

Will Power

Level F Philosophy Curriculum

Guidebook



Sharon Kaye

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Royal Fireworks Press
P.O. Box 399
41 First Avenue
Unionville, NY 10988-0399
(845) 726-4444
fax: (845) 726-3824
email: mail@rfwp.com
website: rfwp.com



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Will Power

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

Will Power is less of a textbook and more of a chapter book, with mind-opening ideas and activities conveyed through concepts and events working together. Its fourteen chapters aim to impart three central philosophical skills: ***making careful observations***, ***defending a position***, and ***tolerating ambiguity***. Great thinkers throughout history have used these skills to build and transform the intellectual world.

Will Power is about the gripping, ongoing debate between fate and free will. It falls into three parts. The first part, Chapters One through Four, explores determinism, as articulated by Marcus Aurelius and Albert Einstein; the second part, Chapters Five through Ten, examines the indeterminist views of Epicurus and Jean-Paul Sartre; the third part, Chapters Eleven through Fourteen, investigates some implications for science.

This companion book is called a “Guidebook” instead of a “Teacher Manual” in recognition of the fact that students at this level may be able to use it on their own. 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.



Part I: Determinism

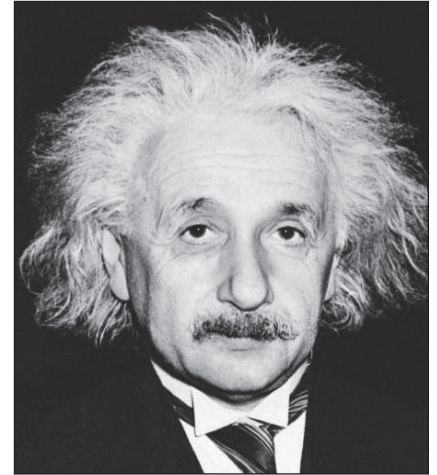
Chapter One. Something Is Wrong with Will

Summary

Kaida “Foo” Fujimoto runs into Will Hume on a bus heading to downtown Philadelphia. He shares his sketchbook with her, but she senses that he is in trouble.

Philosophical Basis

Albert Einstein studied Isaac Newton’s mechanics at school, just like all the other physicists of the early twentieth century. Unlike the others, however, Einstein noticed that Newton’s theories could not explain the behavior of electromagnetic fields. Rather than ignoring this problem, Einstein was intrigued by it and decided to investigate. This took a great deal of intellectual courage because, though seemingly small, it turned into a big problem. In the end, Einstein had to replace Newton’s mechanics with a whole new conception of physics—relativity theory—which made a great leap in scientific progress. Einstein realized that “In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.”



Throughout his career as a scientist and a philosopher, Einstein became convinced that our ability to solve problems in any field heavily depends on how we are educated. He wrote, “Education is not the learning of facts but the training of the mind to think.”

Educators call this **critical thinking**. Going beyond the memorization of information, critical thinking requires careful observation, asking specific questions, identifying problems, generating solutions, reaching conclusions, and making arguments. Critical thinking is not just for science or for school; it is a valuable skill for most aspects of life.

It is the job of philosophers to promote critical thinking whenever they can, especially when it comes to deep questions about the meaning of human existence. In this chapter, Foo demonstrates some critical thinking skills when she observes that something is wrong with Will, and she becomes intrigued. Her investigation leads to a philosophical adventure.

Discussion Questions

1. **Remembering**
What is on Will’s hat?
2. **Understanding**
How does Foo know that something is wrong when she observes Will on the bus?
3. **Applying**
If you were Will and wanted to be left alone, how would you have responded to Foo?
4. **Analyzing**
Why do you think Will’s stomach churns when he thinks about the clock inside his backpack?
5. **Evaluating**
Do you think Foo should have asked Will if he was okay? Why or why not?
6. **Creating**
If you were Foo, what would you do when you realized that Will was in trouble?

