



The History  
of Questions  
"Why?"

A History of Philosophy  
for Children

by José Ezcúrdia

The History  
of Questions  
“Why?”

A History of Philosophy  
for Children



The History  
of Questions  
“Why?”

A History of Philosophy  
for Children

by José Ezcurdia / Illustrations by Juan Ezcurdia

*Translated by Elise Du Rant*



UNIVERSIDAD DE GUANAJUATO



Unidad de Extensión  
SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE

CUERPO ACADÉMICO  
CON•FIGURA•CIONES  
*Formativas*

Arturo Lara López  
*Rector*

José Manuel Cabrera Sixto  
*Director de Investigación y Posgrado*

M. D. T. Ma. Eugenia Tenorio Núñez  
*Directora General de Extensión*

Mtro. Héctor Ernesto Ruiz-Esparza Murillo  
*Director del Instituto de Investigaciones en Educación*

M. en Arq. José Gustavo Vidargas Larrea  
*Coordinador de Extensión Universitaria de San Miguel de Allende*

Primera edición en inglés, 2007

D. R. © José Ezcurdia

D. R. © Universidad de Guanajuato  
Lascurain de Retana 5  
36000, Guanajuato, Gto.

ISBN 968-864-407-2

Hecho en México  
*Made in Mexico*

# INDEX

Introduction for Children .....	9
Introduction for Parents .....	10
<b>GREECE AND THE BIRTH OF PHILOSOPHY .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Thales of Miletus .....	17
Anaximenes .....	19
Anaximander .....	21
Pythagoras .....	25
Heraclitus .....	31
Parmenides .....	34
Empedocles .....	35
Democritus .....	39
Protagoras .....	45
Socrates .....	49
Plato .....	53
Aristotle .....	61
<b>THE MIDDLE AGES .....</b>	<b>65</b>
Saint Augustine .....	67
San Francisco of Assisi .....	73

San Anselm .....	77
Saint Thomas Aquinas .....	81
William of Ockham .....	88
<b>THE RENAISSANCE .....</b>	<b>91</b>
Pico della Mirandola .....	92
Giordano Bruno .....	95
Leonardo da Vinci .....	103
<b>THE MODERN AGE .....</b>	<b>109</b>
Francis Bacon .....	111
Descartes .....	112
Spinoza .....	117
Leibniz .....	121
Hume .....	126
Kant .....	131
Hegel .....	136
Marx .....	139
Nietzsche .....	143
Sartre .....	150
<b>EPILOGUE .....</b>	<b>155</b>

## INTRODUCTION FOR CHILDREN

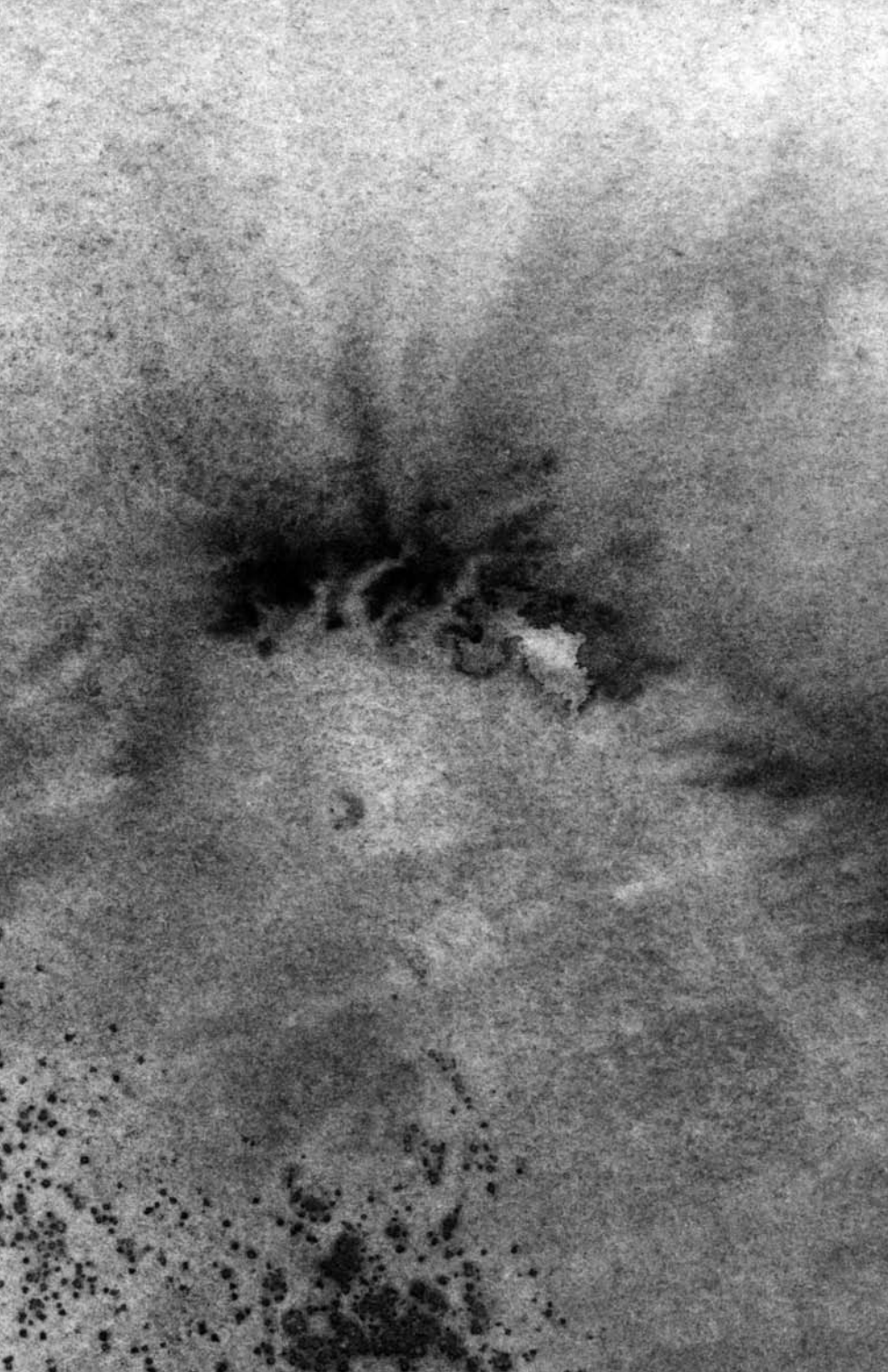
*The History of Questions "Why?"* is a book that invites you to play. The chapters in this book are not filled with interminable and tedious lists of names and dates for you to memorize. The philosophers that we will learn about are more like pieces of a construction toy that needs to be built, coming with no more instructions to use than your own imagination and curiosity. *The History of Questions "Why?"* wants you to read it and befriend the many philosophers you will be introduced to, so that you may converse and think with them, so that you may question with them and, like these philosophers, cultivate a love of knowledge. We all carry a little great philosopher inside ourselves, and it is precisely with him who *The History of Questions "Why?"* wants to play.



