Freedom and Dignity

(A response to the question posted on Philosophy Stack Exchange, "On what grounds can a democratic state prohibit pornography?")

The question of whether a democratic state can prohibit pornography depends entirely on what one means by "democracy." If democracy is merely the tyranny of the majority, then the answer is trivial: pornography could be banned simply because the majority wishes it, with no further justification or "grounds" needed. But majorities are not always just or wise. History

offers sobering examples of collective decisions that led to acts of profound injustice. After all, it wasn’t a king or a tyrant, but the will of the crowd that demanded the crucifixion of Jesus. And nothing illustrates better how dangerous collective “virtue” can become when it silences the individual. Obviously I do not mean to morally equate prohibitionists with the crowd that cried out for his crucifixion, but only to show a recurring historical pattern: the moral fallibility of the masses. Similar dynamics can be seen in other tragic episodes of history, where authorities, fearing the anger or panic of the crowd, sacrifice individuals not for justice, but to preserve their own popularity, or simply because they lack the moral strength

to resist the pressure of the multitude. One such case was the torture and execution of the Milanese barber Gian Giacomo Mora, during the plague, in a trial driven more by popular hysteria and the need for a scapegoat than by evidence, as described by Alessandro Manzoni in Storia della colonna infame. The authorities, as Manzoni writes, were not led by reason but by

> fear of failing to live up to a general expectation, as certain as it was rash, of appearing less clever if they discovered innocent people, of turning the cries of the multitude against themselves.

This is a clear reminder of how powerful non-institutional pressure from the crowd can become. Another example is the long history of witch trials, where fear, ignorance, and public pressure led to unspeakable cruelty. In all these cases, the “will of the people” was neither wise nor just: its appeasement came at the cost of truth, dignity, and innocent lives. Moreover, if someone insists on defending the majority’s will as a sufficient criterion of ethical legitimacy, then they must accept the following logical consequence: the Final Solution would become acceptable, because orchestrated by a regime that came to power through democratic elections, with the support of millions. Again this is, of course, not to suggest that banning

pornography is comparable to genocide, but only to demonstrate the fallacy of considering majority rule a sufficient moral criterion. Democracy is not simply majority rule: it is a framework of procedures designed to protect individuals from arbitrary power, including the arbitrary power of the majority. Without ethical and legal limits, it becomes a form of tyranny cloaked in democratic legitimacy, a form of totalitarian power with a popular face. Some might object: if it is not the majority that decides what is legitimate in a democracy, then who does? This question strikes at the heart of the democratic paradox. The answer is, at once, very simple and very complex.

i) On the one hand, there is the plain fact that power indeed belongs to the majority, but this power is not absolute; it is constrained by limits. And this is not an anti-democratic stance. I am confident that any reasonable reader will agree that there must be fundamental limits (dogmas, if you will) that apply to all forms of power in society, even the most legitimate ones (governments, judges, police, parents, etc.).

ii) On the other hand, the practical challenge of defining and regulating these limits is one of political philosophy's most formidable and enduring dilemmas, a problem that has challenged even the greatest minds.

Alexis de Tocqueville wrote:

> I hold it to be an impious and detestable maxim that, politically speaking, the people have a right to do anything; and yet I have asserted that all authority originates in the will of the majority. Am I, then, in contradiction with myself?

Nearly two centuries later, we still do not have a definitive answer to this million-dollar question: how can we make democracy an expression of the majority's will, and at the same time immunize it against its own fragility? As Anne Applebaum warns,

> Given the right conditions, any society can turn against democracy. Indeed, if history is anything to go by, all of our societies eventually will.

This observation is not pessimism, but realism. Democracies do not collapse only through coups, external destabilization or military aggression. Sometimes, they are slowly undermined by the very people who claim to defend them. The lesson is clear: democracy must be more than the mere implementation of majority preferences. It must be a system that protects the freedom.

Obviously, I do not presume to solve such profound philosophical questions here. I will simply note that, if democracy is understood as a system that safeguards individual liberties, rather than merely enforcing majority preferences, then a prohibition of pornography requires rigorous justification. As John Stuart Mill warned:

> people may desire to oppress a part of their number, and precautions are as much needed against this as against any other abuse of power.

These words perfectly capture the essence of our case.

Far from being a modern invention, sexually explicit material traces back to the most remote depths of antiquity, taking on different forms across the ages but always reflecting a timeless aspect of human desire, as ubiquitous as other forms of cultural expression such as music, mathematics or humor. The latter is particularly relevant in this context: like pornography, comedy reveals a dimension of human freedom that unsettles systems of control. They have often exposed the absurdities of power, or challenged taboos and dogmas, and for that reason, both have frequently been censored, stigmatized, or silenced. Sexuality and laughter share a secret: both dissolve fear with pleasure.

And that is precisely why those who rule by fear have always sought to silence them. Yet they endure because they give voice to something primal and irrepressible in the human spirit, something no decree or dogma has ever managed to erase. Of course, not all pornography aspires to be art, but neither does all music, all comedy, or all literature. The point is that personal expression, even when commercialized, deserves the same baseline respect as any other consensual form of self-representation. Like any other form of human expression, neither pornography nor humor requires justification to exist. Rather, it is their prohibition that demands substantiated reasoning. John Stuart Mill stated:

> The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.

And this is not merely a theoretical concern: it is one of the fundamental pillars upon which a truly liberal democracy is built. If we accept this principle, then the burden of proof lies entirely with those who seek to impose a prohibition, not with those who defend individual freedom. In other words, the fundamental principle of a free society is that individual freedom does not need to justify

itself. It must be noted, however, that the boundary between individual choices and those that affect others is not always clear. In fact, this distinction raises one of the most profound and enduring challenges in political philosophy.

Thus, the key question in a democratic framework is not "why should pornography be allowed?" but rather, as has been rightly asked, "are there any justifiable grounds for its prohibition?". The short answer is that in a free society, every consenting adult should be free to express their sexuality according to their own nature and desires. Watching or producing pornography falls squarely within this principle. Just as no one is forced to watch or

play a sport, no one is forced to watch or participate in pornography. But banning it for moral reasons would mean imposing on everyone a vision of sexuality that is not universal, but only a subjective perspective. Of course, the parallel with sports is not entirely fitting, because pornography can disturb not only those who do not want (uninterested adults) or must not (minors) access it, but also those who do enjoy it, yet only in specific moments and contexts of their choosing: even those who appreciate pornography do not wish for unsolicited exposure outside the times they actively seek it. As wisely stated in Ecclesiastes: "There is a time for everything". But this is not an argument against

pornography per se, but rather a question of regulation and access. It is clear that it must be legislated with particular care.

We can now examine the main objections and analyze them critically, for this, as we have seen, is the only meaningful way to answer the question.

1) Is pornography dangerous?

A frequent criticism is that pornography is dangerous, either for those who produce it or for those who consume it.

1.1) Dangerous for those who produce it?

