

Sex and the iWorld

Rethinking Relationship
beyond an Age of Individualism

Dale S. Kuehne

Foreword by Jean Bethke Elshtain


Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kuehne, Dale S., 1958–

Sex and the iWorld : rethinking relationship beyond an age of individualism / Dale S. Kuehne.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 978-0-8010-3587-6 (pbk.)

1. Sex—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Christianity and culture. 3. Christians—Political activity. I. Title.

BT708.K84 2009

261.8'357—dc22

2009014913

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Foreword

JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN

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We speak of “hot button” questions or “wedge issues.” Television talk shows feature shouters representing the extremes on such issues, displaying thereby that “never the twain shall meet.” We lament this—or many of us do. At the same time, we tend to shy away from attempts to discuss many of the issues we may care about deeply, including the culture of “hooking up,” abortion on demand, the definition of marriage, because we know just how difficult it is for people to engage such questions in a fair-minded, civil manner. The upshot is political stalemate and discursive collapse.

Dale Kuehne, in this important new work, appreciates the dilemma. He himself was dragged kicking and screaming, so to speak, to the subjects he takes up. He understands just how difficult they are to discuss, how easy it is to distort one’s position, how isolated are the voices that aim to illumine and understand rather than to condemn. That said, it is important to take the measure of issues one would rather avoid because they are critical to our understanding of the human person and of the sort of society we live in or hope to live in. This is the responsibility of

a political figure, a pastor or priest, a teacher—indeed, of all of us in our capacities as citizens.

Kuehne examines the place of sexuality in our relationships. Contemporary America is continually depicted as “Puritan” by sexual libertines and liberals, as if our biggest problem is the stifling of sexual acting out. This is risible. We prate endlessly about sex, and nearly all boundaries have fallen. On those that remain—for example, sex acts between adults and children—we oscillate between a kind of horrified voyeurism and a rush to harsh condemnation that violates simple justice. Consider the cases a decade or so ago, conducted in an atmosphere of accusatory hysteria, that sent many innocent people—whose only crime was to tend to the children we do not care for ourselves, our own children—to jail, many with life sentences.

How to explain this simultaneous preoccupation with sex and ludicrous insistence that we are a “sexually repressed” society: that is the question. Kuehne examines the issue of lost boundaries and how these might be recovered. He tells us he avoided the so-called culture wars as he did not want to antagonize around “hot button” issues and because neither the left nor the right positions suited. Still, he determined he had something to say, something that needed to be spoken in a language of thoughtful critique rather than lofty moralism. To this end, he raises the issue of consent, our cure-all for every touchy sexual problem: was there consent? If so, enough said. Consent is our touchstone and talisman. But does it really suffice?

A narrowly legalistic approach to the vast and fraught arena of contemporary sexuality is a way to avoid deep and troubling matters, for persons and for the society as a whole. Kuehne traces the sea change in sexual attitudes with the “sexual revolution,” the phenomenon of “hooking up” that aims to sever sexual acts from emotion. The result is sad emotional consequences, especially for young women. On this the evidence is considerable. What about out-of-wedlock births? Here, too, we possess solid data that children do better in two-parent households than in single-parent homes. Whole families rather than family fragments are more competent by far in the formation of the young. The biological, two-parent household is a child’s best protection against child abuse, for example. Children at risk are children in homes that feature transient males, mom’s boyfriends, if you will. Yet ideologies of

family diversity make no such distinction, as if all children are equally at risk no matter what the structure of intimate relations. What about the explosion of pornography and the exploitation of children, the “final frontier” of illicit sexuality? The internet is rife with this ugly, repugnant stuff. Add the high incidence of promiscuity, the often ugly debate about homosexuality, and you see troubles enough to go around.

Kuehne reminds us that marriage historically was not just a personal relationship designed to fulfill the insatiable “me,” but a foundational institution essential to the formation of society. He helps to bring the wisdom of the West to bear here, a wisdom we are in peril of losing. He examines our options and helps us to understand why the dominant modality of utilitarianism offers only a series of ad hoc pragmatic adjudications as we move from the unthinkable to the acceptable. There seems no principled place to “stop.” The upshot is “Sheilaism,” religion as “whatever I want it to be.” (Sheila, as Kuehne later points out, is the name of an interviewee in Robert Bellah’s *Habits of the Heart*, one of the many expressive individualists the researchers encountered in their studies.) This is a world of feel-goodism where once-crucial distinctions do not pertain: there is no difference between being married or shacking up, no difference between emotionally engaged sexuality and emotionless hooking up, on and on. Kuehne calls this the iWorld, where freedom of the individual reigns—this by contrast to the rWorld, a place based on the belief that homes are made for human beings understood in a capacious sense, worlds in which we live within and are engaged with the full constellation of healthy human relations.

How do we reinstitutionalize boundaries, resurrect forgotten wisdom? Kuehne finds natural law arguments inadequate. We just don’t find these compelling any longer, he insists. No, what Christians, even more than others, should do is to live lives of love, to endure through thick and thin, rich and poor. The anti-Nazi German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called Christ “the man for others,” and that is what we should aim to emulate. Males and females are mutually constituted, relational beings. The existence of two such distinct human “types” requires that we respond to difference at the deepest level. To reject the “other” because she is female or he is male is to deny deep relationality of a very fundamental level.

What we require at this point in our society's life is a powerful and compelling narrative. And if we "really believe" that we "have something to add to the argument" about human sexuality, we should say it, knowing others will label us and categorize us in ways we ourselves would not have chosen. Kuehne takes up Christians who disagree with his approach, many of them indebted to psychological theories and models that accept uncritically the assumptions of the iWorld—offering no alternative narrative thereby.

It takes a good bit of faith to enter the lists in behalf of reasoned argument and critique. No "side" will find you an uncritical ally. That is precisely what recommends this challenging, well-written text. Kuehne is deeply immersed in popular culture: he listens to the music, goes to the films. He is utterly free from condescension. Kuehne appreciates that cultural critics are immersed in the culture they criticize. They cannot take up a lofty stance above the fray. As a teacher, a scholar, and a citizen, Kuehne offers in this volume a powerful example of what political theorist Michael Walzer calls "the connected critic." He is both American citizen and Christian. He is both inside and outside. He appreciates and he criticizes. Above all, he displays a stance that combines both compassion and judgment, reminding us thereby that the God Christians worship is a God of judgment and of mercy. All who read this volume will find much in it to engage, to criticize, to savor.

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Preface

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by.

