

# Is Human Sexuality a Reflection of Design and Purpose?

By Linda Ames Nicolosi

Where did we come from, and what is our purpose? Different people answer that question differently. Yet the answer to that question cannot simply be a personal matter, relegated to private musings during our quiet moments. For the response we give will profoundly affect our foundational understanding of education, the law, ethics, science—and indeed, of psychology and sexuality.

No one in recent years has forced us to look at that issue more profoundly than Berkeley law professor Phillip Johnson.

Professor Johnson has reopened a controversy that was assumed by many to be long-ago laid to rest—the scientific debate about evolution. The media tends to caricature the debate as a contest between Bible-waving, illiterate creationists from the backwoods on the one hand, and modern scientific rationalists on the other. The issue, however, is not that simple.

Specifically, Professor Johnson has pointed out the striking gaps in the fossil evidence and the unanswered questions in the established Darwinian theory of evolution, while challenging scientists to take a closer look at a new discipline known as intelligent-design theory (1,2,3).

As a theory of limited variation within pre-existing types, Johnson agrees, neo-Darwinism is perfectly scientific; but as a general theory of how complex types of plants and species of animals came into existence, Darwinian evolution is as yet philosophical speculation.

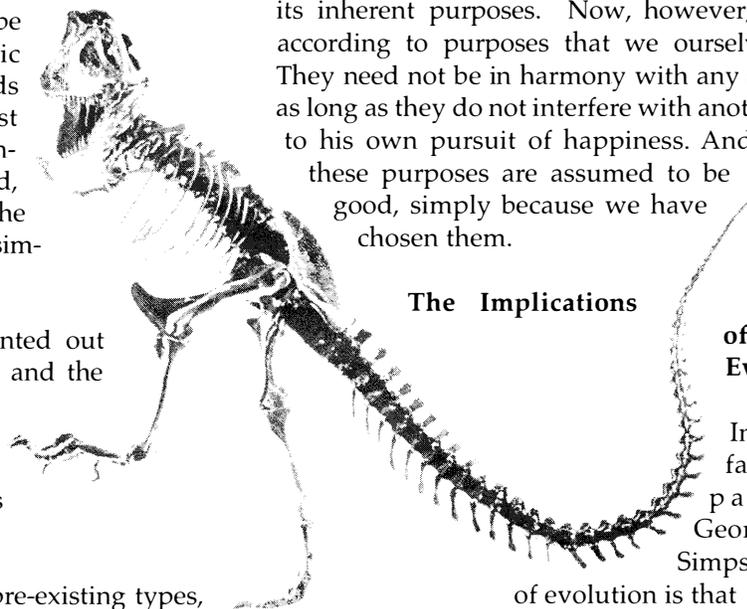
Since Johnson burst onto the intellectual scene a few years ago, he has stimulated a small group of science writers to reexamine the evidence. (4,5,6) But such a pursuit is not for the faint-hearted researcher. Since grants, teaching appointments, faculty tenure, peer review in scientific journals, and overall credibility all depend on a researcher's willingness to work within the established scientific model, an interest in intelligent-design theory could be the kiss of death for an ambitious scientist.

## The Essence of the Debate: Where Did We Come From, and Why Are We Here?

Still, Johnson emphasizes that it is not so much a dispute over the *mechanism*—whether or not we came into being

through some form of *gradualism*—that is at the heart of the debate. (Johnson himself is a theist who admits that a supernatural creator *might* have used some form of evolution.) No, the heart of the problem, he believes, is the foundational principle that arises from the assumption that no intelligent cause *could possibly have been involved* to give human life direction and transcendent meaning. This is the assumption of naturalistic evolution.

Science is the supreme authority in modern society, and so we have (usually unthinkingly) come to accept naturalism as our culture's official creation story. We once sought to understand the created order and to live in harmony with its inherent purposes. Now, however, we seek to live according to purposes that we ourselves have chosen. They need not be in harmony with any external measure, as long as they do not interfere with another person's right to his own pursuit of happiness. And these purposes are assumed to be good, simply because we have chosen them.



## The Implications of Naturalistic Evolution

In the words of the famous Harvard paleontologist George Gaylord Simpson, the meaning of evolution is that

“man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind.”

A popular college biology textbook written by Douglas Futuyma echoes the same assumption. It says,

“Some shrink from the conclusion that the human species was not designed, has no purpose, and is the product of mere mechanical mechanisms—but this seems to be the message of evolution.”

In contrast, if the world *was* designed by an intelligent agent for a purpose, according to Professor Johnson, then it follows that *the* most important knowledge to have would be an awareness of the purposes of that designer.

But if there is *no* evidence for design and we are merely evolving through a mindless, uncaring, and strictly mate-

rial process, then man is free to tailor his life to fit his own or his culture's evolving values.

