

Chapter 12: Ruling Ourselves

Footnote: Serial Monogamy vs Polyamory

As an outsider to both, I can see no difference in moral principle between serial monogamy and polyamory. The latter, however, appears to alleviate the former's pain and acrimony of repeated break-ups.

I am given to understand that many people of both genders have by mid-life gone through a whole *series* of intimate partners. Among these are a few close friends of mine. Some of their relationships have been proper marriages, others have been stable unofficial relationships, others have been short term or casual relationships. Yet, I have heard more than one of these friends assert emphatically that they are 'monogamous by nature'. This to me has always appeared a paradox.

The answer my friends give to my apparent paradox is that they are *serial* monogamists: they are completely faithful to each partner in turn while they are with them - however long or short a time each relationship may last. Sadly, each time a serial monogamist couples with a new partner, he or she sooner or later discovers new incompatibilities, which eventually results in yet another break-up. The plea is that he or she has not found the 'right' partner yet, so must try again. Some have even gone back to a previous partner to have another go at making it work.

Those of other persuasions will have to bear with me but herein I am considering relationships that involve binary coupling between male and female. Each physical event involves only two people of complementary gender. And it is within this context that I cannot see any difference in moral principle between *serial monogamy* and *polyamory*.

Any intimate event of the kind to which I have confined this discussion is - through physiological constraint - necessarily monogamous. It involves only two people for the duration. So in this sense, both serial monogamy and polyamory are the same. They are a series of monogamistic encounters between different MF pairings. The only difference is in how these encounters are arranged in time.

An example of serial monogamy is illustrated by the following sequence of encounters:

Anne-John, Anne-John, Anne-John, Anne-John, Anne-Dave, Anne-Dave, Anne-Dave ...

And an example of polyamory:

Anne-John, Anne-Dave, Anne-John, Anne-Dave, Anne-John, Anne-Dave, Anne-John ...

In the first example presumably, Anne loves John for a time and then parts permanently with him and takes up with Dave, whereas in the second example, she remains intimate friends with both. It is just that the encounters are more tightly interlaced in the polyamorous scenario, but this is just a matter of event timing. There is no difference in overall principle, since each encounter is exclusive to the two individuals concerned.

Now there is no reason why - as a serial monogamist - Anne, having dumped John and taken up with Dave, should not at a later time fall back in love with John, this time dumping Dave. This would simply be a less rewarding and certainly more stressful and upsetting version of the polyamorous scenario. In fact my serial monogamist friends tell me that contrary to what most people seem to think, breaking up always gets progressively harder, not easier. Each new break-up is more painful than the one before it.

In both cases, Anne has had loving relationships with both John and Dave, which she can remember and savour in later life. There is a substantial bit of 'wiring' in her brain relating to each of them. Why

should she end the joy of what has been in order to enjoy what is to come? Isn't it therefore better for her to love both of them (and even others) throughout her life? This way there are no break-ups, no acrimony, no pain, no loss.

This to my mind is much the more preferable. It simply requires that all concerned conquer the lust for exclusivity, possession and control, and instead learn to share.

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