

# Finding Faith

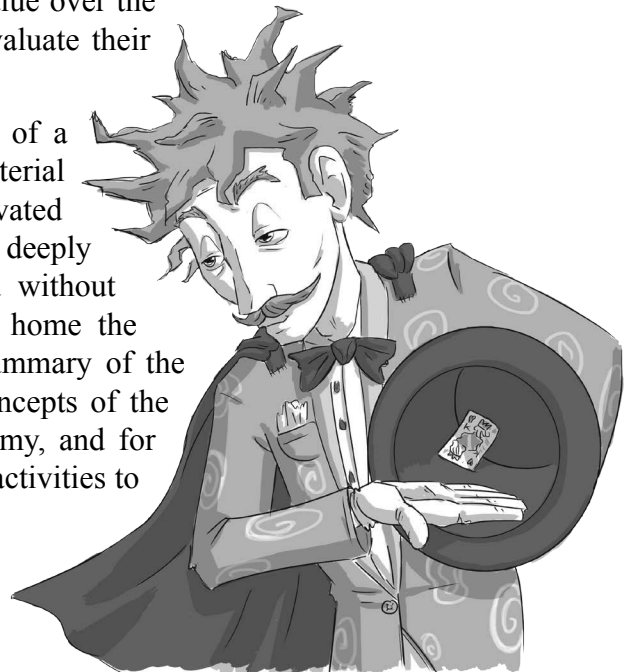
*Finding Faith* is an introduction to philosophy for intellectually adventuresome children. As the fifth volume in the Royal Fireworks philosophy curriculum, it is designed to be suitable for children in fourth grade. Because philosophy is so richly layered, however, this volume could be of interest to children who have advanced beyond the fourth grade—perhaps significantly so—as well as younger children who are ready for and excited about *Finding Faith*'s challenging new concepts. Although it presupposes no prior familiarity with philosophy, it is loosely linked to other volumes in Royal Fireworks' philosophy curriculum.

*Finding Faith* is less of a textbook and more of a junior novel, with mind-opening ideas and activities conveyed through concepts and events working together. Its thirteen chapters aim to impart three central philosophical skills: *following a complex argument*, *suspending judgment*, and *having the courage of your convictions*. Great thinkers throughout history have used these skills to build and transform the intellectual world.

*Finding Faith* explores arguments for and against the existence of God. Some people may regard religion as a touchy subject, inappropriate for children to discuss. Any child studying philosophy, however, must discuss this subject because philosophers have been arguing about God since the very beginning.

The four main philosophers presented in this book—Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, and Pascal—are classic in the original sense: judged as the having the highest value over the test of time. The characters in the story discuss and evaluate their views from atheist, Christian, and Buddhist perspectives.

This companion book is called a “Guidebook” instead of a “Teacher Manual” in recognition of the fact that the material within its pages may be of interest to especially motivated children or to older children who want to delve more deeply into the content. Of course, the story can be enjoyed without the Guidebook, but the Guidebook will help to bring home the philosophical content. It provides for each chapter a summary of the plot developments, a philosophical basis for the key concepts of the chapter, discussion questions based on Bloom's Taxonomy, and for some chapters, suggestions for further exploration or for activities to extend the learning.



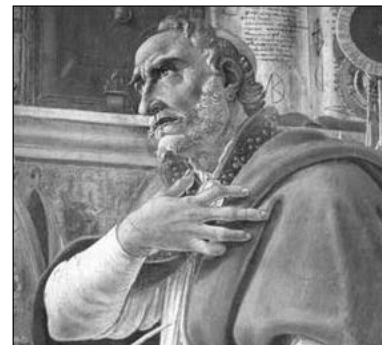
# Chapter Two: Why Will Is an Atheist

## Summary

Vida convinces Will to take the number ten trolley to The Loop, an amusement park, just as the note says, to find Faith. On the way, Will tells Vida that the note can't be from God because God does not exist.

## Philosophical Basis

Why do bad things happen to good people? Almost everyone asks this question at some point in their lives. Philosophers call it the **Problem of Suffering** (or the Problem of Evil). Atheism provides an answer: There is no god to take care of us, so there is no reason to expect life to be good. Theists, however, believe in God. But how can they defend him from the charge of being cruel and unfair?



