

Faith and philosophy  
in flannery o' connor's  
"good country  
people"



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Flannery O'Connor's short story "Good Country People" mocks modern philosophy and those who follow it by suggesting that those who turn away from God will be taught, in one way or another, that God is real. The story, which takes place in the south, follows a girl who favors modern philosophy and how she is taken down by what seems to be the divinity of God. Through the characters presented in the story, O'Connor's beliefs about Christianity and modern philosophy are revealed.

At the beginning of the story, Hulga is introduced as an arrogant girl with a belief in nothingness. She has a PhD in philosophy and sees herself as better than the people around her. The narrator describes her through the eyes of her mother, Mrs. Hopewell; "She was brilliant but she didn't have a grain of sense. It seemed to Mrs. Hopewell that every year she grew less like other people and more like herself - bloated, rude, and squint-eyed" (1343). Hulga believes in existentialism and philosophy, which is exercise in the denial of God, and she takes arrogant pride in believing that she knows far more than her mother, or any other country person does, because she does not follow God. Flannery O'Connor, having a traditional conception of God, represents all those who believe in modern philosophy through Hulga, and she makes Hulga appear to be a horrible person. Hulga's birth name is Joy, but she chooses not to go by it. The narrator says, "Her name was really Joy but as soon as she was twenty-one and away from home, she had had it legally changed. Mrs. Hopewell was certain that she had thought and thought until she had hit upon the ugliest name in any language.... Her legal name was Hulga" (1342). This is important because Hulga was given a beautiful name by her mother, who is of the Christian faith. But when Hulga becomes

involved and interested in philosophy and the nothingness of the world, she changes her name to something ugly. Her name was chosen by herself, representing the denial of God and the acceptance of something ugly. Hulga, a philosopher who believes in nothingness, represents the way Flannery O'Connor saw those who turned away from God.

During the story, a bible salesman, Manley Pointer, works his way into Hulga's life. Hulga, being arrogant and full of self-pride, believes she can show Manley the absolute truth, or at least the one she believes. When Manly invites her on a picnic, she agrees because she believes she can turn him away from God. Hulga keeps making it very clear that she does not believe in God throughout their time together. Hulga, when asked if she was not saved by God, says, "'I'm saved and you are damned but I told you I didn't believe in God'" (1350). Nothing seemed to destroy Hulga's confidence in her denial of God. Finally, near the end of the story, it is revealed that Manley is not a bible salesman but a fraud who steals from people. When he takes Hulga's fake leg, she yells at him that perfect Christians like him do not do things like this. He replies by telling her he was never a Christian; " I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!" (1353). Manley was the deliverer of God. He was there to give Hulga slap in the face, to show her that only people who deny God with arrogance the way she did end up in pain. When Manley leaves after stealing Hulga's leg, she watches from where she is stuck; " When she turned her churning face toward the opening, she saw his blue figure struggling successfully over the green speckled lake" (1353). The way he is described as a blue figure walking over water suggest not that he is God, but the presence of God. Like

academics and philosophers, Hulga wants to be in control and always wants to be right. When she is with Manley, she believes he is just another Christian who follows along with everything. She tries to control him and push her beliefs on him. When he turns out to be just like her, she loses her control and gets punished. Manley and Hulga are not good country people because they turned their backs away from God. A belief in God is what makes one seemingly good. Manley being a terrible person, and Hulga having something horrible happen to her both supports Flannery O'Connor's view of modern philosophy and those who follow it.

" Good Country People" thus mocks modern philosophy and the denial of God. By representing those who do not believe in God in Hulga and Manley, O'Connor is portraying the idea that those who deny God are either terrible people or will be punished. Hulga's arrogance and belief that she is better than anyone else in her small town made her the perfect target for such cruel behavior. Manley, in being the deliverer of God's message to Hulga, took away her leg and left her stranded. Flannery O'Connor's traditional conception of God is presented through Hulga's tragic tale; according to what O'Connor would believe, she got what she deserved.