

Not My Children:

A Response to Paulson's "The Flying Spaghetti Monster"

Ted Wilkenfeld

Professor Moriarty

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Abstract

This paper discusses the personal response of the author to Steve Paulson's work, "The Flying Spaghetti Monster." The author interjects his own personal experiences about the debate between religion and science, particularly as it relates to child-rearing.

Keywords: child-rearing, science, religion, separation of church and state, atheism

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"The Flying Spaghetti Monster by Steve Paulson is a thrilling exploration of the inner workings of atheism and its condemnation of religion. In this work, Steve Paulson interviews Richard Dawkins, an outspoken scientist and atheist. Paulson's discussions with Dawkins are interesting. Dawkins discusses the evils of faith and contends that religion is without fact and contains unquestioned faith. Further, Dawkins posits that religion is most problematic when scriptures of any faith are interpreted literally. Towards the close of his piece, Paulson and Dawkins explore how early religious teachings harm children and is in itself a form of child abuse.

My response to Paulson's piece is that I agree that religion is problematic, as it, as Dawkins suggests, hinders science and the acceptance of science. Moreover, I agree that religion is most problematic when taken exclusively literally. Religious texts, in my opinion, should never be taken literally, as most texts are generalized in their intent and their content is outdated. Even as Paulson and Dawkins discuss the significance of the Holy Bible, I find that most of it contains lessons and contexts which are well-over two thousand years old. Furthermore, I strongly agree with the idea that early religious teachings are child abuse. They are.

I remember being a child in a religious school, watching the teachers slap our hands when we did not perform to their expectations or conform to their behavioral standards. All the while, I wondered, how would any loving God accept such things. Moreover, why would we need to learn things from ancient books. If God wanted something done a particular way, wouldn't he just reveal it to us collectively? In hindsight, I kept thinking that perhaps God didn't want to reveal things like that for fear of critics and skeptics. However, as things work now, there are many more skeptics.

I asked my parents if I could leave the church. My mother who was very devote renounced my decision but generally supported by intellectual curiosity. Likewise, my father who was more or less an atheist supported such things immeasurably. So, on Sundays, following my release from the religious

school, I stayed home with my father. And, as Dawkins suggests, he did indeed discuss things that were moral and ethical with me. He never had to refer to a scripture. He never had to refer to a God. He would proceed a lesson with either: That's illegal or that's the wrong thing to do. He would convey his lessons with the simple idea: You could go to jail or you could lose what is most important to you. And, so these lessons permeated my life and seemed much more substantial than those learned at the end of a ruler by sister so-and-so.

To this day, I have felt as though I escaped the mental abuse of my peers, who were misled, misinformed, and mistreated. Some of them abused by priests sexually, physically, or mentally, and some simply lost when confronted with a theological challenge such as: My life is crappy, so where is my god? So, I agree with Dawkin's synopsis of the situation when he says, "I think that it's child abuse not to let the child have the free choice of knowing there are other people who believe something quite different and the child could make its own choice" (p.373).

Children need to have freedoms; however, they need guidance. Some people believe that religious upbringings and guidance are important. Yet, Dawkins brings in a great explanation of how things should work ideally: "Your mother and I believe that it's wrong to eat meat for this, that, and the other reason. We are vegetarians. You can decide when you're older whether you want to be a vegtairan or not. But for the moment, you're living in this house, so the food we give you is not meat" (p.373). I think that personal preference is good for parents and for children. But, adults should be logical and use evidence and model such things for children. As I was reading this section of the Paulson text, I was reminded of how I teach my children. When my child does something wrong or something bad, I quickly stop them in their tracks. I tell them not to do what they were doing. Then, I always explain why. With the evidence and the facts, the children are able to easily process the wrong and the right. These conditions are similar to what Dawkins suggest. They do not need the fear of god. I never even mention it. However, they do need to know the repercussions of such actions or its effects.

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.