

Science and Religion Collide

Ted Wilkenfeld

Professor Moriarty

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Abstract

This paper discusses and compares two works: Steve Paulson's "The Flying Spaghetti Monster," and Kenneth Miller's "Remove Sticker, Open Minds." This paper synthesizes the two papers and discusses similar points among both papers.

Keywords: Paulson, Miller, religion, science, evolution, evolutionary debates

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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.

In Kenneth Miller’s essay, “Remove Stickers, Open Minds,” Miller describes a time in the academic school year of 2004-2005. He discusses how the Georgia Cobb County Board of Education required stickers to be pasted into biology textbooks. These stickers suggested that evolution was a theory, not a fact.” Miller goes on to reveal that after complaints from parents and teachers, a federal judge ordered the school system to remove stickers from the textbooks, claiming that such disclaimers were unconstitutional.

In the opening to his essay, Miller begins by asking if such conditions were the product of censorship or of a federally-protected idea. The answer he suggests is far simpler, pointing to the judge's claim that the stickers served no scientific or educational purpose. Miller moves on to discuss how evolution is more than a theory. "Evolution," as Miller suggests, "is a fact" (p.366).

Miller discusses how a new mammalian fossil in China that has a small dinosaur in its stomach, helping to support the fact that life has changed over time, since there is evidence that some early mammals were able to prey upon dinosaurs. Miller continues by suggesting that "theories don't become facts rather, theories explain facts. Evolutionary theory is a comprehensive explanation of change supported by the facts of natural history, genetics, and molecular biology" (p.367). Miller posits that the stickers should have told students, "Everything in science should be approached with critical thinking and an open mind" (p.367).

In comparison, both texts discuss the value of a more critical and scientifically informed perspective in considering religion within our communities and within institutions of learning. In contrast, while the Paulson text suggests that religion somewhat toxic, proposing falsehoods and unquestioned claims, Miller seems much more open to the dialogue between religion and science, particularly in the domain of education. Yet, both text discuss the evils of religion, particular as it obscures fact and evidence. Miller proposes that evolution should not be considered a theory, as it is a fact, while Paulson's interviewee, Dawkins, is thoroughly convinced that religion's abuse of evidence and facts is abusive to society, particularly to children.

Both authors approach the fragileness of children and early educational contexts. Both authors, from different perspectives and situations, condemn leading children astray by allowing the presence of religion in schools and particularly its teachings in the home. While Dawkins suggests children should be more free to thought and spared the insults which he believes religion brings, Miller suggests that

children be taught to be open-minded to both the scientific thought behind their lessons and the religious fallout suggested by those who are anti-evolutionary thought.

References

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