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Monogamy Unredeemed

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Abstract
Monogamy, I've argued, faces a pressing problem: the difficulty of finding a morally relevant difference between its restriction on having additional partners and a restriction on having additional friends. To the extent that we'd find a restriction on having additional friends morally troubling, that puts pressure on us to judge the same about monogamy. This argument, however, has recently come under attack by Kyle York, who defends monogamy on grounds of specialness, practicality, and jealousy. In this paper I'll argue that, *pace* York, these defenses of monogamy all fail.

Keywords Monogamy · Non-monogamy · Specialness · Practicality · Jealousy

1 Introduction

Monogamy, I've argued, is morally impermissible (Chalmers, 2019). More precisely, I've argued that monogamy's mutual restriction on having additional partners is morally analogous to a mutual restriction on having additional friends; just as the latter restriction—here I'll call it simply "the friendship restriction"—is morally troubling, so, too, is the former. What makes such restrictions morally troubling is the fact that both friendships and sexual and romantic relationships are important human goods, which raises the question of why one should restrict one's friend or partner from having more of them.

Such an argument, of course, raises no shortage of objections, most of which posit that monogamy has certain good-making features that justify its restrictions. (Consider, for example, the claim that monogamy preserves a sense of "specialness" in a relationship, or that monogamy provides the best environment for raising children.) Such objections are, in fact, where the bulk of the battlefield lies here; accordingly, most of my earlier paper is devoted to addressing them, arguing that each of the standard candidates for a major good-making feature of monogamy is either not in fact a good-making feature or is not a feature distinctive to monogamy.

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Some philosophers have taken issue with these claims. Kyle York (2020), in particular, defends monogamy on grounds of specialness, practicality, and jealousy. Here I'll argue here that, *pace* York, these defenses of monogamy all fail.

2 Setting the Stage: What Would it Take to Justify Monogamy?

Before delving into the areas where York and I disagree, I'd like to note a limited point of agreement. I began my earlier paper (2019: 226–227) by noting two broad ways in which one might attempt to find a morally relevant difference between monogamous restrictions and the friendship restriction: (1) argue that the friendship restriction has bad-making features (such as being especially onerous) that monogamous restrictions lack, or (2) argue that monogamous restrictions have good-making features that the friendship restriction lacks. I then suggested that strategy (1) would not work for the defender of monogamy, since it could at most suggest that the friendship restriction is morally worse than monogamous restrictions, and such a suggestion would be compatible with the claim that monogamous restrictions are immoral. (That is, both kinds of restriction could be immoral, even granting that the friendship restriction is worse.) For this reason, I set aside strategy (1) and focused on addressing strategy (2).

York, however, objects that strategy (2), at least as I described it, is not the only remaining way of defending monogamy. Rather than arguing that monogamous restrictions have good-making features that the friendship restriction lacks, the defender of monogamy could simply argue that (a) monogamous restrictions have good-making features that are shared by the friendship restriction, (b) these shared good-making features are not enough to justify the friendship restriction, given how onerous it is, and (c) these shared good-making features are nevertheless enough to justify monogamous restrictions, given that they're less onerous (York, 2020: 540).

This point is well taken; rather than saying that what the defender of monogamy needs is to find "unique good-making features of monogamy," I should have simply said "good-making features of monogamy," leaving it open to what extent such features might be shared with the friendship restriction (2019: 227). That acknowledged, it is, I believe, equally fair to point out that this is only a minor infelicity. For it remains true that the worseness of the friendship restriction is not enough to justify monogamy; what the defender of monogamy needs to find are sufficient good-making features of monogamy (whether these features are shared with the friendship restriction or not). And the prime candidates for such good-making features are the ones my earlier paper goes on to consider, namely specialness, sexual health, children's well-being, practicality, and the prevention of jealousy; for each of these, I've argued either that it is not in fact a good-making feature or that monogamy has no special claim to it. Surface-level correction aside, the heart of the argument is unchanged here.[1]

[1] To be sure, some might doubt this, holding in mind York's claim that one should be wary "whenever one sees an argument of Chalmers' that examines a good-making feature of monogamy and points out that such a feature doesn't justify restrictions of friendships. In such cases, it could be that the more onerous restriction on additional friendships crosses a certain threshold such that the good-making fea-

In what follows, I'll further examine some of the alleged good-making features of monogamy. But first, it's worth considering a more general issue: How significant would a good-making feature (or set of good-making features) of monogamy need to be to justify monogamous restrictions? If the answer is "Not very," then one might have hope that monogamy could be justified with little effort. For multiple reasons, however, I'd like to suggest that the answer is not so favorable to monogamy's prospects after all. When it comes to justifying monogamous restrictions, not just any good-making feature(s) will do; in fact, the good-making feature(s) would need to be tremendously weighty.[2]

Why think this? Consider, first, the weight of what's at stake in monogamous restrictions. Precisely what's at stake will vary by the (monogamous) relationship, of course. Usually it's nothing less than the relationship itself, though not always. However, if there's any doubt that *something* very significant need be at stake for a relationship to count as monogamous, we might pause to imagine a case like the following:

> Phil and Maxine have agreed to be monogamous. Yet Phil constantly and openly violates monogamous restrictions, to the point where Maxine regularly discovers him in bed with other partners. Maxine, however, never puts anything very significant on the line to deal with Phil's behavior. Her go-to response is simply to tell him that she disapproves. To the extent that she feels any blame or resentment toward him, it is slight and always forgotten by the

Footnote 1 (continued)

ture in question no longer compensates for the restrictions" (2020: 540). To clarify, there are two places where my earlier paper "examines a good-making feature of monogamy and points out that such a feature doesn't justify restrictions of friendships." The first is in one part of my response to the specialness defense. The idea there, however, is not simply that considerations of specialness fail to justify the friendship restriction; it is, rather, that "[h]aving additional friends does not make any particular friendship less special" (Chalmers, 2019: 228). In other words, rather than specialness's being a good-making feature of the friendship restriction which is simply not weighty enough to justify it, the thought is that specialness is not a good-making feature of the friendship restriction *at all*. And that, in turn, is meant to make salient the question of why we should think that specialness is a good-making feature of monogamous restrictions at all; to the extent that we do, we would need to find a relevant difference between friendship and romantic relationships. So the argument here is more defensible than simply saying, "Specialness doesn't justify the friendship restriction; therefore, it doesn't justify monogamous restrictions, either."

There is a second place where my earlier paper points out that a putatively good-making feature of monogamy would fail to justify the friendship restriction: a part of my response to the practicality defense (2019: 232). I acknowledge that, at least in its present wording, this point indeed runs into York's criticism. While I believe that the point could be reformulated to be more defensible, I lack the space to do so here. More importantly, it is in any case a matter of limited interest, as direct comparisons to the friendship restriction are only a small part of my earlier discussion of the putatively good-making features of monogamy; even if I withdrew such comparisons entirely, there would, I propose, remain ample reasons for thinking that the defenses of monogamy all fail.

[2] To avoid some cumbersome sentence constructions, in what follows I'll generally use the singular "good-making feature," rather than "good-making feature(s)." I do so, of course, with the understanding that monogamy might in principle be justified by multiple good-making features working together, even if no such feature is enough to justify monogamy by itself.

next day. And, through it all, she remains perfectly willing to continue her relationship with him.

