

## **Feminism and Evolutionary Psychology: Can They be Reconciled?\***

S. L. Hurley

Draft of work in progress

1. Introduction: the standard opposition between sex and gender. These days it seems at best odd, at worst politically incorrect, to think sex has much to do with justice. On this now-standard view, sex is a system of biological reproduction, a matter of natural fact. Gender, by contrast, is a culturally constructed role. Gender roles, such as hunter or gatherer, breadwinner or homemaker, are socially imposed. Sex is a matter of nature, gender of nurture. Feminists argue that gender, not sex per se, raises concerns of justice between men and women. They deny that the inequalities and restrictions that go along with a traditional division of labor between the sexes result from the different natures of men and women. What is natural is relatively unalterable. Recognizing that traditional gender roles are culturally constructed radicalizes us: it allows us to see their injustice and empowers us to challenge it. So feminists tend to criticize evolutionary psychological explanations of gender roles for naively attributing too much to nature, too little to social conditioning.

The standard feminist view gets a lot right. Social conditioning does contribute to traditional gender roles. And the resulting unfairness is deeply embedded in the structure of human society. We do need to be radicalized, to recognize and challenge the gender role injustices we are still too often blind to.

It is inadequate to reply that many women don't object to their restricted gender role. Amartya Sen (1985) has shown that deprived women often don't feel dissatisfied, even when they are malnourished or ill because they are expected to eat less than 'more valuable' male members of the household. Limited experience may limit imagination and the desire for anything better. And people tend to adapt what they want to their deprived circumstances, to avoid the frustration of wanting what they cannot expect to get. If this is true even for food, why not also for education and job opportunities? If someone is content with her restricted

gender role, we should not simply take this at face value, but should cast a critical eye on how this comes to be the case.

But there is also something wrong with the standard feminist view's choice of enemies. By looking harder at our sexual nature we can shed light on the cultural construction of gender. Perhaps surprisingly, arguments made by evolutionary psychologists can support feminism by removing obstacles to feminist arguments. Evolutionary psychology reveals the great variety of reproductive patterns in nature. The human pattern, social monogamy, is extremely rare and unstable in nature. Evolutionary psychologists explain why, and how the human pattern of reproduction required cultural support or 'construction' to survive.

Moreover, recent technologies, such as contraception and assisted reproduction, contradict not just the assumptions of evolution, but those of most of human history and culture as well. They have started a process of change in our sexual nature. We haven't yet caught up with ourselves: if our old nature was adapted to the circumstances of our hunter-gatherer past, then it may be ill-adapted to our changed circumstances. To understand how best to respond to our present situation, we need to understand how it differs from the situation in which we evolved. Evolutionary psychology can help to open our eyes to the ruts we are stuck in and to the workable alternatives. Understanding the evolutionary forces that contribute to human and other forms of sexuality, far from condemning us to unalterable sexual roles fixed by nature, can help us to avoid a blinkered anthropocentric conception of sex. Understanding sex as a natural phenomenon can be a radicalizing force in relation to gender roles.

I shall argue for this suggestion by giving an exposition of two standard views, one held by feminists and the other by evolutionary psychologists, and relating them to each other. I shall use prominent proponents in each category as reference points, in particular, Pateman and Okin for the feminist view and Ridley and Wright for the evolutionary psychology view. Both views are explained in part through the use of just-so stories, and it turns out that these converge in an interesting way. Though I am largely in sympathy with both of the views I describe, my point here is not to defend them or their details. It is rather to draw attention to their mutual

compatibility and indeed to the ways in which the story from evolutionary psychology not only is not in tension with the feminist story but furthermore can remove obstacles to it.

2. Feminists on the social contract and the sexual contract. Essential background to a feminist reading of evolutionary psychology are classic feminist arguments such as those made by Carole Pateman in *The Sexual Contract* (1988) and Susan Moller Okin in *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (1989). These criticize social contract theories of justice for focussing exclusively on the public realm and ignoring injustices in the private realm, within the family.

