

Finding Faith

Level E Philosophy Curriculum
Guidebook



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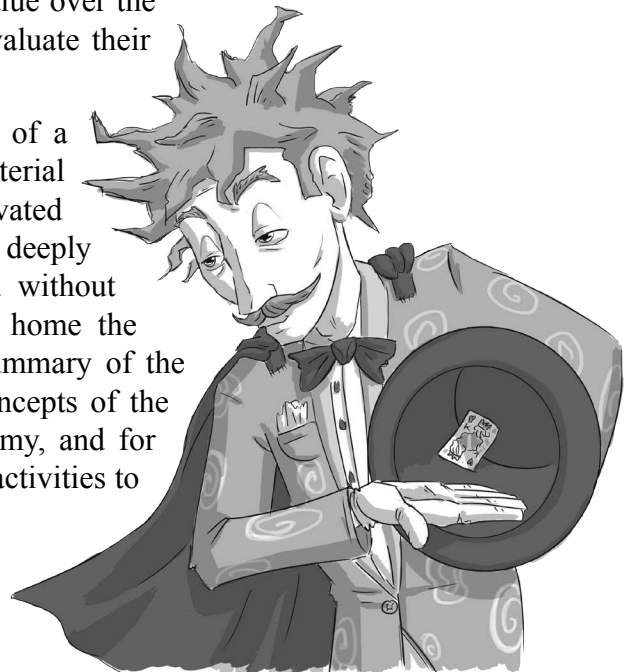
Finding Faith is an introduction to philosophy for intellectually adventuresome children. As the fifth volume in the Royal Fireworks philosophy curriculum, it is designed to be suitable for children in fourth grade. Because philosophy is so richly layered, however, this volume could be of interest to 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 One: A Disturbing Note

Summary

A girl named Vida and her brother Will live in a small, disorganized house with their grandmother. One morning, Vida finds a note from God on their printer telling them to find Faith, a runaway puppy.

Philosophical Basis

Philosophy is the search for wisdom. Wisdom certainly includes knowledge, as when Socrates said, “Know thyself.” But many philosophers have maintained that wisdom also includes **faith**. If knowledge is something you believe based on evidence, then faith is the opposite—something you believe without evidence.

Most religions teach that there are important truths that human beings should believe without evidence. In particular, three of the major religions of the world—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—are monotheistic, meaning they teach that there is one god.

On the one hand, this is a strange claim. No one has ever seen God or detected his existence with scientific instruments. This has led many people—called atheists—to deny that God exists. For example, the biologist and philosopher Richard Dawkins wrote, “Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence.”

On the other hand, many people regard human life as meaningless without a belief in God. Most of us go through the same routines day after day, week after week, year after year. Many people feel that it would be hard to endure the dull repetition of life without deriving meaning from a sense of service to a higher power. The theologian and philosopher Paul Tillich wrote, “Whoever reflects earnestly on the meaning of life is on the verge of an act of faith.”

Philosophers through the ages have been reflecting earnestly on the meaning of life while at the same time vigorously questioning religion.

Discussion Questions

1. Remembering

Why was it taking forever for Vida to get her chores done?

2. Understanding

What was unusual about the note Will and Vida found in the output tray of their printer?

3. Applying

Do you think there is a point to cleaning your room? What would you tell Vida when she said that it seems meaningless?

4. Analyzing

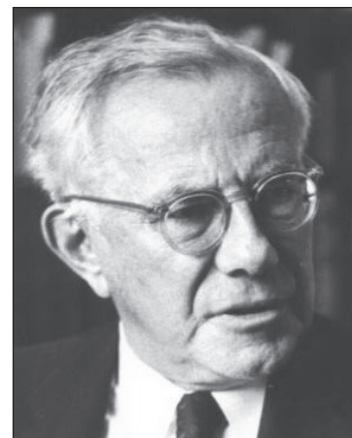
Find two instances in this chapter that Vida regards as evidence of Dog understanding. Do you think that Dog really does understand? Why or why not?

5. Evaluating

Based on what you’ve read, what do you think Gran is like? Why do you think so?

6. Creating

If you were God, how would you send a message?



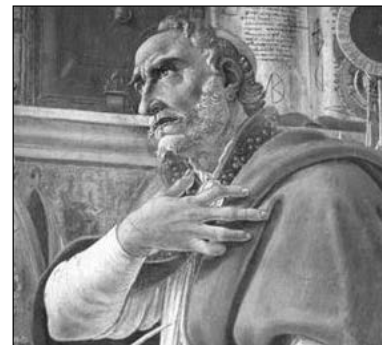
Chapter Two: Why Will Is an Atheist

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

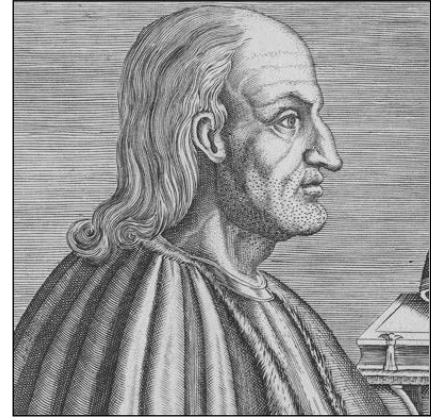
Summary

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.