

Review Essay

Jason Stotts's *Eros and Ethos: A New Theory of Sexual Ethics*

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In *Eros and Ethos*, Jason Stotts sets out for a more ambitious goal than its subtitle, *A New Theory of Sexual Ethics*, would imply.¹ He discusses sexual ethics within a eudaimonist, specifically Objectivist, framework. As if that's not enough, along the way he also discusses the structure of values, emotions, sentiments, erotic love, and romantic relationships, making advances in each of these areas. Overall, this book amounts to a contribution to the Objectivist ethics and eudaimonist ethics more generally.

Other than Ayn Rand's essays on the subject, relatively little work has been done on sexual ethics in the Objectivist literature. Nathaniel Branden touched on the subject briefly in his book *The Psychology of Romantic Love*.² Otherwise, whatever little was done focused primarily on the limited question of the permissiveness or not of homosexuality.³ Although that work was substantial in developing and emphasizing the importance of an attitude of openness and permissiveness regarding sexuality, it did not reach much further into sexuality in general. *Eros and Ethos* addresses a wider range of

¹ Jason Stotts, *Eros and Ethos: A New Theory of Sexual Ethics* (Ontario, Canada: Erosophia Enterprises, 2018).

² Nathaniel Branden, *The Psychology of Romantic Love: Romantic Love in an Anti-Romantic Age* (New York: Penguin Group, 1980).

³ Chris Matthew Sciabarra, *Ayn Rand, Homosexuality, and Human Liberation* (Stow, OH: Leap Publishing, 2003).

issues—from the nature of sexual attraction and sexual arousal to sexual identity and the role of sex in an overall human life—and Stotts promises even more in two future volumes.

Chapter 1 opens with a general discussion of eudaimonistic ethics that would be familiar to those who are versed in Aristotelianism or Objectivism. Stotts introduces the reader to the general framework and how it differs from other ethical systems. He explains that it is an ethic oriented toward living well in a way that is meaningful and not psychologically conflicted. He further explains that it is an ethic composed of principles that have to be understood and applied by each individual in the context of his own life. This is done by using practical wisdom (*phronesis*) rather than a system of easy-to-follow rules, and exercising virtues, which are “ongoing choices that we must make to be a certain kind of person and live a certain kind of life” (p. 17). All of this is oriented toward attaining happiness, which he describes as “a way of being engaged with our life and the experience of it going well” (p. 18).

Stotts explains that this system of ethics has, at its foundation, the biological requirements of human life. In an answer to a common Objectivist dilemma of whether ethics is supported by the needs of survival or flourishing, he offers words that should be etched in the soul of every Objectivist: “for a eudaimonist, to live and to live well is the same thing: living organisms are either flourishing or they are declining. . . . An animal that is ‘merely alive’ is an animal nearly dead” (p. 14). He focuses further on the fact that biology does not compel us to live, but that each of us must make that choice. He reminds us that “eudaimonism is a conditional system of principles, which come into play only if we choose to live” (p. 15).

Yet Stotts’s discussion of the choice to live itself is disappointing. He repeatedly emphasizes that it must be a free choice and that all normativity depends upon it, leaving the impression that it is effectively a subjective choice and that all objectivity in ethics begins after that choice. Later in the book, he says specifically that the choice is subjective: “while life cannot be an objective value . . . we can still choose to subjectively value our lives” (p. 115). Unfortunately, he does not engage with other scholars on this question. For example, David Kelley and Darryl Wright each attempt to save this choice from subjectivity without falling into intrinsicism.⁴

⁴ David Kelley, “Choosing Life,” *The Atlas Society* (June 22, 2010), available online at: <https://atlassociety.org/commentary/commentary-blog/3705-choosing-life>; Darryl Wright, “Reasoning about Ends: Life as a Value in Ayn

