

# What is the deepest?

## A DEEPESSAY

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Andreas Thelander Bertelsen and Per Jespersen

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**A** summer afternoon in the city, noisy and busy. People hurry to and fro in the nowadays stressness, which does not leave much time for thinking and pondering. Thousands of people rush from place to place, hunting money or career. The city air is polluted, and the people's minds are polluted by stress, and they only have a slight suspicion, that they are living their lives in useless business, and they have no eyes for the small quiet park, which is situated in the middle of the infernal city.

The park is surrounded by a high wall, grey and with loose bricks, as if nobody has ever cared about this green oasis in the city. But a few people do know this place. Right now a vagabond passes the gate with his tramp and his dog. This is all he possesses: a tramp with some dirty clothes, which he has intended to wash for days, and a dog, who faithfully follows him day and night. The vagabond is talking to the dog all the time, as it is the only true friend he knows.

He takes a look around the park. He has not been here since last year, and he feels the change of the atmosphere. But the path is still there, and luckily the arbour is there, too. A very old arbour, perhaps from the last century. He used to spend the night here, although it is not allowed, but he was always able to cheat the guards, so he could spend the night in peace.

Today the sun is shining and a boy is playing with a ball against the arbour. And he thinks to himself: don't spoil this old place of mine. Suddenly the dog runs up to the boy, trying to catch his ball. The dog is in a playing kind of mood and seems to enjoy the peace of the small park. It tries to catch the ball, but in vain, as it is a soccerball, too big for its mouth.

The park is very small, so the vagabond can hear the boy talking to the dog, as if they have been knowing each other for years. Then he turns around, saying, «What a nice dog you have.» He scratches the dog's ear, continuing, «What's her name?»

«Wonder.» «What?» «Sure, her name is Wonder.»

«What a wonderful name! A dog called Wonder!

That's something.»

«That's the way it is.»

«So why exactly Wonder?»

«Well, you see - when she was only one year I went with her into a supermarket. It was not allowed, but I did it anyway. I had to find some food for her. Suddenly she disappeared, and I dared not call her. Then something happened. Wonder came up to me, wagging its tail - and do you know what it brought me?»

«No. A bone?»

«Oh no, she brought me a pizza - my favourite pizza. She had found it in the huge fridge and simply brought it to me!»

«So how could she know which kind of pizza you like?»

«Well, I don't know. That's why I named her Wonder. And I said: Good dog. You are my Wonder!»

«I see.»

«But that was not the only thing. Wonder disappeared again, went up to the shelf with cigars - I saw it with my own eyes - and found a package of cigars and brought it to me. Cuban cigars.»

«Your favourite cigars!»

«Exactly. I wondered - and was quite sure, that her name could only be Wonder. What's your name?»

«Steven. I have experienced something like your story.»

The vagabond sat down on the ground, saying, «Do you mind?»

«Of course not, it's a public park, isn't it? But why don't we sit down on the bench over there. It's more comfortable.»

«As you like, sir,» the vagabond said, smiling.

«You see,» said Steven. «I've experienced something like your story. Mom and I visited the doctor, and while he was examining me, he suddenly said: «How could you manage to make those three goals yesterday?»

«What,» I said. «How do you know? Were you there? Did you watch the game? Oh, I love soccer.»

«No, I didn't. I was working here all day.» «So how DO you know?»

«No, I didn't watch the game. Really, I didn't.» The doctor wondered for some minutes. Then he said, «So how DO I know?»

The vagabond smiled and took some old food from his tramp. «Want some?»

«No thanks, sir. I'm not hungry.» «You call me sir.»

«And you call me sir! I guess we might be friends, aren't we?»

«Sure.»

«How could Wonder know your favourite cigars?»

«And how could your doctor know about your goals?»

«The answer is blowing in the wind,» Steven said. «That's something,» the vagabond said. «And the wind?»

«There's more to the world, than our eyes can see.

«Oh,» said the vagabond. «Is that so!» «Sure,» Steven said.

«So tell me.»

«Well, I sometimes hear people talk about ethics and religion. We do it in school, too. But when I ask, what they really are talking about, I get no answer. They seem to talk about things, they don't know anything about.»

«Maybe they know, but won't tell you, because you're too small, and because they suspect, that you don't understand.»

«But I do. They should know!»

«Well,» said the vagabond. «That's the way adults are.»

«So what about you. You're grown-up, aren't you.»

«In a way, yes. I own very little, my tramp, some dirty clothing and Wonder. That's all. So I'm not a real adult.»

«Do you have to own a lot of things to be an adult?»

«I guess so. Most people think so anyway. I'm different.»

«I see. So you must be able to explain to me about ethics and religion.»

«Oh! Do you really want to hear?»

«I sure do. Come on. I'm all ears!»

«Well - for me religion is a play like you see it on the stage in a theatre - a play - something people invented to create safety.»

«What do you mean?»

«That religion is a play with different roles for the players so people think that everything is OK, and so that they don't have to think things over. And they don't have to wonder. What do you think?»

«I'm not so sure you're right, because religion gives me a push to think about Life. Without it we would all be lost,» Steven said.

