

**Monogamy, Democracy, and Morality:  
Some Speculations about the Force of Multiple Confluences of  
Interest**

Across the recent history of the world there has been an undeniable movement of social rules -- either in an overall sense or through exaggeration, or novel appearance of, extremes -- away from certain patterns, such as despotism and polygyny, and toward certain alternatives, such as democracy, monogamy, and equality of opportunity among minorities, the sexes, diverse ethnic or racial components of society, and so-called "handicapped" people. It is probably fair to say that, concomitantly, the concepts of morality and legality have become more prominent in the world, and the continuity of moral and legal systems within nations has become more reliable. Many academic philosophers have become preoccupied with universally beneficent behavior as an ideal -- even a realizable ideal -- and groups preoccupied with the rights of embryos, nonhuman animals, and even plants and nonliving features of the environment have become more prominent.

This essay proposes a contribution to the explanation for these trends, and for the background of strong or potently enforced rules and morality in general. The proposition is that sometimes diverse sets of interests are served by the same change in social or political rules, creating unexpected confluences of interest that together lead to potent pressures for certain rules or laws. Sometimes these confluences of interest are perceived by some or all of the participants, and sometimes their effects, even if potent, are probably unnoticed by virtually everyone.

Let monogamy be the first case. Monogamy is probably always in the interests of women, so long as we include the qualifier that women

sometimes enter into marriages that turn out to be less than ideal, or to be less satisfactory than an alternative marriage that subsequently becomes available to them. The reasons for marriage being always in the interests of women, given this qualifier (which is not an alternative to monogamy per se but to a particular marriage), are that (1) women typically cannot gain (much, or as much as males can) by increasing their numbers of mates; (2) human juveniles have evolved to be virtually dependent for survival, let alone success, upon at least one parent (this is surely an understatement, in that throughout most of history human juveniles probably required more than the resources -- material and social -- of one parent to be successful); and (3) women have, historically, depended upon men as the sources of the resources necessary to insure the success of their offspring. Resources given to the offspring of co-wives in polygyny subtract from the entire fund of resources available to the offspring of each wife, so that women also exerted pressure toward monogamy in men (There are some societies in which polygyny has become so linked to status that the offspring of a woman married to a polygynous male might be better off even if he had to divide his material resources more finely; and in some such societies a man's second wife becomes the virtual servant of the first wife, so that women might actually aspire to be the first wife of a successfully polygynous man).

A correlative point is that once resources controlled by men began to be used extensively to insure the success of juveniles, then it became important for men to know that their spouses' offspring were also their own. As a result, tendencies among women to seek the best genetic fathers for their offspring, irrespective of whether or not the fathers were also the providers, would be thwarted by efforts of men to insure that their resources were used to assist their own offspring. Thus, efforts of

women to insure monogamy in their mates, so as to provide resources for the women's own offspring, would lead incidentally to a more emphatic enforcement of monogamy on the parts of women as well.

Additionally, monogamous marriages create a remarkable confluence of interest within the nuclear family, with the two parents equally interested in the success of the offspring they have produced jointly, and to which they are equally related. Indeed, all members of a monogamous nuclear family are equally related to one another, so that in societies in which such families become relatively isolated, a potentially self-interested unit (temporary in nature and finite in size) is created.

A second general source of pressure toward monogamy has surely been the prevalence of social diseases spread primarily as a result of promiscuity. The extent to which such diseases have influenced patterns of sexual behavior, and if so precisely how, seems yet to be investigated (e.g., some social diseases may cause sexual avoidance of strangers, others may cause avoidance of unhealthy-appearing individuals or members of families containing such individuals, whether strangers or not).

A third general source of pressure toward monogamy has been the compatibility of the nuclear family, as compared to its alternatives, with governments. Overall or "federal" government is evidently less threatened by a monogamous marriage system than by any other. Polygyny leads to extended families and clans, which tend to create their own sets of rules that will inevitably conflict in some sense or fashion with rules deriving from sources at higher levels. Moreover, a reverse kind of compatibility also contributes to stability, because governments, by encouraging monogamy and being able to allow more or less complete autonomy within the nuclear monogamous family, become a source of reinforcement of the effects of monogamy that were in the first place positive from the point

of view of the individual participants. Religion can have the same effect.

A fourth source of pressure toward monogamy is the fact that socially-imposed monogamy reduces competitiveness among men by insuring that no one or small number of men can monopolize all the women. This means, for example, that men can cooperate in absentee defensive or offensive actions with respect to other groups without being entirely disenfranchised with respect to mates and marriage. The reduction of competitiveness among men carries the concomitant that complex and ardent cooperation is more possible or likely. One result is that monogamous societies are likely to have a certain edge, possibly primarily over the long run, over polygynous and more divisive societies; hence the spread of socially-imposed monogamy as a result of successful conquest.

The point of this essay is not merely to describe multiple contributing factors involved in the spread of monogamy, but to argue that potent moral rules and beliefs (and systems) may typically be established or maintained because they represent multiple confluences of interest of the sort just described. The general hypothesis is that to explain long-term general trends in social, moral, or political behavior, one may need to identify and understand sets of such nexes, and to understand how humans use one confluence of interest to support or reinforce another.\* As an example, consider the statements of people morally opposed to homosexuality and drug use, and morally devoted to monogamy, that AIDS is a disease sent by God to rid the world of homosexuals, drug users, and promiscuous people.

\*It is probably not irrelevant that written language solidified the concept of precedent and to some extent took it out of the hands of the physically powerful, the best orators, or those most capable of "respeaking" history.