# Marriage and the Norm of Monogamy

*Wilt thou keep thee only unto her?*[1]

*You whisper soft to me*
*That I ain't the only one*
*To breathe your yellow hair*
*Caress your bosom fair*
*Do you think I really care?*
*Do you think it matters?*[2]

It appears that spouses have less reason to hold each other to a norm of monogamy than to reject the norm. The norm of monogamy involves a restriction of spouses' access to two things of value: sex and erotic love. This restriction initially appears unwarranted but can be justified. There is reason for spouses to accept the norm of monogamy if their marriage satisfies three conditions. Otherwise, there is reason to permit non-monogamy. Some spouses have reason to accept the norm of monogamy because this will avoid reasonable hurt and prevent diversion of resources needed to sustain the marriage. Other spouses have reason to permit non-monogamy to allow the spouses access to aspects of a well-rounded life. The choice to be either monogamous or non-monogamous can also be non-instrumentally valuable if chosen for the right reasons.

## *I. Introduction*

We investigate whether it makes sense for spouses to accept a norm of monogamy among the terms of their marriage.[3] Monogamous marriage has long been the dominant model for relationships of erotic love. Indeed, to most people it is obvious that marriage should be constrained in this way. However, on closer inspection, monogamy appears to constitute an unwarranted restriction of two things of value: sex and additional relationships of erotic love. Such a restriction requires justification. We consider

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and reject some common rationales for monogamy before offering our own rationale. We identify a series of conditions such that if a marriage meets these conditions, it makes sense for it to be monogamous. For many spouses, we conclude, monogamy is preferable. Nevertheless, many marriages will not meet the conditions necessary to make sense of monogamy. Hence, both monogamy and non-monogamy are legitimate forms of marriage. We begin with an initial explanation of what we take monogamy to be.

## *II. What is monogamy?*

Monogamy is a norm that requires two partners to refrain from some range of sexual activity outside their relationship. There are interesting questions about what is, and what should be, forbidden by the norm. However, these questions are beyond the scope of this paper. We assume a moderate norm that allows for innocent physical and emotional contact but rules out paradigm examples of sexual activity.

The term 'monogamy' can refer to either a state of affairs or a norm. Our interest is in the norm rather than in the state of affairs. We refer to the norm of monogamy as simply 'monogamy' and the rejection of this norm as 'non-monogamy'. Unless otherwise stated, by a monogamous/non-monogamous relationship we shall mean a relationship governed by/not governed by this norm.[4]

Norms of monogamy usually involve two restrictions. For those governed by the norm, sexual activity is restricted to relationships with a certain feature, and the number of relationships with that feature is restricted to one. The traditional relationship is marriage: one must be married in order to engage in sexual activity and one can only marry one person at a time. Indeed, the etymology of 'monogamy' is 'single marriage'. However, use of the term now extends beyond its narrow etymological roots in such a way that it makes sense to speak of monogamous relationships between unmarried partners. It is this wider use of the norm in which we are interested. This norm of monogamy does not confine sex to marriage. Partners will usually have engaged in sexual activity before marriage. Moreover, they will generally have done so while seeing themselves as adhering to a norm of monogamy. They then see the marriage vows as formalising this already accepted norm. This suggests that the norm does not restrict sex to marriage, even when it is adhered to by a married couple. Instead, we maintain that the norm of monogamy currently

accepted is of the same form as the traditional norm, but with relationships of erotic love taking over the role once held by marriage. By 'erotic love' we simply mean the kind of deep emotional intimacy found in successful marriages and other serious sexual relationships. Although erotic love is difficult to analyse, one can recognise paradigm cases. For those governed by the current norm of monogamy, sex is restricted to relationships of erotic love and erotic love is restricted to a single relationship.