«Oh - I see - don't you see, that religion gives people a false security?»

«No, religion gives me more time to other things. I want to know myself better, and religion gives me time to try to know what is going on in myself.»

The vagabond laughs. «Is that what they tell you in school? Do you believe everything they tell you? Do you? No, my boy - look at the sky. See? A cloud is covering the sun, so that only parts of the light come down to us. That is what religion is. This cloud is really only a bit of water - a fog - tiny drops of water - not a real thing. That is what religion is for me: something that covers for the real light.»

«But the cloud disappears again!!» Steven looks at the sky, seeing the clouds drifting and covering the sun, and drifting away again.

«Right - but the sun doesn't. The light from the sun is the real thing - the cloud is only a veil which we take for a real thing, although it's only a bit of water.»

«So you mean, that there is something, which we can call the real truth?»

«No, there is no such thing.»

«Then I try to understand you in another way. Let's imagine, that I'm standing somewhere in the night. The sky is clear, so that I can see all the stars and the milky way. It is very beautiful. My eye catches a certain star, which is twinkling in blueish and greenish. But I have read, that there are one thousand light-years from where I am till the star. So maybe it doesn't exist anymore. It is dead - exploded - grown into a black hole of compressed energy or something like that. But I still see the star - twinkling in its beauty. What is real, then. The dead star or the view I experience?»

The vagabond laughs. «Maybe you are too clever, my boy. But I can answer you back. My answer is a question, as all real answers are.»

This is the key to doing philosophy for children: making new questions in order to improve children's personal thinking. You do not learn to think independently, if you only get strict and narrow answers to your questions. Philosophy for children is a questioning subject, whose goal is to improve the students' personal comprehension. Questioning is a way to find the limits of a spiritual problem. The conversation between the vagabond and Steven is the same as the discussion going on in a philosophical classroom.

The vagabond says, «What do you think yourself?»

Seen from below, a man and a boy. They talk and talk, use strange words. They seem to have forgotten everything around them. They think a lot, as if they try catch reality with their strange words. Questions and answers, words and words, sometimes smiling, sometimes frowning, sometimes shaking their heads. But the sun is warm here in the park. Everything is easy. So how stupid can humans be?

Steven answers, «I really never thought about all this before. There are so many strange things in the world. I guess there are two truths then: the dead star and the star I can see.»

«And time - where does time come in?»

«Oh, this is weird. We build our time on our religion. But other countries have other beliefs and therefore another time.»

«Right. So?»

Don't they see, how easy and lovely Life can be, when the sun is shining. If they would only scratch my ears!

«Look at the sun. It's beautiful, isn't it? But if you could ask the sun about time, it would answer, that there is no such thing as time. It's a human invention, which profoundly disturbs us. Time is a veil, too.»

The vagabond is silent for a moment. Thinking. Pondering, and scratching Wonder's ears. «The first people in the world? Who were they?»

«Adam and Eve.»

«Yes, I have heard that, too. But they were thrown out of Eden, weren't they. Later they got two boys, and they were married with two women. Where did these women come from, as Adam and Eve were the first people?»

«This is really weird. I never thought about that either.»

«So?»

«I still use religion as a help to find out who I am! You are attacking religion by logic - you can't do that. Logic is one thing and religion another.»

«So there are two truths in the world,» the vagabond laughs.

I guess this is the right time to wag my tail. Sure. I'll do it!!

Steven goes on. «Ethics is important, right? Where do we find it, when there is more than one truth?»

Two children come rushing into the park on their bikes. They ride their bikes as fast as they can, without knowing anything about the deep discussion going on on the bench, exactly like a school director passing a philosophical classroom without knowing what is going on there. Two different worlds! Two different truths?

Steven continues, «You don't answer. Where do we find ethics, when there is more than one truth?»

The vagabond laughs. «Oh, you got me, fella'!!»

«You see,» Steven says. «I've been thinking. Really! The only way to find the ethics is to discover it in oneself. It is inside oneself - in the soul - in the inner I - whatever you'll call it. There is only ONE way!»

The vagabond stretches his legs. «Steven, you're a living paradox! You told me, how important religion was to you. You denied its falseness. And now you say, that there might be more than one truth!»

«Don't you see? We were talking about two different worlds - the dead star and the star, I still see - two different truths. But they exist simultaneously as ONE truth. So where is the paradox?»

Is this the time to wag my tail? No, I'm sure not. There is some disagreement here, so I guess I'd better put down my ears.

The vagabond ponders for a while. Then he says, «Take the price of a bottle of beer. I can buy a bottle cheaper in the small shop on the corner just outside this park than in the downtown supermarket. This doesn't mean, that there are two truths about beer. Beer is beer, and that's it!!!!»

«I don't drink beer,» Steven laughs. «But I do know, that there are different qualities of beer. Not only god or bad beer, but also dark and light beer. Even beer without alcohol. No, beer is not just beer.»

Why are they suddenly talking about beer? But I like it when I get the rest from the bottle, although I get a little dizzy sometimes.

«Then there are many truths,» the vagabond says. «An infinity of truths. What a mess!!»

