

BOOK REVIEW

*Adam and Eve after the Pill: Paradoxes of the Sexual Revolution.* By Mary Eberstadt. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012. 171 pp. \$19.95. ISBN 978-1-5861-7627-3.

In *Adam and Eve after the Pill: Paradoxes of the Sexual Revolution*, Mary Eberstadt argues that modern contraception might be the central fact of our time, “in the sense that it is hard to think of any other whose demographic, social, behavioral, and personal fallout has been as profound” (11). This “technological severing of nature from nurture” (14) made the Sexual Revolution a much stronger social and personal force than it otherwise would have been. She defines the Sexual Revolution as “the ongoing destigmatization of all varieties of nonmarital sexual activity, accompanied by a sharp rise in such sexual activity, in diverse societies around the world (most notably, in the most advanced)” (12).

As Eberstadt states, most people are pleased with the Sexual Revolution and its perceived effects. Women have more personal and professional opportunities because they can control their fertility. Men can engage in sexual activity without being responsible for the women they mate with or for any resulting offspring. Children have better lives because, in smaller families, they receive more emotional and material benefits than in larger families (14-15).

Eberstadt examines a wide range of empirical, literary, and other evidence about the results of the Sexual Revolution. Her goal is to understand the effects of the Sexual Revolution (15). The evidence she presents confirms her propositions that the Sexual Revolution “has proved a disaster for many men and women, and its weight has fallen heaviest on the smallest and weakest shoulders in society—even as it has given extra strength to those already strongest and most predatory” (15-16). The popular support of the Revolution is not based on an accurate interpretation of the facts.

Eberstadt cites an extensive amount of evidence from academic sources and cultural observers, by both those in favor of, and against, the Sexual Revolution. In each of four chapters she deals with the impact of the Revolution on a separate segment of the population: women (subtitled, *What Does Woman Want?*), men (subtitled, *Peter Pan and the Weight of Smut*), children (subtitled, *The Pedophilia Chic, Then and Now*), and young adults (subtitled, *What to Do about Toxic U?*).

In the chapter “What is the Sexual Revolution Doing to Women,” Eberstadt summarizes evidence from about twenty sources. Her central issue is “the paradox of declining female happiness and unprecedented freedoms enjoyed by women” (16-17). If women are the beneficiaries of the Sexual

Revolution, why are they not happy? Women consistently complain, in this post-pill age, that they are under too much pressure (motherhood, marriage, and breadwinning), that many of today's marriages are "a sexual desert," and that romance is no longer present in marriages (44-46). She cites a study done by economists Stevenson and Wolfers using the General Social survey. Summarizing their findings, she says,

given the many social and economic transformations of modernity that would appear to benefit women...one would reasonably expect to see those who are the beneficiaries of these trends registering increased happiness. Instead...the reverse seems to be true. Over the past thirty-five years, 'women's happiness has fallen both absolutely and relative to men's in a pervasive way among groups, such that women no longer report being happier than men and, in many instances, now report happiness that is below that of men.'" (47)

Eberstadt argues that gender neutrality and an increase in pornography resulting from the Sexual Revolution led to women's unhappiness.

In two additional chapters, Eberstadt draws comparisons between the reversal of attitudes towards sex and food and those towards tobacco and pornography. She uses extensive evidence in these chapters also.

The real strengths of this book are found in its theoretical foundation and in her interpretation of the evidence she has amassed. In Chapter 1, "The Intellectual Backdrop: The Will to Disbelieve," Eberstadt draws a lengthy comparison between the Cold War and the Sexual Revolution. In both, there is a powerful will to disbelieve the negative results of a strong social force. For instance, in spite of data exposing the negative impact of communism, many social scientists argued distinctions between communism and capitalism were negligible, or that the two acted in much the same manner. Even though the evidence was available, the interpretation of the evidence was not accurate.

She argues that in the case of the Sexual Revolution, the same phenomenon exists. The record on the benefits of marriage and monogamy, the "happiness" studies, the work done with children from broken homes, new definitions of the family, selective abortion of females, the courses in self-defense for women, all point to the negative impacts of the Revolution. Yet, "it's not that these scholars are unaware of the evidence; it's rather that they feel forced to explain it away" (27). Eberstadt likens this denial of the evidence and continued support of the Revolution to People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (theoretically) publishing "magazines that were half pitches for vegetarianism and half glossy pages of pork and beef and chicken simmering in sumptuous sauces. If something like that were to happen, people would notice the contradiction" (32). But people do not want to see the contradiction in the Sexual

Revolution, because they want to believe they can have “sex on any terms without penalty” (33).

Eberstadt’s most significant writing occurs in Chapter 8, “The Vindication of *Humanae Vitae*.” Speaking of *Humanae Vitae*, she says “not only have the document’s signature predictions been ratified in empirical force, but they have been ratified as few predictions ever are: in ways its authors could not possibly have foreseen, including by information that did not exist when the document was written, by scholars and others with no interest whatever in its teaching, and indeed even inadvertently, and in more ways than one, by many proud public adversaries of the Church. Paul VI predicted that society’s moral standards would lower, infidelity would increase, women would be less respected by men, and governments would use coercion in reproductive technologies(136). All of these predictions have come true, as Eberstadt has meticulously shown. And yet, as she points out, in spite of all the evidence that Paul VI was correct about the results of separating nature and nurture, most people refuse to see the negative impact of the Sexual Revolution on society and their lives.

I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in a detailed and well-balanced analysis of the impact of the Sexual Revolution on modern culture.

Cynthia Toolin, PhD (Sociology), STL  
Professor of Dogmatic and Moral Theology  
Holy Apostles College and Seminary  
Cromwell, CT