

No, Virginia, There is no Santa Claus



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"The Self Owner" is an original column appearing every Wednesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Spencer W. Morgan. Spencer is a husband and father, and has studied History and Philosophy at the University of Utah. Archived columns can be found [here](#). OVP-only RSS feed available [here](#).

Every Holiday season, Francis Church's famous editorial reply to a question asked by 8-year old Virginia Hanlon in 1897 makes it's way through the popular culture. Although generally upheld as an icon of holiday sentiment, and the "giving spirit," I find the editorial to be deeply disturbing. I can't recall a time in my childhood when I did not at least suspect Santa Claus to be a falsehood. Ever since the reality was confirmed for me as a child, I have been disturbed by this famous editorial both because of its efforts to substitute the *believed* for the real, and for it's callous failure to simply give a child the truth about reality they are seeking.

Children are trusting by nature, and highly dependent on those around them as a barometer about reality. Conflicting messages can lead to a deep mistrust, especially when asserted as a matter of authority or on the basis of fear of punishment as psychologist James Kimmell has explained.

Rather than dissect the problems with this editorial line-by-line, or take a systematic look at the metaphysically and epistemologically monstrous assertions it makes, I have chosen to write the reply Virginia should have received. A careful contrast between my reply and the original should reveal my specific concerns.

"DEAR EDITOR: I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, 'If you see it in THE SUN [newspaper] it's so.' Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus?"

Virginia, your friends are correct. They probably have done a lot of thinking about the parts of the Santa Claus story that seem, and are indeed, impossible. They may have even seen their parents hiding presents or laying them out on Christmas Eve instead of Santa Claus. You are old enough now, being 8 years old, that you have probably thought of some of these things yourself and would have figured this out on your own soon. Santa Claus is not

real. Your mind is strong, and it is the only tool you have for deciding things about the world. Don't ever let anyone tell you that your mind is something that is broken, or that you should set it aside in favor of what others have decided for you.

I'm not going to tell you that your parents didn't lie to you when they told you Santa was real, because they did. But I want to help you understand some of the reasons *why* most parents tell this lie to their children. You should also ask them about it. I am sure your parents want you to trust them, and once they realize that you know the truth about Santa Claus, will help you to understand why they did it.

There are a lot of traditions in this world people enjoy. A tradition is something that gets passed down from parents to children, and people just sort of go along with it because it's always how things have been done. My parents taught me about Santa Claus, as did theirs and theirs before them.

Our parents love us, and every year they enjoy seeing the happiness that they can bring us through giving gifts. For many people, it is embarrassing to take credit for a gift and it is easier and more fun to give a gift when someone doesn't know it came from you. Have you ever given someone a present secretly? Wasn't it really fun seeing how surprised and happy they were without them knowing it was you who gave them the present? Pretending to be Santa Claus every year is just a fun way for your parents to give you gifts without you knowing they came from them.

You are a very smart girl, Virginia. I'm sure you would have figured this out soon even if I did not tell you. Now that you know the secret about the Santa Claus game, I hope you have a lot of fun with your friends, family and your future children giving them secret presents at Christmas time. But please don't feel like you ever need to lie to them about something you know isn't real.