Let me be absolutely clear: given the vastness of the adult entertainment industry, it would be unrealistic to believe that serious problems don't exist. Some of these issues are undeniably criminal, including psychological pressure, emotional manipulation, and unethical working conditions. For this reason, minimizing the potential gravity of such abuses by arguing that performers always had the option to decline, is not just superficial, it is dangerous. No serious discussion on these issues can rely on such oversimplifications. That is not a view I hold, nor one I intend to defend here. Abuses deserve not only moral condemnation but also legal prosecution with full determination. In a

commercial context, dynamics are not the same as in a private sexual relationship. If the environment is unhealthy, a performer might feel pressured not to say "not this", or "not today", simply because they’re in a paid, structured, and expectation-laden environment. Both situations raise ethically significant concerns. The first is problematic for reasons that are all too obvious: consent must be specific, not just general. But the second (feeling unable to say “not today”) is just as important. It is reasonable to assume that even the most sexually vibrant and confident individuals experience moments, sometimes extended periods, when desire fades. And this, too, deserves respect. Desire has its seasons,

and freedom means honoring not just the moments when it burns brightly, but also those when it dims, or quietly withdraws. The right not to feel desire is not a defect: it is a facet of our humanity, and one that must not be erased by the rhythm of production or the expectations of others. This makes the situation more delicate than ordinary sex, and it is true that commercial contexts may be more exposed to such risks. But it’s also essential to note that these same dynamics can, tragically, occur in unhealthy private contexts, and with far greater severity than in professional pornography, where even unethical behavior is limited by the public nature of the act. As in other potentially dangerous work environments, true safety

depends on sound legislation, on the intelligence, empathy, and ethical awareness of those who manage the process, and on well-written contracts.

Sexual expression, like all forms of human intimacy, must always remain free, never owed. No one, under any circumstance, should feel morally obliged to offer their body. To turn desire into duty is to extinguish its soul. Of course, choosing to give oneself, even without desire, can be an act of affection or generosity (although humanly questionable; and what happens if both partners make love only to please the other? The result, ironically and paradoxically, is that no one is pleased). But it

must always remain a choice, never an expectation. A mental openness to pleasure, when authentic and free, can certainly enrich intimacy, but it must never be confused with obligation. There is a fundamental ethical difference between a professional obligation that can be revoked without shame, and a moral expectation that turns refusal into guilt. In patriarchal models of marriage, saying no often makes you “selfish.” Of course, this is not to equate the two domains. But if we’re honest, we must admit that emotional coercion and moral expectation can operate more insidiously in private relationships than in regulated professional contexts. The difference is in the moral consequences of refusing the act. In

healthy professional contexts, a performer may withdraw at any moment without being seen as morally deficient. There may be economic consequences, but no one questions her dignity. Her “no” does not stain her worth. And neither should her fantasies, if freely expressed, mark her with shame. The freedom to withhold one’s body and the freedom to reveal one’s desires are two sides of the same dignity. In a toxic marriage, shaped by duty and expectation, the same “no” can be met with guilt, emotional pressure, or quiet disappointment. The cost is not financial, it is relational: affection, esteem, or peace may be withdrawn. A person is not a service. Freedom ends where availability is presumed, and where freedom ends, so does

dignity.

Certainly, some may argue that the very presence of serious crimes should be enough to justify an outright ban. They might claim that anyone honest and lucid enough to acknowledge the obvious (that it is not plausible to believe that a global phenomenon of this size has remained untouched by serious issues) must either side with the most radical prohibitionists, or be accused of monstrous insensitivity. But this kind of thinking reduces every complex reality to a binary logic. As I will argue further on, there are at least two truths that must never be forgotten:
i) first, that extremely serious crimes,

unfortunately, exist in every human sphere, even in those considered the most noble. The tension between formal consent and real, unconstrained freedom is not a problem unique to pornography: it can arise in many domains, including marriage, where emotional pressure, social expectations, or financial dependence may deeply affect a person’s choices. Yet we do not ban marriage because of its pathological cases. We recognize its importance, and we work to protect those who are vulnerable within it. The same reasoning must apply here.

ii) second, that the possibility of serious problems arising cannot justify the banning of something that, for many people, represents not only a form of expression or beauty, but a

deeply personal and vital dimension of life, much like faith is for a believer. In both cases, we are dealing with intimate realms of meaning that cannot be judged from the outside. Just as we do not demand that a faith conform to collective norms in order to be legitimate, we should not demand that from sexual expression either.

Prohibition, far from resolving the problems discussed above, generates others, just as serious starting with the denial of freedom for those for whom exhibition is a profound existential need. Eliminating the problems by destroying the entire context that contains them is like trying to “cure” a cancer by killing the

patient; or like refusing to eat, dress, or use a phone in order to eliminate any risk of supporting unethical practices. Instead, we must believe in the possibility of removing the evil while preserving what is good, free, and worthy of existence. It is precisely in such cases that discernment becomes essential.

While crimes must be condemned and prosecuted with full determination, they do not justify banning pornography. History shows that outright bans do not eliminate demand. They drive it underground, into markets where abuse is harder to detect, prevent, or punish. There is no reason to believe pornography would be an exception. Of course, this does not

mean that regulation is always the right answer. Some markets deserve prohibition (such as human trafficking, child exploitation, or hard drugs) because the harm they cause is inherent and cannot be eliminated or mitigated through oversight. However, this is not the case for pornography: unlike inherently harmful markets, it can operate safely with proper regulations, ensuring fair working conditions, informed consent, and mandatory health screenings. Legality does not guarantee perfection, but it allows for transparency and monitoring. A sector that operates in the open can evolve, improve, and be held to ethical standards. In recent years, attention to these issues has grown significantly. And if this is

still deemed insufficient, rather than engaging in prohibitionist crusades, it would be far more productive if activists pushed for stricter ethical certifications, without denying the freedom of those who choose to be part of it.

Concerns about crimes are understandable and legitimate. However, arguing that pornography should be banned for this reason would be as absurd as arguing that the church should be abolished due to the existence of abusive individuals within them (and it should be noted that these crimes are far more serious than anything that may occur within professional pornography, for reasons I would rather not even name, though they are known to all).

Clearly, this would be an unreasonable and unjustified response. Preserving something that holds deep value for many people, while demanding strong ethical oversight, is not a betrayal of the pain of the victims, it is not denial, but discernment: the ability to separate what must be condemned from what still deserves to exist. The same holds true for the family, arguably the most sacred institution in human society, the very cradle of love and care. And yet, when the family becomes toxic, it can also be the setting for the most devastating emotional and physical abuse. Should we abolish the family for that reason? Of course not. Because we understand that its value, for millions of lives, remains immense, and that the

answer to pain is not destruction, but justice. We don’t destroy what is meaningful and beautiful to punish those who betrayed it. We strive to heal, to protect, and to preserve what still deserves to exist.