Social contract theories explain the legitimacy of political power and the demands of justice in terms of an agreement to form a political state out of pre-political society. Liberal social contracts are especially concerned to limit the resulting power of the state to intrude into private life. The family is regarded as a private space that should properly be governed by natural instinct and sympathy, not by rules of justice such as govern public life. The social contractors are thought of as rational, autonomous, mature individuals; how they get to be that way is not a concern of justice (Pateman, 43, 49). Feminists argue that the social contractors are implicitly assumed to be male heads of households, with families at home in the shadows. The social contract they reach is a deal struck between males (Pateman, ch. 4). It might regulate the distribution of income to households, but not what happens to income *within* the household. It might require equality of opportunity among male breadwinners, but not across gender roles. It might protect the privacy of men, keeping men out of other men's households and bedrooms, but not the privacy of women against male control within the household. How labor and benefits and opportunities are divided within the family is discreetly veiled, beyond the purview of justice.

Okin argues that the line drawn by social contract theories between the public and private realms makes injustice within the household invisible. Most men manage to offload most domestic and childcare labor onto women, even if the women also have careers. As a result most women are handicapped in career structures that assume the worker has someone else at home to care for children. They thus face a choice between family and high-flying career

that most men don't face. Such unequal gender relations are mired in the kind of restrictions, based on birth and status, that liberals reject in feudalism. But social contract theory looks the other way. Since these relations hold in the private realm, they are not concerns of justice, but personal matters properly governed by the different sexual natures of males and females.

Okin rejects the public/private distinction and the convenient rationalization it provides for ignoring injustice between men and women. In her view, procreation is not outside the scope of justice. Culture, not nature, dictates that marriage has such different consequences for men and women, and it can be challenged. Having a family should not preclude having a career, and the unavoidable costs of having a family should be shared fairly between men and women. Questions of fairness and justice do arise within the family. The fight against injustice must extend to private as well as public injustice. The failure to confront injustice within the family is a betrayal of liberal principles of equal opportunity and individuality.

The veil drawn by social contract theories over family injustice can be seen as a symptom of a sexual contract among men tacitly presupposed by the social contract (Pateman, 93-4). Pateman illustrates this using the mythical story that Freud tells in *Moses and Monotheism*. In this story the patriarchal father is a kind of alpha male, who hoards women and deprives junior males of access to females. His dominion over women leads his sons to rebel and murder him. The brothers then enter a contract of sexual equality, renouncing incest and the aspiration to hoard women, and establishing an orderly system of equal access by each man to an unrelated woman: socially regulated monogamy, or marriage. Conjugal rights over women are distributed equally among men. Marriage reflects an agreement among men to share women rather than a fair agreement between the marriage partners. The "initial momentous step from nature to culture" is marked by the sexual contract among men (see Pateman, 110). These cultural arrangements are then taken for granted as the 'natural' foundation for the subsequent social contract, and are carried over implicitly into the new social order. The presupposed sexual contract defines the players in the social contract and removes from the stage injustice in the private realm (Pateman, 103-115).

Surprisingly, there are echoes of this feminist just-so story in recent evolutionary psychological arguments about social monogamy.

3. Evolutionary psychology on the variety of mating patterns in nature: parental investment and sexual selection. To understand why I say this, it is first necessary to see marriage in the context of the variety of reproductive patterns in nature. These are explained by Matt Ridley in *The Red Queen* (1993) and Robert Wright in *The Moral Animal* (1994), whose accounts I paraphrase below.

The concepts of parental investment and sexual selection are basic to the evolutionary psychology of sex. Robert Trivers (1972) argued that the difference between male and female genetic interests can be understood in terms of the sacrifice or investment required to reproduce. Parental investment in one offspring increases the chance of that offspring surviving to reproduce, at the cost of the parent's ability to invest in other offspring (Wright, 42). The sex that invests more in rearing the young makes the least marginal profit, in evolutionary terms, from an extra mating. Among mammals, the female carries the offspring internally and provides essential food to the newborn. Extra matings don't contribute much to her fecundity; she can only deal with a few offspring at a time (Ridley, 128ff, 173). The quality of the genes donated to her offspring matters more. Offspring who get better genes from their father are more likely to survive, taking her genes with them. Any help she can get from a partner in feeding and protecting offspring is also valuable: it increases their, and her own, chances of surviving for further reproduction. The female mammal is thus biased to seek quality of mate rather than quantity of mates. The male mammal invests less in each offspring, so is more likely to be interested in quantity of mates. He can increase his fecundity by taking more mates.