## INTRODUCTION FOR PARENTS

*The History of Questions "Why?"* introduces its readers to a history of philosophy in a pleasant and fun way, establishing a dialogue with its readers, bringing into question their own doctrines, and creating in this way a place to think. Rather than being a prescription of truths that its readers must memorize, this book aims to shine light on a whole fabric of ways of living, reasoning, and intuiting, at times contradictory, that use the question "Why?" as the basis for the art of questioning and cultivating reflection. We must be considerate with children. We must not expect them to ingest the entire Platonic or Aristotelian corpus. Instead, we should approach philosophy gently, from a more humble –and no less rich– perspective, one from which we are allowed to ask, and also dream...

*To my nephews, Lucía and Martín,  
from your uncle José*



## **GREECE AND THE BIRTH OF PHILOSOPHY**

A long time ago, in ancient Greece, there were certain men called "philosophers," or lovers of knowledge.

These men lived in cities where there were no tall buildings, electricity or highways filled with noisy trucks. These cities were very beautiful because they had magnificent buildings and yet were the size of what today we would consider to be a small town. To take a short walk from the center of one of these cities meant to quickly find yourself at the edge of town looking at the countryside.

You may ask yourself, "What do ancient Greek cities, which were small and didn't have skyscrapers, electricity or trucks have to do with philosophy and philosophers?"

Well, because the people who lived during that time did not have television or radio or even movie theatres to entertain them, they spent their evenings –and sometimes complete days– contemplating and enjoying the landscape around them.

They saw how the sun hid behind the horizon every day, coloring the sky red, and finally disappeared so that the moon, with its silver light, could shimmer in the night's star-filled sky.

These people also noticed how the seasons changed, how the hot summer, little by little, would fade away so that autumn

could arrive and change the colors of the leaves and give the blue sky a more intense hue.

The Greeks of ancient times were great observers, precisely because they liked to contemplate nature.

These people asked themselves why nature dressed itself in such beautiful colors, why the air blew so hard in winter, and, how it was that the sun could give off so much heat without burning out?

The people of antiquity began to ask "*Why?*" about everything they saw around them.

So they had a big discussion. Some of them, repeating what they had learned from their ancestors, would say that everything was a god, that rain was a god, that thunder was a god, and that the sun was another god. The changing moods and fights amongst the gods were believed to cause summer's heat, lightning and thunderstorms, good and bad harvests, and the flowers growth in spring.

These explanations were very old and respected beliefs that had been passed down from ancient times by priests.

There were men, however, who were not satisfied by these stories, accounts and myths. They did not believe that nature's elements, like a thunderbolt, the moon, and the rain, could become angry and have temper tantrums. Before answering their "*Why?*" questions according to what the myths dictated, these philosophers preferred to wait a little, to observe and listen to nature, so that its mysterious beauty could be revealed and perhaps whisper one of its secrets into their ears.

