

To Be, or Not to Be?

Summary

The activity tries to explain to students a difficult concept such as ontology in a way which may be easier for them.

We offer two possibilities to introduce the topic of discussion on the subject: one suitable for younger children, and one for teenagers.

The first is a children's book which concerns some basic questions – what it is, where it is, the nature of being a bear and how it exists, as well as the relations between the bear and other living creatures. It could be helpful for students in developing cognitive models of themselves, patterns of themselves existing in the world, and of the way they relate to all other living creatures.

The second is an episode of a TV cartoon series very popular among teenagers. Through direct and ironic language, at times cynical and ruthless, the cartoon can become good food for thought and offers a number of philosophical and reflective ideas.

Description of the activity

The activity is a group discussion between the teacher and students. The discussion is built on students understanding what ontology is as a philosophical study. Ontology asks questions such as: *What does it mean for a being to be? Is existence a property?* The answers to these questions will later be connected to the history of the development of religions – the existence of God, the nature of God, etc.

Book: Using a simple children's book like "*The bear who wasn't there*" teachers can use models of comprehension and a style of language much simpler and closer to the students' cognitive skills.

The activity requires all participants to sit in such a way as to be facing the others. The teacher may use a whiteboard to project some images from the book or write down thoughts of students, so that everybody feels "introduced" in the discussion. An ordinary board can also be used, where each student can write down his/her thoughts, leaving them there. Later the teacher can discuss all thoughts, questions and issues raised with the whole group.

Cartoon: Futurama - In the episode "The Bender Prisoner", Series 6, Episode 10, the protagonist robot, Bender, wants to rob a famous prince, so, with the new professor's car, he exchanges his body with Amy's because she is much more attractive than him. The result is that in a short time, with sudden body exchanges, no one is in their own body. The confusion between mind/being and body creates a chaos in animated and inanimate characters. It is a good starting point for a discussion on the BEING, then on ontology. A reflection on "who is who" will be useful for students to develop cognitive patterns of themselves, existing in the world, and how to deal with all the other animated and inanimate beings. After viewing the Futurama episode, the activity will be a group-led discussion between the teacher and the students. The discussion will have to get students to understand what is meant by the word "Ontology," beyond the mind / brain - thinking / extended matter - form / matter – relationship, all of which are aspects of studying the Being's.

Ontology raises questions such as (for book and cartoon debriefing):

- What does it mean for a being "*being*"?
- If something "*is*", can that same thing change and remain the same?
- Is Being a property or predicate of other characteristics?
- Is there a "*being*" common to all things?

The answers to these questions will then be related to the history of the development of religions - the existence of God, the nature of God, and so on.

The activity requires all participants to sit in such a way that they can see the others.

Activity structure

- **Preferred Activity Location:** the classroom
- **Resources required:**
Book: The book "*The bear who wasn't there*", a whiteboard, projector or a black board, pens, post-it notes.
- **Cartoon:** IWB or projector and screen, computer, cartoon file or Internet connection to watch the streaming episode. Traditional or interactive board to note down students' considerations
- **Recommended number of participants:** the class group, up to 25.
- **Prior knowledge of the participants:**
Book: It will be necessary for students to have read the book "*The bear who wasn't there*"
Cartoon: NOT required.
- **The duration of the activity:** The activity can take place as a single event during the lesson.

Learning Objectives

Students acquire knowledge of ontology as a concept, and are able to relate it to the concepts of existence, religion, and science.

Expected Outcomes

Students will understand ontology as the study of how to organize things into categories, including understanding what it means to be "the same thing" even by making changes. Students can also refer to hierarchies of categories.

Students will be able to identify how an object exists in relation to other objects and classes or categories of objects.

Target group

Students between 14 and 16 years of age

Subject of the curriculum in which the activity could be implemented

Literature
Science
Philosophy





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Learning objects to be used with this activity

A children's book "*The bear who wasn't there*"

(<https://us.macmillan.com/thebearwhowasntthere/leuyenpham/9781596439702/>)

Cartoon streaming (English version):

<http://watchseries.do/series/futurama/season/6/episode/10>



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