Robert Frost,
“The Road Not Taken”¹

This is a book about sex, love, religion, and politics—all of the things our parents warned us to avoid in conversation. More precisely, it’s about the ways our individual and collective choices about sexuality affect us both personally and relationally. It examines the place of sexuality in our lives and its role in relational fulfillment. At a time when contemporary culture, societal structures, and many Christian denominations are seeking to relax traditional restrictions and sanctions on sexual behavior, this book goes against the tide and argues that there are merits in resisting such attempts and in working to restore a number of the boundaries now being relaxed. What’s more, it seeks to do so without resorting to a “Chicken Little” approach that has dominated much of the current debate. The aim of the book is simply to try to help keep us all from getting lost on a never-ending quest for acceptance, love, and fulfillment while looking in the wrong place.

1. Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken,” in *Mountain Interval* (New York: H. Holt, 1916).

There—I said it.

This is not a topic that I ever wanted to engage. Indeed I have spent the better part of my adult life avoiding it. Even though I am a pastor and a professor of politics, I have been content to sit on the sidelines and let the hotly contested social issues of the day be fought by others. The culture war being waged over the proper boundaries of human sexual behavior and the definition of marriage is a nuclear conflict disguised as a debate. In this conflict I would much prefer being the undertaker who collects carcasses on the side of the road or the physician who tends to the victims, rather than being a combatant on either side.

I like to think of myself as being a nice person. The Myers-Briggs personality test tells me that I am driven to try to make people like me and, if necessary, even to lie to help others feel good about themselves. It also tells me that I will attempt to avoid a debate like this at all costs—and on this point Myers-Briggs is right.² But the culture war came to my doorstep, and even though thoughts about deserting had a lot of appeal, I discovered that doing so was something that circumstances wouldn't allow. I live and work in New Hampshire, and one day, when I wasn't particularly paying attention, the Episcopal Church ordained as bishop one of my neighbors, the Reverend Eugene Robinson. Others, however, were paying attention. Since Robinson is open and unapologetic about being in a homosexual relationship, his ordination ignited a worldwide controversy in the Anglican Communion. Then as I was trying to formulate a way to avoid discussing homosexuality and ordination, the supreme court in neighboring Massachusetts decided the state constitution allowed for same-sex marriage.

Being one of the only, if not the only, ordained politics professor in New England, I found it nearly impossible to hide from these issues. The press, my parishioners, my students, and my fellow citizens came to me and asked, "What do you think about all of this?" They genuinely wanted help in sorting through these issues and wanted to know what I professed. "Is it theologically acceptable for Christians to support the ordination of those who support and/or practice homosexual behaviors?" "Is it theologically acceptable for Christians to agree with

2. For more information about the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory, see www.myersbriggs.org/.

same-sex marriage?” “If we leave religious reasoning out of the discussion, are there any compelling nonreligious reasons to oppose same-sex marriage?” And finally, “Should Christians, or anyone for that matter, be trying to use the political process to outlaw same-sex marriage, or should they simply be content not to practice it themselves and let others make their own choices?”

As I began to think about these questions, I realized that they were the point of departure for a much broader and deeper inquiry into the meaning of human relationships and sexuality. They introduced a host of other questions I felt equally inadequate to address, such as: “What’s your best advice for finding a rewarding and fulfilling relational life?” and “To what degree are love, sexuality, marriage, friendship, intimacy, and human fulfillment linked?”, along with many others. It immediately became obvious that these questions involve us all, not merely a few of us.

When I understood this, I looked to the left and to the right and saw there was no dignified path of escape. I realized, like Robert Frost, a fellow citizen of New Hampshire, that I had come to a fork in the road and had to make a choice. I had to either respond directly or deny my chosen professions, for it would be impossible for me to continue in pastoral ministry, teaching, or politics if I chose to give stones to those who asked me for bread. All eyes were on me. But when I opened my mouth and took my first verbal steps on the road less traveled, I found that nothing I said was helpful.

At that moment I committed myself to write this book. I felt I owed my students, parishioners, family, and fellow citizens my best thinking about these issues rather than just the passing thoughts of a converted undertaker. In doing so, I have been fortunate to find support from a number of institutions. Saint Anselm College granted me a sabbatical. The Jubilee Centre in Cambridge, England, supplied extraordinary financial, intellectual, and spiritual support. The Monastery of Christ in the Desert in Abiquiu, New Mexico, provided me the solitude to pray, think, and write. The Emmanuel Covenant Church in Nashua, New Hampshire, gave me more sabbaticals in five years than most pastors receive in a lifetime.

I have also received the assistance of many individuals. Michael Schluter, Jason Fletcher, John Ashcroft, Guy Brandon, Femke Maes,

and Jonathan Burnside have read and commented on countless drafts. James Skillen, Elizabeth Ossoff, Montague Brown, Gordon Preece, Mario Bergner, Chris Clark, Auriel Schluter, Brant and Emily Menswar, Howard Burgoyne, David Matta, Carolyn Larson, Jennifer Donahue, and my editors, James Ernest and Brian Bolger, have each given generously of their time and expertise. My son, Ryan, gave his twenty-first summer to revising this manuscript, and my daughter Naomi and Brant Menswar performed heroic feats in securing music permissions. Pat Ford guided me to new music, and Cathy Ford opened my eyes to dimensions of spirituality of which I was ignorant. I borrowed from Walker Percy the Nietzsche epigraph that opens the book, and gladly use it as a tribute to him, and from Mark Regnerus the Yeats epigraph that introduces the eighth chapter.

At Saint Anselm College, President Father Jonathan DeFelice, OSB, Academic Dean Father Augustine Kelly, OSB, and my department colleagues have supported me so profoundly that I have never been concerned that writing a politically incorrect book will harm our relationship. I am unaware of a better example of academic freedom. For the last fifteen years my Politics of Diversity students have interacted with me as I constructed the arguments that form the foundation of this book, and they have honored me with an honesty and authenticity that has instructed me profoundly.

My parishioners at Emmanuel Covenant Church have honored me in a deeper way. This topic is not merely academic but touches the deepest part of our lives. At Emmanuel Covenant we do not all agree on these issues, but it has mattered little. Our relationship with God and one another is more important than our opinions. To discover a congregation in which this is a lived reality has been one of the greatest gifts I have ever received. If it is indeed true that the best theology comes out of a pastoral context, and if this book reflects that in any way, it is a tribute to the men and women of Emmanuel Covenant.

