

The invisible gardener

You arrive at school one day and notice a small, new plant growing in a patch of dirt in the corner of the schoolyard. 'It must have been planted by a gardener,' says your friend. But when you ask your teacher, she tells you the school has no gardener. Your friend says, 'There must be a gardener or where did the flower come from?' When you say that perhaps the flower just grew on its own, your friend replies that it must have had a gardener to help it.

The next morning you notice the flower has grown a little bigger and there is a second flower in the dirt. 'You see,' says your friend, 'there must be a gardener! He must visit in the middle of the night.'

You still don't believe your friend so you decide to stay up all night and watch the patch of dirt. You see no gardener, but the following morning, the first plant has grown some more and there are several other flowers. 'The gardener is invisible,' says your friend. You tell your friend that you didn't hear anything either, but your friend replies that the gardener must work silently. When you ask if it's possible to smell the gardener, your friend says no.



The next night you stay awake again and you stand in front of the patch of dirt so that if there is a gardener you can feel him walking past. You feel nothing all night, but in the morning the flowers have all grown some more. Your friend tells you that the gardener must be **invisible**, **inaudible** (you can't hear him), and **intangible** (you can't feel him).

- 1) Do you believe the gardener exists? Why or why not?
- 2) Is it possible to prove that the gardener does not exist?
- 3) Even if you can't prove the gardener does not exist, does that make it reasonable to believe in him?
- 4) Is a gardener that you can't see, hear, or feel any different from no gardener at all?

Many people accept it would be impossible to prove that the invisible gardener does not exist. However, they believe it would be perfectly reasonable to doubt it. The important question for many people when deciding whether to believe would be 'Is there any good **evidence** the gardener exists?'

Source: The parable of the invisible gardener, John Wisdom (later developed by Anthony Flew)