The ancient Roman philosopher Augustine spent his entire life trying to answer this question. He lived during the fall of the Roman Empire—a very difficult time, when tragedy was all around. His own son died at the age of sixteen.

Augustine's first answer to the problem of suffering is known as the Free Will Defense. God gave human beings the gift of free will so that we could choose how to live instead of following orders like robots. Some people make bad choices, and this causes suffering.

The problem with the free will defense is that only some suffering is caused by bad choices. Other suffering is the result of natural causes, such as cancer or tornadoes. Why does God let nature hurt innocent people?

Augustine proposed several answers to this question. His main conclusion was that there really are no innocent people. Since all of us make bad choices from time to time, all of us deserve to suffer. But we should not regard suffering as a bad thing because it can teach us to be strong and compassionate. This solution is called "the virtue defense." Part of having faith in God is having faith that he always makes sure things work out for the best in the end. Augustine wrote, "God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist."

## Discussion Questions

### 1. Remembering

What happened to Will and Vida's parents?

### 2. Understanding

Why doesn't God exist, according to Will?

### 3. Applying

If you were on the trolley with Will and Vida, what would you have added to their debate?

### 4. Analyzing

Vida compares God to a strict but widely admired teacher at her school. Is this a good or a bad comparison? Why? What makes it good? What might be wrong with it?

### 5. Evaluating

Will claims that no god would have let his parents die in a bad accident. Would a good god allow people to suffer? Explain.

### 6. Creating

Gran told Vida that "Some bad stuff happens because people make the wrong choices, and other bad stuff happens in order to make us strong." Think of examples she might use to illustrate each kind of bad stuff.

# Chapter Three: Anselm's Ontological Proof

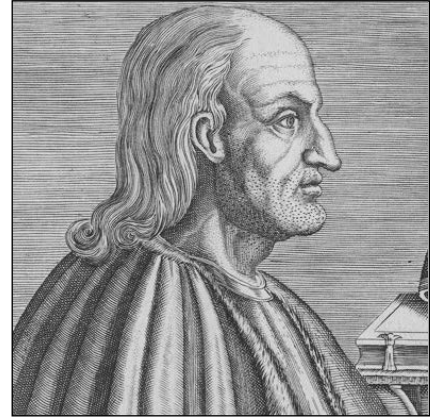
## Summary

Will and Vida meet Anselmo the Great, The Loop's magician. Having overheard their conversation on the trolley, he offers to show them his favorite trick. Using the King of Hearts, he tries to prove that God cannot exist in the mind alone.

## Philosophical Basis

During the Middle Ages, Christianity became the dominant social force in Europe. The Church tightly controlled what people read and wrote, and as a result, philosophy did not thrive. After Augustine died, there were almost no important philosophers for 500 years. Then, at last, Anselm of Canterbury turned up.

Even though everyone was officially required to believe in God, there were plenty of secret atheists. Anselm thought it would be nice to provide these doubters with an argument for God's existence. Anselm's argument—known as the **Ontological Proof**—is one of the most famous and most disputed arguments in the history of philosophy. (*Ontos* comes from the Greek word for being.)



Anselm's argument hinges on determining what it means for God to be perfect. Anselm saw the whole universe as ordered in a hierarchy like a deck of cards, in which an ace is worth the least, then the two, then the three, and so on up to the king, which is worth the most. God is like the King of Hearts in a card game in which hearts is trump. In such a game, it is impossible for any card to be superior to the King of Hearts. Anselm wrote, "God [is]... a being, than which none greater can be conceived."

Anselm believed that once atheists fully understand the definition of God as a perfect being, they will not be able to deny his existence.

## Discussion Questions

- 1. Remembering**  
Which card does Anselmo the Great use to represent God?
- 2. Understanding**  
Why is Anselmo wearing a blue costume with a cape?
- 3. Applying**  
Would you listen to a stranger in a funny costume talk to you about the existence of God? Why or why not?
- 4. Analyzing**  
Will agrees with Anselmo that God exists in his mind. Do you agree with them? Could God exist in the mind of someone who doesn't believe in him? Explain.
- 5. Evaluating**  
Do you think it was wrong for Will and Vida to follow Anselmo through the "Employees Only" door? Explain your view.
- 6. Creating**  
Think of three ways that Vida and Will could have gotten into The Loop besides sneaking in through an unlocked door.

