Mr. Fred Edwords, Humanist: How do you understand the relationship(s) between science and your religious or secular tradition?

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Mr. Fred Edwords: 00:19

Religion is one of the topics that science explores and so therefore, rather than inform science, I think rather science can inform religion. But more importantly, I think we can learn more about religion and other aspects of culture by using the scientific approach in the fields, not only of the study of human origins, but also psychology, sociology, neurology, and so on. There's just so much that we can learn about who we are and in learning about who we are, get a better idea about what makes us religious and how we become that way or what we do with it, or the different varieties of religious expression. (01:08) These are important topics for science to discuss, but I don't think religion therefore, being something that is a product of culture, is appropriate to inform science other than what's considered to be the prophetic message of religion. That is where religion offers an ethical outlook that might inform a science behavior. But we need to understand when we do that, that religion is not the only fount for looking at ethical or moral questions. And that sometimes, religion represents a groping from the past on questions that we know very little about, and that as science learns more, then we may need the prophetic voice of religion, less and less. (02:06) As a humanist, I follow science wherever it leads when it is following the facts and it's following the data correctly. Science of course has made mistakes, oftentimes due to the cultural biases of a given time and scientists can just make mistakes anyway. But that said, it is our best means of understanding the world and it is our best means of understanding ourselves. So, from a humanist perspective, science informs us of who we are and gives us a better understanding of humanity, human nature, and how we came to be who we are. And as a result, this can guide us in deciding what we ought to do. (02:53) It can’t tell us what we ought to do, because we might find that we have elements of our character that we don’t want to give full throttle to, as it were. For example, there may be a natural human tendency toward genocide, but we don’t want to live in a world in which genocide exists. So, we want to understand what brings that out and we want to understand how we can better counteract it. So, just because we learned something ugly about ourselves, doesn't mean we have to then be ugly, but the more we know,
the more power we have over ourselves, knowledge is power. (03:32) Well, there are a number of challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. First of all, as we learn more about ourselves, we need to try to figure out, have we evolved in a manner appropriate to the society which we've created for ourselves? The society we've created for ourselves just may not match very well who we are and that could create conflicts that we may not be able to adequately overcome. Of course, the power of culture is tremendous and it has a tremendous ability to overcome a lot of things. The fact that we can have genocide treaties in our time that outlaw this practice and can set up political systems whereby these actions are discouraged, shows the power of culture over nature. But how far does that extend? This is where the challenge is going to come because as we advance culturally, as we build a more and more complex society, is that society going to be sustainable? (04:44) Are we going to bump into a reality that's going to force us to recognize our limitations? And also, is religion a natural tendency of human nature, such that it can get in the way of our success, of our thriving, of our wellbeing? We've certainly found that certain forms of religion can be a serious challenge to human wellbeing and human flourishing. So, we have to look at that honestly, and looking at these things honestly, when religion plays a strong political role, is really hard to do. That's one of the major challenges that we face now and could well continue to face in various ways in the future. (05:38) In our world today, religion is a major force for billions of people and therefore, it's a force to be reckoned with. To the degree then, that scientists can work hand-in-glove with traditionally religious people to accomplish better goals for humanity, such as preserving the planet's ecosystem and having sustainable behaviors by human beings. Well, that's something we need to do. That scientists do need to be willing to work with people of faith in order to save the planet. (06:15) You can't just wish people of faith away, if you don't have a faith, you have to look honestly at the situation and say, "This is the world I live in. These are the people I live with and what therefore, do I have to do to make the planet a better place?" And so, just as other aspects of culture affect the way we think, religion affects the way we think, and it affects massive segments of the population and therefore, that has to always be addressed.