Is such a relationship monogamous? I don't believe so. True, some monogamous partners might be able to get past an isolated instance of cheating with the relationship intact. But for the non-monogamous behavior to be both known to the existing partner *and* sustained—with one's existing partner remaining willing not only to continue the relationship, but to do so without any significant repercussions for the straying partner at all, such as intense blame or resentment—would make the relationship monogamous in name only. For a relationship to be monogamous, the partners must do more than pay lip service to the norm of monogamy; they must be willing to enforce the norm through their actions and reactive attitudes. And the only natural candidates for such actions and reactive attitudes are things like ending the relationship, withdrawing one's affection, or feeling intense blame or resentment.[3] All these amount to very significant costs, given the importance we place on romantic relationships and on being on good terms with one's partner. Any restriction, such as monogamy, which puts this much at stake calls for a likewise weighty justification.[4]

For an analogy, consider two partners who, instead of imposing monogamous restrictions, impose a "shoelaces restriction" on one another. Specifically, each makes clear that if the other ever wears green shoelaces, the consequence will be, if not the flat-out undoing of the relationship, then at least severe resentment, blame, or loss of affection. What should we make of this restriction? Perhaps some would say that such a restriction is merely silly. I think that most, though, would agree with me in sensing something unsettling about it. Of course, I've left it open whether the restriction is justified; with sufficiently imaginative additions, the scenario could turn out to be one in which the restriction is justified after all (to take an extreme case: if both partners knew that, somehow, the restriction was necessary to convince powerful aliens not to blow up the earth). Yet the question of whether the restriction is justified does arise, and it appears that only a very weighty justification would be an acceptable answer. Suppose, for instance, that the partners maintain the restriction simply because each moderately dislikes the look of green shoelaces, or because it would amuse one of their friends if they put such a restriction in place.

[3] I say that these are the only natural candidates because prospective romantic and sexual relationships—including those that would be in addition to an existing one—are liable to be the subject of intense desire. To enforce a norm against beginning additional romantic and sexual relationships, then, one must be prepared to impose a correspondingly severe cost for violating that norm. A mild-to-moderate blame or resentment, for example, simply would not be enough here. Indeed, even the willingness to feel intense blame or resentment, or to outright end the relationship, is often not enough—as shown by the all-too-common willingness to cheat even though these typically *are* understood to be what's at stake.

[4] Note, too, that even if I'm mistaken here, and monogamy itself need not involve having such significant costs at stake, it's nevertheless true that having such costs at stake is a part of monogamy as typically practiced. Thus, even if we reject the claim that monogamy itself has such high stakes, we're left with a point that remains equally troubling for most defenders of monogamy (viz., that monogamy, as typically practiced, requires a very weighty justification in view of how much partners tend to put at stake for violating monogamous restrictions).

Evidently, these would not be nearly enough to justify the restriction. For each to be holding the other to the restriction for such small reasons as these, and to be willing to put such severe stakes on it, regardless of how happy and fulfilling their relationship might otherwise be—that would be morally troubling indeed.

Such a case is illuminating in another way: Notice how weighty a good-making feature would be required to justify the shoelaces restriction, *even though the range of the restriction is so small*. Wearing green shoelaces is such a specific and unlikely choice that each partner may well never have the occasion for it. Monogamy, by contrast, involves far broader restrictions. In prohibiting extra-partner sex and romance across the board, monogamy restricts a much wider range of behaviors than the shoelaces restriction does. And the broader a restriction is, the more will be required to justify it. Here we have one reason for suspecting that, however great a good-making feature would need to be to justify the shoelaces restriction, justifying monogamous restrictions would require a good-making feature that is yet weightier.

Lastly, consider that what monogamy restricts is not merely some arbitrary or insignificant behavior (as with the shoelaces restriction), but behavior that can be, and typically or at least often is, of deep value to those who engage in it. Additional sexual or romantic relationships, much like the not-so-additional ones, tend to be a source of pleasures, insights, closeness, and support. And the more a restricted behavior tends to be of value to those who engage in it, the more will be required to justify the restriction. Thus does the burden of justifying monogamous restrictions become even heavier.

Taking stock, we have three reasons here why monogamous restrictions would require a great deal to justify: (1) the seriousness of the penalty for violating the restrictions, (2) the broadness of the restrictions, and (3) the extent of the value the restricted behavior tends to have to those who engage in it.[5] All this should be kept in mind as we examine the defenses of monogamy on offer. If indeed a given good-making feature is to justify monogamy, it will need to be tremendously important.

The groundwork having been lain, the task now is to reexamine York's proposed good-making features of monogamy: specialness, practicality, and the prevention of jealousy. Specifically, we need to consider whether (1) these are in fact good-making features and, if so, whether (2) monogamy has a special claim to them. Should (1) and (2) both hold true for any of these proposed good-making features, we'd face the further question of whether it is weighty enough to justify monogamy. This further question, however, won't be relevant here, as I'll argue that for none of the proposed good-making features on offer do both (1) and (2) hold true.

[5] This is not to suggest that these are the only features relevant to justifying a restriction. Other features, for example, include the ease with which a restriction may be overridden. No such further features, however, have any obvious bearing on monogamous restrictions—or, at least, not the kind of bearing that would make monogamous restrictions easier to defend. (For instance, to continue the above example, it's typically understood that monogamous restrictions are never, or almost never, to be overridden.)

3 The Specialness Defense

Some believe that to choose and be chosen by strictly one partner at a time makes a relationship special, and that the value of this specialness is enough to justify monogamy. I've called this reasoning into question in part on the basis that it's not how we reason about other kinds of relationships, such as friendships and parent-child relationships. I've also pointed out that there are distinct senses of "special"—particularly the sense of being exclusive, on one hand, and the sense of being highly valuable, on the other—and suggested that it's only if we conflate them that the specialness defense will seem plausible (2019: 228–229).

York, by contrast, believes that there's more to be said for the specialness defense. He begins by drawing on a point from Bryan Weaver and Fiona Woollard:

> As for the distinctive feeling of being the one person one's partner has chosen, Weaver and Woollard suggest that this might simply have to do with the fact that a relationship we make exclusive for practical reasons should be sufficiently fulfilling and significant to protect in such a way.[6] It is not that exclusivity makes the relationship special; it's that the specialness of the relationship justifies making it exclusive. (York, 2020: 544)

As suggested by York's use of "for practical reasons," this part of Weaver and Woollard's argument is concerned with practical justifications of monogamy. More precisely, Weaver and Woollard think that it's justified (for at least some couples) to restrict erotic love to a single relationship because of the substantial commitments of time, energy, and other resources that romantic relationships tend to involve (2008: 517–519).

This point, however, is essentially the practicality defense, not the specialness defense. More fully spelled out, the last part of York's final sentence above should read as follows: "it's that the specialness of the relationship, *in conjunction with certain practical constraints*, justifies making it exclusive." I'll have more to say about the practicality defense in the next section. For now, though, I'll simply note that York himself states that his defenses of monogamy are supposed to stand independently (2020: 541). In what follows I'll hold York to this, focusing strictly on the points that could provide monogamy with independent support.

York goes on to suggest that exclusivity itself may be valuable, and that one way it could be valuable is by facilitating privacy in a relationship. For example, "if you spent last night doing something personally important and private with your lover Nia, and your other lover Sofia asks you what you did last night, you can tell Sofia that it's private, but this… seems to risk undercutting your capacity for intimacy with Sofia" (York, 2020: 544). (Here I'll assume that you've already informed Nia about your relationship with Sofia, and vice versa, since not to have done so would be an ethical problem in its own right.) Assuming, also, that "something personally important and private" refers to sex, the case seems to me to have a straightforward

[6] Here York cites Weaver and Woollard (2008: 519).

solution: tell Sofia (1) that you had sex with Nia last night, (2) to what extent Nia has any known STIs, and (3) what level of protection, if any, you used—but don't provide detail beyond that. If Nia feels that revealing this necessary minimum of information violates her privacy, then that is an irrationality on her part. To be sure, in other contexts, it's easy to see how Nia could reasonably wish for such information to stay private. But non-monogamous relationships tend to come with an expectation that everyone involved will be clear to one another about the basics of their sexual interactions—at a minimum, information pertinent to sexual health, such as whom they're having sex with and what levels of protection they use—so that everyone can better manage their own risk. Fulfilling this basic communicative duty to one's partners violates no one's privacy.