Philosophers asked “*Why?*” about everything they saw. They searched for answers outside the priests’ ancient tradition. They observed what was occurring in nature, the secrets which, if they paid close enough attention, might be revealed.

Don’t you think it is amazing to see how a rainbow will appear when the sun’s rays pass through raindrops? Don’t you find it surprising when a bright thunderbolt shakes the sky on a stormy night?

Have you ever wondered why water turns to ice when it gets cold; and why, when it gets hot, that same water turns into steam? Have you asked yourself why bats only leave their caves at night?

Philosophy began with the wonder and curiosity that nature provoked in people; this wonder caused them to dedicate their time to contemplating and asking “*Why?*” to everything that surrounded them.

When the ancient Greek philosophers lived, there were many seaports that brought merchants from foreign lands who came to sell goods like fabric, spices and weapons. The philosophers noticed that these merchants had different gods and beliefs according to the country they were from. For example, the merchant who sold rice had gods with Asian faces, and the one who sold flying carpets believed in Arabic gods. They also noticed that the merchants’ gods were like the priests’ gods, that is to say, they were grumpy and moody gods.

Instead of looking for answers from these gods –some light skinned and others dark skinned, depending on the country

the gods belonged to— philosophers preferred to look at nature in order to find the answers to their “*Why?*” questions.

The philosophers, instead of searching for answers in the legends and myths of the gods, preferred to observe nature, and to attentively listen to it in order to find the answers to questions like, “Why does the universe have so many stars?” “Where do oceans end?” and “What happens to a person’s soul when his body dies?”

Each philosopher came up with a different answer to his “*Why?*” questions. The questions and the answers that each one came up with —the long history of the “*Why?*” questions— is the history of philosophy.

## **THALES OF MILETUS (7TH CENTURY BCE)**

The first philosopher we will meet is Thales, who was born in Miletus, a very pretty port in Asia Minor —a region now called Turkey. Thales had many occupations, but perhaps the one that he most enjoyed was to observe the stars and learn the secrets of the sky. He liked dark nights most, when there was no moon and no clouds, because on those nights he could see comets shoot across the sky and admire the constellations the stars formed.

Thales enjoyed looking at the sky so much that one night as he was walking, he was so entranced by the stars above him that he fell into a ditch by the road. Thales' servant laughed heartily at him and noted that because philosophers were so distracted by the sky, the stars and the moon, and the many “*Why?*” questions they had about the world, they forgot about everyday necessities and ended up putting their foot where it did not belong. But this is only an anecdote. What is certain is that Thales was very smart and paid a lot of attention to the sky because he liked it so much. He spent so much time observing the sky that on one occasion, aided by mathematic calculations, he predicted an eclipse. In other words, he anticipated when the moon would place itself between the earth and the sun.

Can you imagine how impressive it must have been back then, when there were no telescopes, electric watches, or space-crafts, for Thales to predict precisely when the sun would disappear behind the moon —right in the middle of daytime? Have you ever seen an eclipse?



If it were not for Thales, who knew the movement of the moon and the planets, Thales' contemporaries would probably have thought that the sun had disappeared because the gods were angry with them.

Thales also liked to observe the earth and spent a lot of his time enjoying the color of the wheat fields, the fresh air after a rainfall, and the way birds flew.

Thales would ask himself "*Why?*" the world was so beautiful and what everything was made of.

One day, after thinking a lot about this, he told his friends that he had decided that everything was made of water. Everything made of water? Yes, of water.

Thales thought that the world was made of water because if it got cold, water turned into very hard ice, and then it could turn into rocks or even into metal; and if it got hot, it would become very soft like steam, and could turn into air and everything that was light, like flowers and butterflies.

Thales asked himself, "Why is the universe so big?" and "Why does it contain so many different things?" He answered his questions by saying that the universe must be made of water and must be the origin of all things, because depending on how water heated up or cooled down, how it softened or hardened, it became different things, like earth and rocks, trees and animals, and the wind and insects.

Thales believed that everything was made of water because water could become any shape, color, odor or flavor.

Do you think that everything is made of water? What do you think everything that surrounds us is made of?

## **ANAXIMENES (6TH CENTURY BCE)**

Anaximenes lived around the same time as Thales, and in the same city, Miletus. Like Thales, Anaximenes was a great observer of nature and a great philosopher who contemplated the universe and sought to know its secrets. And, like Thales, Anaximenes spent most of his time asking himself "*Why?*" about everything around him.

Anaximenes liked animals such as birds, horses and fish. He noticed that to be able to live, these animals needed to breathe as much as they needed to eat and drink. And because these animals needed to breathe in order to stay alive, this philosopher told himself that they were made of air.

Anaximenes thought that thick, or compressed, air produced water, plants and animals. He believed that the air was like a force or a spirit that gave life to the whole universe. According to Anaximenes, air was the "physis," in other words, the beginning, or origin, of all things.