These are generalizations. There is tremendous variety in mating patterns even among mammals, let alone the rest of the animal kingdom. Females don't always carry young; for example, male seahorses do. Sometimes both sexes invest equally. The point here is not that females must invest more in offspring than males, but to distinguish the heavier investors from the less heavy investors and to explain sexual behavior accordingly. Usually, though not

always, the heavier investors are female. But when they are male, they behave as heavy parental investors should: small male jacanas, for example, form a harem, sit on eggs, rear the chicks, and are controlled by a large, fierce female (Ridley, 170).

The degree of male parental investment, or MPI, varies between species a great deal. Human MPI is high compared to MPI in most other primates. While human females invest more than human males, the imbalance is not as great as it is in many other mammals (Wright, 42, 57ff). This is partly because human babies have such large brains that they must be born early. They are so helpless at birth that significant contributions from both parents are often needed to keep them alive at all. Thus relatively high MPI makes sense from the point of view of the male's genes: they don't benefit if the young are eaten while the mother hunts (Wright, 58).

If the heavier investors are females, then females tend to seek quality, and males to seek quantity in sex. So males compete for females. As a result, males have a greater chance than females of leaving a large number of offspring. But they also have a greater chance than females of leaving no offspring at all. Ridley explains that males act as a "genetic sieve" or filter: only the 'better' males get to breed, and nature throws the rest away (Ridley, 129). The reproductive expendability of less fit males purges weak genes from the population. This filtering process is an aspect of sexual selection. Notice it can operate without polygamy: monogamous males might compete to win the first females ready to breed. If earlier breeders breed more, getting there first has a genetic advantage (Ridley, 135).

Sexual selection can take different forms: males can fight for females, or females can choose males (Ridley 132ff, 136ff). Nature uses both techniques: males are equipped with weapons to fight other males, like horns and antlers, and ornaments to display their fitness to females who might choose them, like the peacock's tail and elaborate songs. In many species, males congregate at breeding time, each marks out his own space, and they parade their wares to the females, who wander through the market inspecting and choosing. Males can also be

choosy, especially in species with high MPI. High MPI males will seek females who are fertile but coy: it's not in their genetic interest to invest in another male's offspring.

Exaggerated ornaments can threaten the survival of males--an absurdly long tail might prevent a male bird from flying efficiently, for example. But such ornaments will still evolve, if females like them so much that they increase the male's likelihood of breeding enough to outweigh their threat to his survival (Ridley, 135). So we can see why males will evolve the traits that females choose. But why should females choose traits that burden males, like long tails?

One theory says that the female preference may be arbitrary to start. But once most females prefer long tails, females who choose a short-tailed male will probably have short-tailed sons who won't attract mates. Females who do choose long-tailed males will probably have "sexy sons", so will be at a genetic advantage. The process can spiral onward: males evolving ever longer tails, females choosing ever longer-tailed males (Ridley, 138ff).

Another theory is that females might prefer males whose long tails say: "I have such incredibly good genes that I can get by even with this ridiculous handicap" (see Ridley, 138, 142ff). Ornaments and displays may be more than just promises of sexy sons. They may also reveal the underlying quality of the genes, such as disease-resistance and vigor. Indeed, males have a genetic incentive to advertise better genes than they actually have. Ornaments that are actually handicaps may be a female way of forcing honesty on males: only really good genes can afford really big handicaps.

Selection pressures don't result in just one 'natural' pattern of sexual behavior, but many. It is more common for the female to invest more in offspring and the male to aspire to a harem, as in gorillas or elephant seals, but it can go the other way, as in jacanas. Alternatively, both sexes may be promiscuous, as in chimpanzees. Or, a group of related females who hunt together may share a small group of related males whose only parental contribution is to protect

their own offspring from other males who would kill them, as in lions. Or, animals may mate with one individual for life and share parenting equally, as in the albatross.

