

Caritas Fellowship
 7 Deadly Sins—#8
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“What happens when, for the first time in history...adult human beings are more or less free to have all the sex and food they want?”

—Mary Eberstadt, [“Is Food the New Sex?”](#)

Lust

MATTHEW 5.27-30

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

1 CORINTHIANS 7.2-5

But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.



PETER KREEFT

...Lust is a sin and sexual desire as such is not. It is God’s invention and implied in the very first command to our race: “Be fruitful and multiply.” God did not mean: Learn the multiplication tables!

ROGER SCRUTON

In general we have moved on at such a pace in the last half a century that to many people it appears quaint to talk of sexual morality at all. If there is sexual misconduct, many people think, it is only some special case of the more general sin of forcing, defrauding or manipulating other people into doing something they do not really want to do. If they do really want to do it, and the feeling is mutual, then what on earth is wrong?

ALAN GOLDMAN

[T]here are no moral implications whatever [in sex]. Any analysis of sex which imputes a moral character to sex acts in themselves is wrong for that reason. There is no morality intrinsic to sex, although general moral rules apply to the treatment of others in sex acts as they apply to all human relations.

HADLEY ARKES

There stands the case for “plain sex,” plainly made [see Goldman, above]. And if we have reservations about that position, fully and candidly stated, we would repair to an understanding nourished by generations, and consecrated in song, that there is, after all, something notably different about sex. Something that makes it virtually impossible to detach sex in this way from any trace of moral significance. To put it another way, my own case, in regard to prostitution and pornography, would have to argue that there is something of inescapable moral significance about sex. It is not that this understanding cannot be ignored or conveniently overlooked by the obtuse, but that it is no more possible to purge moral significance from sex than it is to follow Holmes in purging moral significance from the very notion of law.

I thought that the entry into the explanation was disclosed years ago when a group of undergraduate women at Yale demanded that rape should be regarded, in the code of student conduct, as a crime apart from others. Presumably, assaults were already regarded as offenses under the statutes at Yale. If rape were nothing more than another assault—an unwarranted setting upon the body of another person—then it would have been no more necessary to make any further specifications for rape than it would have been to distinguish assaults directed at the head, say, from assaults directed at the legs. There must have been an awareness of rape as not merely a striking of the body, but an act of larger arrogance and violation, There is something different, after all,

about the penetration, the forceful access to an intimacy that is reserved only for people with whom the woman has a special connection. It may be hard to put the matter artfully, but it must be said also that this is an assault in which the assailant presumes to engage the reproductive capacity of the woman...

And so, for example, we could imagine someone saying to a friend, I had a date to play tennis with Fred this week, or bridge with the Johnsons, but I can't go. Would you take my place playing tennis with Fred or bridge with the Johnsons. But we would react differently, I think, if someone said, Look, I was supposed to have sex with Louise this weekend—could you go in my place? The fact that the laugh comes from liberals as well as conservatives may suggest that there is something in the nature of the thing.

W. JAY WOOD

All these authors agree that the vice of lust, as opposed to an isolated episode thereof, is an abiding disposition to disordered sexual appetites and behavior, typically structured by the thought "I can be whole or happy only if I indulge and satisfy my sexual appetites and preferences as they suit me." It is marked by emotions such as shame, boredom, longing, aggression, and loneliness, and finds expression in physical abuse of oneself and others, manipulation and deceit of others for sexual gratification, predatory and domineering behaviors, and other actions that oppose genuine love of the other.

DAWN EDEN

Compared to celibacy, the concept of chastity contains nuances which are utterly confusing to the modern mind. Its very nature goes against popularly held beliefs about not only sex but the human will in general.

What exactly is chastity, then, if not merely abstaining from sex?

The best short definition I've seen is by Dr. Mark Lowery, associate professor of theology at the University of Dallas. He says it is 'that virtue by which we are in control of our sexual appetite rather than it being in control of us.'

In a larger sense, chastity is seeing your sexual nature as part of a three-way relationship—and no, that isn't what it sounds like. The relationship is between you, your husband—or, if you're not married, your future husband—and God. That means if you have sex without one corner of that triangle in place...the act becomes disconnected from its purpose...