Stotts then moves on to an in-depth analysis of the structure of values. He explains that values must be organized around a central purpose in one's life.⁵ He then classifies values as core or peripheral, depending on how close or far they are from one's identity and central purpose, and as universal, constitutional, or personal, depending on how universally or particularly they apply (pp. 27-30). Stotts explains how universal values are achieved by virtues, providing a general explanation of how central Objectivist virtues achieve universal values: the virtue of rationality achieves the value of reason, productiveness achieves purposiveness, pride achieves self-esteem, honesty achieves truth, integrity achieves unity of self, independence achieves responsibility, psychological independence achieves reality-focus, and authenticity achieves meaning. The last two pairs are his innovations and are unconvincing as separate virtues, since they amount to slight variants of other virtues—psychological independence is an important aspect of rationality and independence, and authenticity is productiveness by a different name. Despite my quibbles, the overall discussion in Chapter 1 is a clearly written and valuable introduction to the subject matter.

Having set down this foundation, Stotts offers in Chapter 2 an in-depth analysis of emotions and sentiments. He presents a cognitive theory of emotions in three phases: identification, evaluation, and response. The process begins when one identifies something external or internal to one's self. He claims that identification can be conscious or subconscious, but it must be conceptual: "simple perception or imagination of an entity, action, or state of existence that does not involve identification cannot serve as the object for an emotion" (p. 64). Even in the case of simple fear for an unknown reason, he insists that what one identifies as the object of emotion is one's lack of

Rand's Ethics," in *Metaethics, Egoism and Virtue: Studies in Ayn Rand's Normative Theory*, ed. Allan Gotthelf and James Lennox (Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 3-32.

⁵ This is a claim originally made by Ayn Rand; see Alvin Toffler, "Playboy Interview: Ayn Rand," *Playboy* (March 1964), pp. 35-43, reprinted as a pamphlet by The Objectivist, Inc. (HMH Publishing Co., Inc., 1964), p. 6. It has been challenged by other Objectivists, namely, David Kelley and William Thomas, in their unpublished book manuscript *The Logical Structure of Objectivism*, accessed online at: <https://atlassociety.org/sites/default/files/LSO%20Binder.pdf>, pp. 166-70. Stotts neither mentions nor responds to this work.

knowledge. An implication, here, is that pre-conceptual beings, such as infants, cannot experience emotions in the mature sense of the term. He might say, instead, that they experience automatic affective states that fall into a different category from adult emotions.

Moving onto the next phase, Stotts claims that evaluation is a matter of automatic “subconscious correspondence” between the identified object and what he dubs as one’s “evaluative framework” (p. 68). This evaluative framework is a result of internalized beliefs, values, and “anti-values,” which form a network. This process at once accounts for the speed of emotional response and for the potential for conflicting emotions. It is fast because the evaluative framework is already developed. Conflicting emotions are caused by one’s evaluative framework containing contradictions or an insufficiently established hierarchy of values.

Last comes the response phase. Stotts parts ways with many psychologists in that he draws a distinction between emotional responses and affective states (p. 72). While the latter are physiological states of the body (e.g., the tension in nervousness), emotions are the already formed evaluations themselves that are held in mind over time. He clarifies this distinction with an example: When one says or thinks that he loves his wife, he may or may not experience the affective state of love at the time, but he does hold the evaluation in awareness. Stotts thus defines emotions as “a form of automatic evaluative awareness that orient us to their objects and are experienced as a cognitive conviction and often with attendant affect” (p. 73). Stotts then places emotions into a broader category—sentiments—which also includes a range of similar phenomena, including moods, existential moods, and existential orientation (pp. 74-85). Moods are responses to one’s general state of existence at a period of time. Existential moods are responses to overall direction and satisfaction with one’s life. Existential orientation is one’s response to one’s broadest evaluations, including one’s view of the nature of the world as well as the nature of oneself and others in the world.