4. Human sexuality, and the rarity and instability of social monogamy in nature. Where amongst all this natural variety does human nature lie (see Ridley, 170)? Are we naturally polygamous? Our hunter-gather ancestors seem to have been largely monogamous, with occasional polygamy (Ridley 186). In past civilizations, rich and powerful men often monopolized thousands of women in harems, cutting many males out of the genetic stakes entirely. Though most human beings today aspire to monogamous marriage, many tribal cultures are polygamous (Ridley, 171; Wright 90). Moreover, Wright argues that the serial monogamy so common today is equivalent in many ways to polygamy: one male monopolizes the reproductive years of more than one female, but in a series rather than simultaneously.

However, human beings don't have the physiology of full-fledged harem polygamists. In the animal kingdom there is a strict correlation between harem polygamy and a large size difference between males and females, as in gorillas. The size difference between human males and females does not qualify them as true polygamists (Ridley, 170). And our ancestors lived in social groups containing multiple sexually active males and females, unlike harem polygamists--probably as a result of food pressures.

Food pressures also give chimps cause to live in social groups (Ridley 206). Chimps practice promiscuity, initiated by females as well as males. Female chimp promiscuity can be a way of extracting resources from various males: she trades sex for extra food, which benefits her young. Moreover, male chimps, like lions, often kill the young of other males, which makes their mothers sexually available sooner. Female promiscuity sows the seeds of confusion among males and thus helps to avoid infanticide: the more males there are who sense they might be the father of her young because they've often had sex with her, the fewer males who are inclined to kill her young (Ridley, 207, Wright 68-9).

But human beings don't have the physiology characteristic of promiscuity either. Many-many promiscuity like that of chimpanzees or right whales requires sperm competition: large quantities of sperm are needed to flush out rivals' contributions. So testicle size correlates with promiscuity: the more promiscuous, the larger. Human testicle size does not qualify us as truly promiscuous (Ridley, 211-12; Wright, 71).

On the other hand, human beings are not as utterly monogamous as the asocial gibbons, where bonded pairs retreat into their own territories and defend them against all others. Human beings are highly social. Nevertheless, we most commonly aspire to monogamy, and our MPI is relatively high.

This combination, social monogamy, has built-in difficulties. It is rare and unstable in nature, and where it is found it is ridden with adultery, as in the human case. Group living in other mammals almost always goes with promiscuity or polygamy; male parental investment and monogamy are almost always found in isolated, asocial pairs. Social monogamy is delicately balanced in between. Some of the closest comparisons to human mating patterns are not with other primates or even mammals, but with colonial birds, where monogamy and high MPI survive despite frequent adultery by both sexes (Ridley, 180, 213, 215ff).

Unlike promiscuous chimp sex, which is overt, adultery in human beings and many monogamous birds is covert (Ridley, 227). But genetic research on the offspring of social monogamous birds has shown that a surprisingly large percent result from adultery. The monogamous male has genetic incentives to play a mixed strategy: to play daddy with one high-quality (fertile and coy) female to guarantee some offspring, while maximizing his genetic fitness by covert adultery whenever possible. The monogamous female also has genetic incentives to adultery. Extra mates may not increase the quantity of her offspring, as they do for the male, but may increase their quality. Females need not just parental investment from males, but also good genes: adultery can be a way of getting both. A female may be genetically better off with a monogamous but mediocre daddy than in a big rich male's harem. But she may be better off still if the big fancy male fathers her offspring in secret and the unsuspecting

monogamous male helps to raise them. To protect their parental investment, males in turn will evolve anti-cuckoldry strategies (Wright, 66). However, the female's parental investment is not equally threatened by her mate's infidelity, as long as he maintains his parental investment dutifully. Thus a 'double standard' may emerge (Ridley 229, Wright 66).

5. Cultural support of social monogamy. Given the rarity and inherent instability of social monogamy in nature, and the variety of more common alternatives, what explains social monogamy in human beings? Evolutionary psychology suggests an answer that shows how human reproductive patterns do indeed depend on social and cultural support.

Our ancestors' sexual division of labor into hunters and gatherers was a distinctively human form of social life, uncharacteristic of other primates (Ridley, 182-185). Initially, it was probably a response to drier habitats with more seasonal food supplies. Meat became an important food, to fill the gaps in seasonal supplies. Hunting was done most efficiently by teams of cooperating males, while females, pregnant or with children, gathered fruit and greens. Males had to help females rear their helpless young if they were to survive at all, so MPI was relatively high. Moreover, team hunting had relatively egalitarian results for males; it did not generate the food hoarding or inequalities that would be needed for harem polygamy (Ridley, 187).