There are several forms of non-monogamous relationship. Relationships can be non-monogamous by relaxing either (or both) of the above restrictions. Some non-monogamous relationships reject the restriction of erotic love to a single relationship; sex is still restricted to relationships of erotic love, but partners may have multiple such relationships. Others retain the restriction to one relationship of erotic love but do not restrict sexual activity to relationships of erotic love; sex outside the relationship is permitted. Alternatively, both the restrictions may be lifted, so that both casual sex and additional relationships of erotic love are permitted. The additional relationships of erotic love may have equal status or there may be a fixed hierarchy, so that, for example, only one relationship is regarded as a marriage.

### *III. A problem for monogamy*

We believe there is a problem for monogamy. This problem results from the apparent disvalue partners suffer from accepting a norm of monogamy. Stated in terms of reasons, it appears partners have most reason not to be monogamous.[5]

We assume that both sex and erotic love have a certain default value; that an action will involve sexual pleasure or that an action will cultivate feelings of erotic love both usually speak in favour of the action.[6] As far as this goes, in choosing to be monogamous, partners give up something of hedonic value. Instances of sexual activity are valuable insofar as they provide for sexual pleasure, and the pleasure of one sexual encounter is not the same as that of another, let alone the same as another with a different partner. In tying sex to erotic love, monogamy outlaws the pleasure available in sexual encounters with others outside the relationship.

Monogamous partners also give up the possibility of additional relationships of erotic love. As before, the erotic love shared between partners differs where the partners differ. By further tying erotic love to exclusivi-

ty, partners are not allowed to cultivate erotic love with anyone else. Since the value of erotic love does not consist entirely in the value of sexual pleasure, relationships of erotic love are valuable apart from the sexual pleasure they produce.

The second restriction enhances our problem because the monogamous relationship itself is supposed to be based on erotic love; the value monogamous partners place on their relationship is taken to be a testament to the value of erotic love. Yet this restriction bars both partners from cultivating additional such relationships.

Therefore, monogamous partners are required to give up two things of value—sex and relationships of erotic love with others. In exchange, one receives the assurance that one's partner will forego the same valuable things. Our problem for monogamy is that, unless it is taken for granted that monogamy is of overwhelming value, this exchange seems altogether *dis*valuable. Partners' requiring that one another be monogamous involves harshly restricting each other's access to two valuable things. But we assume the love partners share entails promoting to a reasonable extent each other's access to things of value. Therefore, acceptance of a norm of monogamy appears to deny partners precisely what such a relationship should encourage. We expect that a resolution of this problem must provide an account of the value generated by partners' acceptance of a norm of monogamy that surmounts its apparent disvalue.

One might object that the formulation of our problem for monogamy is oversimplified in that it assumes that the hedonic value of sexual pleasure and the non-hedonic value of erotic love are commensurable. What is more, it might be objected that our formulation is crass in that it relies upon a quantitative treatment of value that is inappropriate for considerations of sex and erotic love. Here it is important to clarify two points.

The first is that the formulation of our problem does not rely on comparing the value of sexual pleasure and the value of erotic love. We merely note that they are both valuable and that some value must be found in acceptance of the norm of monogamy to match this value. We never compare the value of the original relationship of erotic love with *either* the value of sexual pleasure or the value of additional relationships of erotic love. We simply ask why the restricted form of the relationship is more valuable than the unrestricted form, why the apparently greater combination of values turns out to be less valuable than the lesser combination.

The second is that, although our problem for monogamy is generated by a quantitative treatment of value, the treatment employed in this case is by no means *too* quantitative. On a strictly quantitative treatment (often associated with versions of consequentialism) if something is valuable, then it is best to promote as much of that value as is feasible. The formulation of our problem is consistent with the denial of this. For what generates our problem is not the claim that one should experience as much sexual pleasure or as much erotic love as is feasible, but rather the claim that it is valuable to experience more sexual pleasure and more erotic love than monogamy allows. Because monogamy is so stringent a restriction, the denial of it need not be excessive. By 'non-monogamy' we simply mean a norm that allows more than one sexual relationship or relationship of erotic love. Thus doubts about monogamy need not endorse promiscuity. The mean may lie between only one and too many. Considered in these terms it appears that monogamy, rather than non-monogamy, is immoderate. For a moderate approach seems to be one that avoids promiscuity without restricting partners to only one relationship.