This theory of emotions and sentiments has the advantage of allowing them to lay dormant without disappearing. One can still be in love with or angry at someone who wronged him long ago, without feeling the affect at all times. However, like many other sections in the book, this part suffers from a lack of engagement with other literature on the subject. There have been many empirical and conceptual advances in theories of emotions in psychology during the twentieth century. One competing account is the appraisal theory of emotions.

Appraisal theory researchers have found that emotions are a result of multiple steps of cognitive evaluation, rather than just one. The first step is the one that Stotts identifies, where an object is related to one's values. Other evaluative steps include assessments of the *cause* of the object (e.g., man-made versus metaphysical, intentional or accidental) and one's ability to deal with the object.⁶ Stotts recognizes that there is such complexity in the case of existential orientation, but not in his discussion of other sentiments like emotions, moods, and existential moods. Furthermore, appraisal theory researchers have developed more complex models of emotional *response*. Rather than separating emotional response from affect, they consider emotional response to have multiple components, including cognitive evaluations, affective states, and others that Stotts does not consider, such as motivational elements.⁷

Stotts then moves on to two excellent chapters that discuss the context of passionate sex. Chapter 3 covers erotic love and Chapter 4 covers erotic relationships—two experiences that obviously go hand in hand. He begins by appropriately identifying and rejecting several models of love that are widely—though often implicitly and partially—held: Platonic love, soul-mates, desperate longing, causeless love, and physicalism. In their place, he offers a rich and mature model of love that involves mutual intimacy and an internalization of the values of another human being so that he becomes analogous to “another self” (p. 104). Drawing in part on Aristotle's concept of mirroring, Stotts explains that love involves knowing and responding to another person deeply and in his entirety, including “the full range of what makes the person unique” and, especially, his “chosen self” (p. 105)—that is, his values and how they come together to form his character. He then provides us with a discussion of several specific characteristics of love: reciprocity, commitment, passion (i.e., caring deeply), exaltation, profound and selfish joy, shared history, intimacy (self-revelation), shared identity, and irreplaceability. These features will be familiar to anyone in a deeply loving relationship, but it is challenging to tease

⁶ K. R. Scherer, A. Shorr, and T. Johnstone, eds., *Appraisal Processes in Emotion: Theory, Methods, Research* (Canary, NC: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁷ Agnes Moors, Phoebe C. Ellsworth, Klaus R. Scherer, and Nico H. Frijda, “Appraisal Theories of Emotion: State of the Art and Future Development,” *Emotion Review* 5, no. 2 (April 2013), pp. 119-24.

apart and identify them conceptually. Stotts makes it clear that “without any of them, erotic love loses the qualities that make it special” (p. 111). He also explains that this kind of love requires self-love as well, which in turn requires both self-awareness and valuing oneself (pp. 114-16).

The discussion of erotic relationships also includes several characteristics. Some, such as caring, respect, mutual enjoyment, and erotic love, are relatively straightforward. Others may be less obvious to some readers, but Stotts offers convincing arguments for them. One of these features is equivalence: partners in a relationship should be morally and intellectually equivalent so that they can understand each other, continue to value each other, and benefits can flow in both directions (pp. 119-20). Another is sexual compatibility, which implies, among other things, that “pre-marital sex is morally obligatory” (p. 120), so that one does not commit to a partner with whom one would have pervasive sexual difficulties. Two others, mirroring and psychological visibility, involve being able to see the other accurately, echo each other’s qualities, see the benefits of one’s influence on the other, and be seen in a way that matches our view of ourselves. Lastly, he discusses one of the central difficulties of romantic relationships: balancing dependence on another individual for a portion of our happiness with one’s own independence as an individual (pp. 121-23 and 126-27).