What if Sofia isn't satisfied with simply knowing the basics, though? Should she want a play-by-play of your night with Nia, what then? *Now* Nia's privacy is at issue, and the only right thing to do, given Nia's reasonable preference to keep those details private, would be to refuse Sofia's request. If Sofia feels that you've thereby undercut your capacity for intimacy as a couple, then she is being unreasonable. For simply being unwilling to divulge the additional details doesn't at all reflect a lack of trust in Sofia, but merely a need to respect Nia's privacy. (One can trust someone completely but still rightly be unwilling to tell her something that would violate the privacy of another.)

So much for privacy, then. But York proposes an additional way in which exclusivity might be valuable. Specifically, for many people, exclusivity is associated with intimacy (whether it's seen as making a relationship more intimate or, more strongly, as a precondition for significant intimacy at all). Such a claim immediately raises the question of why exclusivity and intimacy need be or should be associated in such a way. Here York gestures at a few reasons one might give for the association, citing especially Natasha McKeever's point that "exclusivity may help a couple 'make more effort sexually with each other and/or feel more relaxed and confident knowing they are not being compared to others'" (York, 2020: 544–545; the quotation that York cites is from McKeever, 2015: 361).

Let's approach these claims one by one, starting with the claim that exclusivity might help couples to "feel more relaxed and confident knowing they are not being compared to others." This claim doesn't seem very plausible. After all, except if it is your partner's first relationship, there's always the prospect of being compared to his past partners. For that matter, even if it is your partner's first relationship, there's the prospect of being compared to what he imagines other partners would be like. (Indeed, it might even be worse to be compared to the imagined version of other partners, as it's all too easy to imagine others as being better and more sexually adept than they in fact are. Perhaps ongoing experience with additional partners would in fact help here by influencing a couple's sexual expectations of one another to be more realistic.)

Consider, next, the claim that exclusivity might help couples to "make more effort sexually with each other." It's difficult to see why this would be the case, unless we assume an implausible model in which sexual effort is seen as a strictly zero-sum resource, such that any sexual effort one gives to anyone else entails reduced sexual effort for one's partner. Personal resources in general don't work like that. For

instance, suppose that I play a video game with someone else; it'd be silly to think that I must now somehow give less "gaming effort" to my partner. And it's unclear why sexual effort would be any different. (Moreover, any suggestion to the contrary would be steering toward the practicality defense, so I'll leave the matter at that for now.)

We've been searching for a good reason for the association between intimacy and exclusivity, but the search has proved difficult. If neither privacy, nor freedom from being compared to other partners, nor considerations of sexual effort can justify the association between intimacy and exclusivity, what can? At this point, one could be forgiven for suspecting that there simply are no good reasons to be found here. Ultimately, though, York argues that that doesn't matter; regardless of whether they do so for good reason, what matters is simply that people do in fact associate intimacy with exclusivity. And this is all that matters here, York claims, because my argument is an argument against individual agreements between couples to be monogamous, not monogamy as a cultural institution. As York puts it:

> [W]hile reasons for our associations may be necessary if we are interrogating monogamy as a cultural phenomenon, I don't see why they're necessary for defending exclusivity agreements as a practice within cultures…. When considering whether sexually restrictive agreements may be bad, we wouldn't demand an explanation of why exactly sex is associated with "a special kind of emotional support and closeness"[7]…. [W]hat matters is simply that sexuality and exclusivity have these characteristics for some people. (York, 2020: 545)

This line of reasoning, however, is unmotivated. What matters here is that, regardless of to what extent people (individually or collectively) happen to associate sex with "a special kind of emotional support and closeness," they need not—not if we're reading "special" as "exclusive"—and, in some salient ways, it'd be better if they didn't. (In particular, it'd make open a prima facie valuable resource, namely additional sexual and romantic relationships, and would in that way be less restrictive of their partner.) That's all that's needed for the association between intimacy and exclusivity to be open to critique (or, if you prefer, to demand a reason). Whether the critique is at the individual or cultural level is neither here nor there.

To be fair, York concedes that sometimes our associations indeed call for critique, particularly when they themselves are immoral; he offers the example of being willing to date only members of a certain ethnicity because one associates that ethnicity with purity (2020: 545). But he goes on to argue that the association between intimacy and exclusivity is not immoral:

> Certain associations between specialness and exclusivity doubtlessly rest upon assumptions of entitlement and ownership, but the particular association between specialness or intimacy and shared exclusive identities seems too general to rest on such assumptions. After all, it seems to underlie many cultural phenomena that have nothing to do with entitlement or ownership, such

[7] Here York cites my (2019: 225).

> as when friends share inside jokes and groups share special slang and fashions that distinguish them from other groups. (York, 2020: 545)

On closer inspection, though, these examples don't appear to support York's point very well; in fact, if anything, they go against it. To begin, I'll concede that if the people sharing distinctive slang, fashions, or inside jokes are not trying to stop outsiders from using them, then there's no sense of entitlement or ownership present. But if they are trying to stop outsiders from using them (e.g., through shaming or complaints about cultural appropriation), then it seems that their attitude indeed involves a sense of entitlement and ownership.

Why does this matter? It matters because monogamy is much closer to the latter kind of attitude. After all, being monogamous does, in an important sense, involve trying to stop your partner from engaging in sex or romance with others, since it's understood that you'll impose a significant cost on your partner for doing so (such as becoming angry, withdrawing your affection, and, if the infidelity is repeated or severe enough, ending the relationship). And however appropriate entitlement and ownership might be when it comes to certain slang, fashions, or inside jokes, surely they're immoral when targeted at another person's sex life, as in monogamy.[8]

York acknowledges the possibility that "there is a restrictive quality to these associations [between intimacy and exclusivity] that makes them seem immoral" (2020: 545). But he goes on to deny that there is any genuine problem for monogamy here:

> [W]hile exclusivity is restrictive, to associate intimacy or specialness and a shared exclusive identity does not seem restrictive *per se*. It does not follow from this association that shared exclusive identities should be affirmed through restrictions, but only that certain restrictions will have at least one good-making feature if they contribute to a shared exclusive identity. (York, 2020: 545)

What this passage leaves unexplained is why we should assume that "contribut[ing] to a shared exclusive identity" is a good-making feature. True, it's easy to see how simply contributing to a *shared* identity could be a good-making feature. But the added element of *exclusivity* seems merely restrictive, and in that way morally problematic. Why not simply have the shared identity without making it exclusive?

I suspect that what's at issue here, and in many people's attraction to the specialness defense more broadly, is a failure to distinguish between a shared *distinctive* identity and a shared *exclusive* identity (or perhaps assuming that the latter is the only way to obtain the former). A shared distinctive identity is marked by distinctive ways of relating to one another—whether through special jokes, memories, ways of speaking, ways of dressing, activities (or ways of doing them), insights into one another, or just about anything else. The distinctiveness, however, need not be enforced through restrictions. By contrast, in a shared exclusive identity, the distinctiveness is enforced through restrictions.

[8] See Liberto (2017) and McMurtry (1972).

We might well think that shared distinctive identities are more valuable than those that aren't distinctive.[9] Even if shared distinctive identities are in fact especially valuable, though, that provides little reason to opt for shared exclusive identities. The matter would be different if exclusivity were the only way of ensuring a shared distinctive identity—but it is in fact far from it. Given the vast differences among human individuals—differences in personality, interests, experiences, gifts, preferences, manners of expression, and myriad things beyond—it is practically guaranteed that, for anyone you become close to, your shared identity will be in many ways distinctive. (That is, of course, unless you intentionally shape it not to be, as might a cult whose members adopt a message of "we are all One here.") So giving up a shared exclusive identity doesn't at all imply that your shared identity (or identities) will no longer be distinctive. Ultimately, trying to maintain distinctiveness through exclusivity and its attendant restrictions is cheap and unnecessary. Better to simply ditch the restrictions and let the distinctiveness form naturally.