*IV. Why our problem is a problem*

In order to fully appreciate why our problem is a problem, we need to elaborate on the brief account of monogamy provided above (§II). Although our focus is monogamy within marriage, our overarching concern is with significant, norm-governed relationships of erotic love generally. Marriage is a particularly interesting form of love relationship because it involves an explicit contract that formalises some of the norms governing the relationship. Our conception of marriage is of a long-term relationship of erotic love, formalised by inclusion in some religious, secular, or legal institution. Marriage is also supposed to be a serious commitment. It is therefore a paradigm example of the kind of relationship in which we are interested. However, our arguments should apply equally to sufficiently serious non-marriage relationships of erotic love. We have left aside other issues that divide proponents of traditional and non-traditional marriage, such as gender, divorce, and remarriage. However, we do make two assumptions. We see marriage primarily as a relationship of erotic love rather than a means of procreation. We also assume that non-monogamous marriage is possible. Some people will insist that a relationship not

governed by the norm of monogamy simply is not a marriage.[7] For such people our question can be rephrased, "Why should we have a marriage rather than a non-monogamous formal relationship?"

Distinguishing between the traditional norm of monogamy and the norm currently accepted also highlights a difference in the scope of the norm. Whereas the traditional norm governed everyone, regardless of marital status, the current norm only applies to those in a relationship. Moreover, the traditional norm applied to *all* relationships; partners could not opt out of the traditional norm by agreeing to be non-monogamous. The traditional norm was not voluntary in these respects.

There are two ways in which the current norm of monogamy is voluntary. First, it only applies to partners who have voluntarily entered into a relationship of erotic love, such as marriage. A single person may have multiple sexual partners without violating the norm of monogamy (although he may be violating a separate norm of non-promiscuity). Second, we assume that two people entering into a relationship such as marriage are to some extent free to choose the terms of their relationship. So there are some norms that partners can choose whether to include among the terms of their relationship.[8] We see monogamy as a norm of this kind. Since partners can choose whether their marriage will be governed by the norm of monogamy, if they do not do so, the norm of monogamy does not apply to them. Where spouses have agreed to be non-monogamous, extramarital sex is not a violation of the norm of monogamy.

It is also important that the precise nature of the topic not be glossed over. First, we contend that sex and erotic love are only derivatively moral; that is, an action will not be right or wrong simply in virtue of being an instance of sex or erotic love, although it could be right or wrong for other reasons. Second, we reject the notion that either is thoroughgoingly non-rational. The upshot of these two points is that we disagree with two conflicting but both common views on the nature of these kinds of relationships: either they are moral matters or they are outside the space of reasons. On our position, sex and erotic love are not moral matters *per se*, but reasons do apply. Monogamy can come under rational criticism; it makes sense to question how couples should agree to govern their relationship.

Thus our normative account of monogamy neither overintellectualizes nor moralises the matter. Bearing in mind that monogamy is the sort

of restriction the consequences of which spread widely through our lives, we think it reasonable to begin from the premise that we should not accept unmotivated restrictions, and the strength of this premise seems to increase the more stringent the restriction. Given how restrictive monogamy is, we think it only natural to require some justification for it.

We also anticipate attempts to cite human nature as somehow deterring any arrangement other than monogamy.[9] But as we see it, it is not enough to insist that human nature is such that we are comfortable with a norm of monogamy. There are numerous arrangements with which individuals and society have been comfortable at one time or another that turned out to be unfitting as general norms for action. With that said, we do not intend to be iconoclastic. We simply query the reasonableness of this norm.

We focus on the value of monogamy for the spouses rather than for society at large. A rationale for monogamy based solely on its value for society would not capture why monogamy is valuable for spouses. Even if it has social value, it is assumed to have a much greater personal value. When partners choose to be monogamous, they do so for the sake of their relationship, not for the sake of society. When a partner breaks the norms of monogamy, he betrays his spouse far more than society at large. So, although one may be able to defend monogamy on the basis of its social function, this will not make sense of the way couples actually value monogamy.

