

This is the text of a video published on youtube. Since it touches logical and philosophical subjects it is here transcribed for the purpose of an in-depth discussion. Numbers were added to the sentences for easier identification of text passages.

Open-mindedness

by QualiaSoup

1. Sub-title: A look at some of the flawed thinking that prompts people who believe in certain non-scientific concepts to advise others who don't to be more open-minded.

Text:

2. It seems to be an extremely common experience amongst people who don't believe in certain non-scientific concepts to be told by others who do to be more open-minded. 3. This advice is typically based on highly flawed thinking including an inaccurate understanding on what open-mindedness is. 4. In fact, being open-minded simply means being willing to consider new ideas. 4b. Science promotes and thrives on open-mindedness because the advancement of our understanding about the reality in which we exist depends upon our willingness to consider new ideas. 4c. Indeed, scientific discovery often requires entirely new ways of thinking.

5. However not only disbelief in certain non-scientific concepts not automatically make you open minded. It can often lead to be the complete opposite. 6. A neighbor of mine once noticed a moving lamp-shade in my front room and said it was a ghost. 7. When I told him it wasn't he said 'you've got the evidence in front of you!' and said I was stubbornly close-minded and had no curiosity. 8. When he finished his little outburst I reached down and switched off the small fan heater underneath the lamp to stop its currents of warm air from moving the shade.

9. It was actually my neighbor who'd had no curiosity in this situation. 10. He'd leapt to an immediate conclusion and dismissed all alternatives.

11. When you label an event supernatural just because it has no explanation that is obvious to you, you'll evidently misinterpret evidence and make invalid causal connections. 12. You'll eliminate whole rounds of alternative explanation before it is even clear which explanations might be appropriate. 13. And that's the very definition of close-mindedness.

14. People who tell others to be more open-minded about so-called supernatural concepts often accompany this advice with one of more personal anecdotes they claim can't be explained. 15. This is another flawed approach. 16. Even if your experience can't be explained that in no way strengthens the case for any supernatural concept. 17. All it shows is that your experience can't be explained. 18. Trying to suggest that a lack of explanation is evidence to supernatural powers are at work is actually a contradiction. 19. In effect what it's saying is „I can't explain something, therefore I can explain it“. 20. The unexplained is just that: unexplained.

21. Furthermore, although it's quite reasonable to describe an experience and say you can't explain it, telling your audience they can't explain it is senseless because your audience has no independent access to the events you describe nor any way of investigating which details you may have missed or edited out. 22. If my neighbor had told other people that I had to accept his ghost story because I couldn't explain the moving lamp-shade, how would anyone be able to agree or disagree without knowing anything about the fan heater? 23. Expecting others just to take your word that you had your brush with the supernatural is simply unrealistic. 24. Even if I saw someone disappear right in front of me I'd recognize how unreasonable it would be to a complete stranger just to believe me without cooperating evidence, however personally frustrating that might feel.

25. Someone once tried to suggest to me that scientists who ask for evidence before accepting claims are as close-minded as witch-doctors. 26. The idea that requiring evidence makes you close-minded is a fallacy. 27. A willingness to consider new ideas doesn't commit you to accepting them unconditionally.

28. If someone you love is lying injured and unconscious and a complete stranger told you she had some magic powder that would cause instant healing if poured into the wounds, would you just accept this strangest claim? 29. Would it be close-minded not to let her pour a substance you know nothing about into the open wounds of someone you love?

30. We are all sceptical about some things. 31. If Alfie isn't sceptical about the existence of ghosts and Beth is, it may be that Beth's experience about other people's flawed evidence and logic is giving us strong reasons to be sceptical. 32. Now if Alfie develops a valid operational definition for what ghosts are supposed to be and produces valid evidence Beth might one day re-evaluate and accept their existence. 33. But it is important to remember that unless Beth says something like 'ghosts do not exist' she has made no factual claim requiring justification or indicating a closed mind.