4 The Practicality Defense

According to the practicality defense, monogamy is justified by the commitments of time, energy, and emotional resources that romantic relationships require. Humans are, after all, finite beings; having only so much of yourself to give, you are surely morally permitted to limit yourself to one relationship at a time (and to expect your partner to do the same for you). In response, I've argued, among other points, that the practicality defense exaggerates the extent to which relationships need be a burden and that it fails to explain why someone in a monogamous relationship should be permitted to spend time on hobbies and friends but not on additional partners (2019: sec. 2.4).[10]

York raises several points on behalf of the practicality defense. The first is that partners typically need to be able to move for one another, a prospect that non-monogamy can complicate (York, 2020: 541). For instance, suppose that you have multiple partners, and each moves to a different area—where should you move? Friends and hobbies, by contrast, tend not to pose this problem. York suggests, further, that "it's not troublesome for partners to agree to only take on careers that allow them to live together" (2020: 541–542). As monogamy, too, helps partners be more certain that they'll keep living together, it seems likewise untroublesome for partners to agree to be monogamous.

[9] As it turns out, there's reason to doubt that being distinctive in fact makes a shared identity more valuable. If it did, then the value of a shared identity would depend in part on extrinsic features—distinctiveness being an extrinsic feature, depending as it does on whether other shared identities happen to be like a given one—and some might find such a consequence objectionable. For present purposes, however, I'm willing to set this aside and assume, for the sake of argument, that being distinctive makes a shared identity more valuable.

[10] For further discussion of this last point (from a perspective defending monogamy), see Weaver and Woollard (2008: 517-519). For discussion of (non-)monogamy and practicality more generally, see Brake (2017: 211-212), Brunning (2018), McKeever (2015), and Veaux and Rickert (2014: Ch. 14).

Is a couple's agreement to be monogamous analogous to a couple's agreement to take on only careers that will allow them to live together? No. The first crucial disanalogy is that York's example involves a restriction on careers that *would* physically separate the couple, whereas forming an additional relationship merely *might* do so. Second, the restriction in York's example is on "tak[ing] on [certain kinds of] careers," but the restriction in monogamy is not simply on taking on additional relationships; beyond this, monogamy prohibits even investigating the potential for additional relationships (e.g., using an online dating profile to scope out new potential partners, going on dates with others to gauge romantic compatibility, and so on). To be analogous to monogamy, then, the agreement in the career case should be that neither partner will even *investigate* other career options that *might* end up physically separating the couple. And this restriction surely does seem morally problematic, in that it is excessively controlling.[11] York's analogy here, when properly worked out, is far from favoring monogamy; if anything, it disfavors monogamy.

It's worth looking more closely at what would be wrong with the above restriction on investigating certain career options. Imagine that someone were defending the restriction; he might say something like this: "Look, it's very important to my partner and me that we stay together—so important that even if something (in this case, for one of us to investigate a given career option) simply *might* complicate that, then that seems to us like a good reason to forbid any such investigation." What would be wrong with this reasoning? The key, I think, is to notice the special way in which investigating the career option might end up "complicating" the couple's prospects of living together: by providing something of great value to one of the partners. (It would presumably be something of great value to one of the partners, after all, if she chose it at the cost of no longer living together as a couple.) However understandable it may be to want to impose restrictions that might prevent such a turn of events from happening, that is not something we have a legitimate interest in; to do so would be selfish. And if we likewise opt for monogamous restrictions out of a wish to avoid these kinds of "complications"—those that come in the form of valuable opportunities and experiences for our partner—we are, I claim, being no less selfish.

Let's turn to another angle of the practicality defense. I've considered the claim that monogamy is justified by the substantial emotional burdens of romantic relationships (2019: 233). The thought is that, given how emotionally draining it is to navigate a romantic relationship, one is morally permitted both to limit oneself to one relationship at a time and to require that one's partner do the same. In response, I've suggested that such claims exaggerate the extent to which romantic relationships need be emotionally burdensome. Specifically, I've pointed out that (1) close friendships tend not to be emotionally burdensome on balance, (2) adding a sexual

[11] Here an anonymous reviewer raises a worry: "The response here seems to underestimate the ways that, once started, romantic relationships can lead to commitments and obligations. A more appropriate analogy would be a restriction on investigating career options where that very investigation may mean you are committed to move." While I believe that this kind of worry is worth addressing, I find it more natural to do so in the context of the jealousy defense. Accordingly, I'll address this kind of worry later, in section 5.1.

component to a close friendship would not necessarily, or arguably even typically, make the relationship emotionally burdensome on balance, and (3) a close friendship with a sexual component simply is (at least one kind of) a romantic relationship (2019: 233–234).

York, however, claims that this all misses the point: "The point here… isn't whether romantic relationships must be emotionally burdensome but whether they tend to be, and romantic relationships tend to contain more emotional challenge than platonic friendships" (2020: 542). I must disagree here. If the point were simply that romantic relationships *tend* to be emotionally draining, that would not justify monogamy's prohibition—its categorical prohibition—on having additional romantic relationships. Monogamy doesn't prohibit only additional romantic relationships that would be emotionally burdensome, but even those that wouldn't be. For romantic relationships to merely tend to be emotionally taxing would suggest only that you should pay close attention as you consider starting an additional relationship—asking yourself, for instance, how needy the new potential partner is, how mature you both are, and so on. In some cases, the answers might well suggest that starting the additional relationship would in fact be an undue emotional burden. But in other cases, the answers might suggest something quite different.

Of course, as with any domain, there's always the potential for reaching a mistaken verdict here. Perhaps you judge that a certain new relationship wouldn't be an undue emotional burden but then find, alas, that it's turning into one. Depending on the details of the case, there could be various ways of resolving the issue. Examples include discussing your concerns openly, giving each other some space, and so on. Being disposed to this kind of course-correcting can keep open the potential benefits of additional relationships while ensuring that unanticipated bumps don't metastasize into a crisis. Proceeding this way makes much more sense than simply prohibiting additional relationships wholesale. In any additional relationship that starts to become too draining, one can take steps to resolve the problem; by contrast, if monogamy is leading one to miss out on an additional relationship that would be worth taking on, then there is no way to resolve *that* problem (short of abandoning monogamy).[12]

Here some would worry that relationships might become demanding unexpectedly—say, when a partner suddenly finds himself facing a medical or emotional crisis—and that, when this happens, the kind of "course-correcting" mentioned above is often not feasible (or perhaps even morally permissible). And while friendships, too, can become demanding in this way, we typically take ourselves to have stronger obligations to our partners than to our friends.[13] That relationships can become unexpectedly burdensome, however, is a double-edged blade. Having additional partners indeed opens more possibilities for unexpected burdens—but then, it

[12] Even if one found other fulfillments to try to compensate for the worthwhile additional relationship(s) one is missing out on, this would not cancel out the loss. Given that relationships are non-fungible, there would remain something regrettable about missing out on the worthwhile additional relationship(s) here.

[13] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for articulating this worry.

also opens more sources of support. I'll now illustrate how this point applies to both partners who begin as a couple.

If my partner finds an additional partner, then she might well need to provide care for him later—yet it's equally possible that my partner will need someone to provide care for *her* later. And if indeed she does, then her having an extra partner to provide such care would presumably be good for our relationship. After all, since the duty or burden of providing such care wouldn't fall entirely on me, I'd be less likely to start feeling resentful or burned out. Thus, in terms of threats to our relationship, things appear to balance out here. The prospect of avoiding conflicting obligations or burdens for my partner, then, does not ultimately offer any clear reason for monogamy.