We've seen that genetic pressure to monitor mates against adultery, and to avoid monitoring by one's mate, is inherent to social monogamy. This generates ever-more-refined strategies for monitoring, cheating, deceiving, and detecting cheating and deception. But the hunter/gatherer system makes social monogamy even more problematic and generates further communicative pressures. The sexual division of labor meant that hunting males weren't around to guard their gathering females (Wright, 56). This provided built-in opportunities for adultery, which appears to have been far more common among hunter-gatherers than overt polygamy. In response, males may have assigned guard duty to other family members. Symbolic and cultural support for monogamy--in effect, marriage--may have been needed to hold the whole system together.

A recent argument to this effect is made by Terence Deacon in his book *The Symbolic Species* (1997, ch. 12). He asks why symbolic language evolved, and suggests that it may have helped to solve the uniquely human evolutionary dilemma our ancestors faced. Males had both to hunt cooperatively and to provide meat to females and their young. They needed assurance that the offspring who benefited were their own, even though they could not guard their mates themselves while hunting. So they came to rely on social mechanisms to verify and enforce fidelity (see also Ridley, 221; Wright 56). Pairbonding became a public promise and the object of joint social attention and ritual. Social support was needed to make monogamy work: recognition of established pairs, enforcement of the pairing, detection and punishment of the cheaters who inevitably arose and who found ever more subtle ways of avoiding the enforcement mechanisms. We are the only species in which the whole group gets involved in maintaining pairbonding and punishing cheaters. Marriage is the uniquely human way of regulating social monogamy, an essentially symbolic relationship involving symbols and rituals that refer publicly to abstract social relations and future expectations, to reciprocal obligations, prohibitions, and expected social consequences. Deacon suggests that the heavy informational demands made by social monogamy in the hunter/gatherer context may thus explain the origins of symbolic language and culture. In effect, they countered the evolutionary instability of social monogamy by making it possible to establish a sexual contract.

6. Evolutionary psychology on the sexual contract and the social contract. Feminists should take note. Evolutionary psychology points out not only the striking variety of reproductive styles in nature, but also that the human style is distinctly unusual--and indeed so unstable in nature that it appears to require cultural support: to be a matter of nurture as much as nature. If this correct, the "initial momentous step from nature to culture" is indeed marked by the sexual contract. Can evolutionary psychology throw any further light on the sexual contract and its relationship to the social contract?

There are evolutionary pressures both toward monogamy and toward deviating from monogamy, for both sexes. Consider a polygamous population of birds, in which females

invest more in the young and males attempt polygamy. Remember that to attempt is not to succeed: where a few males have big harems, many males don't mate at all. There are never enough females for most males to be polygamous (Ridley, 174). The more polygamous a species is, the more males are excluded from reproduction altogether. Females, by contrast, will nearly always find mates and have offspring under polygamy.

Suppose you are a junior male without a harem. As Ridley explains it (at 177ff), you have two strategies. The high-risk 'macho' strategy is to emulate the harem masters, to hope one day to follow in their footsteps. The safer 'daddy' strategy is to offer high MPI: find an unattached female and help to rear your joint offspring, thus increasing their chances of survival. You won't have as many offspring as a polygamist, but at least you'll have some. Females now have a choice: they can choose a rich polygamist, with flashy genes or a big territory. Or they can select a monogamist, who'll help with the kids.

The sexual selection trade-off between good genes and high MPI can go either way. A species can be taken over by monogamy, as more females choose 'daddy' males to get extra care for their offspring. But if a polygamist is big or rich enough, females will choose him over a monogamous male, even though they share him and can't expect much help with their offspring; their offspring will still be better off if the polygamist's genes or his territory are good enough.

Is this kind of reasoning relevant to human beings? Women in some societies appear to prefer to be one of several wives of a rich man rather than the only wife of a poor man (Ridley 178). This raises the question: In whose interests is polygamy, anyway? We tend to assume it is in men's interest, and that outlawing it is in women's interest. But Wright and Ridley argue that we should think again.