This theory of erotic love and relationships is far more sophisticated than the models that Stotts rejects, and he identifies most of the central features involved in these experiences. There is, however, one feature of relationships that is conspicuously absent from his account: the importance of creating and pursuing *shared* values. A deep and committed relationship, especially one that leads to marriage, typically involves taking on new values together. Couples build a home by buying or renting a place for themselves and set it up according to their values and tastes; they build a family by having children; they take on new hobbies and experiences; they build traditions, such as rituals around important days of the year. Stotts writes extensively about *sharing* experiences, *sharing* values, *mutual incorporation* of the other’s already formed values, but he does not at all discuss building new values that are unique to the relationship and that were not held by either of the individuals prior to the relationship.

Furthermore, as was the case in prior chapters, these sections suffer from too little engagement with other literature. The simplistic models of love he rejects, although prevalent, are not the only ones that

exist. Psychological studies of love and romantic relationships have substantially advanced during the past few decades. John Gottman, for example, did extensive empirical studies leading to his “sound relationship house theory.”⁸ Others from the Positive Psychology movement have developed what has come to be known as the “self-expansion model of love,” or “Aristotelian Love.”⁹ Stotts even ignores work on romantic relationships by those closely aligned with Objectivism. As mentioned above, in 1980, Nathaniel Branden published a book-length treatment of romantic love, approaching it with a eudaimonist, Objectivist framework.¹⁰ Branden’s book also goes into the role of sex in a relationship and comes to some of the same principles and conclusions as Stotts does. Does Stotts agree or disagree with his claims? Who knows, for he doesn’t even mention Branden’s work.

Nonetheless, having set down these foundations, Jason Stotts moves on in Chapter 5 to the topic of sex, covering sexual attraction and sexual fantasies. He begins by rejecting the claim that sexual attraction is primarily physical, arguing instead that it is experienced toward the whole person, and that it emanates from one’s whole integrated self as well. Although he recognizes that sexual attraction can occur between strangers, he emphasizes that this “initial sexual attraction is either dampened or heightened by our response to their character” (p. 144) as we get to know that person over time. Even the initial sexual attraction is not entirely physical; it is also a response to what Stotts calls a person’s “style” (p. 143), which is an outward expression of a person’s fundamental attitude toward life. A person’s style manifests in his every expression and action, so it plays some role in all sexual attraction, whether between strangers or lovers. One is sexually attracted to the totality of a person’s physical appearance, style, and character as an integrated whole.

While that is the *object* of attraction, Stotts explains that the *source* of attraction is, in large part, our values and character. He does this by identifying sexual attraction as an emotion; like other emotions,

⁸ John Gottman, *Principia Amoris: A New Science of Love* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2015).

⁹ Jennifer M. Tomlinson, *The Positive Psychology of Romantic Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁰ Nathaniel Branden. *The Psychology of Romantic Love*.

it comes from one's evaluative framework. He also offers several hypothetical examples of how individuals with different characters are likely to find different individuals attractive: "Sexual attraction . . . involves *our* full person as well . . . our bodies and minds, existential orientation, values and beliefs, style, and character" (p. 156).

Stotts is right to reject simplistic physicalist models of sexual attraction. His discussion brings sexual attraction to life, so to speak. He shows how sexual attraction involves individuals in their full complexity. Yet even this discussion is incomplete and suffers from two serious drawbacks. First, he underestimates the role of biology. He leaves out nearly the whole issue of physical attractiveness, because he thinks that values and life experience account for most of attraction. Values and life experience account for why people are attracted to youth or to particular physical characteristics and why they regard some people as more beautiful than others. For example, he says that many people are "fixated on youth as the paradigm of sexual attraction [because] this is when we first develop our sexual attractions and this paradigm is prevalent in our culture" (p. 150). He largely dismisses sexual types because people "package together certain values . . . and certain physical characteristics" (p. 152). In other words, if a man likes blonde women, it's likely because he once found a happy, blonde woman and this became his model of a good woman. This may in part be true, but it is too simplistic for a book of this depth. Studies have repeatedly found certain physical characteristics and age ranges to be widely sexually attractive, and some of these characteristics correlate with reproductive abilities.¹¹ Thus, biological variation likely plays at least some role, just as it partially explains why people are more attracted to men or to women, a point which he acknowledges later in the book (in Chapter 6).