Similarly, if I find an additional partner, then I might well need to provide care for him later—yet it's equally possible that I'll need someone to provide care for *me* later. And if indeed I do, then my having an extra partner to provide such care would presumably be good for my relationship with my existing partner. After all, since the duty or burden of providing such care wouldn't fall entirely on her, she'd be less likely to start feeling resentful or burned out. Thus, in terms of threats to our relationship, things appear once more to balance out here. Much as before, the prospect of avoiding conflicting obligations or burdens for myself does not ultimately offer any clear reason for monogamy.

I'll now consider a final point York makes about the practicality defense. But first, a bit of context. In my earlier paper, I noted a puzzling discrepancy: On one hand, romantic relationships need not be emotionally burdensome; on the other hand, many people seem to assume that romantic relationships, by their very nature, leave us emotionally exhausted (2019: 234). Why might such an assumption be so popular? I proposed that the explanation might lie in the dominance of monogamy itself. That is, monogamy makes relationships more draining than they'd otherwise be—in particular, by pressuring us to adopt the norm that one must by oneself fully satisfy one's partner's needs for a satisfying sex life and for romantic companionship. Non-monogamy, meanwhile, does not pressure us to adopt so stringent a norm, as a non-monogamous relationship leaves it open that any needs unmet by a given partner could be met by another (Chalmers, 2019: 234).

York summarizes the import of this reasoning as follows: "So without monogamy, new relationships wouldn't be taxing" (2020: 542). He then dismisses all this as "speculation" that "needs empirical support"; after all, non-monogamous relationships, too, are often emotionally taxing, as revealed in all-too-common discussion threads in which non-monogamous partners discuss the many challenges of their relationships (York, 2020: 542–543). In response, let me first note that York's framing of my point is not very charitable. The point of my discussion was not that "without monogamy, new relationships wouldn't be taxing"; rather, it was that the dominance of monogamy offers one plausible explanation for the popularity of the assumption that romantic relationships, by their very nature, are taxing. Such a point is in no way at odds with acknowledging the obvious fact that there are additional ways for a relationship to be taxing, ways not stemming from monogamy (e.g., clashes over pet peeves).

However, while it is not the caricature of an anti-monogamy point that York depicts, my earlier discussion does nevertheless touch on a practical advantage of

non-monogamy here. Insofar as monogamous relationships are taxing, that is plausibly, to some significant extent, because of monogamy itself. (As before, the explanation would be that monogamy pressures partners to live under the relatively stringent norm that one must satisfy all of one's partner's sexual and romantic needs.) Insofar as non-monogamous relationships are taxing, by contrast, that is not because of non-monogamy itself, but other, contingent factors (e.g., having chosen a partner with whom one isn't very compatible).[14] Here we have one significant sense in which practical considerations not only fail to favor monogamy, but in fact favor non-monogamy. All this gives us yet more reason to doubt that the practicality defense can justify monogamy.

5 The Jealousy Defense

For many or most of us, the mere thought of our partner's starting an additional relationship is enough to make us uneasy. Were our partner actually to do so, it would be an occasion for fear, rage, and despair. Thus does the jealousy defense arise. By making a mutual promise not to be with others, partners protect themselves from the inner ravages of jealousy.

I've responded to the jealousy defense by arguing that jealousy is irrational, that monogamy is a counterproductive response to it, and that a better response is to overcome our disposition to be jealous in the first place (2019: sec. 2.5). York, in turn, argues that jealousy is at least sometimes rational and that, for some people, overcoming the disposition toward jealousy may not be a realistic prospect (2020: secs. 4–5). I'll now consider these points in order.

5.1 Might Jealousy be Rational?

Jealousy comes largely, perhaps primarily, from the fear that your partner will leave you for someone else—in short, "trading up." I've argued that this fear is irrational (2019: 237–239). (To simplify a bit, one reason such fear is irrational is that it seems unreasonably distrustful of your partner.) York thinks that in many cases, however, the fear of trading up is rational. Or at least, there is a closely related fear, namely that for your partner to have an additional relationship would undermine the stability or quality of your own relationship with her; York suggests that being non-monogamous would, in many cases, make this fear rational. After all, if your partner starts a serious additional relationship, then "implicit commitments may be entered into with the new party that make it difficult to sustain the other relationship as it was"

[14] Such a claim might seem surprising; what about people like those whom York quotes, those who report finding it exhausting to have even simply two partners at a time? If someone persistently finds it exhausting to have even one additional partner, does it not follow that non-monogamy itself is exhausting for him? No, it does not. For such a person could stick to one partner at a time while letting his partner be free to pursue others; such a relationship would still be non-monogamous. (In such a case, sticking to one partner for oneself would be merely a preference, not a restriction.) For further discussion of this point, see my (2019: 241).

(York, 2020: 547). For instance, if your partner starts spending a significant portion of her free time with a new partner, that's liable to create an implicit commitment that she'll continue to spend (at least) that much time with him—potentially at the cost of no longer being able to go on vacations with you as often, to spend as much time with you at home, and so on. Reasonably fearing such a prospect, a couple may justifiably opt for monogamy; that way, the new implicit commitments that threaten their existing relationship would be less likely to arise in the first place.

However, this picture of implicit commitments that York suggests—one in which implicit commitments are, in serious additional relationships, liable to arise spontaneously—is at odds with the very nature of commitment more broadly. To see how, let's keep our focus to additional relationships that meet a minimum honesty requirement, namely that all partners involved are kept aware of whom else, if anyone, their partner is seeing. For a simple illustration, imagine that Alvin and Marie are already in a serious relationship, and that Marie begins developing a serious relationship with another person, Zane. On a view like York's, implicit commitments might now arise between Marie and Zane—potentially the kind that could threaten Marie's prior commitments to Alvin. In fact, though, it's difficult to see how any such implicit commitments could arise. Given our parameters, after all, Zane would know that Marie already has commitments to Alvin, so Zane shouldn't expect Marie to make commitments to Zane that risk interfering with her prior commitments to Alvin. Or, more precisely, Zane should understand that Marie has a significant (though not necessarily decisive) reason not to make such commitments. All this simply follows from the nature of commitment itself: A commitment to X is *ipso facto* a commitment not to do things that interfere with one's commitment to X, unless one has a (perhaps very) good reason to do so.[15] Zane, thus, has good reason not to interpret, as a sign of a serious implicit commitment, behaviors from Marie that he might otherwise have been right to interpret as such.[16] To the extent that Zane does hastily or unreflectively interpret a behavior from Marie as a sign of such an implicit commitment, that is not an indication that any such commitment has in fact developed, but simply that Zane is being irrational.[17]

There remains a yet deeper problem with the fear of trading up. As I've argued, even if our partner does trade up, that is something we should welcome rather than fear: "There is something puzzling, if not deeply unsettling, in the hope that your partner will remain ignorant of options that are better for her… however much it

[15] I add the qualification "unless one has a (perhaps very) good reason to do so" in light of cases like the following: Suppose that you've agreed to a meet a friend for lunch, but suddenly you learn that missing your lunch meeting is necessary to stop a nuclear strike on a distant city. In normal circumstances, missing your lunch meeting might well call into question your commitment as a friend; here, however, missing your lunch meeting would not appear to do so, given that you have a very good reason for it.

[16] This does not imply that it's impossible to develop a committed additional relationship, but simply that the commitments in such relationships should be discussed explicitly rather than merely inferred from behavior.