Do you believe, like Anaximenes believed, that all animals and plants are made of air? Or do you believe, as Thales believed, that everything is made of water?

Some say that Anaximenes preferred air to water, because air is simpler and lighter than water and can convert itself more easily into something else.

When Anaximenes asked "*Why?*" the world was made of so many beautiful things like forests, lakes and mountains, he thought that it was because everything was made of air that was more or less compressed, or more or less free.



## **ANAXIMANDER (7TH CENTURY BCE)**

Anaximander was also born in Miletus, when Thales was an old man, and when Anaximenes was not yet born. Anaximander was a curious man. He liked to observe and enjoy everything that happened in nature, like the sun's first rays at dawn as they illuminated the firmament, and the dew that dampened the fields.

One morning, as Anaximander walked along a mountain path, something Thales had told him came to mind: that everything was made of water, and so the origin of everything was water.

Anaximander understood why Thales had claimed that everything was made of water because he knew that water could take on any form and become anything depending upon whether it heated up or cooled down, and became light like steam and dragonflies, or hard like ice and rocks.

And yet, Anaximander asked himself, "Where does water come from? Does it not come from somewhere? Where does water take its form, soft and elastic or hard and rigid, in order to transform itself into anything, like trees or animals?"

Anaximander thought that water could not be the origin of all things and that there must be something that came before that was the real origin of everything.

Anaximander noticed a well next to a small house. He was thirsty, so he went to the well and drew water to drink. At the moment he heard the bucket hit the bottom of the well, he

noticed that the interior of the well was dark, quiet, and did not have any form; and yet, it was a source for pure crystalline water mixed with a little dirt. He thought too, how on occasions when a well dried, bad smells and little creatures like worms and spiders could emerge from it.

Have you ever looked down a well? Have you noticed how it is dark and silent, and appears to have no form?

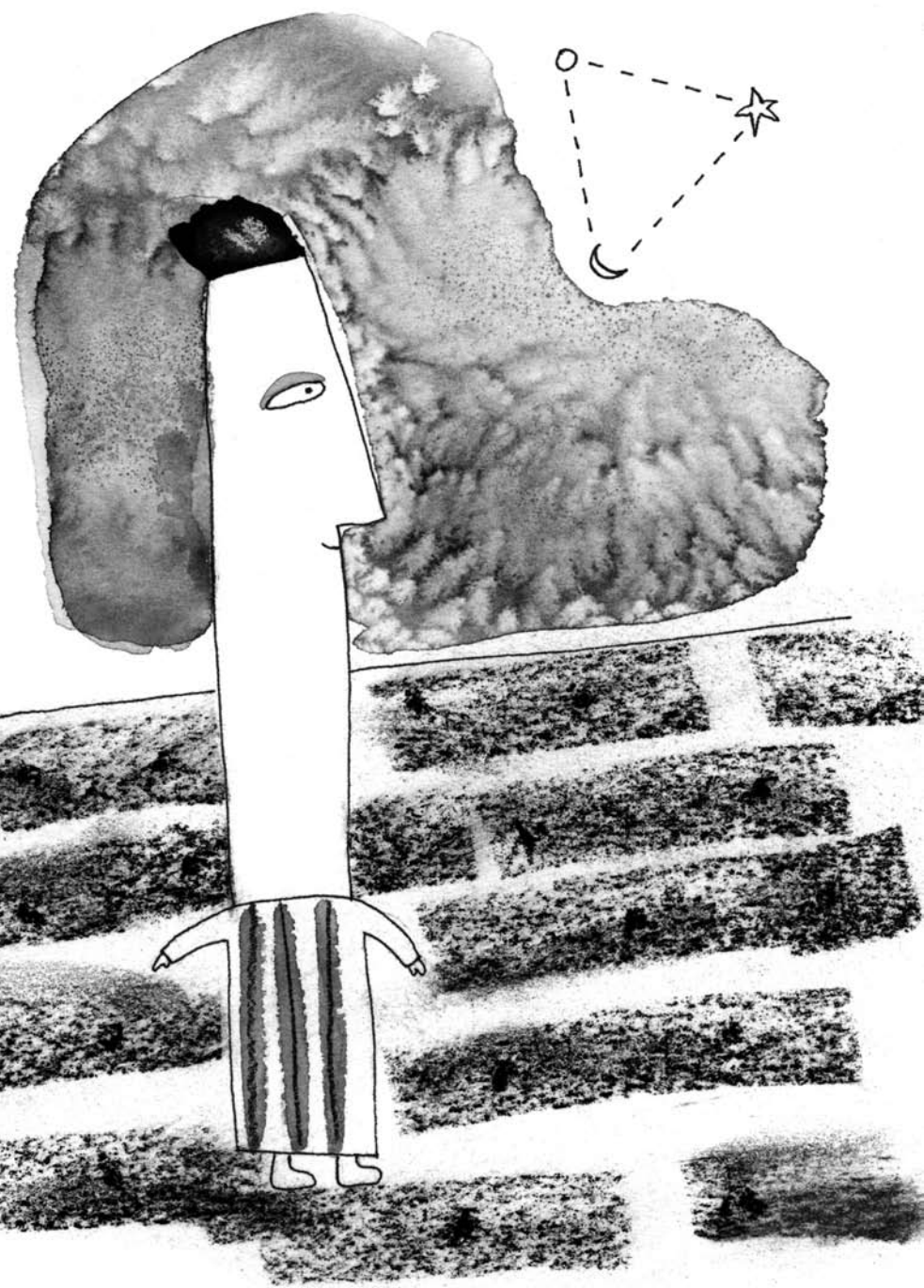
Suddenly Anaximander had a great thought: he would call the origin of all things, the "physis" of the universe, "that which has no boundaries," "the Boundless" or "the Unlimited," because like the bottom of the well that was dark and without form, "the Boundless" or "the Unlimited" became a fountain from which anything could emerge, like water, earth, mountains and stars.

