomes a “way of life” and at the same time, protects the health of children and grandchildren. Fortunately, NFP has been part of our married life and, as a scientist specializing in his retirement years in infrared detection of breast cancer, my

husband was well aware of the carcinogenic effect of birth control pills.

Everyone should be aware of the estrogenic dangers the book describes. Anthony G. Jay has done us a real service in exposing them.

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