Lastly, our account presupposes that a relationship is otherwise healthy. What we have to say is no defence of engaging in sex outside the relationship in a way that harms others. In fact, we assume that this is one of the ways that sex can become a moral issue.[10] This qualification is significant in that it creates a disanalogy between our discussion of monogamy and T. M. Scanlon's discussion of friendship.[11] Scanlon argues that the correct response to the values central to friendship is not sheer promotion. Therefore, he claims, one should not betray one friend in order to make any number of other friends. This is disanalogous to what we are discussing for two reasons. First, we accept the claim that the correct response to the value of sex and the value of erotic love is not sheer promotion. Second, in the case of sexual relationships it cannot be presupposed that one should be monogamous without assuming that non-monogamy somehow undermines the relevant relationship—in our case erotic love. Betraying a friend undermines friendship; but it is not

clear that engaging in sexual activity or cultivating additional relationships of erotic love undermines the original relationship. The latter is precisely the question at hand: is there decisive reason to be monogamous?

*V. Some answers that do not work*

We shall begin by considering some putative rationales that do not work. The first two are practical rationales. Some argue that the appropriate context in which to raise children requires monogamy. However we reject this for two reasons. We are not aware of adequate evidence either that the nuclear family is in fact the optimal context for childrearing or that non-monogamy endangers partners' ability to fulfil their parental obligations. These are largely empirical matters. But even if it turns out that we are wrong, this rationale is restricted to relationships likely to produce offspring *and* to those portions of partners' sexual life in which they are either involved or likely to become involved with childrearing.[12] The second practical rationale for monogamy is preemptive. It states that partners' requiring one another to be monogamous is a reasonable response to their current desire to maintain their desire to be in the relationship.[13] Since cultivating additional relationships of erotic love could undermine the current relationship, by disallowing such relationships partners are acting in accord with a current shared desire to preserve their relationship.

However, monogamy is not guaranteed to have a protective effect. In cases in which feelings of erotic love develop without sexual contact, monogamy will be irrelevant or even counterproductive. It will be counterproductive where the imposed lack of sexual contact proves only to intensify what might otherwise have been a mere infatuation.

In addition, it remains a question whether relationships need protecting. To assume that they do presupposes a competitive model of relationships. On such a model, relationships of erotic love are by their very nature opposed to the formation and maintenance of additional sexual encounters or additional relationships of erotic love. However, one cannot simply assume the competitive model is correct without begging the question.

Another possible defence of monogamy might start from the thought that some things are more valuable when restricted. However, most things do not become more valuable when restricted, so it would have to be shown that sex is one thing that does. But in doing so, such an argument

must not implicitly echo the historical misconception of wives as property. For if the possessiveness partners (regardless of gender) express towards one another involves viewing the other as property, it could hardly be considered virtuous.

Yet another attempt to answer our problem might invoke something akin to John McDowell's notion of "silencing."[14] Partners often find, at least in the initial stages of a relationship, that they have no desire either to have sex or to form a relationship of erotic love with anyone else.[15] Their love "silences" any desire or affection for others. On such an account, monogamy is a consequence of their love and not a norm they take to govern their relationship. As such, monogamy ceases to be problematic.

We do not deny the phenomenon of silencing in this context, but we do deny that it can justify the norm of monogamy. We accept that many, maybe most, people will not have desires for sex or erotic love with others when first falling in love. So most people will, at least initially, be exclusive. However, monogamy is not just a state of affairs. It requires partners not just to find that they are refraining from such activity, but to see themselves as required to do so. If monogamy were just a state of affairs, then the failure of one partner to be monogamous would simply make the relationship non-monogamous. But that is not the sort of sway such an action has over the status of the relationship, nor the way the other partner responds to that failure. In such a situation, the failing partner has transgressed; his action is construed as an infraction, a violation of a rule.