The philosophical assumption of naturalism has led to profound changes in law, education and science. Some changes that come to mind:

- the statement, now accepted unthinkingly in our culture, that homosexual is "*who a person really is*"
- the relativist's insistence that no one can "impose his morality" on another
- the educator's claim that children's values should be primarily *chosen* by them, not *shaped* by adult mentors
- the drive to reform marriage into a legal contract between any two people who love each other—rather than viewing it as a covenant based on complementarity, whose central purpose is the protection of children
- the "rights-based" mentality in law, which has no universal concept of the good—and thus is on shaky grounds when it calls prostitution illegal, when it tries to discriminate between pornography and art, and when it rules that a boy cannot go to school wearing girls' clothing
- the "*grand sez who*" -- that is, the retort "Who are *you* to say?" to any statement of value.

### Social Science is an Applied Philosophy

Professor Johnson reminds us what the scientific community --and psychologists--tend to forget: that there are actually two kinds of science.

First, there is the objective, "hard" science that involves the likes of data-collection, statistical analysis, discovery of mathematical and chemical formulas, and so on, through what is known as the scientific method. Few people dispute its validity.

Second, however, there is another kind of science that is necessarily an *applied philosophy*. Most of psychology, particularly the personality theories, fit into this category.

According to established scientific practice, a scientific investigator must first begin with a foundational philosophy or worldview, which is necessary to give his work direction and meaning. He thus commits himself to whatever explanation for a phenomenon he considers to be most plausible. He then works backward from that foundation and tries to prove that the data actually fit his conceptual framework. If the data *don't* fit, it's his job to reject that original conceptual framework and start over.

The dedicated evolutionist holds a philosophical precommitment to the assumption that matter is all there is, and no supernatural force *could possibly* have intervened at any

point in history. Evolutionists will freely admit that the world may *look* like it was the product of some sort of designer. But they refuse to follow the facts wherever they may lead, Professor Johnson charges, whenever the evidence points away from naturalism and toward the design hypothesis.

Johnson notes instances where evolution theorists have worked to suppress scientific evidence that would reveal the weaknesses of their theory. Nevertheless the idea that man has evolved from *impersonal and purposeless* processes has become our culture's official creation story, and that concept—with all the far-reaching philosophical implications such a worldview implies—is tenaciously defended by a dogmatic priesthood.

### What This Means for Psychology

Many observers see evidence for design and purpose in the psychosexual complementarity of men and women.

"We need to live a certain way because we are *designed* to live that way," says Professor of Philosophy J. Budziszewski (7). "Everything in us has a purpose: everything is *for* something. When you thwart a thing's design, it either works badly, stops working or breaks...The same thing is true of the human design."

Others, however, approach human sexuality from the philosophical assumption that—as gay advocate Andrew Sullivan has argued—"order is just a euphemism for disorder."

In 1945, one researcher defined normality as "that which functions according to its design." (8) But just

before the 1973 decision to remove homosexuality from the diagnostic manual, Judd Marmor—who was soon to become president of the American Psychiatric Association—expressed a philosophy that flatly rejected design and purpose. He wrote,

"I submit that the entire assumption that homosexual behavior *per se* is 'unnatural' or 'unhealthy' is a moral judgment and has no basis in fact...

"...to call homosexuality the result of disturbed sexual development **really says nothing other than that you disapprove** of the outcome of that development [*emphasis added*]" (9)

In disparaging terms, Dr. Marmor labelled the philosophy undergirding the "disorder" view of homosexuality as "pious" — at the same time he freely admitted that homosexuality often results from disturbed family relationships.

Because of science's dedication to naturalism, the idea of a created nature with inherent purposes has fallen into disfavor.

Marmor's worldview seems to fit that of psychoanalyst and author Robert Stoller. In his book *Pain & Passion*, Stoller explored the "fetishes and bizarre practices" of consensual sadism and masochism. Rejecting established concepts of normalcy, Stoller contended that "psychoanalysts [should] become less threatened by the pleasures that perversions bring the perverse ..." (10) It is only the psychoanalyst's "deep prejudices" about the nature of perversion, Stoller says, that would lead to the conclusion that sado-masochism is abnormal.

We see a similar worldview in a recent book by a gay advocate. *Biological Exuberance* "celebrates the diversity" of sexual behavior that can sometimes be seen among animals, particularly gender-atypical and homosexual behavior (11). With his rejection of the purposes inherent in male-female complementary, and a valuing of diversity *per se* as good, the author does not look beneath the surface to investigate *causes* for the behavior (pollution in the environment, high levels of stress, fetal-hormonal anomalies, dominance) that would explain homosexuality as either a prenatal developmental error or as a behavioral anomaly.