# Chapter Four: Anselm's Ontological Proof, Continued

## Summary

Anselmo gets Will to agree that God exists in his mind and that God is perfect. However, a being with existence in the world is more perfect than a being without existence. So, he concludes, if God is perfect, then Will must agree that God has existence in the world.

## Philosophical Basis

Anselm established that, whether you are an atheist or a theist, you must think of God as the most perfect being. If you think of him as something less than that, then you just don't understand what God is. The most perfect being has all the best attributes—all knowledge, all power, all love, etc. The crucial step in Anselm's argument is to assert that existence is one of those attributes. Let's look at that assertion a little more carefully.

Anselm said that there are **two different kinds of existence**: existence only in the mind, and existence both in the mind and in the world. He used an analogy to help establish this claim, writing, "When a painter imagines what he is going to paint, he has it in his mind.... Once he paints it, he has it both in his mind and in the world."

Anselm further asserted that these two kinds of existence are attributes that something can have or lack. If he was right about this, then a perfect being would have to have the better of the two—namely, existence in the mind and in the world.

But is Anselm right about this? A monk named Gaunilo famously attacked Anselm's argument by asserting that you could bring anything into existence that way. Imagine the perfect island. It has all the best attributes—beautiful beach, pleasant temperature, tropical fruits, no mosquitoes, etc. But now, how can this island exist only in your mind? If it really is perfect, then it should have the best kind of existence, which is existence both in the mind and in the world.

Clearly, something is wrong in this reasoning. But does it show that Anselm's reasoning was wrong? That is up to you to decide!

## Discussion Questions

### 1. Remembering

How do Vida and Will describe God?

### 2. Understanding

Why can't God exist only in the mind, according to Anselmo?

### 3. Applying

Can you think of anything in the world that is perfect? If so, what is it, and what makes it perfect?

### 4. Analyzing

Will says that God doesn't have a physical form but instead is a spirit. Can something that is a spirit without form exist in the real world? Explain.



# Chapter Five: The Fujimotos and Buddhism

## Summary

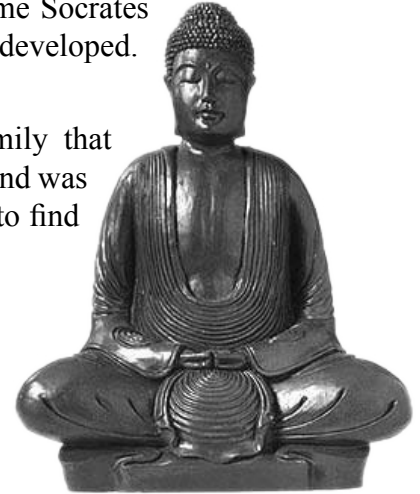
On their way to look for Faith in a ride at The Loop called Aladdin's Castle, Will and Vida run into X and Kaida "Foo" Fujimoto. The Fujimotos tell Will and Foo about Buddhism and join their search for Faith.

## Philosophical Basis

Buddhism is a religion that started in ancient India at about the same time Socrates lived in Greece. As Buddhism spread across Asia, many different branches developed. Today, there are an estimated 500 million Buddhists worldwide.

Buddhism's founder, Siddhartha Gautama, was born to a wealthy family that sheltered him from the world. When he grew up, he went out on his own and was shocked to learn about poverty, disease, and old age. He left his family to find wisdom. Through rigorous study, he discovered four noble truths:

1. Life is full of suffering.
2. Suffering is caused by attachment to unimportant things (toys, candy, TV, popularity, etc).
3. It is possible to detach from unimportant things and therefore to stop suffering.
4. Buddhism provides the path to detachment.



The Buddhist path involves meditating and **living mindfully**, which means focusing on what is important. The ultimate release from unimportant concerns is called nirvana, and a person who reaches nirvana is called a Buddha, which means "enlightened one." Siddhartha Gautama became a Buddha at the age of thirty-five. Since he is the only one to have accomplished this so far, he is known as *the* Buddha. The Buddha wrote, "We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves."

