“Isn’t she cute?” Monica asked rhetorically as she pressed the palm of her hand against the shiny glass vessel. It felt hot to her touch, but the lab tech assured her the temperature was a very normal 98.6 degrees. “Look, she’s sucking her thumb and curling her toes.” Bill, one of her repro-partners placed his hand on Monica’s. It was one of those sweet moments, though they were both sad that only the two of them could be at Kinder-Grow that afternoon. Their other repro-partner, Celine, had to work late and couldn’t make it for the regular visitation.

“It’s hard to believe,” Monica exclaimed expectantly, “in only 60 days we can take her home.” “Will you have the final payment by then, Bill?” Bill rolled his eyes and said a half-hearted, “Yes, of course.”

Monica heard classical music playing faintly in the background.

“Do you play this all the time?” asked Monica.

The tech, in her blue-green scrubs, said, “Not all the time. Would you prefer some other music?”

“Could you play some worship music?” Monica wondered.

“Worship music? I’m not sure we have that in our library,” the lab tech said, “but if you’ll search the cloud, I’d be happy to download them.”

Kinder-Grow is similar to the other commercial gestational services in Chicago. A little pricier, but they allowed repro-partners more
choices, including a choice in the environment in which the baby is growing, along with background music. And they also play high-definition digital recordings of the repro-partners’ voices during some of the baby’s awake states.

“Dr. Sanger said the gestational environment should be as identical as possible to a mother’s body,” Monica remarked. “If she were growing inside me,” she said rubbing her tummy, “I would sing lullabies to her all night long.”

Looking at Monica quizzically, Bill replied, “Inside you?” He had never seen a pregnant woman. He’d read about human pregnancy in his college biology text, but he’d never actually seen it himself. It seemed so, well, messy and inconvenient. Bill mustered some sympathy as he said, “It must have been really hard for women to carry a baby in their bellies for 9 months.”

“Yeah,” said Monica as a tear began to form in the corner of her eye, “but I think it might have been better that way.”

“Better?” said Bill with a tiny bit of disgust in his voice. “How could it be better than this? We get to choose our repro-partners. We can keep working so we can pay for an excellent gestational service like this. We choose our baby’s gender, biological traits, and personality-linked genes. We even get to visit her every day at Kinder-Grow. Oh, and no morning sickness and no stretch marks! Don’t forget that.”

As Bill pulled her close, Monica looked up at him, the tear now rolling over her silky cheek and dropping onto her collar, “I know you’re right, but still . . .”

Bill touched the temple of his cyberglasses with the built in camera and said, “Let’s get a picture for Celine.”

A few of the older, more conservative members of their church questioned the relationship between Bill, Monica, and Celine. But most of their Christian friends applauded them for being prolife. After all, they insisted, “we’re not having sex.” They weren’t even living together. Two had maintained their virginity into their early thirties, the other stopped having sex with other humans when she became an evangelical Christian at twenty-five.

Using gamete harvesting, IVF, and the latest in artificial uterus technology, they had been able to maintain sexual purity
and have the child they always wanted. With three of them entering a repro-partnering union, they could share the responsibilities of raising their little one just as they had been raised, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Those who find this scenario difficult to imagine have not been keeping up. Sex is not what it used to be. For millennia it was about a one-flesh-kind of union leading to procreation with children as a gift. Only in a perverse way is Monica and Bill’s story about procreation. It is really about baby-making, a project. And baby-making, like every other aspect of sex today, is about personal desire satisfaction—I want what I want, when I want it, with as few complications or obstacles as possible.

What does the future of sex portend in the culture of personal desire satisfaction? St. Paul’s injunction in Philippians 4:8 to think upon the pure and lovely precludes a discussion of the burgeoning sex trade, the ubiquity of pornography, and the mainstreaming of the so-called adult toy business. Yet, because the expression of our human procreative gifts is so intractable, something will have to be done in the future about the proclivity to produce offspring. So, doubtless we will see in the near future increasingly powerful contraception. “Guys might someday have a birth-control option that rivals the pill” exults Science News in its account of a new contraceptive gel for men that may hit the market in a few years. Adding this to the existing arsenal of contraception, the likelihood of a sperm living long enough to find an egg is decreasing daily.

And even if the wily sperm does finish its marathon, the resulting embryo will be subjected to a growing battery of tests that will make impossible the birth of a child who does not live up to a couple’s personal desires. In June 2012, a team of researchers at the University of Washington reported it was able to map the entire genetic blueprint of an unborn baby using only a blood sample from the mother—who was just 18 weeks into her pregnancy—and saliva from the father. They believe that this technique will enable them, with 98% accuracy, to screen a fetus for more than 3,000 genetically linked conditions, including cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy, and Marfan syndrome. Today, because of the pervasiveness of
testing, 90% of children with Down Syndrome are never born. Why would we expect this new test or any future tests to be used any differently?

The irony is that treating sex as personal desire fulfillment and baby-making as a project is slowly resulting in fewer of one’s own species with whom to have sex. For any population to replace itself every couple must have 2.1 children on average. Some European countries are in a precipitous decline toward depopulation. France, for instance, is around 2.0, just under the replacement rate, and the UK is at 1.8. Estimates are that world fertility will drop below replacement rate by 2050. So, in order to maintain a sufficient level of population to support the world—and avoid the messiness and inconvenience of having children the old fashioned way—couples will be encouraged, perhaps even incentivized, to have multiple children simultaneously using artificial uteri or the technology de jure.

Sex in the future will be more diverse, deranged, and bizarre than today. For example, sex will most assuredly include cyborgs. David Levy has written about this cyborg-erotic future in Love and Sex with Robots. An expert in artificial intelligence, Levy argues from both history and contemporary science that as robots become more human-like, they will be constructed to satisfy human affectionate and physiological desires. If that seems too farfetched to believe, there is personal testimony to suggest just the opposite. In Sherry Turkle’s recent book Alone Together, she introduces us to a man called Wesley. I am sure he speaks for others when he says, “I’d want from the robot a lot of what I want from a woman, but I think the robot would give me more in some ways. With a woman, there are her needs to consider. . . . That’s the trouble I get into. If someone loves me, they care about my ups and downs. And that’s so much pressure.”

No one should be surprised by this vision of the future of sex. Since ideas have consequences, the fallout of the sexual revolution could not be avoided. This is exactly what we should expect when desire is disordered. Indeed, Mary Eberstadt’s volume, Adam and Eve After the Pill: Paradoxes of the Sexual Revolution, shows that these scenarios may be among the least dystopian.
Even the National Association of Evangelicals is on the edge of the precipice. As they said to Marvin Olasky, editor of WORLD magazine: “Evangelicals are conflicted about contraceptives outside of marriage because we never want to promote or condone sexual immorality. But we are told that contraceptives can reduce abortions and we want to stop abortions.” This is called the fallacy of excluded middle. Either one uses condoms or one will have abortions. It is simply unfathomable in a culture where personal desire satisfaction trumps everything else, that anyone could maintain sexual purity until marriage or that they could care for a child they did not take on from the beginning as a project.

Sex is not what it used to be. Unless there is a significant backlash against the prevailing currents, it is also not what it is going to be.

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