Following the logic that cancels rather than reforms, and simplifies rather than understands, we would have to ban work, sports, music, education, tourism, games, volunteering, or practically any human activity or institution, because crimes can occur in any context. Even charity, one of the noblest activities of humanity, has been implicated in serious scandals. Consider the Oxfam scandal in Haiti, where some humanitarian workers abused their

power to exploit vulnerable women. Should we ban charity for this reason? No, of course not. The problem is not charity itself, but the individuals who prey on vulnerable individuals within it.

The same reasoning applies to pornography: the need for clear regulations in the industry is not a reason for prohibition, but rather a way to ensure the protection of those involved, just as in any other field. Moreover, just as the scale of the phenomenon makes it unreasonable to believe that abuse never occurs, there is likewise no reason to assume that misconduct is more prevalent in this industry than in traditional workplaces, where various forms of

abuse occur, often behind closed doors and away from public scrutiny, in ways that remain hidden precisely because those environments are considered respectable and uncontroversial.

At this very moment, thousands of people are working on construction sites without proper safety measures, a reality that leads to thousands of deaths every year. And yet, we do not call for banning construction, because we recognize both its social value and the possibility of improving safety through regulation. Why should pornography, where the risks are not comparable, be treated as if it were more dangerous?

Some damage isn’t written into law. Not all wounds are crimes, but they are wounds nonetheless. So they matter. Are there environments within pornography that are toxic? Inevitably the answer, somewhere, is always yes. No human field of this size can be entirely free of such problems. But this is not a reason to condemn the entire realm of sexual expression. Is there a risk that some may use pornography not to explore desire, but to make it wither? Yes, of course there is. The world is full of people who harm what they do not understand. Be very careful: this is not a matter of how explicit a scene is, or how intense the fantasy might be. When a woman chooses to express her deep desires freely, even the

boldest, wildest ones, what matters is that they are hers, not forced. And that freedom includes everything: the right to embrace one's sexuality boldly, or to reject it entirely. Both choices (and everything in between) are legitimate. Her freedom, her self-determination in choosing if and how to live her sexuality, her happiness: these are what make the difference. (And this truth reaches far beyond pornography.)

Ultimately, just as we don't outlaw marriage because some people twist it into something toxic (without technically committing a crime) we shouldn't outlaw pornography because some misuse it, or because they reduce it to a mere money-making machine, turning something that could honor a person's deepest

self into something hollow, soulless, stripped of meaning, blind to the beauty it should have revealed.

On the other hand, the existence of serious misconduct, statistically unavoidable in any large human endeavor, does not negate the reality of positive and deeply meaningful experiences: many people in the industry speak openly about their personal fulfillment, even after leaving the field, when any financial interest is minimal or absent. And as with Formula 1 drivers, they may leave not out of regret, but simply because they felt It was time to begin a new chapter in life, perhaps influenced by family concerns or other personal

reasons. These positive testimonials are realities that cannot be ignored. Some may dismiss this as a naïve or "romanticized" view of pornography, but what is truly naïve is the assumption that human desires, motivations, and aspirations can be reduced to a single, simplistic narrative. The idea that any woman who speaks positively about her experience in pornography does so solely for financial gain is a non-falsifiable claim. As Karl Popper explained, a theory that cannot be empirically tested is not scientifically valid. If every positive testimony is automatically dismissed as being influenced by financial interest, then there is no possible observation that could disprove this theory. This does not mean that

every statement should be accepted uncritically, but dismissing all favorable testimonies a priori, as a matter of principle, amounts to adopting a dogmatic rather than a rational position. And dogma, not reason, is the true enemy of understanding.

Returning to the question of risk, it’s worth noting that many socially accepted activities involve far greater dangers than pornography, such as motor racing, extreme mountaineering, or scientific exploration in deadly environments like volcanoes and caves. These pursuits are hazardous, yet society does not call for their abolition, because the danger is voluntary and informed. Everyone finds meaning in different

ways: what may seem reckless or absurd to some is, for others, life lived to the fullest. Opposition to pornography, then, often seems less concerned with demonstrable harm and more rooted in cultural discomfort with sexual expression. In a free society, there is no justification for prohibiting consensual adult activity merely because some see it as risky or unwise. Those who truly care should offer arguments, not impose restrictions.

1.2) Dangerous for those who watch it?

A common argument posits that pornography may have an impact on mental health. Although pornography can have negative effects,

especially on psychologically vulnerable individuals, I often wonder whether the deeply aggressive, rude, and frustrated behaviors that are commonly seen in society could, at least in part, stem from sexual repression. While I do not claim expertise in psychology, it is a legitimate philosophical question whether unfulfilled sexual needs, when prolonged, might contribute to emotional imbalances. This is not to assert a definitive conclusion, but to highlight a philosophical asymmetry: we scrutinize the potential harm of pornography while rarely we consider the potential psychological consequences of its absence in certain contexts, especially when this absence is driven by shame or internalized guilt.

However, unlike alarmist claims about pornography, I acknowledge that my perspective is a hypothesis, not a certainty. It is also worth emphasizing that my intent is not to criticize abstinence itself, which is a legitimate and personal choice that, for many individuals, may carry no negative consequences at all. My point is simply that for those who are not in a relationship and who reject prostitution, and for whom casual sex is not a desired or accessible option, practical alternatives are limited. In such cases, the choice comes down to either some form of self-stimulation, which may include pornography, or abstinence. This is not to say that pornography fulfills the need for

intimacy: it does not. But in certain circumstances, it may function as a pressure valve: a way to discharge accumulated tension and maintain a workable inner balance, avoiding psychological strain where repression might otherwise lead to distress. This is not an ideal; it is simply a human reality. If we are to discuss potential harms, we should weigh them fairly, rather than assume that abstinence is inherently neutral while pornography is inherently harmful, and it is worth asking whether the risks attributed to pornography truly outweigh those associated with prolonged or forced abstinence.

Specifically regarding the issue of distorted

perception of sexuality, I do not deny that, for some individuals, particularly those who struggle with critical thinking, pornography could have negative effects such as for example the development of unrealistic expectations, but this is not something peculiar to pornography, consider the cult of perfection in social media or the idealized portrayals in mainstream films and series. What we know for sure is that social media is addictive and promotes distorted visions of reality. Just consider the spread of conspiracy theories such as chemtrails, anti-vaccination movements, flat-Earthism, or the rejection of the theory of evolution.

While there are indeed movements advocating

for stricter regulation of social media, few propose outright prohibition. Instead, the focus is on raising awareness, promoting responsibility, and ensuring appropriate use. Naturally, just as alcohol and other adult-oriented content, pornography should remain accessible only to mature individuals. Ensuring that minors do not access it is a separate issue, one that concerns regulation, not prohibition for everyone.

Do some individuals develop a compulsive use of pornography? Certainly, just as science shows it can happen with other forms of entertainment, including television, video games, and even healthy activities such as

studying, nutrition, or physical exercise. Science is for understanding, not for legitimizing moral crusades. Those who struggle with compulsive behaviors should seek help through medicine and therapy. They deserve care, support, and respect, not a censorious state that punishes everyone else in the name of their suffering. That would be neither just nor dignified, for them or for others. I very occasionally drink a beer, and my wife plays two euros on the lottery every Friday. Should both be banned because some people suffer from alcoholism or gambling addiction? Why shouldn’t we be free to enjoy essentially harmless "vices" in peace? The issue is not pornography, social media, gambling,

smartphone use, shopping, or alcohol in themselves, but the context in which they are engaged with.