Anaximander thought that "the Boundless," or "that which has no boundaries," was a force that, because it was odorless, colorless, and without a determined form or size, could produce anything of any size, shape and color like an eagle, a fish or a bull.

Do you agree with Anaximander in that the origin of all things is something that does not have any precise form and that, because of this, it can take on any form, and become anything, like a cloud or a turtle?

Anaximander thought that everything came from "the Boundless" and that when things died or ceased to exist, they returned to "the Boundless" and disappeared definitively in the same way a doll made out of clay disappears when it is returned to the ball of clay it originally belonged to.

What do you believe happens when a tree dies? Where do you think it goes? Anaximander said that it would return to "the Boundless," to "the Unlimited," the place it once came from.



## **PYTHAGORAS (6TH CENTURY BCE)**

Pythagoras was one of Greece's most important philosophers because he founded a school where other great philosophers studied.

Pythagoras' school was very pretty. It was like a private house on a large field with many trees and an orchard where philosophers studied and worked the land to grow food like carrots and onions. And, it had a view of the ocean.

Unlike most schools today where students take classes and then return home, Pythagoras' students lived at the school.

Because Pythagoras' school was in the countryside, he and his students spent their time, like Thales and Anaximander, watching the sunset, enjoying the fresh smell of flowers in the spring, and observing the seasons change throughout the year.

Pythagoras, like many Greek philosophers, liked to observe nature. He wanted to learn its secrets and answer the many "Why?" questions that came to his mind.

For example, Pythagoras would ask himself, "Why are the ocean's waves bigger when the moon is full?" "Why do trees shed their leaves in autumn?" and "Why do some birds fly away when summer ends?" Do you know the answers to these questions?

Pythagoras realized that there are many things in nature that are related to each other, like the leaves that fall from the trees with autumn's arrival or how some flowers open in the morning light; he also noticed that every year or every so often, these things repeated themselves.



The more attention he paid to nature, the more he realized that there were many things that repeated themselves again and again, such as how the moon grew full every 28 days or how robins returned to their nests at sunset.

Have you noticed that there are things that repeat themselves in nature? How often do animals, like bears for example, sleep and eat? When do roosters crow?

When Pythagoras began to take account of all the things that repeated themselves, he discovered that everything in nature had a certain rhythm. He also discovered that the repetition happened not every once in awhile, but with regularity. Pythagoras noticed how the fields around him bloomed every spring and became yellow in winter.

He came to realize that the rhythm he observed in nature was marked in the same way that numbers and metronomes mark rhythm in music. For example, each year marked one turn of the sun, and each turn of the sun marked 365 days and 4 seasons.

Pythagoras concluded that due to the rhythm by which all things were repeated, nature was not made of water or air, but of numbers.

Nature made up of numbers? Yes, because numbers tell us how often everything repeats itself. Every 28 days there is a full moon, and on every full moon, the ocean's waves swell. And, every year when summer arrives, it gets hot, and the vineyards' grapes can grow.

Pythagoras saw that everything had its own rhythm. And, he thought that each rhythm could be learned by figuring out the numbers that corresponded to it.

Do you agree with Pythagoras in that numbers give rhythm to all things, like the durations of night and day or the duration of a season or, for example, the size of a dog's paws in proportion to the size of its body?

Can you imagine a dog with very big paws, and a tiny body? How ugly that would be! Pythagoras would say that the size of its paws were too big, that the dog was disproportioned and had bad numbers in its body.

Pythagoras thought about music and the notes of a scale: Do-Re-Mi-Fa-So-La-Ti. He thought about how these notes repeated themselves, Do-Re-Mi... and how they had different rhythms. Some rhythms were slow, like those found in music for religious ceremonies, and others were fast, like those found in music made for dancing. Pythagoras kept studying music and the numbers that regulated its chords, harmonies and rhythms. He also continued to observe nature and paid special attention to the stars and planets.

Because when Pythagoras lived, only 7 planets had been discovered, he believed that each planet corresponded to a musical note of the 7-note scale. That way, Mercury was "Do;" Venus was "Re;" Mars was "Mi" and so on.