Finally, this book comes out of a lifetime of learning from others about relationships. For that I thank childhood friends Scott Russell, John Nichols, and Ruth Hovland. I also must thank adult friends Patricia Sayre and Nelda and Darrell Godfrey. I offer deeper thanks to my parents, Norman and Janet; my brother, Ross, and his wife, Bonnie; and my in-laws James, Eleanor, Eric, Sue Beth, Lee, and Heidi. My

deepest thanks are due to my children, Naomi, Leah, and Ryan, and especially my wife, Rachel.

Solomon wisely observed that “there is nothing new under the sun,” and the reader will soon discern that this is true of this book. Being multidisciplinary in scope, each section relies heavily on the expertise of others for its content and authority. Indeed, at points it may be more true to say that I am the editor of this book than to say that I am its author. Nevertheless, it is a book I have been compelled to compile. I am grateful to the many who have instructed and challenged me and who will continue to do so in the future.

It would be foolish to publish anything on these issues unless I was convinced I had something worth saying. I do believe that is the case. Nevertheless, I present these ideas in the spirit of dialogue; I want to discuss them with people of all persuasions. I am not one who possesses the wisdom or authority to merely make pronouncements. I am well aware that these issues, while political and social, are also intensely personal. This book questions behavior practiced by my friends, my family, and myself. Those who have felt the condemnation of others for choices they have made, as well as guilt concerning impulses they cannot help but feel, will also read it. Moreover, given the cultural context from which positions like mine are usually proclaimed, it will be easy for the reader to infer that I write as a way to cast the first stone.

Nothing could be further from the truth. I will cast no stone, and I pray that all who read this will drop the stones from their hands, minds, and hearts. The question that drives this book is, “How can we live the best and most fulfilling lives as individuals, families, extended families, and communities?” My purpose is not to condemn but to consider seriously and deeply what human happiness and fulfillment require. I am convinced Paul is correct in Romans 3:23 when he says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Repentance is demanded not of some, but of all. Forgiveness is needed not by some, but by all. Grace is needed not by some, but by all. It is life, not death, that is the driving passion of this book.

So what is the life to which we are called, and how can we experience the fulfilling life for which we yearn? Sexuality matters to human relationships, human happiness, and human fulfillment. But how, why, and in what ways? It is to these questions that we now turn.

Introduction

What were once vices are now habits.

The Doobie Brothers¹

In the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Indiana Jones peers into the cave into which he would go in search of the lost Ark of the Covenant and sees it is teeming with snakes. He sighs deeply and groans, “Snakes? Why does it have to be snakes?” In real life, then-Senator Joseph Biden chaired the United States Senate Judiciary Committee during the Clarence Thomas Supreme Court confirmation hearings. The committee spent many days hearing testimony concerning Anita Hill’s allegations of sexual misconduct by Clarence Thomas. It was an unpleasant ordeal for everyone involved. While it may be apocryphal, Senator Biden is said to have remarked at the end of the first week of hearings, “No matter what we do, we look bad, and I can’t figure out what we can do so that we don’t look bad.” I approach the writing of this book with the same trepidation and misgivings of Indiana Jones and now–Vice President Biden. “Sex! Why does it have to be sex? No matter what I say, I am going to look bad.”

1. The Doobie Brothers, *What Were Once Vices Are Now Habits* (Warner Brothers Records, 1974).

Human Sexuality in the Twenty-First-Century West

There is no topic in Western culture more contentious, more personal, more divisive, and more prone to cause hurt than human sexuality. The bitter battle over abortion has so deeply divided our culture that one can sense exhaustion whenever the topic is raised. Yet the issues raised in this book not only match but potentially exceed the emotional and intellectual intensity of the abortion debate. In this book we will look at the meaning of human life and identity as well as the purpose of human relationships and sexuality. We will spend considerable time examining two questions on which our culture is currently fixated:

1. Ought adults be able to engage in any form of sexual relations so long as it is consensual?
2. Will we be denied the best of human fulfillment and intimacy if we are not allowed freedom to engage in consensual sexual relationships outside that of a marriage between a man and a woman?

As I reflect on these two questions and see the faces of friends and students who are asking them, I wonder if there is any way to avoid writing this book badly. But, according to G. K. Chesterton, “If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly.”² So I have decided to venture ahead in the belief that addressing these questions is a thing worth doing even if I’m not able to do it well. If it inspires someone else to do so, it will have been worth doing.

The debate surrounding these questions is very complex, but one dimension of it is relatively new. Until the sexual revolution of the 1960s, there was a general and widespread agreement that the answer to both these questions was no. Today an increasing number of people are answering yes. This shift in public opinion on sexual morality is without precedent in the history of the West. It is not new that men and women practice a wide range of sexual behavior, but what is new in the past forty years is the significant erosion of the accepted belief that the moral boundaries of a sexual relationship should be confined to a marriage between a man and a woman.

2. G. K. Chesterton, *What’s Wrong with the World* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1927), 320.

While many factors have led to this profound shift in moral understanding, the defining event was the sexual revolution of the 1960s. In the United States it was a movement of mostly young people who came together over opposition to the Vietnam War, and in addition to being a peace movement, sexual freedom was central to their politics.³ While their antiwar efforts had some success, their sexual politics have changed the world.

In the first chapter we will examine why the sexual revolution occurred, and we will see that its impact has been truly revolutionary. What has changed is not merely our understanding of sexuality but also our conceptions of marriage, family, gender, friendship, and the nature of human happiness and fulfillment. We are living at a time of tremendous transition in our understanding of morality. The Doobie Brothers summed up this transition extraordinarily well in the title of their album *What Were Once Vices Are Now Habits*. Behavior that was once regarded by our society as vice is increasingly regarded as acceptable.