Some may manipulatively object by appealing to the authority of the WHO, but this is a misrepresentation. The World Health Organization does not advocate for banning pornography. Its concerns are centered on protecting vulnerable populations (particularly minors, who must be strictly excluded from access to it) not on prohibiting adult sexual expression. Just as it raises concerns about excessive screen time without calling for a ban on tools that, despite their risks, remain immensely valuable, such as smartphones.

Concluding, while it is undeniable that pornography can have negative effects, portraying it as a social plague is a gross exaggeration that distorts reality. For most people, in ordinary circumstances, it functions as a harmless form of entertainment. This does not mean it’s harmless for everyone, but that, like other types of adult entertainment, it can be responsibly enjoyed by the vast majority without adverse consequences. Instead of fueling moral panic, a more rational approach would be to focus on responsible consumption, just as we do with other adult-oriented industries.

2) Would the abolition of pornography prevent the illicit dissemination of intimate material?

One argument for banning pornography can be that it contributes to the unauthorized dissemination of private sexual content. This is a deeply troubling issue that deserves not only our attention but also our empathy and unwavering solidarity with the victims. The shame belongs entirely to those who violate their trust, or feed on it, not to them. They are not alone, there are people who stand with them. To them, I would say: If today feels unbearable, hold on. You are more than this pain. You are worthy of love, respect, and

justice. You are not defined by what was done to you. However, the idea that this problem can be solved by banning legal pornography (thereby restricting the freedom of those who find sexual expression and exhibition gratifying) is flawed for multiple reasons (though men can also be victims, the stigma and consequences are often more severe for women: for the sake of clarity, I will therefore refer to the female case in what follows).

Let's imagine that, in a repressive and therefore anti-pornography state (fascist, communist, theocratic, etc.), a woman reports the non-consensual sharing of an intimate video of herself: will she be protected or will she risk

being persecuted for "immoral acts"? In countries with regulations, there are legal tools to report and punish the illegal distribution of videos. In prohibitionist countries, however, victims may face barriers to seeking justice, as discussing sexual content itself can be stigmatized or even criminalized, potentially deterring them from reporting abuses.

Some might argue that this issue is less prevalent in countries where pornography is banned since, in theory, there would be no intimate videos to be shared without consent. However, this argument is deeply flawed for at least two reasons.

The first is that even in countries where pornography is legal and widely available, the distribution or seeking of non-consensual intimate material is a very serious crime, prosecuted with specific laws aimed at protecting victims and prosecuting offenders under criminal law. Strengthening these protections and ensuring their enforcement is a noble cause worthy of unwavering support.

The second is that, even if, absurdly, we assumed that in prohibitionist countries an intimate video spreads less easily, this would change nothing: Reducing circulation means nothing if the price is silencing the victim or criminalizing her sexuality. Furthermore the

most serious damage from illicit spreading does not necessarily occur on a large scale, it can occur between acquaintances, inflicting deep and unjust suffering, and this regardless of the quantity of accessible pornography. This pain can be even more devastating in contexts where sexuality is strongly stigmatized: precisely in countries where sex is taboo and porn is prohibited, the risk of retaliation for the victim is even higher, because not only is she exposed against her will, but she is also branded as guilty of an act considered socially unacceptable. In these contexts, the victim has no way to defend herself, while those who spread the video remain unpunished or even find support in the social hypocrisy that

condemns women more than men.

3) Is pornography degrading?

This criticism is based on a very questionable assumption: who decides what is "degrading" and for whom? I do not mean to relativize all values here. Rather, I want to emphasize a fundamental ethical point: that when an adult gives valid, informed consent to a sexual expression, and feels no shame or harm in it, we must ask ourselves whether calling it “degrading” is a reflection of the act itself, or of an external moral judgment being projected onto it.

There was a time when even Flaubert’s Madame Bovary was prosecuted for obscenity. And for a long time, even Michelangelo’s frescoes in the Sistine Chapel were considered scandalous because of their nudity. What is considered “degrading” has always been largely a matter of cultural perception rather than an objective truth. Theater, too, was long regarded as disreputable, in a way that is difficult to imagine today. The same can be said of work: in many past societies, what we now regard as a noble and dignified pursuit was once seen as something to be ashamed of. In chapter 4 of The Betrothed, Alessandro Manzoni tells the story of a merchant who, having grown old, was ashamed "of all that

time he had spent doing something in this world" and observes with his usual intelligence and subtle humor that "selling is no more ridiculous than buying," highlighting how absurd it was to consider degrading an activity necessary to society.

3.1) Degrading for whom?

Labeling as "degrading" something that an adult voluntarily engages in is merely an external projection of personal sentiments, rather than an objective reality. I'll admit: I personally find many reality shows degrading, for both the dignity and intelligence of those involved, but I recognize that this is a matter of

taste, not a legal concern. Others enjoy them, and that’s enough. Surely, we can all agree that banning such programs by law would be a clear violation of personal freedom.

If, on the other hand, the claim is that pornography is degrading for the viewer, then what makes watching sex more degrading than watching sports, films, or documentaries?

One might argue that making pornography is humiliating. However, if a person experiences something as positive and fulfilling, there is no reason to criticize it just because it does not fit into traditional social canons. Pornography can include dirty talk or involve dynamics such as

the consensual and pleasurable exploration of control and surrender. But these take place within a space defined by mutual consent and personal autonomy, which fundamentally distinguishes them from coercion. They have nothing to do with the oppression that excites the sick mind of a rapist. The fundamental difference is consent: what makes a sexual dynamic engaging is *precisely* the fact that it is freely chosen and enjoyed by both parties, nothing could be further from any kind of abuse. It’s also worth noting that some individuals find deep fulfillment in consensual dynamics of domination and submission, not grounded in violence or suffering, but in trust, psychological surrender, and the shared joy of

exploring roles of control and vulnerability. This, too, is a valid and meaningful form of sexual expression, as long as it is freely chosen and mutually enjoyed. To be ethically sound, these dynamics must be grounded in deep emotional attunement, and chosen because they resonate with the inner truth of those involved. Labeling such experiences as “degrading” ignores the diversity of human sexuality and risks projecting one’s personal discomfort onto others. That diversity includes not only bold expression, but also silence. Some people express their autonomy by turning toward sex; others, by turning away from it. No form of freedom is more legitimate than another. Abstaining is not repression, and disinterest is

not a failure. The freedom to say yes means nothing without the equal freedom to say no, not just to a moment, but maybe to an entire life. Moreover, pornography does not necessarily embrace bold dynamics. It covers a vast spectrum of expressions, ranging from the softest and most romantic forms of eroticism to more explicit performances. There is no single definition of pornography, just as there is no single way to experience sexuality. What matters is that all forms are based on consent and personal choice.