34. I have watched a number of people worked themselves up into a froth about me having a closed mind on some paranormal issue only to realize when they start listening carefully that I don't actually hold the views they rushedly attributed to me. 35. For example when I say 'I don't believe in something' I've not said it can't be true. 36. All I've said is that I've not yet been presented with persuasive evidence for it. 37. Now if someone describes an entity to me that is logically impossible, then in that specific case I might well say X can not be true and I back up my statement. 38. But it's a classic debating trick to exaggerate and therefore misrepresent another person's position. 39. And when you treat someone's statement of non-believe as an assertion that something cannot be true this is exactly what you are doing. 40. If you have difficulty accepting that other people don't share your beliefs, then that's unfortunate for you because there is a lot of difference out there. 41. But if knowing that someone's beliefs differ from yours causes you to lose a sense of perspective when talking to them, so that as soon as you hear certain trigger words you start crafting inaccurately assumed attitudes onto them you are no longer communicating.. 42. You are merely rehearsing your own prejudices, and that's TRULY close-minded.

43. In the course of my life I have been told to be more open-minded by people that believe in a god but not in reincarnation and people that believe in reincarnation but not gods. 44. Both groups seem quite happy for others to express skepticism when they do but not when they don't. For these people, open-mindedness seems to mean 'agreeing with me'.

45. Then there are others whose ideas of open-mindedness is accepting the unreliable testimony of any person with a spooky story. 46. These people are often also fiercely sceptical of science. Certain comments can quickly reveal that poor understanding what it is (figure says 'Science can never make up its mind' and 'Science thinks it has it all figured out'). 47. And this results in two supreme ironies. 48. One is that they are guilty of exactly the same sceptical attitude they criticize in other people. 49. The other reason is what they're reserving their criticism for is a domain that emphasizes skepticism. In other words they are sceptical of scepticism.

50. Again, open-mindedness isn't about believing things, so believing in more paranormal things than the next person doesn't make you more open-minded, though it can be a sign that you are more gullible. (Figure shows a podium with a person c thinking of 'lycanthropy' on third place, a person b who thinks 'mermaids, unicorns, ouija boards' on second place and person a that thinks 'homoeopathy, fairies, telenikesis, aura-reading, crystal healing, devils, numerology, graphology' on first place). 51. And despite what some people would have as belief, it's not a virtue to be easily

persuaded by people. 52. Those who say it is and that requiring evidence is close-minded clearly wouldn't survive one day in a court of law. 53. After all, what does a person with that attitude do in any situation where there is more than one version of events? 54. And is it close-minded to require evidence of someone's guilt before locking them up? 55. These attitudes don't stand up for a moment in the real world.

56. It would be absurd to suggest that we need evidence for everything that we're told. 57. When a friend tells us about a day at work we don't ask them to back up what they say. 58. And we don't stop enjoying films and stories just because they contain incredible events. 59. But when someone is trying to persuade us to accept some as fact or take some sort of risk demanding valid evidence helps us distinguish true claims from false ones, and that's an invaluable ability in a world where believing false claims can seriously damage your wealth and your health.

60. Critical thinking is not incompatible with open-mindedness. 61. On the contrary it empowers an open mind. 62. Even though demanding valid evidence may lead you occasionally to reject ideas that are poorly supported but nonthe less valid, even when accumulate for those ideas an open mind will allow you to reconsider them and possibly dislodge false ideas you've previously accepted as true. 63. This approach is promoted by science.

64. By contrast, when you have an open mind but demand little or no evidence before accepting things you leave your understanding of reality much more up to chance. 65. Even worse, if you've accepted false ideas uncritically and close your mind to anything that contradicts them you won't recognize true ideas even when the evidence is overwhelming and you'll sabotage your own capacity for learning.

66. If you believe in super-scientific and super-natural concepts that's your privilege. If you want to put forward your personal reasons for believing in them, understanding that whoever is listening may have questions or find flaws in your arguments that's fine. 67. But if you're in a habit of targeting individuals that you've never met and suggest they are in some ways deficient just because they don't believe in these concepts, if you reject conflicting evidence and counter arguments without consideration but demand that others accept your arguments and what you regard as evidence uncritically, not only is that close-minded -- it's controlling, arrogant, and presumtious in the extreme. 68. More importantly, when you're trying to make it seem unreasonable for someone to want evidence before changing a significant attitude or take a significant risk, the mere fact that your claim requires a suspension of critical thinking should indicate it's not the other person that needs to demand less evidence but you that needs to demand more.

69. Before presuming to advise others to more open-minded think about some of the widely accepted ideas you dismiss without consideration. 70. You might need the advice you're dispensing far more than other people. 71. Remember too that an open mind that demands little or no evidence for ideas before accepting them will let in awful lot of rubbish