In some ways, the touring rock musician was my ideal sexual partner. By bedding them I could enjoy a temporary sort of fairy-tale bond; knowing it was bound to be fleeting as we would both move on meant that I never had to confront my own vulnerability about properly making a connection with someone. I could establish a transient intimacy and never have to deal with the real thing — and the real rejection that might entail.

Of course the rejection would come as the latest lover moved on to the next town and the next woman — but somehow, being able to see it coming made me feel more in control. I was choosing, I thought, the lesser pain.

But in all that casual sex, there was one moment I learnt to dread more than any other. I dreaded it not out of fear that the sex would be bad, but out of fear that it would be good. If the sex was good, then, even if I knew in my heart that the relationship wouldn't work, I would still feel as though the act had bonded me with my sex partner in a deeper way than we had been bonded before. It's in the nature of sex to awaken deep emotions within us, emotions that are unwelcome when one is trying to keep it light.

On such nights the worst moment was when it was all over. Suddenly I was jarred back to earth. Then I'd lie back and feel bereft. He would still be there, and if I was really lucky, he'd lie down next to me. Yet, I couldn't help feeling like the spell had been broken. We could nuzzle or giggle or we could fall asleep in each other's arms but I knew it was play acting and so did he. We weren't really intimate — it had just been a game. The circus had left town...

...But in a wider sense, losing my virginity, far from being the demarcation between past and future, was just a blip on the continuum of my sexual degradation. The decline had begun when I first sought sexual pleasure for its own sake.

Our culture — both in the media via programmes such as *Sex and the City* and in everyday interactions — relentlessly puts forth the idea that lust is a way station on the road to love. It isn't. It left me with a brittle facade incapable of real intimacy. Occasionally a man would tell me I appeared hard, which surprised me as I thought I was so vulnerable. In truth, underneath my attempts to appear bubbly, I was hard — it was the only way I could cope with what I was doing to my self and my body.

ROSS DOUTHAT

Over the past three decades, the VCR, on-demand cable service, and the Internet have completely overhauled the ways in which people interact with porn. Innovation has piled on innovation, making modern pornography a more immediate, visceral, and personalized experience. Nothing in the long history of erotica compares with the way millions of Americans experience porn today, and our moral intuitions are struggling to catch up. As we try to make sense of the brave new world that VHS and streaming video have built, we might start by asking a radical question: Is pornography use a form of adultery?

...Every society lives with infidelity in one form or another, whether openly or hypocritically. Why shouldn't we learn to live with porn?

Live with it we almost certainly will. But it's worth being clear about what we're accepting. Yes, adultery is inevitable, but it's

never been universal in the way that pornography has the potential to become—at least if we approach the use of hard-core porn as a normal outlet from the rigors of monogamy, and invest ourselves in a cultural paradigm that understands this as something all men do and all women need to live with. In the name of providing a low-risk alternative for males who would otherwise be tempted by “real” prostitutes and “real” affairs, we’re ultimately universalizing, in a milder but not all that much milder form, the sort of degradation and betrayal that only a minority of men have traditionally been involved in.

If the turn toward an “everybody does it” approach to pornography and marriage is wrong, it’s because that approach is wrong in and of itself, not because porn is going to wreck society, destroy the institution of marriage, and turn thousands of rapists loose to prey on unsuspecting women. Smut isn’t going to bring down Western Civilization any more than Nero’s orgies actually led to the fall of Rome, and a society that expects near-universal online infidelity may run just as smoothly as a society that doesn’t.

Which is precisely why it’s so easy to say that the spread of pornography means that we’re just taking a turn, where sex and fidelity are concerned, toward realism, toward adulthood, toward sophistication. All we have to give up to get there is our sense of decency.

MARY EBERSTADT

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 a real paradox. 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...

It really is ironic, in a nauseating sort of way, that so many sophisticated people have labored so hard, for so long, to convince us that any truly loving God could not possibly send people to hell for Lust. It’s ironic because – as internet pornography addiction shows – there are times when He apparently needn’t lift a finger to send anybody anywhere. As a couple of former addicts testified at the Princeton conference: who needs marching orders for the next world when you’re glued and frozen, incognizant and indifferent to anything and anyone else, right here in this one? These men think they are in Hell already.

MAGGIE GALLAGHER

It is not free love but the vow that is daring.