If a sexual experience is consciously chosen between adults and lived in safety, then whether it is considered degrading is a matter

of personal perspective, not a justification for prohibition. It’s ridiculous for someone to dictate: "No, you shouldn't enjoy it this way, just because I don’t like it". Ultimately, this principle applies to any other human activity: and I find the comparison with extreme mountaineering very interesting again: some find it extremely gratifying while for others it would be a nightmare. Depriving the former of this experience would be almost as serious a crime as forcing the latter to live it.

It is also worth considering that it is not unreasonable to assume that even those who are skeptical or personally indifferent to pornography would likely admit that not all of

it is ugly, soulless, or degrading. Even setting aside almost all of existing content, it is hard to believe that most people, if exposed to a broad and diverse spectrum, would not find at least a few works that resonate with them. Not because they are “hypocrites,” but because erotic imagination is as diverse and complex as music or poetry. Even if we were to accept, absurdly, the prohibitionist logic that says “I ban it because I dislike it,” (a logic that is ethically untenable) the implicit syllogism behind a total ban would still collapse.

3.2) The moral double standard

In reality, the idea that pornography is

degrading is often a reflection of a long cultural tradition that has always seen female sexuality as something to be controlled and limited. It is no coincidence that women who do porn are often judged badly, while men are much less so, if not even admired. This is the same pattern that leads to praising a man with many partners and condemning a woman for the same behavior. But if the problem is social stigma, the solution is not to ban pornography: it is to change the mentality that surrounds it. It is not pornography that degrades women, but rather the social norms that impose a moral burden on women for their sexual choices. This judgment is a form of sexual oppression. Such condemnation is not only unjust but also

fundamentally incompatible with the principles of fairness and non-judgement that true Christian ethics promote.

But there is something even more troubling behind the claim that a woman “should not” do pornography, not because she doesn’t want to, but because others say it is unworthy of her. Such reasoning is not protective: it is sexist, and ultimately dehumanizing. It rests on the assumption that women are not fully capable of deciding for themselves what honors or dishonors their dignity. To tell a woman “you cannot make pornography” because it offends your moral taste is no different than telling her “you cannot speak in public,” or “you must stay

at home and cook.”

It is not about safeguarding her soul, it is about policing her will. To deny someone the right to define their own dignity is a deeper form of objectification than any consensual act. It says: ‘You are not allowed to be you, because we have already decided who you should be’”. And there is no insult more cruel, nor more arrogant, than pretending to protect someone by denying them the right to be who they are. I do not presume to speak for women, only to stand beside those who have been judged, and to affirm their dignity.

We must remember that stigma does not only target those who choose pornography as a

profession. It also strikes, perhaps even more cruelly, those who explored it once, out of curiosity, desire, a sense of freedom, or even just to make some easy money, and then, over time, they may have begun to doubt, wondering whether that choice has left a mark on them. To these women, I want to say, with all the gentleness and strength I can: you have lost nothing. Not your dignity. Not your right to be loved. Not your ability to be seen with eyes full of esteem and genuine and tender love. There is nothing wrong with you, not then, and not now. Those who judge you without understanding are only revealing their own limits, not yours. You deserve to be loved with passion, with respect, with poetry. Not “in spite of” what

you’ve done, but all the more so because of the courage you had. Because to show yourself, to say without shame to the world: ‘this is me’, is not just to reveal your skin, but to bare your soul. And that, too, is something profoundly human, and profoundly worthy. This is not to say such a choice should be made lightly. As I said earlier, “if the problem is social stigma, the solution is not to ban pornography: it is to change the mentality that surrounds it”, but that goal is still far away, and may never be fully achieved. Stigma exists, and if one feels too fragile to carry it lightly, with peace, I don’t think it’s wise to ignore it. But that has nothing to do with the worth of a person who has had this experience.

3.3) The fear of other people's freedom

Personally, like most people, I am emotionally and sexually monogamous and private, and I have no interest in living my sexuality differently. But this does not make me feel superior to those who make choices different from mine (for example, choices of promiscuity or exhibitionism that characterize pornography), just as I would not feel better than someone who practices extreme sports or dedicates themselves to passions that I would not practice. The only criterion that truly matters is the willing and informed consent of those involved. Why should I say to those who

live their sexuality differently from me, "I am righteous and you are wrong"? What objective principle justifies such a stance? In what sense am I morally superior? Real love is not threatened by sexual expression, especially when it is understood that sex and love, though they often meet, are not the same. One can feel emotional involvement without desire, and desire without emotional involvement. That is not a flaw in human nature. It is part of its richness. I also firmly believe in the possibility of deep friendship between men and women, or, in the case of gay individuals, between people of the same gender. It saddens me when people feel the need to sexualize every form of affection or closeness, as if our only emotional

language were erotic. There is immense beauty in bonds that ask for nothing but presence, loyalty, and the quiet joy of being there for the other. This brief digression, I believe, is not misplaced. Philosophical thinking also means recognizing the deep connections between seemingly different themes. Sexual freedom also includes the freedom not to engage in sex, the freedom to cultivate deep, non-erotic bonds, to live affective relationships without pre-established patterns. Here, I wanted to challenge the idea that certain connections must be sexualized or categorized. This is, in fact, the very same impulse that underlies the urge to ban pornography: the obsession with labeling, with categorizing, with controlling. In other

words these reflections, though personal, matter deeply, because our ability to respect other people's freedom begins with our ability to understand the diversity of human connection. It is precisely this richness of human experience that should remind us that we are in no position to judge.

If a person voluntarily chooses to do pornography, finds satisfaction in their work and does not suffer harm, the real question is whether it is anyone else's place to judge. Who are we to say that it is "degrading"? Attempting to legislate morality based on personal discomfort comes dangerously close to an authoritarian mentality and raises broader

philosophical concerns about individual freedom and state control over private life.

As John Stuart Mill eloquently put it in On Liberty:

> As soon as any part of a person’s conduct affects prejudicially the interests of others, society has jurisdiction over it, and the question whether the general welfare will or will not be promoted by interfering with it, becomes open to discussion. But there is no room for entertaining any such question when a person’s conduct affects the interests of no persons besides himself, or needs not affect them unless they like (all the persons concerned being of

full age, and the ordinary amount of understanding). In all such cases, there should be perfect freedom, legal and social, to do the action and stand the consequences.

Similar debates arise in other areas of individual autonomy. Consider euthanasia: should an informed, consenting individual be denied the right to end their suffering? Or take homosexuality, which until relatively recently was restricted based on moralistic arguments similar to those sometimes directed against pornography today. In some parts of the world, it is still outlawed, often by heterosexual men (in many contexts, women tend to show more tolerance, and in culturally regressive countries,

they rarely hold positions of power anyway) who, precisely because they are heterosexual men, understand how excruciating it would be to find themselves trapped in a world where the only permitted form of intimacy is one with men. And yet, despite this understanding, they feel entitled to impose exactly that on lesbian women, denying them the right to follow their own nature and to love freely. Not out of ignorance, but out of a will to enforce on others what they themselves would never accept to endure. As with pornography, what all these cases reveal is the same underlying fear of other people's freedom, and the obsession with control over what is different.