«Sure, and it's not a mess. Don't let yourself be cheated like that. You're too clever for that!»

«Oh, thank you sir!»

Now I certainly wag my tail. It feels relieving.

«What is ethically right for me,» Steven continues, «doesn't necessarily have to be ethically right for you. People fool around in the world, believing that there is one and only one real truth. They will never find the ethics in themselves, because they are sort of blindfolded. What I really said about religion is, that I do need it in this phase of my life as a springboard to think things over and find out who I am.»

«I see, Mr. Cleverness. Don't you think, that it is misuse of religion?»

«No, it's what religion really wants us to.»

«And if you leave religion — «!

«—— it doesn't mean that I leave my belief, does it?»

What does one do now? I simply want a bone, a fresh and meaty bone, and that's it.

«So what you are saying is, that religion and belief is not the same.»

«Of course not. It would be the same as to say, that the sun and the clouds were ONE thing.»

«You got me again, Steven. I can follow you, but I don't agree with you.»

Neither do I stick to my man, and he's the best for me. Holy bone, how complicated the human world is!

«No, it's complicated. That's why I have chosen religion as a beginning.»

«So what do you do in school? Do you talk philosophy all the time? When I was a boy we were taught reading, spelling, and mathematics. And that was it.»

«Don't you see,» said Steven. «This is not enough. Reading, spelling and all other subjects is worth nothing without a spiritual background.»

«Oh, I see. Do your teachers say that?»

«Some of them. But definitely not all. But when I leave school in the afternoon I always wonder, what all this is for. So I started to really wonder, and then I suddenly found out, that wonder is the beginning of everything. People who don't

wonder are weirdos, because they take everything for granted. They make the mistake, that there is one and only one truth.»

Steven used my name four times. Are they really talking about me? That's something. I guess, I'll lick Steven's hands. «Good dog,» Steven says. «So what do you think?»

«It's a mess. Religion, ethics, soul, and emotions.

Great words - but?»

«You forget philosophy,» Steven said eagerly.

«Oh, I'm sorry. But you see, I think philosophy mixes up everything.»

«Oh no!!!! That's not the way it is. I enjoy the philosophical hours we have at school. They helped me to come to a conclusion.»

«A conclusion!!!! Life brings no conclusions. Look at my life - is that a conclusion?»

«Sure, for you it is. You are a real clever man.» «And you are a searching boy.»

«Yeah, I search all the time.» «Searching for what? Conclusions?»

«No, not really. I search for meaning and intention. And I know it is going to change all the time - my whole lifetime. Because in fact we don't know anything. We only assume.»

The vagabond laughs. «The Socrates of the new millennium!!! So what is your conclusion for today?»

«That philosophy is the deepest of everything. Then comes the subconsciousness - maybe you'll call it soul - after that comes ethics - and finally religion.»

«My goodness. What you are saying is, that without philosophy there would be no religion.»

«Exactly.»

«And without philosophy we would not be able to comprehend our soulish life, and without that we cannot find the ethics.»

«Exactly!!»

This is a hard one!! I'm all ears!!! I have even forgotten the bone!!!!

«So,» said the vagabond. «Where do emotions come in? I have lots of them, you see.»

«We all have. Emotions exist somewhere between the soul and ethics - sort of independently.»

«Oh no, Steven. For me emotions are part of both ethics and the soul.»

«Listen,» said Steven. «I feel quite sure: philosophy is the depth of everything. And if people don't take a step into philosophy we are going to lose our own world.»

The sun is setting, sending long shadows over the park. But the two humans still talk and talk, while the city is making itself ready for nightlife.

«What do you think, Wonder,» the vagabond asks.

Now it is time for me. I want to get up and lick Steven's ears. That is what I really like! Sure, I'll do it.

«Philosophy is the depths of everything,» the vagabond says, smiling. «I think I'm going to spend the night in the harbour. There won't be much sleep.»

«I'll stay with you,» Steven says. «What do you think, Wonder?»

Oh, that would be wonderful. Then IT lie between the two of you.

«You are a good dog, Wonder. Come on, let's <sup>go!</sup>

They get up to avoid the guards of the park. I wonder if there's something called Doggy Philosophy?

#### A CONVERSATION

*Andreas Thelander Bertelsen (age 12) & Per Jespersen (age 61)*

**Per:**

So philosophy is deeper than religion?

**Andreas:**

That's what I mean. Philosophy makes us think independently and find our own answers. Religion provides answers in such a way, that we don't need to think ourselves.

**Per:**

Why do we need to think independently?

**Andreas:**

Religion gives us a final and clumsy answer. Through philosophy you can find the answers, which you can answer for.

**Per:**

Then why don't we see more to philosophy, than we do?

**Andreas:**

You're left out, if you have other opinions than the majority, and religion rules the majority.

**Per:**

So do we have to abolish religion?

**Andreas:**

No, because Jesus is a real philosopher!!!!

**Wonder:**

Oh, I feel so comfortable and secure, lying between my master and Steven. Maybe philosophy provides security!!!!

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***[Back to current electronic table of contents](#)***