When I was born in 1958 the traditional family was a solid social unit, and its status as the ideal institution for procreation and child rearing was unrivaled and largely unquestioned. Since then a dramatic change has occurred in societal attitudes toward marriage and the appropriate boundaries for sexual behavior. Whereas before the sexual revolution it was widely understood that the proper place for a sexual relationship was between a husband and wife, since the sexual revolution marriage has lost its status as having an *exclusive* on sexual relations. Sexual relations are now governed by consent rather than a covenant. An increasing number of couples are opting for cohabitation instead of marriage, divorce has become unexceptional, and sexual relations no longer require the sanction of marriage to be seen as legitimate. Moreover, the definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman is becoming a historical artifact with same-sex civil unions and/or same-sex marriages legal in much of Europe and even in parts of the United States. Indeed, at this point, the relaxation of traditional sexual boundaries does not stop with cohabitation and same-sex re-

3. Stephan Ridgeway, *Sexuality and Modernity: The Sexual Revolution of the 60s* (Annadale, Australia: Isis Creations, 1997), www.isis.aust.com/stephan/writings/sexuality/revo.htm.

relationships since a movement toward the legalization of polygamous relationships is gaining traction.⁴

Some may be surprised at the speed with which the legalization of same-sex unions and marriages is occurring in Europe and the United States, yet when one considers the magnitude of the change in sexual morality that has occurred since the 1960s, the pace of this transformation is less surprising. It is a sad irony that at the same time same-sex couples are winning the right to marry, marriage as an institution is disintegrating. As David Popenoe writes in the 2007 Rutgers University study on *The Future of Marriage in America*:

There can be no doubt that the institution of marriage has continued to weaken in recent years. Whereas marriage was once the dominant and single acceptable form of living arrangement for couples and children, it is no longer. Today, there is more “family diversity”: Fewer adults are married, more are divorced or remaining single, and more are living together outside of marriage or living alone. Today more children are born out of wedlock (now almost four out of ten) and more are living in stepfamilies, with cohabiting but unmarried adults, or with a single parent. This means that more children each year are not living in families that include their own married, biological parents, which by all available empirical evidence is the gold standard for insuring optimal outcomes in a child’s development.⁵

Accommodation and Impotence: Christianity and the Sexual Revolution

What I’ve just described is not just the story of Western culture; it is also the story of twenty-first-century Christianity in the West. The impact of the sexual revolution on the Christian community is enormous. Even as the culture has deviated from the traditional understanding of sexual ethics and marriage, so have Christians. While it is difficult to get accurate polling data on sexual behavior due to the propensity of

4. “Dutch ‘marriage’: 1 man, 2 women: Trio becomes 1st officially to tie the knots,” *World Net Daily*, September 30, 2005, www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=46583.

5. David Popenoe, “Essay: The Future of Marriage in America,” in *The State of Our Unions 2007: The Social Health of Marriage in America*, National Marriage Project at Rutgers State University, 2007, <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/Publications/SOOU/TEXTSOOU2007.htm>.

people to prevaricate about such matters when speaking to pollsters, there is good reason to believe the sexual revolution has more profoundly impacted the behavior of twenty-first-century Christians than has the Bible. George Barna and other social scientists provide abundant evidence concerning the degree to which the sexual revolution has affected the church in terms of the sheer quantity of adultery, fornication, and use of pornography by professing Christians. Remarkably little difference can be found between the sexual behavior of Christians and that of non-Christians in the United States.⁶

Barna identifies a cause for this in his book *Think Like Jesus*, stating that relatively few Christians allow their lives to be shaped by the Bible. “Only 14 percent of born-again adults—in other words, about one in seven born-again adults—rely on the Bible as their moral compass and believe that moral truth is absolute.”⁷ The statistics for people who attend church but are not born again are even more telling. Barna finds of this group, which represents about half the church-going population, that “just 2 percent . . . have the foundations of a biblical worldview.”⁸ Not surprisingly, as Christians have lost faith in biblical teaching, their behavior has come to mirror the culture. For instance, there is little difference in the rate of divorces among Christians and the broader culture. All this has led Barna to the inescapable conclusion that given their behavior, many Christians do not know the historic teaching of the church on these issues, or they don’t seem to care, or both.⁹

Given the rapid shift in the sexual behavior of Christians, it should come as no surprise that when the church attempts to respond to the questions posed by the sexual revolution, it does so with mixed messages, a muted voice, and little impact. The indecisiveness of the church extends to the entire landscape of sexual relations and mar-

6. Barna Group, “American Lifestyles Mix Compassion and Self-Oriented Behavior,” *Barna Update*, February 5, 2007, www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=249. See also Lauren Winner, *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 16–19; Mark D. Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit: Sex and Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

7. George Barna, *Think Like Jesus: Make the Right Decision Every Time* (Nashville: Integrity, 2003), 21.

8. *Ibid.*, 21–22.

9. Barna Group, “Born Again Christians Just As Likely to Divorce As Are Non-Christians,” *Barna Update*, September 8, 2004, www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdateNarrow&BarnaUpdateID=170.

riage. Equivocation and cultural accommodation is nothing new to Christianity. The letters of Paul demonstrate that the church has struggled with issues such as adultery, fornication, divorce, and remarriage throughout its history. Yet even though the church has turned a blind eye toward some sexual behaviors at various points in history, what is unique presently is the degree to which the historic orthodox understanding of sexual morality and marriage is being ignored or revised by clergy and laypeople alike. The extent to which the church is changing its interpretation of biblical teaching in a manner that conveniently accommodates, justifies, protects, and even sanctions the behavior of the sexual revolution would probably surprise even the Doobie Brothers.

Hypocrisy angers everyone. While some have consistently called the church to uphold the entire orthodox Christian teaching concerning sexual morality and marriage, many, if not most, have employed a double standard when it comes to homosexual behavior. The gay and lesbian communities are correct to accuse the church of hypocrisy and bigotry when for decades many Christians have turned a blind eye to adultery and sex between men and women outside of marriage while vigorously condemning homosexual behavior. When those inclined to same-sex sexual relations asked the church for the same blind eye that had been extended to others, many churches responded hypocritically and hatefully by ushering them to the exits. This response is simply unacceptable. Any criticism by Christians of gay and lesbian sexual relationships without correspondingly rigorous standards for all sexual relations between a man and a woman outside a marriage is both hollow and hypocritical. The inconvenient truth is that many Christians chose not to acknowledge the significance of the sexual revolution until it began to manifest itself in the public debate about the legal status of homosexuality and same-sex unions and marriages. By inconsistently applying the orthodox teaching on sexual conduct and marriage, Christians have minimized their ability to speak to the broader culture about all aspects of sexual ethics, including same-sex marriage.

While this book is not written specifically to Christians, I want to speak to Christians for a moment. The Bible teaches that all humans are made in the image of God and are deserving of respect and love.