Wright reasons as follows (at 96-7; see also Ridley, 179). Suppose marriage and polygamy were strictly voluntary, and imagine 100 men and 100 women, ranked in order of whatever determines reproductive status: wealth, power, intelligence, etc. Each woman is

betrothed to her opposite number, the man who shares her status. Each would like to marry higher, but the higher-status types are already taken. Suppose a few low-status women decide that they and their offspring would do better if they become the second wives of men with higher status than their own opposite numbers. Such upward mobility by a few women allows all the women below them to move up in the pecking order of mates, should they wish. Every woman who makes this choice, however, leaves behind a man at the bottom of the pecking order with no mate at all. Equality among women increases along with inequality among men; the more women who opt for polygamy, the more low-status men left mateless. Wright argues that most men may be better off under enforced monogamy and most women worse off. In the human case it is natural to consider this claim not just in terms of the reproductive interests of women, but also in terms of their interests as persons in commanding resources per se.

Wright's reasoning suggests that if no one is coerced to marry and polygamy is not outlawed, then female interests determine whether polygamy or monogamy results; it could go either way. But polygamy necessarily gives men unequal access to women and cuts out low-status males. Official monogamy may do less to protect the interests of women than to enforce sexual equality among men. Monogamy ensures that most men have a chance of at least one mate and protects males against the ravages of sexual selection and their 'natural' sexual expendability (Wright, 96; Ridley, 179).

What is the relationship between sexual inequality and other dimensions of inequality? Enforced monogamy can have inegalitarian effects on the distribution of resources among women; we've seen how polygamy can, under certain conditions at least, more evenly distribute resources among women (Wright, 98; Ridley 179-80, 185). However, overt polygamy appears to depend on inequalities of wealth or power among men. Anthropologists classify more than half of known monogamous societies as nonstratified (Wright, 94). Our hunter-gatherer ancestors were usually monogamous in part because cooperative hunting made men relatively equal. Agriculture opened the door to hoarding, inequality, and thus increasing polygamy (Ridley, 88). The more economically and socially stratified a society, the more extreme the polygamy. Ancient despots hoarded women as they did wealth, in the tens of thousands,

and maximized their offspring by practices such as monitoring ovulation, providing wet nurses, and fiercely guarding their concubines. The number of wives an official was allowed increased with his power and status (Ridley 191-2, Wright, 99). Higher-status folk preferred male children, who could reproduce more extravagantly than their sisters, while lower-status folk preferred female children. Females could always reproduce, but low-status males were in danger of being excluded altogether from reproduction.

Wright suggests that increasing political equality and democracy among males seals the fate of official polygamy. Monogamy is a response to egalitarianism among men: a sexual contract among brothers. High status men still get the highest status women, but at least they only get one each. This is to explain the sexual contract in terms of the changing social contract (Wright, 94, 98-9).

However, inequalities of wealth and power may be necessary but not sufficient for polygamy. Wright is puzzled by economically stratified yet monogamous cultures, such as Western culture appears to be (Wright, 94). In fact, they present a problem for his view: if egalitarianism among men explains monogamy, why are these societies still so inegalitarian in other respects?

Though Wright doesn't ask this question, both he and Ridley make a point that suggests a possible answer. The mateless low-status males produced by polygamy are, in the absence of despotic power, likely to be violent and socially destructive. They may threaten the privileges and life-style of higher-status males. Monogamy distributes sex and weighs low-status males down with the burdens of family, so reducing this threat (Wright, 98, 100; Ridley, 195, cf. 199). Sexual equality is a kind of sop, a shower of gold coins among the masses of the sexually dispossessed. By giving up their sexual privileges under polygamy, higher-status males may protect their other privileges, of wealth and power. Monogamous sex is the opium of the people, and keeps the lower strata in their places--at least for a while, until pressure may arise for a more thoroughgoing social contract. This suggestion invokes interests of men that are not purely reproductive, interests in wealth and power per se. However, ultimately maintaining

their wealth and power may be the best way for high-status males to secure reproductive success, even at the cost of 'official' monogamy.

If so, then the relationship of the sexual contract to the social contract is more complex, in a way that resonates with Pateman's feminist account. A contract of sexual equality among males would mediate between despotic inequality and the terms of the modern social contract. In this way the social contract may indeed presuppose the sexual contract, and the identities of the male sexual contractors may be carried over implicitly into the social contract, leaving no conceptual space for injustice within the family.

