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# 'Beyond choice'—Alexander Sanger 's New Case for Abortion

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**Monday, October 25, 2004**

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"Few women today publicly and proudly acknowledge having had an abortion," Sanger explains. "We can no longer be ashamed of abortion. Abortion won't become safely legal until we recognize and admit how reproductive freedom, including the right to an abortion, furthers human destiny. We got over our shame with birth control. It's time we did so with abortion."

Sanger is currently Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Population Fund and he also serves as chairman of The International Planned Parenthood Council. Following in his grandmother's footsteps, he is an energetic and unapologetic advocate of abortion. He has been closely identified with his grandmother's cause, having previously served as president of Planned Parenthood of New York City. In his new book, *Beyond Choice: Reproductive Freedom in the 21st Century*, he argues that the movement for what he calls "reproductive freedom" has been hampered by a reluctance to claim that abortion is a moral good. By acting as if abortion is a matter of shame, he argues, the pro-abortion movement has undermined its own cause.

As he sees it, the traditional argument in favor of abortion has followed several familiar lines. The first line has to do with the woman's right to control her own body. A second line of argument has pushed the issue of privacy, arguing that government has no right to intervene in the private sphere of reproductive choice. A third line of argument is focused upon a woman's health, arguing that the criminalization of abortion will lead to illegal medical services and clandestine abortion mills. Finally, a fourth line of argument has pointed to the importance of family planning, population control, and can be summarized in the slogan, "Every child should be a wanted child."

Sanger asserts that these arguments have made little progress in changing public opinion. As he correctly reports, public opinion on abortion has changed very little since the *Roe v Wade* decision of 1973. Furthermore, Sanger recognizes that new reproductive technologies threaten the arguments previously put forth by the abortion rights movement. Clearly, something has to change.

"The primary focus of the pro-choice movement should be on why reproductive freedom is vital to humanity and why abortion is good," Sanger now insists. The abortion rights movement should argue "not for legal abortion, but for abortion" he insists.

In sum, Sanger wants to shift the debate from morality to biology. "In my view, the most compelling and honest way to do this is to justify abortion on a biological basis," he urges. "Abortion is, after all, a biological act. We can justify it as such."

Do not miss the subtlety of his argument. Sanger wants nothing to do with feminists like Naomi Wolf who argues that abortion is a “necessary evil” and acknowledges that the nation’s astoundingly high abortion rate represents a genuine moral failure. Though Ms. Wolf is a fervent defender of a woman’s right to an abortion, she concedes that abortion represents a very real failure and a very real tragedy.

But Sanger says that’s the whole problem with the traditional pro-abortion argument. To rescue the pro-abortion movement from its dependence on deflated arguments, he points to evolutionary biology.

Here’s how it works: “The new framework I am proposing is based on evolutionary biology. It is from a basis in science that reproductive rights emerge. This framework is not exclusive of a feminist or human framework. On the contrary, I will argue that understanding evolutionary biology and the role of reproductive control within it can lead to a stronger basis for the necessity of women’s and human rights. I will argue that reproductive rights are beneficial to women, men, and families as they pursue their reproductive strategies.”

Sanger now wants to argue that abortion represents an important “reproductive strategy” for the continuation of the human race. Evolution, he explains, “has weeded out those species and organisms that pursued unsuccessful strategies.”

Not all pregnancies should result in childbirth, Sanger asserts. Women should be free to choose reproductive strategies that would allow for greatest success in reproductive capacity. A woman may well decide, Sanger explains, that a particular pregnancy does not fit her expectation in terms of timing or other criteria, and she should be fully free to terminate the pregnancy in order to maintain her full reproductive potential. “Every pregnancy brings into high relief for the woman not only the prospects for that pregnancy,” he explains, “but also her own prospects of reproductive success in this and future meetings. A pregnancy puts a woman in reproductive control. Abortion lets her choose which path her reproductive strategy will follow.”

The Darwinists’ worldview—updated by contemporary evolutionary theories—allow Sanger to argue that abortion is a necessary tool in humanity’s reproductive toolbox. As he explains, “Men and women strive to control sex and reproduction—to exercise reproductive freedom—because it is a necessary part of their quest for their survival and that of their children. That is why birth control and abortion are vital—because they help humanity survive and propagate.”