That we have given less to anyone is inexcusable. Insofar as we have withheld love and respect from anyone, we need to confess our sin and ask forgiveness. We then need to reconsider what we stand for, practice what we profess, and only then re-engage the culture in a respectful dialogue about all aspects of human sexual behavior as well as the meaning of marriage. The issue of same-sex marriage is one of many topics that can and should be addressed from a Christian viewpoint. Centuries of bigotry toward homosexuals, while undeniably wrong, ought not to reflexively guilt-trip the church into silence on issues of sexual politics. Indeed, the church should ignore no issue related to sexual ethics. The presence of same-sex marriage in our contemporary ecclesiastical and political debates is an illustration of the extent of the sexual revolution's impact on the church and society. In this instance, something that has been inconceivable for virtually the entire history of the church—namely the moral approval of same-sex marriage—has in the past decade become not just conceivable but, for more and more Christians, acceptable.

The question is, “Why?”

Christendom is changing. The ordination of the Reverend Eugene Robinson as bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire in 2003 is not an isolated event. In 2007 the United Church of Christ became the first mainline denomination in the United States to support same-sex marriage, and it will not be the last.¹⁰ While movement in this direction has been anticipated among more liberal denominations, what is more surprising is the relatively mild opposition to such moves from the laity. While American Catholic and evangelical leaders such as Boston Archbishop Sean O'Malley, James Dobson, Chuck Colson, and Eugene Rivers have taken strong stands against homosexual practice and same-sex marriage, they have not received the level of support from their ecclesiastical base that would have been expected just ten years ago. It is clear that the fallout of the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church has marginalized its ability to provide leadership on this issue, yet the relative lack of response from evangelicals, especially those younger than forty, helps to explain why a majority of Americans

10. “Resolution in Support of Equal Marriage Rights for all for General Synod 25 of the United Church of Christ,” United Church of Christ, www.ucc.org/synod/resolutions/RESOLUTION-IN-SUPPORT-OF-EQUAL-MARRIAGE-RIGHTS-FOR-ALL-FOR-GENERAL-SYNOD-25.pdf.

support same-sex unions and an increasing number support same-sex marriage.¹¹

The question is, “Why?”

The serious discussion among Christians concerning the ordination of practicing homosexuals, as well as the decline in opposition to the legalization of same-sex unions and marriages, is without precedent in the history of Western society and the church. What is even more unprecedented is the speed at which this change is taking place. That we are on the verge of the legalization of same-sex marriage in Europe and the United States is beyond what most gay and lesbian activists dared imagine in the 1980s.

The question is, “Why?”

It is almost always an exaggeration to say that Christendom ever spoke with a unified voice on any issue, but if ever there were issues on which there was theological consensus, it was on sexual ethics and the definition of marriage. John Boswell argues that there may have been a time in premodern Europe when clergy blessed some same-sex unions and that there have been times when the church and culture turned a blind eye toward same-sex couples.¹² Nevertheless, until recently the orthodox Jewish and Christian teachings opposing same-sex marriage have remained constant; it has not even been a subject of serious debate. Yet since the sexual revolution, and especially in the past decade, this issue has become one that a growing number of Christians in the West seem ready to concede without a meaningful debate.

The question is, “Why?”

For the first time in the history of the church there is significant disagreement among church leaders, denominations, and the laity over many issues related to human sexuality and marriage. Unfortunately, it has proven difficult to talk in a civil and meaningful way about these

11. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity . . . and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), chap. 5; “Gay Marriage,” Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, <http://pewforum.org/gay-marriage/>; “Same-Sex Unions and Civil Unions,” Religious Tolerance.org, Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, www.religioustolerance.org/hom_marp.htm.

12. See John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980); John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Villard, 1994); Andrew Sullivan, ed., *Same-Sex Marriage: Pro and Con; A Reader*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 7–21.

issues. Even in this, the church mirrors the culture. There are theologians and church leaders on all sides of these issues who employ modes of argumentation that are uncivil, ineffective, unpersuasive, and self-defeating. Others have allowed themselves to be intimidated into public silence. There are precious few who cast more light than heat into the public discourse.

The question is, “Why?”

There are those, such as David Wells, who have foreseen the coming of this moment. He predicted decades ago that we were entering a post-Christian era, and he was right.¹³ While there is a perception that the United States is a Christian nation, if it is, it is not a practicing one. Average weekly church attendance in the United States in 2005 slumped to just 17.5 percent.¹⁴ The church as an institution has lost enormous credibility and is in danger of becoming culturally irrelevant.¹⁵

The question is, “Why?”

What we are witnessing on the issue of same-sex marriage is simply the logical extension of the same sexual ethic that our culture has applied to other sexual behavior since the 1960s. The sexual revolution occurred decades ago, and Christians are now presented with another opportunity to challenge it. Yet in challenging it, Christians must understand that at its heart the sexual revolution is not about homosexuality or same-sex marriage but about human sexuality and relational fulfillment. The primary reason Christians have not had the political fortitude and conviction to challenge our culture on the issue of same-sex marriage is that a growing number of Christians now doubt the traditional Christian teaching on human sexuality and feel it is wrong to condemn consensual sexual behavior. Since the 1960s a profound disconnect has occurred between the teaching and the practice of Christian sexuality among both the laity and the clergy, and this disconnect has played a strong role in causing the political and social laryngitis of the Christian community when it comes to challenging the behavioral implications of the sexual revolution. As George Barna has shown, the

13. See David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1993).

14. David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of over 200,000 Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 29.

15. This is the thesis of Kinnaman and Lyon, *UnChristian*.

sexual behavior and attitudes of many Christians deviate so significantly from traditional Christian teaching that it is no wonder an increasing number of Christians have been unwilling to hypocritically impose different standards on practicing homosexuals. Hence the halfhearted and guilt-tinged silence that permeates the present debate.

The question is, “Why?”

What is occurring in the West is nothing less than the collapse of the Judeo-Christian worldview, a crisis of confidence in *modernity*, and the emergence of a new but undeveloped worldview that might be called “postmodern individualism” but that I will refer to as the “iWorld” and will define in the next chapter.

The challenge for Christians in the twenty-first century is not to use the same old arguments to try to persuade the West of the truth of the traditional teaching on sexual ethics. If these arguments were still persuasive, public opinion and behavior would not be what they are. Yet neither should Christians blindly or reflexively adjust theology to accommodate the sexual revolution without adequate scriptural support. Rather, the church needs to reexamine biblical teaching and orthodox theology in light of the challenges posed by the sexual revolution and see whether it is modification or rediscovery that is in order.

Questions That Face Us All

The questions facing us at this point in the twenty-first century are not merely for Christians but are for all humans. The meaning of human sexual relations and marriage and their role in human fulfillment matters to everyone. To make a decision about what future course is best for our world requires that we comprehend the nature of the astonishing change that has occurred in our world’s understanding of sexual relationships and marriage.

