

Monogamy isn't Natural. But is it Good?

In [a recent interview](#) (linking to Vanity Fair instead of Playboy), Scarlett Johansson discussed a variety of topics: Broadway, her career, the craft of film-making, and her split from husband Romain Dauriac.

It will be the second failed marriage for Johansson, who is not yet 33. So it's no surprise she sounded a little down on marriage.

"I think the idea of marriage is very romantic; it's a beautiful idea, and the practice of it can be a very beautiful thing," she said, before countering, **"I don't think it's natural to be a monogamous person."**

That line prompted [literally dozens](#) of news headlines. I found this strange because it didn't strike me as a particularly insightful or controversial statement.

Psychologist Christopher Ryan is one of many authors who has suggested that "we are biologically programmed" against monogamy. Our "dysfunctional sex lives" are the result of this strange concept of monogamy, which followed the introduction of agriculture, [we're told](#).

"Culture invented monogamy, and with it marriage, cheating, and a sense of shame that surrounds our sexual selves," says Big Think.

Many who accept the idea that monogamy is *unnatural* assume that this means it is bad or undesirable. But is this really the case? This largely depends on one's view of nature, I suppose.

Those in the Rousseau camp tend to believe that man in his natural state is primarily good, free from the corruption that accompanies civilization. Hobbesians, on the other hand, tend to believe that the state of nature is characterized by social antagonism, and hence life in this state is "poor, nasty, brutish and short."

Who's right?

For my own part, I tend to agree with Johansson and Ryan that there is nothing natural about monogamy. Primates, particularly males, seem biologically predisposed toward multiple partners, evidence suggests. Sexual impulses aside, marriage requires a great deal of self-sacrifice, something that hardly comes natural to human beings.

All of the talk on human nature brought to mind the film [*The African Queen*](#). Humphrey Bogart, playing the gin-swilling boat captain Charlie Allnut, is bothered by the fact that Ms. Sayers (Katherine Hepburn), whom he has come to respect,

frowns on his drinking.

*Charlie Allnut: What are you being so mean for, Miss? A man takes a drop too much once in a while, **it's only human nature.***

*Rose Sayer: **Nature, Mr. Allnut, is what we are put in this world to rise above.***

It's been nearly 20 years since I saw *The African Queen*, but I still remember that line and suspect I always will. For it seems to me that much of the human experience involves overcoming our nature.

The earliest humans, need I remind, [didn't](#) just use those spears for hunting game.