Wright offers a different response to the puzzle of stratified monogamous societies. Many western nations, he explains, are no longer truly monogamous. They are riddled with serial monogamy, a form of sexual inequality that is equivalent to polygamy, or worse (Wright, 101). The high status man who marries while young and has one family, then divorces and marries another much younger woman and has another family, is a functional polygamist: he monopolizes the reproductive years of more than one woman. As a result, I would point out, giving up polygamy officially may not be such a sacrifice after all for high-status males, since they can resort to serial monogamy instead. Wright argues that this tendency on a large scale *must* have the effect of leaving many other men without fertile partners, given roughly equal numbers of men and women--just as polygamy does. And men at the bottom of the social scale will face the greatest scarcity of mates. If official polygamy is indeed wrong, inegalitarian in its effects on men and socially destructive, then the de facto polygamy of serial monogamy is wrong for the same reasons. In some ways it is worse than legalized polygamy, in its effects on women and children. True, the second wives of rich men have their options increased. But divorced men are far more likely to remarry than divorced women, and divorce tends to leave ex-husbands better off and ex-wives worse off (Wright, 88, 91). And stepfathers are more likely to mistreat children than their fathers are. Who benefits from insisting the man divorce the first wife before marrying the second?

Inequalities of wealth and power again lead to sexual inequality. Wright suggests that social and economic inequality undermine monogamy; distributing income more equally would strengthen monogamy (Wright, 105). But should that be our aim today, in circumstances very different from those in which human social monogamy first evolved?

We now have contraception, assisted reproduction, work that can be done by both sexes, and babies who can be fed by fathers as well as by mothers. Women now demand equality of opportunity, and we are making slow progress in the direction of parental leave for both sexes, accessible child care, and adjustments in expectations about working hours. But should we still be trying to shore up monogamy? Or, as some have argued in response to Okin (see Kymlicka 1991), should we rethink the sexual contract more radically? Perhaps we should be encouraged by the variety in nature to consider other possible reproductive patterns, which might better suit our situation now? For example, women might take a cue from the lioness and try a feminist version of polygamy, where women choose to share a man. Or, women might separate sexual relations with men from domestic arrangements with other women, and divide child-related labor amongst themselves in fair and flexible ways that provide freedom of choice and career support.

7. Concluding summary. Recall that my point has not been that we must agree with the evolutionary psychologists, or the feminists, whose views I have explained and considered. Rather, I take their views as representative, in order to explain how the perspective of evolutionary psychology can actually be friendly to many feminist concerns. It is not that we can infer feminist norms or values from evolutionary psychology, but rather that evolutionary psychology can remove (rather than present!) obstacles to feminist arguments. I have developed this point in three ways. First, evolutionary psychology brings to our attention many of nature's alternatives to monogamy, some of which may be better suited to our changed circumstances. Second, it points out the natural instability of the human reproductive pattern and the way it depends on social and cultural reinforcement and support. Thus, we can survey nature's alternatives in the recognition that our own pattern may be culturally malleable. It can of course be very difficult to change cultural features. Nevertheless, a mating pattern is at least

*less* entrenched overall if it is not stable without cultural support than if it is stable purely biologically. Third, evolutionary psychology underscores the way equality among men can conflict with equality among women, and the critical social role of the sexual contract.

\*For comments on earlier drafts, I am grateful to Paula Casal, Andrew Reeve, and Chris Woodard.

## References

Deacon, Terence (1997). *The Symbolic Species*. London: Penguin.

Kymlicka, Will (1991). "Rethinking the Family". *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 20:77-97.

Moller Okin, Susan (1989). *Justice, Gender and the Family*. New York: Basic Books.

Pateman, Carol (1988). *The Sexual Contract*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Ridley, Matt (1993). *The Red Queen*. London: Penguin.

Sen, Amartya (1985). *Commodities and Capabilities*. Amsterdam: North Holland.

Trivers, Robert (1972). Parental Investment and Sexual Selection. In Bernard Campbell, ed., *Sexual Selection and the Descent of Man*. Chicago: Aldine de Gruyter.

Wright, Robert (1994). *The Moral Animal*. London: Little, Brown and Co.