In part 1 of the book we will examine the tWorld, the “traditional” world from which we came, and the iWorld, the “individualistic” world that is emerging. We will explore in depth what the iWorld is, what kind of society it seeks to create, and what it professes about the nature of human sexuality, relationship, and fulfillment, as well as the public policy implications of its positions.

In part 2 of the book we will use the Bible as a basis to help describe the rWorld (the “relational” world), a proposed alternative to both of these worlds, and we will explore what kind of alternative the rWorld provides concerning the understanding of human fulfillment and the place of sexuality, marriage, and relationships. Yet the Bible is not the only source text for the rWorld. Indeed, one may embrace the rWorld as a more constructive alternative to either the tWorld or the iWorld, or both, without being Christian or religious. The Bible, however, provides a coherent relational vision that will help in constructing an approach to life that can adequately contrast with the one currently offered by the iWorld.

The book will conclude by comparing and contrasting the iWorld and the rWorld and examining the contributions modern science can and cannot make to our deliberations. Finally, we will consider which of these “worlds” provides a more compelling vision of relational fulfillment in today’s world.

Finding a way to live well is the purpose of this book. Even though my characterization of human history may appear unconventional, and even though dealing compassionately with the intensely personal issues surrounding sexuality provides a challenge, perhaps the biggest hurdle this book faces is whether people from very different faith and ideological perspectives can come together and converse about what it means to live together in today’s world. Rather than create a veneer of faux objectivity behind which to hide my religious faith and write this book as though my religious convictions didn’t matter, I have chosen to bring my faith into this conversation. In doing so it is not my intention to make this a *religious* conversation. I want to have a real conversation among real people about the real world, and I invite you to join me. I accept that there may be skepticism about whether this can be done, but because it is a thing worth doing, let’s find out.

PART 1

From the tWorld to the iWorld

So I walk up on high
And I step to the edge
To see my world below.
And I laugh at myself
While the tears roll down.
'Cause it's the world I know.
It's the world I know.

Collective Soul,
"The World I Know"¹

Making sense of the world we know is no small task given the staggering number of recent societal changes that just a few decades ago were inconceivable. In an effort to make this task manageable, I have divided the intellectual and cultural history of Western civilization

1. Ed Roland and Ross Childress, "The World I Know," Collective Soul (Atlantic Records, 1995).

into two eras by creating the terms “tWorld” and “iWorld.” The tWorld (traditional world) represents the cultural worldview that developed in the West over centuries and that is drawn from Greek and Roman civilizations and Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The iWorld represents the individualistic worldview that is rapidly replacing the tWorld throughout Europe, the United States, and urban centers worldwide.

I acknowledge that these categories inadequately reflect the complexities of intellectual and cultural history. My purpose in creating this terminology is only to provide useful referential designations to help discuss the changing understanding of the relationship between marriage, sexuality, intimacy, and human relational fulfillment. Despite the prevailing sense that society cannot have genuine dialogue about these matters in the present age, there is a conversation to be had. It is my hope that the use of this terminology enables and furthers this conversation.

1

The tWorld

The World from Which We Came

Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore.

Dorothy, *The Wizard of Oz*¹

Buckle your seat belts, Dorothy, 'cause Kansas is going
bye-bye.

Cipher, *The Matrix*²

The world is changing, and in order to get a sense of where we are and where we are headed, we need to recall where we have been. The movies *The Wizard of Oz* and *The Matrix* set the context for this chapter. *The Wizard of Oz* represents the values of a traditional world that precedes our present time, and Dorothy spends virtually the entire story seeking to get back to that world and home to her family in good old Kansas. In *The Matrix* the main character, Thomas Anderson, who

1. Frank Baum, *The Wizard of Oz*, screenplay by Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson, and Edgar Allan Woolf (Loew's Incorporated, 1939).

2. Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, *The Matrix* (Warner Brothers Pictures, 1999).

goes by the computer alias “Neo,” wakes up to discover that not only is the old world of his ancestors gone but so also is the modern world in which he thought he lived. Much to his amazement, he finds that he lives in the twenty-second century and the world has changed almost beyond his ability to comprehend and recognize. At the moment the above epigraph is spoken to him, Neo is about to find out just how much has changed and what, if anything, he can do about it.

The Relational Matrix of the tWorld

Since the sexual revolution, a profound change has occurred in the way we view and understand the world. This can be seen in the history of American television. When one regards the relational and sexual values represented by early 1960s shows, such as *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver*, and compares them to the popular television shows of the early twenty-first century, such as *Sex and the City* and *Friends*, the contrast is clear.³ Fifty years ago American television rarely showed significant physical affection between anyone who wasn’t married, and even married couples were portrayed as sleeping in separate beds. In today’s television shows sexual relationships are considered normal for virtually everyone—with the possible exception of married couples. In fact, contemporary television or cinema rarely portrays healthy marriages or sexual relations within marriage.

What has changed is not merely our understanding of sexual ethics but also the traditional relational order of Western society. The tWorld represents a way of ordering our relational life that grew up over millennia in the West and is the product of many philosophical and religious traditions. While each of these traditions has its own distinctiveness, there is a common understanding among them about the nature of marriage, the extended family, and the local community. Marriage is considered the legal and covenantal basis for a lifelong relationship between one man and one woman. Marriage is also the one relationship in which sexual relations are deemed appropriate because children—the product of a sexual relationship—are best raised

3. Gordon Preece, “(Homo)Sex and the City of God,” *Interface* 9, nos. 1 and 2 (May and October 2006), 187–216.

in a home with a father and mother. Yet marriage is about more than having sex and children; it also connects extended families, forming the foundation of community and the backbone of the tWorld, without which it could not exist.

If such a statement sounds exaggerated or overreaching, it merely illustrates how much and how quickly our culture has changed. Just a half century ago not only was this framework understood, but it was accepted as a foundational norm of Western civilization. David Blankenhorn makes an even more far-reaching claim. In his book *The Future of Marriage*, he states: “The evidence that marriage as defined here is a universal human institution is overwhelming. In fact, especially in light of the vastness of the human historical record and the variety of human sexual experience, the power and prevalence of this one sexual institution across time and cultures is so noteworthy and so empirically incontrovertible, that I am tempted to say ‘all human societies.’”⁴ Blankenhorn admits there are a few examples in human history where this statement may not hold, but in speaking of the West he regards it as a bold yet defensible statement.