[17] Such a judgment need not be as harsh as it might sound. In particular, depending on the details of the case, we can allow that the irrationality is understandable, at least.

may crush us to see our partner leave us… [we should] want what's best for her" (2019: 239). Yet York, while allowing that this is a "commendable attitude," objects:

> [I]t doesn't seem that [Chalmers's] point applies equally well to both positions that partners may occupy in such a situation—the straying partner and the jealous partner. Imagine that I am in a loving relationship with my partner but our life together is contingent upon the fact that I don't find someone who's a better fit for me. If I find someone else, it may crush my partner to see me go, but I'll console myself that a truly loving partner would want this for me. This situation also seems deeply unsettling. The relationship involves no commitment or loyalty on my part. It would likewise be understandable if this disturbed my partner. If we care about loyalty and commitment, we might not see the opportunity to trade up as a genuine good being forsaken in monogamy.[18] Like the value of friendship and promises, a fully committed relationship is the kind of good available only when refraining from weighing its value comparatively to other potential goods. (2020: 548)

Multiple responses are in order here. Let's begin with York's last point: "Like the value of friendship and promises, a fully committed relationship is the kind of good available only when refraining from weighing its value comparatively to other potential goods." Is this true? Consider that even in a monogamous relationship, questions involving such comparisons will sometimes become salient—for instance, if circumstances force one to choose between staying with one's ailing parents and moving away with one's partner. In such cases, a rigid unwillingness to compare the value of one's relationship to other potential goods would seem misguided indeed. If that's what a "fully committed relationship" involves, it's not clear why anyone should want that.

However, there could still be a truth in the vicinity that York is describing. First, let's dispense with the talk of having a "fully committed relationship," as it might suggest the kind of pathological extremes gestured at above, and replace it with something like "healthily committed relationship." Now here is a plausible principle: To have a healthily committed relationship, one should in normal circumstances refrain from comparing its value to other potential goods, yet still be willing to think of such comparisons when they become a salient issue (e.g., when one is forced to choose between staying with one's current partner and exploring a new relationship with someone who seems just as compatible). Such a disposition would avoid the above problem of being unduly rigid. More broadly, commitment, on this proposal, would amount to something like this: being unwilling to abandon one's relationship except for a very good reason.

The trouble for York is that, once we adopt this latter understanding of commitment, it becomes clear that the kind of case he describes—that in which a person leaves her partner in order to be with someone who's a better fit for her—need not involve a lack of commitment after all. Whether a given case here does involve a

[18] Here York cites, as "a broader discussion of problems with this attitude in contemporary culture," Bauman (2014).

lack of commitment will depend on the details. For example, if the person is leaving her partner in order to be with someone who's merely a slightly better fit for her, that would indeed indicate a lack of commitment, as she would not have all that significant a reason for leaving her existing partner. But if she's leaving her partner in order to be with someone who's a much better fit—someone with whom she'll feel greatly more fulfilled—then she would have a very good reason for leaving, and her leaving would, thus, not indicate a lack of commitment. A decision to leave one's partner for someone else may well be uncomfortable for all involved, but York is mistaken to think that such a decision entails that "[t]he relationship involves no commitment or loyalty on [the leaving partner's] part" (2020: 548). (By extension, the broader claim in his above passage is likewise mistaken, namely the claim that my earlier point about not fearing trading up fails to "appl[y] equally well to both positions that partners may occupy in such a situation—the straying partner and the jealous partner.")

On a separate point, let's return to York's claim to find "deeply unsettling" a situation in which, "[i]f I find someone else, it may crush my partner to see me go, but I'll console myself that a truly loving partner would want this for me" (2020: 548). I suggest that just how we read "console myself" is doing much of the intuition-pumping work here. If we read it as "coax myself into not feeling any sadness for the situation at all," then that is indeed unsettling—the reason being that one would thereby seem to be failing to appreciate how difficult the situation must be for one's (now former) partner. If, however, we read "console myself" as "help myself feel *somewhat* better (though still with some sadness for the situation)," that appears much less unsettling, if at all.

A final point bears mentioning here. It's true, of course, that this kind of case involves some regrettable components—most significantly, leaving one's partner without what was once presumably a source of fulfillment for him. Sometimes life involves making choices which, even if justified all things considered, remain in some major ways regrettable. But the sad or regrettable component here strikes me as importantly different from—and a great deal less unsettling than—the corresponding one in monogamy (viz., trying to keep one's partner ignorant of romantic prospects that would be better for her). Both kinds of cases involve doing something that makes one's partner worse off, but only in the case of monogamy is this achieved through enforcing a certain kind of ignorance in one's partner—ignorance about how sexually compatible she is with new potential partners, about how she'd experience sharing romantic feelings with them, about how fulfilling she'd find a relationship with them, and so on. There is something deeply ethically suspect in enforcing ignorance in one's partner about all this, especially given how personally important such information could end up being for her. To draw on an earlier analogy, we might imagine two partners who try to keep each other ignorant of any job opportunities in other regions, given their fear that taking on such jobs could

separate them.[19] This seems much worse, in that it is manipulative and controlling, than leaving one's partner in order to pursue a job elsewhere. Likewise, I think, for the comparison between leaving one's partner for someone else, on one hand, and enforcing ignorance in one's partner about other romantic prospects, on the other.

Let's again take stock. So far in the jealousy defense, York has been trying to show, against my earlier arguments, that jealousy is in many cases rational. I take the above considerations to suggest that he's mistaken, and that jealousy, for all we've been given reason to believe, remains irrational after all. This matters because if jealousy were rational, then it would be in response to some genuine problem, a problem that monogamy might well be the solution to. But if jealousy is indeed irrational, that would seem to suggest that there is no genuine or external problem here—in other words, that insofar as there's a problem here at all, it's merely that one is feeling something irrational. For such a problem as this, the solution lies not in restrictions on one's partner's behavior (as in monogamy), but simply in working to overcome the irrational feeling.

However, York goes on to argue that even in (at least some) cases where it's irrational, jealousy can justify monogamy. Here we arrive at the second part of his discussion of the jealousy defense.

5.2 What if some People Need Monogamy in Order to Avoid Jealousy?

I've contended that monogamy is a counterproductive response to jealousy, given the way it maintains a sense of scarcity and competition in relationships. I've also suggested that a better response would be to overcome one's disposition to be jealous in the first place—for instance, by realizing and reflecting on its irrationality, openly communicating one's feelings with one's partner, and so on (2019: 236–240). In reply, York objects that for some people, try as they might, overcoming jealousy simply may not be feasible (2020: sec. 5). To be comfortable in their relationships, such people need monogamy; ergo, at least in their case, monogamy is morally permissible.

To my mind, this is the most plausible attempt at justifying monogamy. Nevertheless, it runs into multiple problems. One is that jealousy, regardless of how feasible it might be to overcome, remains an immature feeling—a feeling that thus lacks the moral weight that could make it justify monogamy. I'll begin by defending the claim that jealousy is immature, and then turn to the claim that it thereby lacks moral weight.

Most centrally, the immaturity of jealousy consists in this: Insofar as I feel jealous over my partner's interest (or prospective interest) in someone else, my feelings are not properly attuned to the good for my partner. Upon learning that my partner has taken an interest in someone else, I should first and foremost feel happy for him—much the same as I'd feel upon learning that he's become interested in anyone

[19] The mechanism for enforcing such ignorance could be analogous to that in monogamy. That is, the mechanism here could be the mutual understanding: "If I find out that you've taken on a job in another region, or that you've been seriously investigating doing so, I'll leave you."

or anything else that might be a source of fulfillment for him, such as a new friend or hobby.[20] When I instead feel jealous, the negative valence of the feeling—whether it comes in the form of fear, despair, resentment, rage, or any other feeling characteristic of jealousy—suggests that my partner has (1) somehow hurt or threatened me or (2) done something that is in some other way bad. (1) is an improperly self-centered thing to feel here, and both (1) and (2) are wrongly critical of my partner. To be afflicted with such feelings, rather than simply being happy for my partner, betrays a stunted heart.[21]

If, as I've just argued, jealousy is in fact immature, that suggests that jealousy lacks moral weight. As I'll now argue, immature feelings more generally appear to lack the kind of moral weight needed to factor into our decision-making (or, at the very least, the moral weight needed to justify significantly restricting our behavior). To see how this is so, let's consider the following two cases:

> Emmy and Veronique are considering starting a relationship. But then it occurs to them that they have a mutual friend, Steve, who has recently had trouble finding a partner of his own. If Emmy and Veronique were to start a relationship, Steve would be envious. Knowing this, Emmy asks Veronique, "Perhaps we shouldn't start seeing each other, given how Steve would feel about it?"
>
> Jake is considering visiting his friend Rob. But then it occurs to Jake that his other friend, Kip, is insecure about their friendship and will feel slighted—as though he's "not enough" for Jake—if Jake visits Rob. Jake wonders, "Perhaps I shouldn't visit Rob, in order to avoid offending Kip?"