Hence, for the phenomenon of silencing to provide a justification for the norm of monogamy, it must be shown to have normative import. One might try to argue that the experience of silencing and the quality of love directly correlate. On such an account, the silencing waning would indicate the fading of the love. At the limit, the absence of silencing would indicate the absence of love. As noted before, insofar as partners value their relationship they will want to maintain the relationship. Partners will therefore have reason to resist the waning of the silencing.

However, the claim that one cannot be in love with his partner and desire someone else is simply implausible. In a long-term relationship, each partner will usually at some point experience sexual desire or feelings of erotic love for another. This seems compatible with enduring love for the original partner. More argument would be required to show that when a partner finds himself with such desires or feelings—when the

silencing wanes—this must represent a diminishment of love. We contend that this could not be established without providing an independent argument for the value of monogamy.

*VI. Sex and erotic love*

We now offer our own justification for monogamy. This justification comes in two parts: first, we defend the restriction of sex to relationships of erotic love; then we defend the restriction of erotic love to only one relationship. Our first argument is based on the idea that the nature of sex makes it natural to see it as having a certain kind of significance. Sex can be seen as both symbolic of, and partly constitutive of, the love in the relationship. Spouses need not see sex as having this significance in their marriage; however, it is reasonable to do so. When this happens, sexual activity becomes conceptually inseparable from the kind of emotional intimacy that is associated with erotic love.[16] Sexual activity without this emotional intimacy is hurtful to the other spouse. In such cases, there is reason to restrict sex to relationships of erotic love.

The connection between sex and erotic love is complex. Some characterise sex as an expression of erotic love.[17] But we should not focus too strongly on the communicative aspect of sex. As Russell Vannoy observes, there are two reasons to avoid understanding sex solely as a vehicle for communicating emotion. There is a risk that we will fail to appreciate the more sensual aspects of sex. Moreover, some aspects of sex, if forced into a communicative framework, are best understood as conveying something other than love.[18] Yet partners often see these aspects of sex as no less closely connected with erotic love than others. If we are to represent accurately the way in which partners see sex as significant, we must find a connection between sex and erotic love that is not exhausted by the use of sex to express love. Our explanation of this connection views the emotional intimacy in a relationship of erotic love as partly constituted by sex.

Sex is neither necessary nor sufficient for emotional intimacy. However, if sex, which involves many other types of intimacy, is shared by those who love each other, it can be an integral part of the intimacy of erotic love.[19] Sex is intensely pleasurable, and intense experiences often forge a bond between those who share them. More importantly, the intense pleasure of sex is a product of the partners' interaction. It is pleasure found in and with the other. Thus, sex is just the sort of thing out of which emotional

intimacy can be built. Of course other shared experiences will be needed for full emotional intimacy. Nonetheless, this shared experience is an important part of the emotional intimacy of erotic love. For this reason, it is reasonable for partners in a relationship of erotic love to attach great significance to sex.

There are various ways of seeing sex as significant. It becomes significant when it is seen as connected to the emotional intimacy of erotic love. However, the question remains: which acts are connected to intimacy? The connections that are made will depend upon the conception of sex had by the spouses and whether they are able to separate sex into different categories, attaching a different type of significance to different types of sex. As far as this is concerned, there are various reasonable ways of conceiving of sex.

If spouses see sex in general as connected to emotional intimacy, they will attach significance to all sex acts. In this case, sex without emotional intimacy will seem like a betrayal; the partner's behaviour ignores the tie between sex and emotional intimacy and is thus seen as a denial of the significance of the sex in the relationship.[20] In this case, there is a strong reason to restrict sex to relationships of erotic love. Sex that does not involve erotic love will be hurtful to the other spouse.

However, if spouses do not tie sex in general to emotional intimacy, they will not attach significance to all sex acts. If spouses only see acts which are sufficiently similar to the sex they have together as connected to emotional intimacy, they will only see these acts as significant. This would suggest a form of restricted openness, which limits only the significant forms of sexual activity to relationships of erotic love. If spouses only connect sex within the relationship to emotional intimacy, then they will not attach significance to other sexual acts. This way of seeing sex as significant is compatible with non-monogamy.