At night, Pythagoras and his students would go out into the fields, hold hands and form a big circle. They would stand in

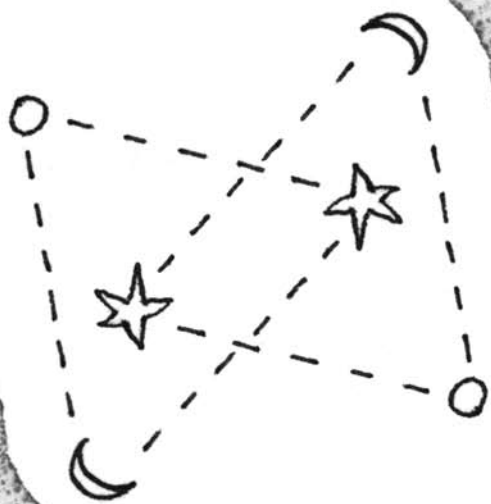
silence. They all kept very still and very quiet. Why would they do this? What for?

Well, since they believed that the planets correlated to a specific note of the musical scale, they hoped to hear the music of the planets, the music and rhythm of the universe.

Numbers were like gods to Pythagoras because they gave order to nature's rhythm and created music, beauty and harmony.

Don't you find the rhythmic sound of waves crashing on the beach beautiful? Pythagoras and his students listened to how the planets, as they orbited our universe, created a beautiful harmony.

Pythagoras respected and adored numbers and their rhythms because he thought they were gods. He did everything to understand them, and like the numbers he observed, he wanted to live his life in harmony. He was like a priest who recognized the spirit of the world in numbers. And, he was a great philosopher because he asked "*Why?*" about everything that surrounded him.





## **HERACLITUS (6TH-5TH CENTURIES BCE)**

Heraclitus was born in a town close to Miletus called Ephesus, and like the other philosophers, he liked to contemplate nature, to watch the movement of the moon and the stars, and to see the birds sail across the sky. Like the other philosophers, he also asked "*Why?*" about everything he saw.

Heraclitus was interested in everything that happened in the universe and preferred to live alone in the mountains where no one could distract him from studying the world. He was a hermit. He liked solitude because he thought that most people were too preoccupied with their own work and never stopped to look at the world around them, to take in the beauty of the trees and the warmth of the sun.

Heraclitus did not socialize much, and because he always used enigmatic phrases to say what was on his mind, he was called "the obscure one."

One day, after many years of living in the forest, even though he was not used to living with other people, he returned to the city to teach what he had learned in his life.

What did Heraclitus teach?

He said that everything moved, that nothing was still, and that the universe was like time passing by, or like a river that never ceased to run.

Have you noticed how things never stop moving and that everything changes?

Have you seen how winter always gives way to spring, that the cold replaces the heat, and that night takes the place of day?

Do you think that there may be something in the universe that stays completely still?

Heraclitus said that this movement of the universe was ordered and governed by "Logos", or Reason. For Heraclitus this "Logos" was like a force that existed everywhere.

Can you imagine a movement in nature without order or placement? Can you imagine water falling upwards, or dogs meowing like cats, or even worse, that one day the sun were to stop shining?

Heraclitus saw that change in all things was an ordered change, that spring came before summer and that clouds gathered before it rained. This order in nature, he said, was due to the force which he called Reason or "Logos."

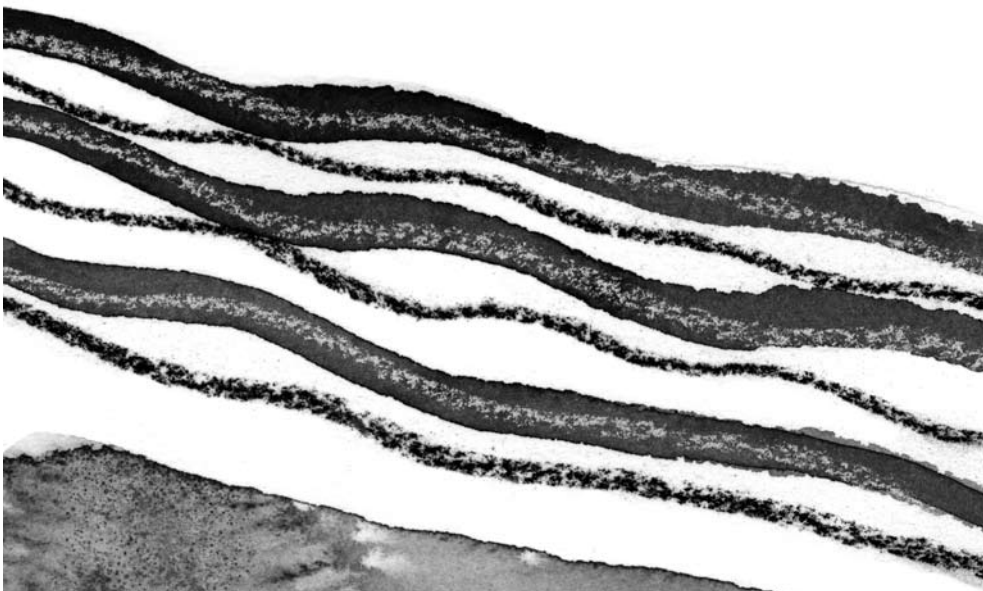
Heraclitus also believed that change or movement was due to an eternal battle between opposite forces found in nature. Have you ever thought that light is in battle with darkness, that wetness is in battle with dryness, or that white fights with black?