This biological argument is a new development in the contemporary debate over abortion. When Sanger argues that “birth control and abortion are not contrary to nature,” he presses the claim for abortion rights into an entirely new arena. If one accepts his worldview, his argument becomes sensible and plain: “Humanity has succeeded because it has not left reproduction to nature or chance. Humanity has thrived on earth because each member of our species has innately sought reproductive success. We have thrived because we have used strategies to give our children the best chance of survival and in turn of reproducing.”

Once again, the determining issue is the worldview. Alexander Sanger is honest and explicit when he situates his new argument for abortion solidly within an evolutionary worldview and frame of reference. This modern evolutionary worldview begins with the assumption that matter is self-explanatory, and that all phenomena must be accounted for on the basis of purely naturalistic explanations. Of course, this includes morality. According to the evolutionary worldview, morality is simply a human invention that should be designed in order to increase reproductive success and the furtherance of the species—nothing else.

“I believe that the sciences can inform, change, and justify moral and ethical thinking,” Sanger soothingly explains. “While I believe that there is a biological basis to morality, the reader does not have to agree with this proposition in order to agree with my argument. I believe that morality is a product of human evolution, is a profoundly human creation, and is vital for human survival.” Sanger acknowledges that those who believe in a revealed morality will have a hard time buying this argument. Nevertheless, “For those who believe, as I do, in morality being a creation of humanity and a product of human evolution, the process of incorporating science into moral beliefs is somewhat easier.”

This shift appears to be quite easy for Mr. Sanger, who recently told an audience at Wake Forest University, “Darwin’s theory of natural selection favors women who control their childbirth. They maximize the chance of their own survival and their children’s survival. . . . Abortion should be used to ensure that a woman can reproduce later on at a time when she wants to have the child and can support it.”

Those of us who contend for the sanctity of human life and oppose abortion as a great moral evil must take Alexander Sanger's argument very seriously. Given the overall worldview shift taking place in our culture, Sanger's proposal is certain to gain ground—especially among the cultural elite. The next phase of the abortion rights argument may well be shaped by Sanger's thesis, for it offers the abortion rights movement several distinct advantages. First, it cloaks their argument in the appearance of scientific validity and biology. Second, it affords the movement a way of moving beyond the defensive posture it has taken in recent years. The women wearing "I Had An Abortion" t-shirts at the 2004 Democratic National Convention obviously share Mr. Sanger's desire to see the abortion rights argument move to a newly aggressive level.

"We must become proud that we have taken control of our reproduction," Sanger chides. "This has been a major factor in advancing human evolution and survival."

What about the long-standing "right to privacy" argument so ardently promoted by the abortion rights movement? "While the right to privacy is important in insuring that the majority cannot try to change the biological rules of life," Sanger encourages, "the word 'privacy' should not be our banner. It connotes secrecy and shame. We must eliminate shame from the debate over reproductive freedom. Our argument must not be for the legality of abortion, but for abortion itself."

Margaret Sanger must be smiling from her grave. Today's leaders of the Planned Parenthood movement are proud to point to Margaret Sanger as a model of feminist progress and the rights of women. They are much less likely to point to her notorious involvement in the eugenics movement and its race-based slogan, "More children from the fit, fewer from the unfit."

Margaret Sanger, along with the movement she founded and promoted, saw abortion as a necessary option for women, arguing that women would never be equal with men until a woman had a right to terminate a pregnancy which, for any reason, she did not want.

Nevertheless, even in our postmodern culture and our post-Christian age, this argument has worn thin. Today, more Americans than ever recognize that abortion is the intentional murder of an innocent unborn human life, and abortionists have been on the retreat ever since imaging technologies allowed us all to see the developing miracle within the womb.

Without doubt, Alexander Sanger is his grandmother's grandson, and his proposal to shift the debate to biology is an honest and clever attempt to reestablish and redirect the abortion rights argument. His proposal confronts us all with the stark reality of our worldview conflict. Sanger's Darwinist worldview leads inescapably to a full-bore defense of abortion as a "reproductive strategy." The Christian worldview, which affirms that humanity is defined in terms of the image of God as given by the Creator, leads in an opposite direction—toward the protection of all life from the moment of conception until natural death.

Alexander Sanger's argument puts the issue of abortion once again right at the center of our public argument. We must be ready to answer this Darwinist worldview with a clear alternative. If morality is nothing more than biology, our entire moral structure is aborted.