It is vital to our argument that connecting sex with emotional intimacy is a reasonable response to the value of sex in the marriage. Because of this, it is reasonable for a spouse to be hurt if the other has sex without emotional intimacy. This reasonable hurt demands a different response than the comparable suffering of someone who is blindly jealous. In the case of blind jealousy, we have more reason to try to stop the jealous attitude or even to end the relationship than to restrict the activities which hurt the jealous spouse. In the case of reasonable hurt springing from a

reasonable response to the value of sex in the relationship, there is reason to restrict sexual activity.

We conclude that there can be a tie between sex and erotic love, conditional on sex being seen as having a particular kind of significance. If partners see sex as having this significance, it is reasonable for each to require that the other refrain from sexual activity with others with whom they do not share this emotional intimacy.

*VII. Erotic love and exclusivity*

We now turn to the second restriction involved in the norm of monogamy: the restriction of erotic love to a single relationship. Our argument is based on the difficulty of sustaining more than one relationship of this kind.

A marriage is a partnership in which two people share their lives. To share a life with another is rewarding, but demanding. It requires giving the other person, and the relationship, a fundamental role in shaping one's behaviour. Substantial investments of time, energy, and emotion must be put into the marriage if it is to be successful. For many, it will be impossible to sustain this kind of commitment to more than one person at a time.

However, other relationships also require substantial investment; much time and energy is demanded by deep friendships and parent–child relationships. Yet the norm of monogamy not only permits these external relationships, it positively encourages them. Many external projects take up vast amounts of time and energy, but there seems to be no betrayal involved in such external interests.

Our challenge is to explain why the norm of monogamy should differentiate between extra relationships of erotic love and these other relationships and projects. If all three types of commitment compete for resources, why forbid some and permit, or even encourage, others? Unless we can find a relevant difference, it looks as if our justification for monogamy will also justify the restriction of all other relationships and projects. We see this result as so implausible as to constitute a *reductio* of our argument for monogamy.

However, we can explain why a norm of monogamy might forbid additional relationships of erotic love without restricting other relationships and projects. Some of these relationships and projects involve obligations that are either unavoidable or prior to the relationship. A spouse cannot cut

ties to his parents or his children from a previous marriage; he is not entitled to default on his bills or break his promises. Spouses cannot be asked to abandon their unavoidable obligations for the sake of the marriage. However, other relationships and projects are not obligatory in this way. Nevertheless, these extra relationships and projects contribute new and different types of value; they provide aspects of a well-rounded life that could not be provided by the marriage. It is therefore worth some diversion of resources to allow each partner to pursue these other values.

Again, this answer suggests that whether a given couple should endorse a norm of monogamy will depend upon certain facts about that couple. Despite the pressure of resources, it will not make sense to ask a spouse to sacrifice a relationship or project that is necessary for him to have a well-rounded life. The norm of monogamy will only make sense if the additional relationship of erotic love would not fulfil any distinct need. There will be some persons for whom restrictions of the number of relationships of erotic love would restrict their ability to live a well-rounded life. An additional relationship of erotic love brings its own distinct value, a value that could not be found in the original relationship. For them, the experience of the distinct value found in a distinct relationship is part of a well-rounded life. For such a person, monogamy will not usually make sense.[21] However, for others, an additional relationship of erotic love will not contribute to a well-rounded life. The marriage provides all they need in terms of erotic love.[22]

Spouses do not have unlimited freedom to pursue other projects and relationships. Too much time spent on other projects gives grounds for complaint. A successful marriage requires compromise between the needs of the partnership and the individual needs of the spouses. Even though these factors can be in tension, they are also mutually reinforcing. Usually the spouses will support each other in their individual projects; indeed, the very existence of the relationship may provide a foundation for wellbeing, which helps in both joint and individual endeavours. It also seems clear that the relationship itself would be less good if the partners were not also fulfilled as autonomous individuals. Part of what is good about a good marriage is that it is a partnership between two well-rounded individuals.