Yet precisely because the defense of homosexual freedom is so important, one must also recognize the risks posed by its exploitation for self-aggrandizement. In recent years, in some Western contexts, we have seen a growing number of individuals who, under the guise of advocating for sexual minorities, seem more concerned with the display of moral superiority than with the actual well-being of those they claim to defend. These dynamics, often driven by vanity rather than virtue, can alienate public opinion, create cultural fatigue, and even make life harder for homosexual people themselves, who may feel embarrassed, misrepresented, or reduced to symbols in ideological battles. A very similar phenomenon

can be observed in anti-racist activism, where some voices seek not justice, but the spotlight. The fight for dignity and equality deserves better than to be instrumentalized by ego. As Alessandro Manzoni once noted (chapter 13 of the betrothed), it often happens that

> the most ardent supporters become an impediment.

A truth that still holds: the most zealous supporters, without humility and measure, can often become an obstacle to the very cause they mean to serve.

4) Does pornography objectify people?

While it is important to recognize that some individuals may find genuine sexual fulfillment in being erotically objectified, within a consensual and intimate framework, the term objectification is often used in a negative sense, to imply a loss of will, dignity or humanity. But these are fundamentally different concepts. Erotic objectification, when chosen freely and experienced with mutual respect, is not the same as dehumanization. The former can be a valid form of personal expression; the latter is a violation of the self.

But when we speak of objectification in pornography, are we really referring to the

latter? If an adult and consenting person decides to make porn, who are we to say that they are "reduced to an object"? If this logic were valid, we would have to say that a model is objectified because he is appreciated for his aesthetics, or that an athlete is objectified because his value is linked to physical performance. But no one raises these objections, because it is clear that the value of a person is never reduced to a single dimension. Furthermore, pornography does not cancel the personality of those who practice it. Why couldn't it, instead, be a way to express one's individuality?

The expression “being seen as an object” is

itself problematic. A porn performer is not seen as a mannequin or an empty shell: it is precisely the fact that she is alive, present and aware that gives meaning to the scene, and makes it erotic. What arouses desire is not the absence of subjectivity, but precisely her conscious presence, the awareness behind the gaze, the deliberate act of showing herself. She is not reduced to an object; she is a subject choosing to play with certain aesthetic codes. And that deliberate choice is what separates erotic display from dehumanization. This is precisely why AI-generated pornography, no matter how realistic, can never hold the same value as real pornography. These are not just images, they are expressions of human

presence, of conscious individuals who choose to be seen. The ethical and emotional dilemmas that will soon emerge around the use of AI in pornography are yet another proof that performers are not perceived as objects, but as conscious individuals. If they were truly seen as mere instruments, pornography would shift to artificial replicas. I strongly doubt that will ever be the case. Artificially generated figurative art can be effective in many other domains, but it is precisely in pornography that it fails to substitute the human element. There are sectors where people are often treated as replaceable tools: in factories, in offices, in customer service. Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with automation: replacing human labor

with machines is often a mark of progress, not a failure of ethics. But we must recognize what it reveals. When a machine can do the job more efficiently, the human is dismissed without moral hesitation, as if their presence had no intrinsic value. That is what true objectification looks like. Paradoxically, it is precisely in pornography (the very field accused of reducing people to objects) that human presence cannot be replaced. And this observation highlights the fallacy of the claim that performers are seen as objects: if they truly were, AI replicas would be more than sufficient. In other words, precisely where there is a greater accusation of objectification, there is in reality a greater recognition of human

irreplaceability.

In reality, those who accuse pornography of "objectifying" often do so to stigmatize female sexuality. Why should a woman who chooses to show her body be "reduced to an object", while those who hide it are considered "respectable"? This mentality does not protect women, it infantilizes them. True respect is not in telling them what they can or cannot do, but in recognizing their ability to decide for themselves. Making porn or becoming a nun are both legitimate and deeply respectable choices. It is hateful that there are people who respect one but not the other. Both are forms of self-definition, neither is more or less noble, so

long as they are freely chosen.

Some invoke Kant to accuse pornography of reducing the human being to an object. But it is precisely his noblest principle, the one that commands us to treat every person as an end, and never merely as a means, that reveals the flaw in this argument. If a person, in full awareness of themselves, feels that one of the purposes of their life includes exhibition, they are not an object: they are an individual making decisions about their own body and sexuality. Moral respect for that person means honoring that choice, not suppressing it. Denying them that freedom, in the name of upholding a dominant social model of sexuality that they do

not recognize as their own, means precisely treating them as means to an end they do not share (namely, preserving a collective and moralistic vision of sexuality), rather than as ends in themselves. And this, yes, really means objectifying.

Some may object that, even granting autonomy and consent, pornography still often involves a sort of objectification, and that this alone would contradict Kant’s principle of never treating a person merely as a means. But this perspective is deeply questionable. When we allow an adult, fully aware of themselves, to engage in pornography, we are not coercing or deceiving them into doing something they do not want,

we are allowing them to fulfill a need, to pursue a form of self-expression that matters to them. When a person consciously decides to offer themselves to the gaze of others, even in a form that erotically plays with objectification, they are not being reduced to a means. They are choosing a purpose; they are exercising agency. In such cases, the body becomes a language, a form of expression, even a cultural or existential statement. If I voluntarily assume a role, even one that symbolically places me in the position of a “means”, I remain a subject. I am the author of that moment. I don't see Kant’s imperative as a prohibition on erotic roles or theatricality, but as call to respect the sovereignty of the person, especially when their

freedom takes unconventional, but ethically harmless, forms. In short, being desired or offering pleasure, as singers or dancers also do, is not the same as being an object.

If we were to bring the historical Kant into the 21st century and ask him what he thinks of pornography, chances are he would be horrified (and I cannot exclude that the same might be true for Mill). That reaction would be shaped by the cultural and sexual norms of his time, not by the core principles of his moral philosophy. This is why I argue that applying his key ethical ideas to our present context may sometimes require departing from his personal judgments. The challenge is not to follow

Kant’s conclusions, but to remain faithful to his moral method: to treat persons as ends, and to act only on principles we can will as universal laws. I believe that, with all the contradictions that dwell in every human being, Kant in some sense even anticipated Mill by several decades. He wrote (from "On the old saw: that may be right in theory but it won't work in practice"):

> No man can compel me to be happy after his fashion, according to his conception of the wellbeing of someone else. Instead, everybody may pursue his happiness in the manner that seems best to him, provided he does not infringe on other people's freedom to pursue similar ends, i.e., on another's right to do

whatever can coexist with every man's freedom under a possible universal law.