#### It's a Worldview Issue

Another gay advocate, writing in *The Journal of Homosexuality*, astutely noted that the 1973 psychiatric debate about homosexuality was not a battle over new scientific evidence. It was, he admitted, really "more akin to judging it [homosexuality] differently, while in possession of the same old facts." (12)

Similarly, psychologist Gary Greenberg—who is a staunch gay advocate and sexual liberationist—argues that the normalization of homosexuality is a question that could never have been settled by science (13). The only way the American Psychiatric Association (or anyone else) could settle the question of the normalcy of homosexuality was through a philosophy—some way of understanding the world. Thus the A.P.A. gave "wrong reasons," Greenberg says, to explain to the public how psychiatry arrived at its landmark 1973 decision. The Association misrepresented its deliberations as having been grounded in facts, rather than facts interpreted through the prism of a new foundational philosophy.

Indeed, to borrow a phrase from Phillip Johnson, "the old creation story had been rejected for a new one," so the A.P.A. could no longer answer the question, "What is sexuality *for*?" or "What *is* homosexuality?" through the philosophical assumptions of design and purpose.

#### The New Goals: "Safety and Happiness"

Modernism's new goal, Johnson says—and one that appears to have been adopted by much of the mental-health profession—is "learning to control our physical and social environment in order to increase our safety and happiness." (14)

We see many examples that suggest such a philosophical shift in the mental-health literature. Since a naturalistically-based psychology cannot meaningfully conceptualize inherent purposes in human nature, it shifts away from the older therapeutic goals of character, wisdom and virtue to focus on a pursuit of autonomy—that is *self*-defined forms of *self*-actualization, which can be roughly translated into the "safety and happiness" model.

The *Family Therapy Networker* recently featured a case history entitled, "Monogamy and Gay Men: When are Open Relationships a Therapeutic Option?" (15). In that column—which, significantly, was followed by *no* published letters-to-the-editor from outraged counselors—the therapist sought to help a sexually bored gay couple stay together.

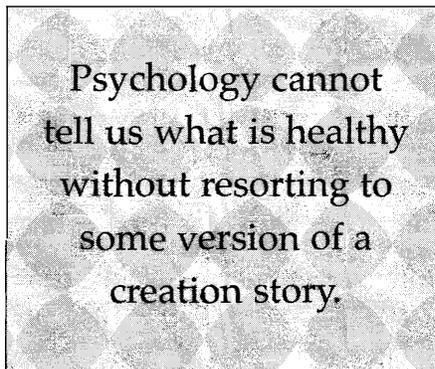
The therapist suggested several possibilities: try group sex, engage in some varieties of public sex, and try changing the "marriage" into a three-person rather than a two-person relationship.

The author of the column, an instructor at Hunter College School of Social Work, said "I have grown to respect the fluidity and customized relationship forms that can work well for gay men." The definition of the term "works well" would have presumably meant whatever succeeded in keeping the relationship

together and providing sexual satisfaction. Of course, whether the counselor's suggestions would have *ultimately* provided the couple with happiness—if the word "happiness" is used in the fuller sense of "well-being"—would be a subject for another discussion.

Then there was the case of the woman going through a traumatic divorce, who felt rejected and vulnerable and was considering a lesbian relationship. Taking a utilitarian tack in apparent pursuit of "safety and happiness," two scholars wrote that a lesbian affair can represent a useful adaptation when the woman needs to consolidate her female identity, introject a loving maternal object in response to a disappointment, or where there is no man available (16).

Could sado-masochistic torture-play really be just harm-



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less fun? Even if it brings pleasure, what does it do to the integrity of the person? Is three-way sex good for the well-being of a relationship? If we don't see *obvious* evidence of harm among men who were molested as children, could adult-child sex be harmless? Could a lesbian affair be "adaptive" during a time when no man is available?

This brings us back to Phillip Johnson's original question: "Where did we come from, and what is our purpose?"

Indeed, psychology cannot begin to respond to any of those questions without first assuming some version of a Creation Story. And if Johnson is correct---that the concept of design and purpose will eventually be recognized within the realm of *scientific* knowledge, not marginalized in the fields of philosophy and ethics---then psychology may yet find a compelling motivation to rethink its foundational assumptions about human sexuality.

### Endnotes

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- (3) ----- (1998) *Objections Sustained: Subversive Essays on Evolution, Law and Culture*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity.
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- (5) Behe, Michael (1996) *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*. N.Y.: Free Press.
- (6) Berlinski, David, "The Deniable Darwin," *Commentary*, June 1996.
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- (8) King, C.D. (1945) "The Meaning of Normal." *Yale J. of Biology and Medicine*, 18, 493-501.
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- (12) Bagemihl, Bruce (1999) *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
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- (14) Johnson, P. (1995) p. 13.
- (15) "Monogamy and Gay Men: When are Open Relationships a Therapeutic Option?" *Family Therapy Networker*, Mar-April, p. 63-71.
- (16) Kirkpatrick, M. and C. Morgan, "Psychodynamic Psychotherapy of Female Homosexuality," in *Homosexual Behavior: A Modern Reappraisal*, by Judd Marmor, editor, 1980, N.Y.: Basic Books.

