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Adam and Eve After the Pill

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Mary Eberstadt, *Adam and Eve After the Pill: Paradoxes of the Sexual Revolution* (Ignatius Press, 2012, 275 pages).

Mary Eberstadt's *Adam and Eve After the Pill* is a satisfying, albeit disturbing, read for those already convinced of the perils of tinkering with the divinely designed structure of human sexuality and procreation. One would hope it would be similarly disturbing for those who herald the so-called advances of the sexual revolution, given the clarity with which Ms Eberstadt lays bare the sociological evidence of the various damages wrought by modern contraception and the accompanying "destigmatization of all varieties of nonmarital sexual activity" (p. 12).

The book, in large part a collection of essays from other publications, opens with the assertion that the "amputation" of sexual activity from the procreation of new life "has proved a disaster for many men and women" and, interestingly, that "its weight has fallen heaviest on the smallest and weakest shoulders in society - even as it has given more strength to those already strongest and most predatory" (p. 16). It is to be noted that Mary Eberstadt is not blind to the purported success stories of the sexual revolution - the childless female CEO unencumbered by family demands; the happy couple well-off and child-free vacationing in exotic locales instead of surrounded by children playing in their local campground. Armed with secular, scientific data (often ignored, she points, out by many intellectuals and academics), as well as common sense, Ms Eberstadt uncovers the hidden and not-so-hidden victims of the sexual revolution, highlighting its specific effects on women, men, children, and college-age young adults, respectively. Frequently her arguments are bolstered by thoughts and details pulled from the work of those who are unlikely to want to make a case friendly to the Catholic Church or her allies in the stand against contraception, which further serves to convince the reader of the pervasiveness of the problems at hand.

Women, she says, are at the heart of the paradoxical effects of the sexual revolution. Rather than reveling in their satisfying liberation from the bonds of the sexual act's natural and normal effects, women, both single and married, are suffering from, at best, a lingering unhappiness and dissatisfaction with their relationships, and, at worst, are using divorce as the trapdoor to escape from their sexless, miserable marriages. Ms Eberstadt suggests that two bad ideas may be smoldering beneath the ruins that many relationships are in these days - the theory of gender neutrality on the one hand, and the purported "innocence" of pornography on the other. Of pornography specifically she meditates: "[there is a] sexual flood - a torrent of poisonous imagery, beginning now for many in childhood, that has engulfed women and men, only to beach them eventually somewhere alone and apart, far from the reach of one another" (p. 53).

Children and young adults are similarly suffering, although the wave of "pedophilia chic" that rolled

through the 1970s to the 1990s seems to have come to a screeching halt in the wake of the Catholic church sex-scandals. College-age young people have not been as fortunate; on campus the fallout of the sexual revolution can be observed as though in a "petri dish": the clearly toxic mix of binge drinking and the "hookup culture" has served to empower the strong (often the drunk, sexually aggressive man) and penalize the weak (frequently the even-more-drunk young woman). Eberstadt suggests three possible solutions to parents concerned about "Toxic U" - first, opt out, and send one's child to a religious school; second, for those for whom such a solution is not practical, support the campus counter-culture; and third (a thought-and-argument-provoking suggestion), bring back early marriage (p. 92).

One highlight of Eberstadt's book is her use of incisive personal observation as an intelligent person living in the midst of the situation she is describing. This is particularly true in two fascinating chapters in which she reflects on the Nietzsche-esque "transvaluation of values" occurring in today's society. Two entertaining vignettes detail the flip-flopping attitudes on the subjects of pornography and tobacco. Whereas Betty, a fictional but typical woman of the 1950s and an occasional smoker, does not consider tobacco "a moral issue in its own right" but rather "a matter of individual taste" (p. 123), she considers the rarely-encountered phenomenon of pornography to be "smut" that is "morally wrong" (p. 124). Her fictional granddaughter, Jenny, a culturally typically thirty-something living in the 2000s, however, has attitudes that are exactly the reverse. While she would "never dream of putting a cigarette in her mouth" and considers those who create cigarettes "borderline evil" (p. 125), she is somewhat more ambivalent towards pornography, which she encounters much more frequently than her grandmother Betty. Although not a fan of it herself, she "does not think [it] is morally wrong" when made by and for consenting adults (p. 125).

Ms Eberstadt sees reason to hope in the similarities, pointing out that just as tobacco's ubiquitousness in the 1950s gave way to increasing popular disdain, there is the chance that a future society may similarly turn a cold shoulder to pornography, as well it should given her well-documented assertions about the damages wrought by smut on the whole of society and on men in particular. (She knows that of which she speaks, as the co-editor of a widespread, empirical study on the "Social Costs of Pornography," published in 2010 and cited in the book.)

The timing of Ms. Eberstadt's book is striking, to say the least, considering the Church's current struggle against the Obama administration's claims that contraceptives are a vital part of women's preventative *health care*. Anyone who continues to insist in such a vein has missed the "ongoing empirical vindication in one arena after another" of Pope Paul VI's 1968 promulgation *Humanae vitae* (p. 158), the encyclical which upheld the long-standing Christian opposition to artificial birth control. In the 1970s and 80s, the Catholic Church suffered through a few decades of post-Vatican II turmoil and confusion, yet as the years go by more and more people, young people in particular, are noting the negative fallout of society-wide contraceptive use.

What is more, in the wake of the current insurance-funding challenge issued to all Catholic institutions from the US Department of Health and Human Services, it seems that the Church no longer has the luxury of sweeping the Church's teachings about sexuality and contraception under the rug to avoid ruffling the feathers of faithful yet selectively-dissenting church-goers. Upon pondering the evidence of this book, one wonders whether (to use Ms. Eberstadt's own word, paradoxically) the social, psychological, and physiological cost of the contraceptive-spurred sexual revolution could be the problematic "elephant in the room" dragging down both the health care system and society as a whole.