Heraclitus used fire as an example of everything that is constantly changing. Fire continues to be itself even though it never stops moving.

With one of his enigmatic phrases, Heraclitus said, "This world-order, the same of all, no god nor man did create, but it ever was and is and will be: ever living fire."

Heraclitus used fire as a symbol to teach the essence of nature, to show that nature always changes.

Because Heraclitus said that nothing, not even the biggest rock or the smallest mosquito, or even the universe itself, stops from continually transforming itself and changing, he is called, "the philosopher of movement."





## **PARMENIDES (6TH-5TH CENTURIES BCE)**

Parmenides did not agree with Heraclitus. While Heraclitus liked to observe the land around him, watch deer run and feel the fresh air move through the pine trees, Parmenides preferred to stay home alone and think things like, "Why are there so many different animals and trees in nature?" without even going outside to look at them and enjoy their beauty.

Heraclitus, as we saw, thought that everything continually changed in nature, that the cold battled with the heat, and the heat with the cold, and that the night battled with the day and the day with the night.

Because Parmenides preferred to think rather than to trust what he saw with his eyes and felt with his skin, he believed that nature was still, that the world was immobile, that it did not have anywhere to go to, much less anything to become.

Parmenides said that the world does not have anywhere it needs to go to, that it could not be transformed into anything else, because to begin with, it is everything it ever could be.

Where is the world going with its planets and stars? Where is the universe headed? What do you think nature can become, if it already is everything? Could nature be more than what it already is? Parmenides asserted that nature cannot be transformed into something other than what it already is. He believed that nature is immobile, that it is full and perfect, and it cannot move or change because it was already complete.

Can you imagine where the universe and all its stars could go?

Parmenides, as opposed to Heraclitus, said that nothing moves, that the world is like a ball or a massive sphere. And even though it may seem strange, Parmenides said that everything we see move, like rivers and animals, are pure illusions, because the senses deceive us and in reality everything is still. For this philosopher, the world is like a photograph without shape and color that people, forever relying upon their senses, are incapable of seeing in its true form.

## **EMPEDOCLES (484/481-424/421 BCE)**

Empedocles was a philosopher who liked to travel. He saw many marvelous cities in ancient Greece and the Orient and learned the practice of medicine. He made many friends on his travels and kept correspondence with them throughout his life.

Empedocles encountered many different landscapes on his travels. He saw warm beaches bathed with sunlight, green meadows in thick forests, and mountaintops where it snowed all year. And in each landscape, he found different towns and cultures. In each new encounter, he learned what the philosophers and thinkers from those places thought and communicated.

When Empedocles would see golden fields covered in wheat, or seagulls soar on the ocean, he would ask himself "*Why?*" Then he would remember what philosophers before him, like Thales or Anaximenes, had said: that the world was made of water and air.

Empedocles agreed that the world was made of what those philosophers said. But he also believed that the world was made of other elements too, like earth and fire. Empedocles sustained that the world and everything in it was made of water, air, earth and fire.

For example, Empedocles would see a tree and say that it was made of a combination of the 4 elements: one-half earth, one-quarter water, another part air, and a bit fire. A turtle would be made of one-half water, a quarter earth, another part fire, and a bit of air.

What do you think everything is made of? What do you think are their ingredients, and how would you combine them?

Empedocles said that everything in the world was made according to how earth, air, water, and fire were combined. He also agreed with Heraclitus in that everything changed, that flowers would grow and then wilt and that animals were born, would grow big and strong, and then become old and die.

Empedocles noticed that all things moved, that even the sun and the moon never stood still. So, he asked himself:

"Why does a tree grow slowly, give fruit for many years, then dry up and never give fruit again?"

Empedocles remembered that Heraclitus had said that Reason or "Logos" ordered everything. Empedocles, however, thought something different.

He told himself, "When a tree is born, it is because one-half earth, two parts water and air, and a little fire are mixed together. And these elements come together in this way because Love unites them."

Empedocles thought that the ingredients of things were united because Love existed between them.

For example, how do you think that a cake's ingredients are mixed together? Empedocles would say they are mixed together with Love.