Marriage and the extended family were the relational foundation of the tWorld. They were so important and so constant that whether you lived in the tWorld one hundred years ago or several thousand years ago, your identity and your life were rooted in a well-ordered relational structure. Your identity was inextricably connected to your nuclear family, your extended family, your local community, and your nation. Much of your life was determined at birth on the basis of your family relations and social class, to say nothing of genetics. Your situation at birth impacted your educational path, your place in society, your occupation, whom you could marry, and with whom you would interact. Moreover, all this transcended individual choice. It was a world composed of relationships that were for the most part determined by birth.

To use different language, the tWorld was constructed on relationships of *obligation*. Each person was born into a matrix of relationships in which there were mutual obligations and responsibilities. These included a child’s relationships with parents, grandparents,

4. David Blankenhorn, *The Future of Marriage* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007), 105–6.

siblings, extended family members, neighbors, fellow citizens, and the religious community. These obligations were fixed at birth. One could be unfaithful to the obligations, but one could not change the obligations.

To an inhabitant of the West in the twenty-first century, this framework may appear extremely restrictive and stifling, but citizens of the tWorld didn't necessarily see it that way. Like us they craved healthy, fulfilling relationships. The tWorld's relational matrix provided men and women with a rich opportunity for relational fulfillment. The relational matrix was so important that citizens of the tWorld feared being cut off from it. To be an orphan without a family was not a source of freedom but in many societies resulted in almost certain slavery. When convicted of the charge of corrupting the youth of his city, the Greek philosopher Socrates opted to drink hemlock and commit suicide rather than endure the alternative of leaving Athens forever.

While the tWorld offered a rich opportunity for relational fulfillment, not everyone experienced healthy relationships. To the contrary, many people experienced loneliness, abuse, and all manner of relational hurt. The point here is not to describe the tWorld in utopian fashion but to describe the potential it offered. Throughout the book we will examine in detail the concept of relational fulfillment because, while it is something for which we all yearn, it is neither well understood nor commonly achieved in any of the worlds being explored. The task at hand is to attempt to assess which of these worlds provides for us the basis for the most fulfilling relational lives.

While this relational framework has vanished from the developed world, it is the framework on which Western society rested until the last few decades. Moreover, it is the product of many philosophical traditions and religions. It can be found with different expressions from Plato and Aristotle in Greece, through Roman authors including Cicero and Tacitus, and in the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The tWorld has an understanding of freedom profoundly different from the twenty-first-century West's understanding. Rather than seeing freedom as the absence of restraint and the quantity of individual choice, the tWorld believed freedom was discovered in the process of finding contentment and meaning within the matrix of relationships found in one's extended families and community.

Aristotle argues that humans cannot be understood independent of the relationships given to us at birth. He defines the good life by the quality of three fundamental relationships of *obligation* into which people are born: family, neighborhood, and city. A person cannot be fulfilled in the absence of these relationships and cannot be considered whole without all three relationships. Moreover, a human life can be categorized as *good* only if these relationships are healthy.⁵ That these relationships are given to us by birth, rather than being the product of individual choice, neither marginalizes their importance nor restricts individual freedom. They provide freedom from a multitude of hazardous circumstances because they give us, when the relationships are healthy, a quality of emotional support and relational security that allows us to thrive. This relational framework is qualitatively different from what can be provided by an individualistic society based on relationships of choice. In Aristotle's vision your family, neighbors, and city are required to care for you and you them. Unlike contemporary culture, if the society functions in a healthy manner, no one can fall through the social safety net; everyone has a place with relational connections. Hence in the tWorld the key to relational fulfillment was not to find the people with whom we most wished to relate, but to love and engage with those we had been given. Aristotle viewed family as irreplaceably beneficial because it was the place in which we learned the most important lessons about life, and there was no other institution that could teach those lessons as well. To be without a family was to be robbed of something needed for wholeness and happiness. Family taught us how to live with others, how to be citizens, and what it means to live in a community. At its best, the tWorld did not stifle a person, but instead provided the relational security, support, nurturing, and moral compass needed to develop ourselves in ways independent living could not provide.

According to Aristotle, however, there is a relationship of choice that enriches one's life: friendship. Unlike all the other relationships of obligation, friendships are freely chosen and are for the good of each person involved.⁶ Since friendship is entered into without obligation, it

5. Charles Lord, *Aristotle: The Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), bk. 1.

6. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), bks. 8–9.

gives us a quality of love that adds depth and richness to our life. In the tWorld, friendship was not merely an appendix to a good life; it was an important aspect of the relational matrix. As C. S. Lewis observes, “To the Ancients, Friendship seemed the happiest and most fully human of all the loves; the crown of life and the school of virtue.”⁷

Relational health is far more important to Aristotle than material standard of living. He recognizes that we must have our needs met to live a good life, but one of the greatest dangers to society and personal relational health is materialism: a belief that human happiness is dependent on financial wealth and the accumulation of possessions. Since we presently live in an age that equates material standard of living with quality of life, Aristotle’s argument requires some explanation. To demonstrate, follow along with this brief experiment. Imagine your ideal car. Drive your ideal car for three years. Is it still your ideal car? Imagine your ideal house. Live in your ideal house for three years. Is it still your ideal house? We could go on with any object we possess or wish to possess. Will any of this, once we acquire and consume it, provide us with the happiness for which we yearn? No. As much as we may operate with these assumptions, we will never actually find the happiness for which we strive in the things we possess. We invariably grow tired of what we have and want more and different possessions. Yet ultimately we will tire of everything we acquire. In the pursuit of happiness, materialism is a dead end. Why? Aristotle understands that there is no material thing we can desire that won’t eventually bore us if we possess it. Hence, if we wish to live a fulfilling life, the quality of our relationships matters much more than our standard of living.

In the tWorld *happiness* was deeply connected to the quality of our relationships. If we lived in a good family, a good neighborhood, and a good city and had good friends, we had most of what we needed to be happy. Human happiness and fulfillment was primarily dependent on the health of this relational matrix. Plato provides an illustration of this in his brief description of the healthy and “minimal” city in book 2 of *The Republic*. In the following excerpt, in which Socrates begins to explain his ideal life and city, one can see it is the relationships that matter and not the accoutrements:

7. C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), 87.

First let us consider what manner of life men so provided for will lead. Won't they make bread, wine, clothing, and shoes? And, when they have built houses, they will work in the summer, for the most part naked and without shoes, and in the winter adequately clothed and shod. For food they will prepare barley meal and wheat flour; they will cook it and knead it. Setting out the noble loaves of barley and wheat on some reeds or clean leaves, they will stretch out on rushes strewn with yew and myrtle and feast themselves and their children. Afterwards they will drink wine and, crowned with wreaths, sing of the gods. So they will have sweet intercourse with one another, and not produce children beyond their means, keeping an eye out against poverty and war.⁸

The phrase here translated “will have sweet intercourse with one another” would in contemporary English be “will take pleasure in each others’ company” or “enjoy their life together.” According to Plato, the quality of our relational life, which he does not identify with sexual gratification, is an essential aspect of our happiness.