Regarding sexual types in particular, other factors are likely involved as well, including one's particular sexual preferences and choice of sexual fantasies. For example, a person who frequently fantasizes about playing a submissive sexual role may become more sexually attracted to individuals with larger stature and who are more assertive in their style. Stotts does offer a fruitful analysis of fantasy,

¹¹ Jan Antfolk, "Age Limits: Men's and Women's Youngest and Oldest Considered and Actual Sex Partners," *Evolutionary Psychology* (January-March 2017), pp. 1-9; Douglas T. Kenrick and Richard C. Keefe, "Age Preferences in Mates Reflect Sex Differences in Human Reproductive Strategies," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 15 (1992), pp. 75-133.

explaining that it can include four types of activities: envisioning sexual activities we would like to try, testing whether an activity would be exciting, reliving past sexual experiences, and transitioning into a sexually excited state (erotic shift) (pp. 157-59). He further explains that, ethically, individuals should allow themselves nearly complete freedom with their sexual fantasy lives and avoid stifling or impairing themselves. However, he does not connect this activity to values and sexual types.

The second drawback in his discussion of sexual attraction is the complete absence of any discussion, or even mention, of the sexes and any potential differences between them. Nor does he discuss masculinity and femininity and their relationship to sexual attraction. Although men and women share many similarities, both popular stereotypes and science indicate that they experience sexuality differently, at least on average. Furthermore, people generally are attracted to one sex or the other, but not both. A substantial aspect of this trend is that people tend to find masculinity or femininity attractive, but not both. Masculinity and femininity receive some attention in the next chapter, but the issue is kept separate from its role in sexual attraction.

In Chapter 6, Stotts offers an intriguing discussion of sexual identity, which he defines broadly as “that rich confluence of things about us that creates a robust account of our identity as sexual beings” (p. 200). It includes our experiences of ourselves as sexual beings as well as what we like to do sexually, with whom we like to do it, why we do it, and how we understand ourselves doing it. He divides this account into several components, discussing three of them at length: sexual orientation, societal sex role, and erousia. As he does in prior chapters, he begins by rejecting simplistic accounts in favor of more holistic ones. Here, he rejects the idea that a person is by nature homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual, which he regards as too fixed and intrinsic (pp. 163-68). This may seem odd to many readers, who might regard such categorization by nature real. Stotts’s alternative is that sexual orientation is a *disposition* to have sex with individuals of a particular sex *and* in particular ways. A disposition is less fixed, which recognizes that “sexuality is dynamic” (p. 169) and that people can sometimes act outside of their general preferences. This also recognizes that sexual orientation has to do with both sexual attraction and sexual actions, and includes preferences other than the sex of the person we desire.

“Erouisia”—another aspect of sexual identity—is a term that Stotts has created to refer to our conscious experience of being sexual. It arises when we are conscious of ourselves and self-reflective while being sexually aroused or when we see ourselves through a partner while being sexually aroused (pp. 188-89). Such a state brings forward what he calls our “erotic framework,” the entire set of our specifically sexual values and beliefs (pp. 190-93). This erotic framework forms the basis of all aspects of our sexual identity. It develops over a lifetime, beginning with our first experiences with masturbation or sex-play, and includes our conceptualizations of our experiences, messages we get from others about what is permissible or shameful, and ideas we get from our culture.