Let's begin with the first case. It seems to me that Steve's feelings would be immature; were he more mature, he'd simply be happy for Emmy and Veronique, not envious. In light of this, Emmy and Veronique should give Steve's envy no weight in their decision of whether to start a relationship. To do otherwise would be to let their moral autonomy be improperly constrained by the shortcomings of another. Note, too, that all this holds true even if we suppose that Steve's disposition to envy is incurable. While having such an incurable disposition would be unfortunate for Steve, his envy would nevertheless fail to give Emmy and Veronique a reason not to start their relationship.

The verdict in the second case seems even clearer. Kip's puerile insecurity is simply not the kind of feeling that could give Jake a reason to refrain from visiting Rob. Should Kip be offended when his friends visit other friends, let him be; that is his

[20] There are, of course, cases here in which worry would be justified—for instance, if the new person my partner has become interested in happens to be dangerous. Such worry, though, would be importantly different from jealousy, as the concern here wouldn't be over the mere fact *that* my partner has become interested in someone else, but that the person he's become interested in poses a danger to him or to me. Naturally, an analogous worry could be called for if my partner took on a dangerous new hobby or friend; such cases notwithstanding, it remains true that when I learn that my partner has taken on a new hobby or friend, happiness on his behalf should be my default response. Likewise, I claim that happiness on my partner's behalf should be my default response upon learning that he's become interested in someone else.

[21] For a fuller discussion of the badness of jealousy, see Brunning (2020).

problem to bear. And, as before, this holds true even if we suppose that the insecurity is incurable.

Here's another way of approaching the point. Suppose that Emmy and Veronique in fact decide not to start a relationship, in order to avoid making Steve envious. And suppose that Jake in fact decides not to visit Rob, in order to avoid stoking Kip's insecurity. Would all this be a *benefit* to Steve and Kip? No. Were I in Steve's or Kip's position, and were I to learn that others had refrained from pursuing valuable friendships and relationships simply to spare me the sting of my own immature feelings, I would, if anything, feel insulted. True, their actions might have left me happier than I'd otherwise have been, but such happiness—the kind that rests on having one's immaturity pandered to in this way, at the expense of others—is not worth having. Existing in such a state would be its own punishment.

I believe that we should say the same thing about jealousy. To the extent that your partner will feel jealous if you start seeing another, that fails to give you a reason not to do so, given the immaturity of jealousy. Likewise, to the extent that you yourself will feel jealous if your partner starts seeing another, that fails to give your partner a reason not to do so. Combining these, we can say that jealousy gives neither you nor your partner a reason to adhere to monogamous restrictions. And all this holds true even if we suppose that your or your partner's disposition to jealousy is incurable.

York considers essentially this point (though using the term "vicious" rather than "immature"). In response to it, he suggests that "except in extreme cases, the positive or negative valence of emotions is usually taken to be morally significant, even if the emotions *per se* aren't" (2020: 551). He likewise suggests that jealousy is not among these "extreme cases" of an immoral or vicious feeling; for an example of such a feeling, he refers to a slaveholder's sadness at losing a slave. Since jealousy clearly fails to meet such a threshold, we should regard it, or at least its negative valence, as morally significant—for instance, by acknowledging it as (at least in some cases) a reason favoring monogamy.

It seems to me, though, that the cases above go against York's claim here. In both the case of Steve's envy and of Kip's insecurity, (1) the emotions at work are not extremely vicious or immoral (like the slaveholder's sadness at losing a slave), (2) they are not per se morally significant, and (3) their negative valence isn't morally significant, either. (If it were morally significant, then the other people in the cases would need to take it into account in their decision-making, which it seems they don't.)[22]

In the face of the fact that immature feelings, including jealousy, lack moral weight, the jealousy defense fails to justify monogamy. While this strikes me as a critical problem with the jealousy defense, it is not the only one. To see some further flaws of the jealousy defense, let's assume for a moment that my claims above are

[22] To be fair, York does say that "except in extreme cases, the positive or negative valence of emotions is *usually* taken to be morally significant" (2020: 551, emp. mine), so perhaps he'd simply count my cases as exceptions. If so, however, he would owe us an explanation of just why these cases are exceptions, along with why jealousy wouldn't likewise be such an exception. Absent such an explanation, the simplest and most reasonable conclusion is that immature feelings more generally lack moral weight.

mistaken. Let's assume, that is, that jealousy has moral weight after all (whether this is because immature feelings more broadly have moral weight or because jealousy is not an immature feeling). For jealousy to have moral weight would appear to make it at least a pro tanto reason for monogamy. How might we respond to the jealousy defense now?

As I see it, for a given case of jealousy to justify monogamy under present assumptions, three conditions would need to be met:

1. EXTREMITY: The jealousy is extreme.
2. NON-MONOGAMY INEFFECTIVE: No feasible options apart from monogamy—such as changes to one's own thinking, communication, or personal lifestyle—would, together or by themselves, reduce the jealousy to a manageable level.
3. MONOGAMY EFFECTIVE: Monogamy, whether by itself or in conjunction with certain habits in one's own thinking, communication, and personal lifestyle, would reduce the jealousy to a manageable level.

I'll now say more about these conditions—both why I believe that the kind of case York needs requires all of them and why I believe that cases meeting all three conditions are unlikely. (Later I'll address what it means for the anti-monogamy view to the extent that there are such cases.)

Let's start with EXTREMITY. EXTREMITY is needed because a mild-to-moderate jealousy simply wouldn't be bad enough a prospect to justify monogamous restrictions, given how weighty a justification monogamous restrictions need.[23] If the jealousy were merely mild to moderate—the kind of feeling that presents itself as an occasional pang, say, or a sometimes-low mood, but which leaves one still generally able to function well—then the person or couple should simply find ways to cope with it (assuming that they cannot overcome it completely). The kind of jealousy necessary to justify monogamy is that which consumes someone's life, leaving him obsessive and unable to function.

We can turn now to NON-MONOGAMY INEFFECTIVE. I include this condition because, were a person able to reduce her jealousy to a manageable level purely by making reasonable changes to her thinking, communication, and personal lifestyle—say, by practicing self-affirming thoughts, journaling about her feelings, communicating her feelings regularly to her partner, and so on—then she could simply do that; there would be no need for monogamy.[24]

One might wonder here, as York does, whether it really is all that feasible for people to manage their jealousy in such a way. York suggests that "[j]ealousy might take place at a psychological level that is not always malleable by reflective, rational thought or systematic exposure"; in this vein, he points out that "[a]nxious

[23] See section 2 above.

[24] York appears to acknowledge this condition when he writes, "Seemingly, in cases where reasons for jealousy are lacking, a couple should make agreements accommodating such jealousy only if the jealousy is beyond their ability to overcome (without exceedingly large costs)" (2020: 549).

attachment systems, poor mental or physical health, and low self-esteem are all predictors of higher jealousy" (2020: 549).[25] What this leaves out, though, is any consideration of whether such factors, however much they might ultimately contribute to jealousy, can feasibly be changed. To the extent that they can, changing them would be one potential way of reducing one's jealousy.