Plato and Aristotle understood, however, that there is still another dimension to happiness and the good life. To carry the previous exercise in thought one step further, imagine your ideal friend. After relating to him or her closely for three years, would he or she still be your ideal friend? Imagine your ideal spouse. After living with your ideal spouse for seven years, would he or she still be your ideal spouse? No and no. What Plato and Aristotle recognize is that a fulfilling life requires something beyond having our material needs met and enjoying healthy human relationships. In their view the only thing that can truly fulfill us is being able to spend our life contemplating that which is higher than ourselves, attempting to understand it but never fully being able to. So just what is this thing that is higher than ourselves? Since we can never fully know it, it cannot be fully explained. Plato and Aristotle refer to it as “the good,” “the best,” “the ideal,” and “the prime mover,” and understanding this is the very purpose of philosophy. Since this is transcendent, theologians might refer to it as God. For Plato and Aristotle, contemplation of that which is beyond us is foundational for the best life possible.

8. Plato, *Republic* 2.372b, in *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom, 2nd ed. (1963; repr., New York: Basic Books, 1991), 49.

To the contemporary world, which is so fixated on activity to the exclusion of the contemplative, such a statement sounds like abject nonsense. Yet Plato and Aristotle believe that the only thing that can truly satisfy us is to engage in a pursuit we can never finish because it is the only pursuit with which we will never grow bored. It is in this quest that human fulfillment is complete. In the tWorld, the happiest life requires that we be philosophical or theological (seeking to know that which is beyond us), and as we find fulfillment in this pursuit, we can find fulfillment in all our relationships. The best life possible comprises all these elements.

Sexual Relations and Relational Fulfillment in the tWorld

It is important to understand that in the tWorld sexuality was viewed as a drive and an appetite but not a means of fulfillment. Plato believed that appetites would enslave us if they were not controlled and governed appropriately. Sexual relations had a function and a purpose within marriage but were unnecessary outside of marriage. When our sexual impulses become our master, rather than producing happiness they enslave us and rob us of happiness. Plato may have stated this best in the first book of *The Republic* when Cephalus, who is of advanced age, speaks to Socrates about aging and the desires of the flesh, including sexuality:

Now then, when they meet, most of the members of our group lament, longing for the pleasures of youth and reminiscing about sex, about drinking bouts and feats and all that goes with things of that sort; they take it hard as though they were deprived of something very important and had then lived well but are now not even alive. Some also bewail the abuse that old age receives from relatives, and in this key they sing a refrain about all the evils old age has caused them. But, Socrates, in my opinion these men do not put their fingers on the cause. For, if this were the cause, I too would have suffered these same things insofar as they depend on old age and so would everyone else who has come to this point in life. But as it is, I have encountered others for whom it was not so, especially Sophocles. I was once present when the poet was asked by someone, "Sophocles, how are you in sex? Can you still have intercourse with a woman?" "Silence, man," he said. "Most joyfully did I escape it,

as though I had run away from a sort of frenzied and savage master.” I thought at the time that he had spoken well and I still do. For in every way old age brings great peace and freedom from such things. When the desires cease to strain and finally relax, then what Sophocles says comes to pass in every way; it is possible to be rid of many mad masters.⁹

For Plato and the tWorld, sexuality was a drive and appetite that had a function and purpose, but if not harnessed and channeled appropriately, it would enslave us.

In many Platonic dialogues, sexual relations outside of marriage were part of the landscape. It is not the case, however, that Plato regarded these relations as morally acceptable.¹⁰ His discussion with Cephalus illustrates sexuality as an appetite rather than an agent of personal or relational fulfillment. Since sexual relations outside of marriage were not an aspect of the best life and could distract us from the pursuit of the best life, they were not virtuous outside of marriage. Virtuous behaviors contributed to the best life; vice was that which undermines our ability to enjoy the best life. Since Plato and Aristotle did not have a theological conception of sin, they did not attach stigma to sexual vice in the way Judaism, Christianity, and Islam do, but neither did they condone it.

It is not the case that sexual relations in the tWorld were always what they should be. Tacitus reports that every variety of sexual vice existed in Rome.¹¹ If it is true that “hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue,”¹² then Rome paid a great deal of tribute. While over time Rome grew in corruption and its leaders came to ignore its moral code, Romans did not so much change their moral code to justify their behavior; instead they opted for hypocrisy over obedience.

Human happiness and fulfillment in the tWorld were directly related to the health of personal relationships and the ability to engage in a

9. Plato, *Republic* 1.329a–d, in Bloom, *Republic of Plato*, 5.

10. Thomas Pangle, trans., *The Laws of Plato* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 229–34. Some might argue that Plato contradicts himself in book 5 of the *Republic* when he describes the community of wives and children. Book 5, however, exists to help support his argument about justice and is not a normative description of human relational life.

11. Michael Grant, trans., *Tacitus: The Annals of Imperial Rome*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1971).

12. Attributed to Matthew Arnold (1822–1888), British poet and critic.

contemplative life. Vice undermines all that is good, and the tWorld understood this.

Since a well-constructed and healthy extended family is the foundation of the tWorld, it is not surprising that sexual relations were sanctioned only in a marriage between one man and one woman.¹³ Cohabitation, adultery, and illegitimate birth undermined the relational matrix of the tWorld. Once enough people, for whatever reason, found themselves living outside the framework or discarded commitment to their relationships of *obligation* for relationships of choice, sexual or not, the existence of the tWorld was threatened. One cannot have it both ways: if the relational matrix is no longer the rule, then the society created by it will give way. Indeed, by virtually any set of measures, this is happening to our own society at present. The tWorld is passing away before our eyes. The question then is, “What will take its place?”

13. David Blakenhorn does a good job of describing the way this ethic developed historically in Blakenhorn, *The Future of Marriage*, chaps. 2–4.