The third aspect of sexual identity is the “societal sex role.” Unfortunately, this is a somewhat disappointing section in an otherwise enlightening chapter. Stotts introduces the societal sex role as an alternative to gender, which he says has come to mean something *intrinsic* about a person rather than just a social expression of physical sex. So far so good. It’s not clear that this requires giving up on the word “gender”—and doing so is likely to be controversial—but it is appropriate to point out and move away from notions that imply intrinsicism. He further distinguishes the societal sex role (man versus woman) from the corresponding virtues (masculine versus feminine). The bulk of this section, however, is about how these societal sex roles are taught through one’s culture and the *zeitgeist*. Essentially, he thinks that this is done through negative messages and experiences, including “rules, shame, and disgust” (p. 179), but primarily through shame. Messages about appropriate societal sex role behaviors are all around us, including in popular culture, and are absorbed passively by each of us. To the extent that we comply, we are doing well, but to the extent we do not, we face “ostracism and violence” (p. 180). Women are thus initially taught to be docile by seeing such behavior modeled and then by being put down or called various pejorative names, such as “bossy,” whenever they act contrary to their socially expected behaviors. Stotts calls this behavior “shamenorming,” which is the deliberate use of shame to achieve conformity to social standards (p. 183).

What roles do societies shame into their members? According to Stotts, in the United States, the societal sex role for men consists of being assertive, strong, quiet, and emotionless. For women, it consists of being docile, petite, nurturing, and emotional.¹² How do certain roles

¹² It’s not clear how he arrives at these descriptors or whether they are valid. I, for one, have never met an emotionless man or even one who frequently

attain this status? Stotts indicates that they are, effectively, socially constructed (although he doesn't use this phrase). He illustrates this with the example of baby clothing colors: prior to World War I, pink was for boys and blue for girls, while prior to that it was white for both (p. 178). The implication is that these constructions are arbitrary. There is almost no mention of biology in this entire section. Biology then comes back, in attenuated form, somewhat later in the chapter. He says that these societal sex roles are, in part, based on his new concept of *erousia*, claiming that "an individual's experience of himself as male and of his male erotic being is the kernel upon which masculinity is built" (p. 193). The same is true for women. To put this in simpler terms, a male human comes to feel that he is a man and masculine through his experience of being sexually aroused; he builds his masculinity upon this. Society, in turn, builds its notions of masculinity upon that, combined with a somewhat random assortment of other behaviors that it packages together.

This whole description of societal sex roles sounds like it came from a postmodern playbook, with its emphasis on social construction, negative messaging, and insufficient attention to biology. This is difficult to square with daily experience or empirical evidence. Just consider whether you feel like you are living, or ever lived, in a world that shamed you into an arbitrary collection of behaviors and ideas that you now consider your masculinity or femininity. Not just a few ideas here and there, but *in toto*. The reality is that societal sex role, like all morality, *could* operate through shaming, but it doesn't have to be that way, nor is it necessarily that way most of the time. Morality can and should be aspirational, something which Stotts recognizes elsewhere in the book.¹³

Furthermore, it is unlikely that societal sex roles are simply socially constructed or that they arise out of sexual arousal. Children share behaviors and interests with other children of the same sex long before they begin to experience sexual arousal. A more likely cause of such behaviors, and foundation for societal sex roles, is the difference in interests and physical and personality characteristics between the

tries to be emotionless. What I do often see are men attempting to be temperate and, in some cases, Stoic about negative feelings in particular.

¹³ To his credit, Stotts does mention briefly that societal sex role virtues are ideals that people can aspire to, but he does not see this as a major factor, and quickly returns to discussing shamenorming.

sexes. Studies have begun to validate sex differences that parents have known for centuries. For example, boys, on average, like rough-and-tumble play more than girls do, are more interested in sports, and prefer trucks to dolls as kids, while girls have more empathy and interest in other people and prefer dolls as kids.¹⁴ These differences are large, appear early in life, and are stable over time.¹⁵ One study that used sophisticated eye tracking of infants found that the preference of boys for trucks and girls for dolls, is present at 3-8 months of age (or perhaps even earlier).¹⁶ These differences are also likely in part mediated by sex hormones. Young girls with a condition called congenital adrenal hyperplasia that exposes them to higher amounts of male sex hormones, become more interested in male-typed toys—and this effect grows with the quantity of male hormones that these girls are exposed to.