Given the problem of limited resources and the mutually enforcing importance of each of these aspects of a partnership, some compromise is needed. Sometimes the needs of the marriage will take priority, sometimes

those of the individual. Decisions should be based upon the values that are at stake in each case. As noted above, it will not generally be reasonable for spouses to expect the other to abandon external obligations or components of a well-rounded life. However, many spouses will feel that their need for erotic love and companionship can be sufficiently fulfilled by the marriage. In this case, it makes sense to treat the marriage as paramount.

There is another significant difference between the commitments monogamy forbids (extra-marital relationships of erotic love) and those it encourages (for example, the raising of children). It may be highly demanding to raise a child. However, we should not regard the parent-child relationship as a rival relationship, competing with resources that could be spent on the marriage. In ideal circumstances, childrearing is a shared endeavour in which the spouses are co-agents. It should therefore strengthen rather than threaten the marriage.

It may be possible to bring an additional relationship of erotic love within the marriage in this way, so that it strengthens the marriage rather than threatens it.[23] If such an arrangement can be made to work, then it will no longer be true that the additional relationship of erotic love will threaten the original relationship by competing for scarce resources. Thus, the argument given above in favour of monogamy will not apply. However, practically speaking, it may be very difficult to sustain an arrangement of this sort. In many cases, an additional relationship of erotic love would lead to less resources being available for the marriage.

*VIII. The value of monogamy and the value of non-monogamy*

In the previous two sections we have given arguments that, if successful, explain why it can make sense for partners to be monogamous. However, this argument may make it seem as if monogamy is merely a necessary evil, a restriction that our limited resources and capacities foist on us. Monogamy seems to be a restriction that is necessary to ensure that the partners can invest enough in the marriage to ensure its flourishing. Given the value of the relationship, for many couples this sacrifice will be worthwhile. Nonetheless, it seems like something to be endured rather than embraced. It may be objected that this picture of monogamy does not actually fit with the way in which most monogamists regard this aspect of their relationship. Most see their endorsement of the norm of monogamy as something that is itself good rather than a lamentable consequence of

human frailty. Can our account of monogamy make sense of this attitude? It can. What is more, it can also account for the value that non-monogamous couples place on their rejection of the norm.

According to our previous arguments, acceptance of a norm of monogamy makes sense under three conditions: (1) the couple responds to the value of sex within the marriage by seeing *all* sexual activity as having a special significance; (2) the spouses' needs for erotic love are fulfilled by the relationship; and (3) the relationship is sufficiently important to justify accepting restrictions to protect it. Condition (1) is necessary to justify the restriction of sexual activity to significant relationships of erotic love. Conditions (2) and (3) are necessary to justify restricting the spouses to a single relationship of erotic love.

Therefore, when spouses endorse a norm of monogamy, they take their relationship to have satisfied those conditions. It may seem as if both the fact that a relationship does so and the recognition of this fact by the spouses are valuable. Suppose that the spouses assign significance to all sexual activity [fulfil condition (1)], seeing it as intertwined with emotional intimacy. This suggests that the sex within the marriage is so significant that it infuses all similar activity with meaning.

It is also good if the spouses' needs for erotic love are fulfilled by the marriage. If this is so, then each spouse provides for the other all that is needed in terms of sex and love. When spouses decide to be monogamous, they take each other to provide everything they each need. This recognition of how much can be found within the marriage is itself good. In this we find the grain of truth in the thought that monogamy is valuable because it means that one has been chosen. The validation of monogamy need not be the suspect validation of being better than others, in the competitive sense. Monogamy can validate by telling us that *we* ourselves are seen as good enough, giving absolute rather than comparative praise.

It is also good for spouses to be willing to make a sacrifice for the sake of the marriage. This willingness to make space to allow the marriage to flourish is part of a commitment to the marriage and to one's spouse. It reflects the important place they have in one's life.