And, as it turns out, such factors generally can be changed. Except in extreme cases, such as certain cases involving severe disability, people can improve their physical and mental health (e.g., through diet and exercise).[26] Likewise for self-esteem.[27] Attachment systems, similarly, are malleable in multiple ways. In particular, even people with a dispositionally anxious attachment style can experience secure attachment within particular relationships, namely relationships marked by sufficient encouragement and closeness (Baldwin et al., 1996). Further, people can influence their attachment systems to become more secure; methods for doing so can be as simple as regularly recalling their experiences of supportive figures (Carnelley & Rowe, 2007; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Thus, even to the extent that these factors cause or exacerbate jealousy (rather than simply being caused by it or otherwise correlated with it), that fails to suggest that the relevant cases of jealousy cannot realistically be overcome.

To the extent that changing such factors would make one less susceptible to jealousy, that alone is a significant reason for doing so. What's more, even independently of their effect on jealousy, these are factors that people have reason to change. The emotional dependency and insecurity involved in having an anxious attachment system, for example, lead one to unnecessary suffering and maladaptive behavior more generally (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2015: 242ff.) As for poor mental or physical health, it's self-evident why people would have a reason to change this, to the extent that they're able. Similarly for low self-esteem. In light of all this, it seems more reasonable for people to change or overcome such factors, to the extent possible, than to simply take them as given and then use monogamy as a workaround for any attendant jealousy.

More broadly, let's briefly consider the variety of methods of emotion regulation—methods one could use to reduce fear, anger, sadness, and other component emotions of jealousy. Such methods include expressive journaling (Pennebaker, 1997); self-affirmation (Cohen & Sherman, 2014); deep breathing (Zaccaro et al., 2018); muscle relaxation (Rausch, Gramling, & Auerbach, 2006); mindfulness-based meditation (Farb et al., 2015); cognitive reappraisal (e.g., no longer thinking of one's partner's interest in another as a threat or insult, but instead as simply a new potential source of enrichment in her life) (Buss & Abrams, 2017); open, respectful discussion of one's feelings with one's partner (Yoshimura, 2004; Deri, 2015:

[25] Here York cites Knobloch, Solomon, and Cruz (2001), as well as Pines and Aronson (1983).

[26] For information on the benefits of exercise for mental health, see Mikkelsen et al. (2017). The information below about furthering self-esteem, overcoming anxious attachment systems, and regulating emotions is also relevant to improving mental health.

[27] For some key methods of improving self-esteem, see Mruk (2006: 97-105). Although Mruk's discussion is addressed primarily to therapists, it touches on various techniques (e.g., cognitive restructuring) that one could use even in the absence of a therapist.

ch. 3); and soliciting encouragement from one's partner (Fern, 2020: 140–143). The sheer variety of such methods makes it all the more likely that, in a given case of jealousy, at least some of them would prove helpful. Note, further, that many if not all of these are good things to be doing *anyway*, even independently of their effect on jealousy. Thus, such methods, to the extent that they're required to reduce one's jealousy, can hardly be considered some independent or unreasonable burden. Nor do these methods, considered on their own terms, appear unreasonably difficult; the capacities they require, such as meditating, journaling, and discussing feelings with one's partner, are well within the reach of a typical person. By all indications, when it comes to reducing jealousy, there are plenty of reasonable options available.[28]

We arrive now at the last condition, namely MONOGAMY EFFECTIVE. The reason for this condition is clear: If someone suffered from extreme jealousy in his relationships regardless of whether his relationships were monogamous, that would hardly count in favor of monogamy for him.[29]

Suppose that a given case of jealousy fulfills both EXTREMITY and NON-MONOGAMY INEFFECTIVE. How likely is it that it would go on to fulfill MONOGAMY EFFECTIVE as well? One reason for answering with "Not very" lies in a point my earlier paper touches on: Monogamy, in forcing your partner to choose between you and others, fosters a sense of competition in relationships—and competition is gunpowder to the fire of jealousy (2019: 236–237).

Given these points, it seems highly unlikely that there are many, if any, cases that meet all three conditions. To repeat, these would be cases in which one suffers from extreme jealousy that standard, well-supported methods of emotion regulation, individually or together, are not able even to reduce to a manageable level—but adding monogamy to the picture somehow *would* do so, even while it reinforces a sense of competition in relationships. Put that way, the prospects for such cases appear remote indeed. But let's imagine that there are at least some such cases. What then? Assuming that there are—and also, as discussed earlier, assuming that jealousy has moral weight in the first place—monogamy would be justified in such cases. This might at first seem like a sizable concession. However, as I'll now argue, such cases of jealousy would not make very important or interesting exceptions to the anti-monogamy view.

First, if such cases were sufficiently rare, that would leave the spirit of the anti-monogamy view intact. After all, quite apart from anything having to do with jealousy, any sane version of the anti-monogamy view will already allow that there are possible cases in which monogamy is morally permissible; like most moral claims, it was never intended to extend to all possible cases. (For example, consider a case in which powerful aliens will blow up the earth unless you choose to be monogamous;

[28] What's more, so far I have not even mentioned the prospect of neuroenhancement of relationships. This is a new frontier that could very well go on to make NON-MONOGAMY INEFFECTIVE even more difficult to fulfill in the future, should such neuroenhancement include ways of reducing jealousy. See Earp, Sandberg, and Savulescu (2012) and Earp and Savulescu (2020).

[29] York appears to acknowledge this condition, or something close to it, when he writes, "[O]f course, even if both lovers have issues with uncontrollable jealousy, there still seems to be a requirement [if monogamy is to be justified] that they want or usually enjoy exclusivity" (2020: 550).

I would be among the first to recommend monogamy here!) Allowing that there are some rare actual cases in which monogamy is morally permissible would, thus, not be a great departure from the spirit of the anti-monogamy view. What would matter more is that in most or nearly all actual cases, monogamy would remain morally impermissible.

Also, note that even if one does suffer from extreme jealousy that can be addressed only by monogamy, it's unclear how one would know this without having tried non-monogamy. Even if we were to concede everything to the jealousy defense, then, there might very well still be a moral obligation to at least give non-monogamy a genuine effort before deciding that one's more suited to monogamy. I don't imagine that this is a result defenders of monogamy would be happy with.

Finally, even if we conceded that monogamy is morally permissible in the relevant cases of jealousy, there would still appear to be something profoundly regrettable about monogamy. In the absence of any other, better defenses of monogamy, here's what we'd be left with: Monogamy, a mutual restriction on behaviors that might in themselves have been deeply fulfilling, would be justified not by some yet deeper beauty or fulfillment it alone made possible—but by the mere fact that the alternative, for those unfortunate enough to be afflicted with this especially insidious breed of jealousy, would be (even) worse. Such a justification flat-out fails to lend any of the specialness or dignity with which monogamy is usually perceived; if anything, it comes closer to mocking it.[30]

It is clear by now that, even if we were to make the present concessions to the jealousy defense, that would not leave us with anything approaching a pro-monogamy view—nor, for that matter, even a neutral view. What we'd have would remain very much an anti-monogamy view; the willingness to make some rare and regrettable exceptions would only make it slightly less extreme an anti-monogamy view that it would have been.

6 Conclusion

None of the defenses on offer—those appealing to specialness, practicality, and jealousy—manage to justify monogamy. By all indications, monogamy remains analogous to a morally troubling restriction on having additional friends.

Of course, here I have not provided a knockdown argument against monogamy. It's still an open question whether other, better defenses of monogamy will come along. But for now, at least, monogamy is unredeemed. And the more the best

[30] Weaver and Woollard consider an analogous worry: that of whether their own defense of monogamy can avoid making monogamy merely "a lamentable consequence of human frailty" (2008: 519–520). They offer multiple points in response, and here I lack the space to address them all. For now, suffice it to point out that their broader defense of monogamy rests on considerations of specialness and practicality rather than jealousy. Accordingly, their discussion here arguably does not engage (and was not meant to engage) with the worry as framed above, namely that for monogamy to be justified only by jealousy would suggest monogamy to be ultimately something regrettable.

proposed defenses of monogamy keep failing, the more confident we may be that no redemption is there to be found.[31]

Declarations

Conflict of Interest The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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