There are many points of comparison and contrast between Buddhism and Christianity. Both value faith. While Christians teach faith in God, Buddhists teach faith in the path of living mindfully. Buddha wrote, "No one saves us but ourselves. No one can, and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path."

## Discussion Questions

1. **Remembering**  
What is the goal of Buddhism, according to Foo?
2. **Understanding**  
Why do the Fujimotos agree with Will about the note?
3. **Applying**  
Foo says that the goal of Buddhism is to have a peaceful state of mind and a clear head, which she says helps you to be a better person. Do you agree that these things make someone a better person? If so, how? If not, what can someone do to make him- or herself a better person?
4. **Analyzing**  
Why do you think Foo is uncomfortable discussing Buddhism with Will and Vida?

5. **Evaluating**

When Foo explains Buddhism to Will, he looks like he wants to respond, but he doesn't. What do you think he would have said? Do you think it was better for him to keep quiet, or should he have responded?

6. **Creating**

X tells Will that different people picture the Buddha in different ways. What do you think someone who achieved enlightenment would look like? Why do you think that?

**For Further Exploration**

- If you do not already know how, it can be useful to learn how to meditate. Meditation can allow you to find inner peace and to live mindfully. Learn how at a website called "How to Begin Zen Mediation" [[www.wikihow.com/Begin-Zen-Meditation-\(Zazen\)](http://www.wikihow.com/Begin-Zen-Meditation-(Zazen))].
- Try meditating. Go to a quiet place, or use a meditation video. There are dozens of good videos on the internet that contain soft, calming music and beautiful images (see, for example, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=tojbwlr5ebQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tojbwlr5ebQ)).

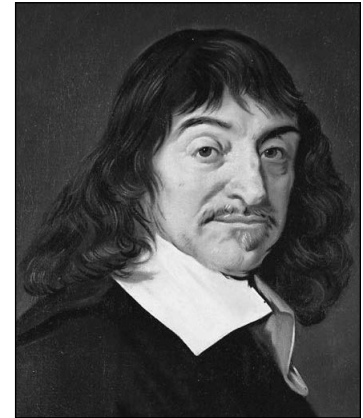
# Chapter Nine: Descartes's Perfect Idea in an Imperfect Mind

## Summary

Will enters the kids in a cake decorating contest at the hotel by Wolf Trap Casino. The contest is to make a cake representing faith, so they make a replica of the casino with Faith jumping off the roof into Vida's arms.

## Philosophical Basis

Recall that Thomas Aquinas tried to prove God's existence from observations of the world. The early modern philosopher René Descartes argued that observations of the world are inconclusive—they leave open too many questions about what is real versus what is only perceived to be real. Descartes therefore rejected Aquinas's Five Ways and returned to Anselm's search for proof based on the idea of God.



Like Aquinas, Descartes offered several different ways. The most original and interesting comes from **introspection**—examining the contents of our minds. Descartes looked into his mind and noted how weak and imperfect it was. For example, given a difficult math problem, he may or may not get the answer right. Yet there was one thing in his mind that was strong and perfect—namely, the idea of God. Where could this idea have come from?

Descartes realized that his parents may have talked to him about God when he was a child. Or he may have read about God in a book. But when these sources referred to God, he already knew what they were talking about. They did not give him the idea but only called attention to an idea that was already there. How did it get there?

Descartes considered the possibility that he made up the idea of God. But this would be like a monkey writing the works of Shakespeare. Someone with a weak and imperfect mind cannot make a strong and perfect idea. He wrote, “Ideas exist in me as pictures or images, which may, in truth, fall short of the perfection of the objects from which they are taken, but can never contain anything greater or more perfect.... The idea of a being more perfect than myself must of necessity have proceeded from a being in reality more perfect.” He concluded that God must exist.

Critics of Descartes's argument point out that no one ever fully grasps God's perfection. Just as we understand the idea of an infinite series of numbers by writing the first few numbers with an ellipsis after them (1, 2, 3...), we understand the idea of God by thinking of ordinary knowledge, power, and love and then extending them to infinity. Perhaps this is something that an imperfect and weak mind can do all by itself.

