

Summary: The Flying Spaghetti Monster

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In the “The Flying Spaghetti Monster,” Steven Paulson presents an interview with Richard Dawkins, a British scientist who is known as “religion’s chief prosecutor.” Paulson begins the interview by asking Dawkins about his beginnings as an atheist. Dawkins responds that he moved in and out of religion until the age of 16. In exploring his atheist background, he compares beliefs between ancient cultures and the current belief in God, commenting, “Nobody believes in Thor or Apollo anymore” (p.371). Further, Paulson inquires about why religion seems so bad. Dawkins replies, “Well, it encourages you to believe falsehoods, to be satisfied with inadequate explanations which really aren’t explanations at all” (as cited in Paulson, p.371). Further, Dawkins suggests that many people never are exposed to the beauties of scientific explanations of the world and its life.

As Paulson probes Dawkins about the limitations of religion, Dawkins suggests that religion is evil when faith endorses consequences for non-believers. Dawkins suggests that moderate or tolerant people of faith make extremism possible. In terms of religious works, Dawkins suggests if people often take things literally then evil becomes more prevalent. With respect to moderate religious people, Dawkins continues to discuss how children are taught the virtues of unquestioned faith and how they should in fact endorse the position of teaching things known to be factually true. To lie to a child by suggesting that perhaps the world was created in six days, he suggests is child abuse.

In a further discussion of the rights of children within the realm of faith, Dawkins suggests that the ideal of the golden rule is good. However, with regards to issues of lifestyle or faith, he suggests that not letting children have free choice of “knowing there are other people who believe something quite different” is abusive (p.373). Paulson takes a turn to discuss “why” questions with Dawkins, to which Dawkins suggests that scientific questions explain things fairly easily and truthfully when possible. However, he closes these thoughts with a simple idea: “Now, the mere fact that you can frame an

English sentence beginning with the word “why” does not mean that English sentence should receive an answer.”

Paulson explores the idea of confrontation with Dawkins suggesting that Dawkins’ work is more or less confrontational. Dawkins admits that he does not like confrontation but prefers to have academic discussions about such things. Further, Paulson probes Dawkins to comment on why Darwinian evolution leads logically to atheism. Dawkins responds that he is not sure why such things are logically connected; furthermore, in discussing some form of intelligent design (i.e., the idea that a god creates the world with a specific design).

Towards the close of the interview, Paulson asks a question about consciousness to Dawkins in an attempt to have Dawkins’s answer to the idea of thought. Dawkins’s response is, “Nobody has an explanation for consciousness. That should be a spur to work harder and try to understand it. Not to give up and just say, ‘Oh well, it must be a soul’” (as cited in Paulson, p.377). In closing, Dawkins suggests to Paulson that science has limits. Moreover, science should see something like consciousness as a challenge. However, Dawkins claims: “I do have a problem with saying God is a supernatural, creative, intelligent being. It’s simply confusion to say science can’t explain certain things; therefore, we have to be religious” (p.377). In the end, Dawkins closes with the thought that condoning such types of thinking is more confusing.

References

Paulson, S. (2009). The flying spaghetti monster. In G. Goshgarian (Ed.). What matters in America: reading and writing about contemporary culture. (pp.369-377). New York, NY: Longman.