Here's a sketch of an alternative model of how societal sex roles come about and are perpetuated. Children make friends predominantly with others of the same sex, in part because of similar interests and in part due to cultural expectations. In these friend groups, the shared characteristics and interests are likely to be accentuated, whereas the unshared ones are discouraged. In other words, boys spending time together will tend to play sports rather than follow the interests of the outlier who likes dolls. Over time, boys will individually aspire to be good at sports, because that is what their friends and other inspirational figures of the same sex do. Each individual will naturally develop those interests and characteristics that are both naturally present and permissible in his or her sex groupings. A boy who does not like sports may still find that, say, there's no stigma against intellectual pursuits and will pursue that rather than sports. It is here that shaming likely plays its biggest role—not as a

¹⁴ David P Schmitt, "The Truth About Sex Differences," *Psychology Today* (November 7, 2017), accessed online at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/201711/the-truth-about-sex-differences>.

¹⁵ Brenda K. Todd, Rico A. Fischer, Steven Di Costa, et al., "Sex Differences in Children's Toy Preferences: A Systematic Review, Meta-Regression, and Meta-Analysis," *Infant and Child Development* 27, no. 2 (March/April 2018).

¹⁶ Gerianne Alexander, Teresa Wilcox, and Rebecca Woods, "Sex Differences in Infants' Visual Interest in Toys," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 38, no. 3 (2008), pp. 427-33.

foundational force, but as a means of bringing outliers in line with characteristics that are typically naturally present in others of the same sex. All the while, the primary motivating force is not to avoid shame, but to develop oneself and become more like other admirable members of one's own sex. Erosia comes late in this process and allows individuals more fully to experience a masculinity or femininity they have already begun to develop.

Now let's move on to Chapters 7 and 8. Here, Stotts integrates his major points and draws out some principles for how to get the most out of sex and how it can contribute to a satisfying life. He advocates an open, flexible, thoughtful, and deliberate approach to sex. He explains that sex should be *both* a source of intense pleasure and a "moral impetus" (p. 203) to become the best we can be. These come together because sexual pleasure itself has to do with our ideas and values, in particular, our erotic framework. An important aspect of sex is that it "lets us not only directly experience the reality of our values and beliefs, but also the necessary unity of our minds and bodies" (p. 218).

In this way, Stotts rejects other approaches to sex which are usually focused on either pleasure (indulgent camp) or morality (restraint or abstinent camp), but not both. These include what he calls the three false alternatives: that one should indulge in sex for pleasure alone, abstain from sex, or engage in it in highly restrained ways. He explains that these alternative perspectives, although different from one another, all have an "impoverished conception of sex" (p. 220) that divorces it from a person's character and higher values. None of them sees sex as a source of moral growth.

With this understanding in the background, Stotts advises us to cultivate good and satisfying sex lives. This includes a wide range of decisions and actions. He organizes some of them for us. To begin with, he advises us to develop good characters and good relationships, including deep and intimate romantic relationships. He also recommends that we think deliberately about how we want to approach sex, what our goals are for any given sexual experience (and for our sex lives as a whole), and to cultivate habits and dispositions that will bring these about. Importantly, he also emphasizes thinking positively and openly about sex, carefully weeding out any thoughts we may have about sex being "'only bodily,' 'dirty,' or 'dangerous'" (p. 227).

Overall, despite the misgivings I raise above, I highly recommend *Eros and Ethos*. It is what a philosophical book should be—a deeply insightful analysis of the issues and a practical guide in

an important aspect of life. It invites the reader to examine his whole being and, especially, the ways he thinks about and engages in sex. All the while, it keeps the reader focused on positivity. It advocates an orientation toward openness, exploration, and satisfaction rather than unnecessary self-restraint or thoughtless indulgence. Its advice is sound and wholesome and will urge you to make yourself better.