## Discussion Questions

### 1. Remembering

What does Ms. Descartes thank God for in her prayer?

### 2. Understanding

Why does Vida half-expect Will to get up and walk out when he hears the theme?

3. **Applying**

Vida describes the other contestants' cakes, which are all made to look like religious symbols. But Team Ten's cake shows an action. Which do you think is the better way of illustrating something as complex as faith? Explain your answer.

4. **Analyzing**

How is Ms. Descartes's idea of God similar to or different from that of the Great Anselmo?

5. **Evaluating**

In her prayer, Ms. Descartes claims that we know God is real because we never could have made up such a perfect concept. But is she correct? Is it possible for imperfect people to create a concept of something perfect in their minds? Defend your answer.

6. **Creating**

If you were a contestant in the cake decorating contest, how would you have designed your cake?



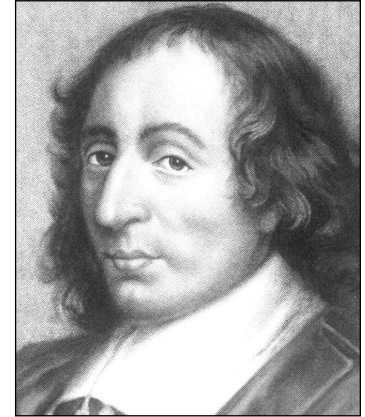
# Chapter Eleven: Pascal's Wager

## Summary

While Blaise Pascal runs a data search for evidence of a puppy on the premises, she tells the kids why she sees faith in God as a gamble worth betting on.

## Philosophical Basis

The early modern philosopher Blaise Pascal was a child prodigy who made many important contributions in math and science. For example, he invented the first calculating machine in history at the age of nineteen. He also knew René Descartes. Unfortunately, he suffered poor health all his life and died at the age of thirty-nine.



As a young man, Pascal spent time with a group of intellectuals who loved to gamble. They were fascinated with the challenge of trying to estimate their chances of winning under various conditions. In particular: How many times would you have to roll two dice to ensure getting a six? This is the question that prompted Pascal and his friend Pierre de Fermat to develop **probability theory**, the branch of mathematics that concerns random events.

Many of Pascal's gambling friends were secret atheists. Pascal himself also toyed with the possibility that God does not exist. One day, however, he almost died, and he thought that God appeared to him. When he told his friends about his experience, they told him that he was hallucinating. He admitted that he couldn't prove that God had appeared to him; maybe it was really God, but maybe it wasn't—a fifty-fifty chance. Still, given a fifty-fifty chance at eternal life, what did he have to lose? And forget fifty-fifty! If there is *any chance at all* that there exists a God who gives an infinite payoff to only those who believe in him, then believing is the smarter bet.

Reasoning in this way, Pascal used his probability theory to defend fideism. He wrote, "Granted that faith cannot be proved, what harm will come to you if you bet on its truth and it proves false? If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Bet, then, without hesitation, that God exists."

## Discussion Questions

### 1. Remembering

What are the chances of God's existence, according to Ms. Pascal?

### 2. Understanding

Why does Pascal conclude that betting on God will always be the smarter bet?

### 3. Applying

When is flipping a coin a reasonable way to make a decision? What are some other ways of making decisions?

### 4. Analyzing

Ms. Pascal concludes that the potential payoff for betting on God is so great, you can't afford *not* to. What she doesn't factor in is the potential penalty for betting against God. Does that change the benefit of betting on God? Why or why not?

5. **Evaluating**

Ms. Pascal asserts that if God doesn't exist, time wasted praying isn't much of a waste. Do you agree? Why or why not?

6. **Creating**

Ms. Pascal says that there's a fifty-fifty chance that God exists, and as a result, there's a fifty-fifty chance that she can get eternal life by believing in him. But is the assumption about the belief in God leading to eternal life correct? What other factors might change the numbers so that eternal life is not a fifty-fifty chance (bad deeds in life, the teachings of other religions, etc.)?

**Optional Activity**

Watch the biography *Blaise Pascal* (1972), which was created as part of a series on the evolution of knowledge in Western civilization.