

A PROOF OF THE EXISTENCE OF FAIRIES

Tink R. Bell

Here is the third of our three responses to Dawkins's The God Delusion.

In his latest book, *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins writes that belief in God is just as irrational as belief that there are fairies at the bottom of the garden. Well, I don't know about God, but we fairies resent such uncalled-for disrespect. It is bloody well time that we stood up for ourselves. Now, I know perfectly well that this is an age of skeptical disbelief, and that all kinds of high-minded and self-appointed debunkers have had their go at us. Admittedly, there have been famous frauds perpetuated in the name of demonstrating our existence, like The Cottingley Fairy Hoax. But the fact that there have been bad reasons to accept us fairies does not mean that there are no good reasons.

We fairies, especially garden fairies like myself, are a shy lot. We are not prone to flashing our wings in public or making spectacles of ourselves with fancy magic tricks and the like. Well, sure, sometimes we'll do that to entertain children, but adults tend to be too unappreciative. They would just as soon try to capture one of us, stick us in a cage, and charge £10 a customer to have a look. Either that, or they would truss us up and ship us off to some unpleasant scientist like Professor Dawkins who would like nothing better than to dissect us, classify us in a phylum, or some other nasty thing. Nevertheless, despite our (justifiably!) reticent nature, regular human folks have an excellent reason to acknowledge our existence. And it's high time you do so.

I live in The Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew. No, I'm not going to tell you exactly where – the last thing I need is a bunch of gawkers and paparazzi coming out, pestering me, and keeping me from my work. What work? Well, as a garden fairy, my job is to make beautiful gardens. More precisely, my task is the creation of beauty itself. As you no doubt know, Kew Gardens has a large staff of human gardeners, all devoted

to planting of plants and their care and upkeep. Perhaps you think that it is they who make the Gardens beautiful. To be fair, we fairies have by-and-large been happy to let you believe this fiction. However, I need to set the record straight here – human beings do not make beautiful gardens. Fairies do, and that's the end of it.

Let me explain. The humans who work in any garden, from my home at Kew down to the humblest villager's windowbox, are engaged in what we might call naturalistic activities. They till, plant, prune, arrange, graft, weed, move one species into another part of the garden, change out the plantings by season, and so on. The more scientific ones at my home do things like the 'cryopreservation of seeds and pollen' and worry about 'micropropagation' and other technical-sounding activities. My point is that none of these things amount to beautification.

'Beauty' is a non-natural property. It is non-natural in the sense that the philosopher Robert Adams discusses: it 'cannot be stated entirely in the language of physics, chemistry, biology, and human or animal psychology.' But let me tell you, beauty is a real thing in the world. Who among you is so cold-hearted as to deny that there is beauty in a piece of music, a poem, a painting, the face of a lover, an artful bed of tulips? You might well start pontificating that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder,' or some other such cynical nonsense. Are you going to start saying the same thing about the non-natural property of morality? That it too is merely in the eye of beholder? Of course not. No, you may dispute about the degree to which something is beautiful or ugly, lovely or unlovely, but that is merely to debate the measurement of those aesthetic qualities. To engage in such a debate at all is already to concede that there are aesthetic properties. The aesthetic qualities themselves are there, real, and not some physical things that one might pick apart on a lab bench.

Some clever humans (they call themselves 'metaphysicians') have suggested that physical qualities give rise to aesthetic ones in this sense: if you have two gardens, with exactly the same flowers, creepers, shrubs, etc., and these are arranged in precisely the same way, and in the same state of

health and bloom, then the two gardens must have the same aesthetic qualities. If the first garden is lovely then so is the second. If the first garden is a visual abomination, then so is the second. As the metaphysicians say, 'aesthetic properties supervene on the physical ones.'

Yes, yes, that's so, and, as I said, clever to figure it out. But have the smarty-pants metaphysicians ever stopped to think about why the beauty of a garden supervenes on the physical properties of the plants? It is because *we fairies make it so*. I mean, honestly. The supervenience idea isn't going to let us reduce or eliminate beauty or ugliness in favor of purely natural properties. Temperature may be mean molecular kinetic energy, but that doesn't mean that a half-pint of bitter (a whole pint is a bit of a bender for a fairy) at the Flower and Firkin doesn't really have the property of being cool to the touch. Likewise, the recognition that the loveliness of a bed of roses is invariably connected with the colour, health, and arrangement of the flowers does not mean that they aren't really lovely at all. Of course they are.

Recall what Immanuel Kant wrote in *The Critique of Practical Reason* about another non-natural property, namely morality. He said that the only way that reason can conceive of 'the exact harmony of the kingdom of nature with the kingdom of morals, which is the condition of the possibility of the summum bonum; and at the same time the only one conducive to morality' is upon 'the assumption of a wise Author of the world' that guarantees that harmony. Just so. There is no connection between natural properties and moral properties unless there is a wise Author of the world who creates and sustains that connection.

Likewise there is an aesthetic order to the world that makes the appreciation and understanding of beauty a rational enterprise. And the aesthetic order of the world requires a guarantor no less than the moral order. Lucky for you it is we fairies that guarantee that order and rationality. Maybe you want to know why we fairies are so consistent, why certain sorts of gardens are always beautiful and others not, or why we are so diligent about holding to the supervenience principle. Why

do we choose to do so? Well, certain things are private. There is a fairy code of omertà, after all.

So again, it is your humble, hardworking fairy at the bottom of the garden who ensures its loveliness, and warranties the connection between your diligence in gardening, your careful selection of plants, your painstaking watering, weeding, pruning, and care, with the beauty that follows. And while we fairies are not generally a vindictive lot, should Professor Dawkins wonder why he lacks a 'green thumb', he would do well to consider that a lack of gratitude to the garden fairies may be behind it.

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