However, there may also be reasons to value the fact that one's marriage is non-monogamous. It makes sense to be non-monogamous when the conditions described above do not apply. In order for it to make sense to permit sex that does not involve erotic love, the spouses must be

able psychologically to separate marital sex from extra-marital sex. In order for it to make sense to permit multiple relationships of erotic love, the partners must find additional value in additional relationships and be able to do so while continuing to sustain the marriage. Both involve sophisticated attitudes toward sex and erotic love. Choosing to be non-monogamous also displays faith in the strength of the relationship.

There can be value in the acceptance of monogamy and value in the rejection of it. Equally there can be disvalue in the acceptance of monogamy and disvalue in the rejection of it. Whether the acceptance of either of these norms is valuable depends on *why* it has been accepted. The acceptance of monogamy is valuable when spouses choose to be monogamous because the marriage alone fulfils their sexual and emotional needs and they see the relationship as important enough to justify the sacrifices. The acceptance of monogamy is disvaluable if spouses choose to be monogamous due to jealousy, insecurity, or the desire to control each other. The rejection of monogamy is valuable when it springs from a realistic faith in the strength of the marriage and spouses' ability to fulfil their sophisticated sexual and emotional needs while sustaining the marriage. It is disvaluable when it springs from a lack of fulfilment within the relationship and a failure to value the marriage enough to protect it.[24]

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## NOTES

1. Paraphrased from 'The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony' in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662).

2. From "Second Lovers Song" by Townes Van Zandt.

3. Following Gibbard, we maintain that to "make sense" is to abide by norms. See Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 90.

4. Valerio Salvi pressed us on this.

5. We proceed with a very general conception of the relationship between value and reasons. This conception simply states that "wherever there is value there are reasons";

that is, there is a "necessary co-presence" between value and reasons. See Jonathan Dancy, *Ethics Without Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 177.

6. See Dancy (2004), pp. 184–87.

7. David Oderberg pressed us on this point.

8. We allow there may be norms that must be included among the terms of any relationship.

9. Alan Carter, Brian Feltham, Allan Hazlett, and Bart Streumer in various ways suggested we take this point more seriously.

10. Although it is conceptually possible that one partner does not desire to engage in sex outside the relationship whilst allowing the other to do so, in practice such situations may constitute a dubious asymmetry.

11. T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 88–90.

12. See John McMurtry, "Monogamy: A Critique," *The Monist*, **56** (1972), 587–99, p. 592.

13. The *locus classicus* for second-order desires is Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," in his *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 11–25. Originally published in 1971.

14. Anna Bergqvist suggested the connection to McDowell.

15. McDowell discusses cases in which reasons are silenced. Our discussion applies the notion of silencing to a different thing: desires. See John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," in his *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 55–56. Originally published in 1979. See also Jonathan Dancy, *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), pp. 47–55.

16. We see this kind of emotional intimacy as an important part of, but not the whole of, erotic love.

17. Most notably Robert Solomon, "Sexual Paradigms," *Journal of Philosophy*, **71** (1974), 336–45.

18. Russell Vannoy, *Sex Without Love* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1980), pp. 11, 16.

19. We do not claim that partners who have casual sex are sharing this experience in the wrong way. Sex can occur without emotional intimacy without implying that participants have the wrong attitude to their shared experience or to each other.

20. It does not seem to us that spouses who see sex in general as having great significance are thereby committed to disapproval either of spouses who allow extra-marital casual sex or of sexually active single persons. The significance partners attach to sex is agent-relative.

21. If such a person finds himself in love with someone who desires to be monogamous, then being monogamous in this case might be more valuable than that which he forgoes.

22. As Ayelet Blecher-Prigat pointed out to us, the marriage may not fulfil all of a person's needs for sexual companionship, but it may fulfil *enough* of them.

23. Questions from Andrew Williams prompted this point.

24. We thank audiences of a research seminar at The University of Reading and of conferences at Texas Tech University and The University of Birmingham, as well as John Cottingham, Jonathan Dancy, and Maximilian de Gaynesford for comments on a penultimate draft. We also thank Philip Goff, Alison Duncan Kerr, and Kevin Scharp for discussions that led to our formulation of the problem for monogamy (§3).