Of course, Kant’s views on sexuality were complex, and my field is physics, not philosophy; I just offer a good-faith philosophical reading of his key principles, applied to a modern context where the moral challenges have changed (many of the realities I refer to here simply did not exist, and were unimaginable, in Kant’s time) but the need for respect, autonomy, and awareness of the impact our actions have on the world remains the same. I dare to say that the historical Kant’s probable rejection of pornography would contradict the heart of his philosophy, both in

terms of the imperative to treat every person as an end and never merely as a means, and in terms of acting only on principles one could reasonably will to become universal laws (in this case, the principle that personal choices we may not share should still be respected, as long as they respect others). What I am doing here is considering an evolved interpretation of his thought, one that preserves its ethical essence, but rejects the sexophobic moralism of another age. To treat someone as an end is not to dictate their life, but to honor their capacity to choose it.

5) Does pornography exploit loneliness?

Some may argue that pornography exploits loneliness, but this is a weak argument for at least two reasons.

i) First, pornography is not exclusive to lonely individuals. Many people in happy and deeply connected relationships enjoy it together as a shared experience.

ii) Second, all industries exist to satisfy human needs. Does agriculture exploit hunger? Do doctors exploit illness? If you want to put it that way, then yes, but this is simply a feature of all professions. Every time we go to work, what we do is precisely to fulfill a need. And this, in general, is truly a noble thing.

Sometimes, these needs are not healthy at all,

consider tobacco, alcohol, fast food, sugary drinks, or trash TV. However, unlike substances like alcohol or tobacco, pornography, at least when experienced in a conscious and respectful way, relates to a natural and healthy need. The real question is: what problem does prohibiting pornography actually solve? In what way would banning pornography improve the lives of men and women who are not in relationships? The only concern that comes to mind in relation to the issue of loneliness is that, in rare cases, psychologically vulnerable individuals might come to believe that pornography could replace human contact. However, as already discussed in Section 1.2, the risk of misuse by a few does

not justify the suppression of freedom for all.

In conclusion, not all use is equally healthy, as with food or entertainment, excess can lead to problems. But this is not a fault of pornography itself, only a reminder that all pleasure requires balance and awareness.

6) The "what if she were your mother?" argument

This is a classic example of an emotional fallacy. The idea that an activity becomes unacceptable when it involves a close relative is not a rational argument but an emotional reaction. If my mother were a porn actress, it

would be her choice, just as it would be if she chose to be a lawyer, an athlete, or an artist. But why should that be a problem for me? If she freely chose that path, what rational basis would I have to object? The only real question should be whether she desires it. What if your mother wanted to climb K2? That would genuinely terrify me, for good reason, as the risks are life-threatening. While I would still find it *profoundly unjust*, I could at least understand why the state might attempt to prohibit such high-risk activities for safety reasons. But pornography? It may involve emotional and ethical complexities, like many human experiences, but when freely chosen, it is not inherently harmful and should not be

treated as if it were a safety threat. In brief, in response to the question "what if she were your mother?" I would respond exactly as Charlie Chaplin did when he proudly overturned an accusation that was intended to be discriminatory: "I do not have that honor". The fact that a family member engages in a particular activity does not change its ethical nature.

7) The "what if she were your wife?" argument

While much of what has been said in the previous section also applies here, this objection cuts deeper: it doesn't appeal to

public morality, but to something more intimate, the emotional bond between two people. It's not about what society permits, but about what romantic love can understand and embrace. And that is precisely why it deserves equal philosophical attention.

This leads me to reflect on how I personally understand relationships, trust, and freedom, not as a mere and inappropriate digression, but because any philosophical response to the "what if it was your wife?" objection to pornography, necessarily depends on how one conceives love and partnership. What follows is not a private anecdote, but a set of general principles, illustrated through a personal lens, yet meant to speak to a universal human reality.

As will become clear, this view is not narrow or prescriptive: it leaves space for all perspectives and emotional sensitivities. My view of relationships is not based on ownership, but on trust and mutual respect. I do not own my wife's body: *she* owns it. If she were to make such a choice, it would be her decision, and my role would simply be to respect it and understand her feelings about it. Love is not control, nor is it fear of the other person's freedom. It is trust, complicity, and the desire to see the person you love fulfill herself in the way that makes sense to her. That said, openness and honesty are fundamental in any relationship. While I do not see love as possession, I do see it as a partnership based on

mutual trust. If my wife made such a decision without informing me, that would be a betrayal, not because of the nature of the choice itself, but because it would violate the foundation of trust that sustains our relationship. Transparency is essential: true freedom in a couple does not mean doing whatever one wants without considering the other, but making choices openly, with mutual understanding and respect.

In a romantic relationship, sex (and more broadly, physical intimacy and touch) and love may intertwine, but they are not the same thing. One can share their body without ever giving away their heart. And one can offer the fullness

of love without ever seeking touch. We all have people we cherish with a love that is radiant and enduring, and entirely non-sexual. Intimacy is not always about touch. Sometimes, it is about presence, loyalty, or being known.

The idea that a woman who does pornography cannot have a happy and loving relationship is a prejudice, not a reality. Whether she made it her profession, or simply chose to explore this side of herself once in her life, it changes nothing. A romantic bond is not measured by sexual history, but by presence, by the depth of connection between two souls. Love is made of affinity, support, and tenderness, not of "purity" certificates. Anyone who believes that a woman

cannot be loved with the same passion and devotion simply because her sexuality has been shared in porn, whether once or often, has understood nothing about love.

A woman can explore even the boldest, rawest, most taboo forms of her sexuality, including fantasies of surrender, visibility, and exposure, and still be embraced with tenderness, loyalty, and respect. Whether she shared her body with the world once or often, she can still be someone’s muse, someone’s anchor, someone’s home. Those who say otherwise have confused love with possession, and dignity with conformity. Real love takes many forms. One of them embraces freedom, not with fear, but

with grace.

It takes strength to reveal yourself, even briefly, in a judgmental world. To embrace your truth even when others point their fingers. That strength is not a moral flaw. It is a form of courage. And that courage, that luminous honesty, is something profoundly beautiful. It deserves not shame, but admiration. It deserves to be met not with coldness, but with the kind of love that doesn't ask you to hide, but stands beside you in the light, and holds you through the storms of life.

Emotional monogamy and sexual exclusivity are two concepts that are often linked but

remain distinct. A person can share their body while remaining emotionally devoted exclusively to their partner. I am not saying that sexual exclusivity is wrong, on the contrary, it is a perfectly legitimate and valuable choice for many couples. But what truly matters is compatibility between partners on this point. Every couple should be free to define their own rules based on their preferences, boundaries, and mutual understanding, without social pressures. Some people consider sexual fidelity essential, while for others, individual freedom is more important. The key is that the partners are aligned and that neither imposes their view on the other. If two people discover they have misaligned needs in this regard, it is only up to

them to decide how to address the issue. That said, I also want to make it clear that my stance does not come from any "ulterior motive." I have no interest in extramarital relationships. But that does not mean I believe in ownership, only in honoring her freedom, not claiming one for myself. To me, love means wanting the other person’s happiness. I would never want to be an obstacle between my wife and her fulfillment in life. Our relationship is built on complicity and mutual trust, not insecurities, impositions, or control. We chose monogamy freely, because it reflects who we are , but that doesn’t mean I would feel entitled to forbid my wife from doing something she felt was deeply important to her, nor that relationships that are

not sexually exclusive are any less profound, loyal, or sincere. What matters is not whether a couple chooses sexual monogamy, but whether their bond is built on mutual respect, consent, and understanding. Some hearts stay close even when bodies wander. Sexual monogamy is not the only possible form of love. It is not the only way to live a relationship. In brief, every choice freely made between adults deserves respect. Because the point is precisely this: no one has the right to tell someone else what the “right” way to love is.