Chapter Two. Will Meets Marcus Aurelius

Summary

Will goes to a clock shop to show Marcus Aurelius his broken clock. When chimes sound, springs pop out of Will's head. Aurelius confesses that he developed a chime frequency that would reveal the human brain to be a machine.

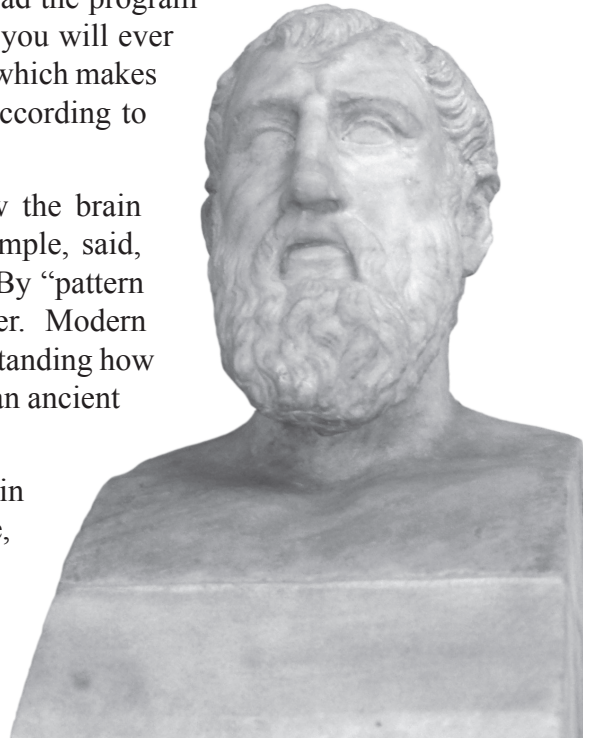
Philosophical Basis

Einstein saw human beings as natural objects that can be explained by science. He wrote, "Scientific research is based on the idea that everything that takes place is determined by laws of nature, and therefore this holds for the action of people."

This view is called **determinism**. It means that there is no such thing as free will. Suppose you make a surprising choice, such as suddenly jumping out of your chair to do a cartwheel. Determinists say that your choice was actually caused by neurons in your brain, which were programmed by your genetic makeup combined with environmental influences. If you could read the program in your brain, you would be able to predict absolutely everything you will ever do. The fact that we cannot read our programs makes us surprised, which makes us believe that we must have free will. But this belief is false, according to determinists.

Determinism is common among scientists, many of whom view the brain as a kind of machine. Science writer Michael Shermer, for example, said, "Humans evolved brains that are pattern-recognition machines." By "pattern recognition," he meant that our brains process data like a computer. Modern machines such as computers may provide a useful model for understanding how the brain works. Nevertheless, determinism can be traced back to an ancient school of philosophy called Stoicism.

A philosopher named Zeno of Citium founded a school in Athens in about 300 B.C. The school taught that virtue is based on knowledge, and wise people live in harmony with reason, which is what governs nature. This school met on a porch with a colonnade, which is called a *stoa* in Greek. The philosophy took its name from this unique setting. The Stoic school lasted several centuries. Perhaps its most famous student was the second-century Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. His book *Meditations* asserts the deterministic foundation of the Stoic philosophy: "All things seek to fulfill the law of their being."



Discussion Questions

1. Remembering

What happened to Will when Marcus Aurelius's clocks chimed?

2. Understanding

Why has Marcus Aurelius chosen the City Hall clock tower as the place to install his new chime?

3. **Applying**
If you were in Marcus Aurelius's clock shop and saw what happened to Will, would you want to help Will, or would you be more interested in helping Marcus Aurelius with his plan? Explain your answer.
4. **Analyzing**
In what ways does your brain seem like a machine, such as a computer? In what ways does it seem different?
5. **Evaluating**
Do you think it was wrong of Marcus Aurelius to install his new chime in his clocks in order to reveal what he believes is the truth? Is it okay to reveal the truth if it involves using people against their will to do it?
6. **Creating**
How could Will have saved himself if someone else hadn't helped him?