8) The "But no woman would ever want to do that” argument

There are ways of feeling, of believing, or desiring that we might never share, but that doesn’t make them less real, or less worthy of respect. Sometimes, people do things that most others can’t understand. Racing drivers are a striking example, many of them spend their lives paying enormous sums just to race. In reality, they pay to risk their lives. Nothing illustrates more clearly that some people deeply love what others see as sheer madness.

There is nothing wrong with having conventional sexual desires, or with having none at all. And just as we respect those experiences, we must also extend our respect to those whose desires take different forms (such

as the wish to be visible, to share one's sensuality openly, as happens in the kind of exhibitionism found in pornography) and find the humility to acknowledge what we may not fully understand or share. What matters is not whether a desire fits societal norms, but whether it is explored with consent, awareness, and mutual respect.

Given this, let us pause for a moment and reflect on the meaning of this particular argument against pornography, which claims that women with consensual exhibitionist fantasies between adults, whether mild or intense, simply do not exist. That claim is not just mistaken: it is so extreme, in light of the

psychological diversity of humankind, that it squarely belongs in the realm of the ridiculous. But worst of all, of all the arguments against pornography, this is by far the most ethically abhorrent, repellent, and dehumanizing. This is not a condemnation of all critiques of pornography: some raise important concerns. What I reject as ethically repellent is the denial that any woman could ever freely desire it. It is not merely wrong, it is morally outrageous. What could be more cruel than telling someone that their way of being is so unacceptable that it must be erased from the very realm of human possibility? That their desires are so illegitimate they cannot even be imagined?

This is not merely control. It is a form of

annihilation: an attempt to erase not only freedom, but identity itself.

That is why it is not enough to tolerate women’s freedom in theory, we must defend it in practice, even when it takes forms that provoke social stigma. If you believe in a woman's right to decide for herself, then the right to make porn should also be respected. To say otherwise is not feminism but misogyny. Some claim to protect women, yet fail to hear the silent scream of those forced to bury their desire under layers of fear and censorship, women who live in societies where expressing their sexuality freely is punished, even criminalized. Including, yes, through the

repression of things like pornography. And it is not liberation, it is the cold suffocation of freedom. This silent scream exists, but it is drowned out by the moralistic hypocrisy of those who claim to protect women. We've seen what happens when "virtue" is used to justify persecution. Even Christ was crucified by a crowd that thought it was doing the right thing. History is full of tragedies committed in the name of virtue.

There are women who would love doing pornography, but were born in places where even the smallest expressions of female autonomy are violently punished. They suffer not because of porn, but because they are

forbidden to embrace it: silenced by law, or elsewhere simply by stigma. If we truly believe in freedom, then we must defend the right of a woman to show or to cover. To express her sexuality openly, or to live it privately, or even not at all. Freedom means choice, not coercion. Denying that these women exist is as blind as denying that others suffer from the violation of their privacy. Both forms of suffering stem from a denial of sexual freedom, just in opposite directions: one from unwanted exposure (a topic we have already explored in Section 2), the other from repression of desired expression. Both realities deserve our full attention.

To those who say that pornography should be banned to protect women, I ask: do you truly believe that all women want the same things? That none has ever suffered in silence for being denied the right to live her own desire? Do you truly think that among the billions of lives on this earth, not one woman lies awake at night, aching for the freedom to be herself without fear or shame, perhaps because she harbors vivid, exhibitionist fantasies, and longs to be seen, admired, desired on her own terms? And worse still, she suffers, thinking that she is flawed at the core. That her desires are deviant, her fantasies shameful, her very self something to be hidden. But there is nothing wrong with her. And she deserves the same dignity and

freedom as anyone else. Perhaps she dreams of saying to the world, “This is me. I exist. I am like this. And I am not ashamed.” (The very same words could be spoken by a believer or by an atheist who dares to profess their faith in a hostile environment.) And yet she suffers, *precisely* because someone, somewhere, is fighting to deny her that freedom.

 # Conclusion

This response should not be interpreted as an uncritical defense of pornography, which can certainly be harmful in certain contexts, but rather as a strong argument against its prohibition as an infringement on individual

liberty. I do not deny that issues related to pornography may exist, for example regarding its potential impact on psychologically vulnerable individuals. But recognizing the possibility of harm does not justify prohibition. Like many other tools, pornography is neither inherently good nor inherently bad: its value depends on how it is used, and by whom. In this sense, pornography is no different from countless other things, which may be beneficial when used responsibly yet harmful when misused.

Ultimately, the core issue is not pornography itself, but the deeper question of whether a democratic society should impose moral

restrictions on consensual acts that do not infringe upon the rights of others. True sexual freedom means protecting both the right to express desire, and the right to retreat from it. It means defending the bold and the quiet alike. This principle extends beyond sexuality alone: the test of a free society is not how well it protects what we admire, but how fairly it treats what we don't.

Freedom is the foundation of every dignified life. To put it like Charlie Chaplin (speech to mankind), "we must not give ourselves to those who tell us what to do, what to think, and what to feel!” That is why this is not just a debate about images and screens. It is a debate about

human dignity, autonomy, and the moral courage to let others be different. And in that light, the answer becomes clear.

If you prohibit consensual sexual freedom, you are not merely oppressing a group of individuals. You are betraying the very foundations of modern democracy. The ideas defended in this text have their roots in the European Enlightenment, in the conviction that individual liberty is a natural right to be fully lived, in respect for others. But it was across the ocean, in the second half of the eighteenth century, that a country had the courage to enshrine in law that liberty and the pursuit of happiness are rights. And to that courageous

(but deeply imperfect) gesture, we owe a great deal. Moreover, if there are still countries today where a person can write a text like this, and others can read it, it is thanks to the blood, courage, and sacrifice of those who believed that freedom, even for a single voice, was worth defending. In darker times, they chose to risk everything so that we might be free. They didn’t always agree with the content of the speech. But they believed in the right to speak it.

Liberty is not a privilege for the conventional. It is the birthright of every human being.

Cuasso al Monte, summer 2025

Author's Note

I would like to thank my wife with whom, between a walk in the mountains or along the lakeside, a pizza, or a Chinese dinner, I've often had the joy of sharing conversations about these (and many other!) philosophical questions. Those moments, too, are part of this text. These conversations are among the things I cherish most in my life, even more than my deep love for physics and mathematics. Her presence, her kindness, and her thoughtful way of seeing the world are my truest sources of joy.