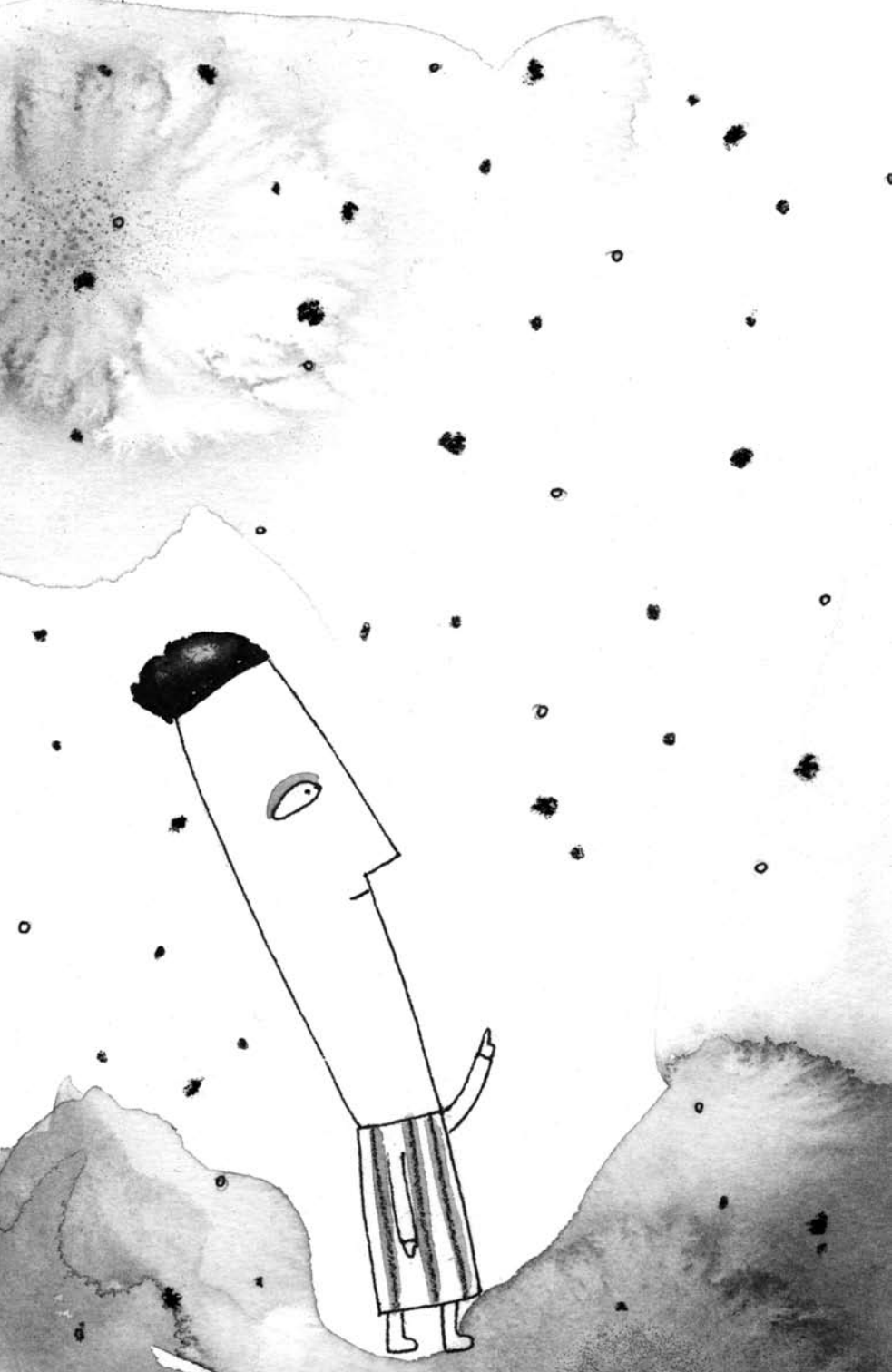
And so, returning to the tree, how do you think Empedocles would explain why a tree dries up and dies?

He would say it is because its elements —earth, water, air, and fire— separate. Why would they separate? Because of Hate.

This would work in the same way a boyfriend and girlfriend are always together and form a couple when they love each other, but will separate and are no longer a couple when they hate each other.

For Empedocles Love and Hate were forces, or principles, that made earth, water, air, and fire combine into many different forms, creating and destroying everything in nature like forests, comets, the night, and the ocean.

Empedocles believed everything was born and died because the elements with which everything was formed —earth, water, air, and fire— were united and separated according to the Love and Hate that governed them.



## **DEMOCRITUS (460 BCE)**

Democritus, like Empedocles, was a great traveler. He would join Bedouin caravans and take long journeys through the desert. It is said that Democritus learned many sciences, above all mathematics, from his travels through Egypt.

Democritus was lying in his bed one summer morning after he had just woken up. He could only hear the voices of children playing in the street.

Democritus' room was very dark, except for a ray of the sun's light that entered through the door that was open a crack. Democritus began to pay close attention to the ray of light, and noticed how an infinite amount of dust particles floated in the air. Have you noticed how dust looks like little stars when the sun's rays filter into your house through the slit of a half-open curtain?

That same night, Democritus went out for a walk just outside the city of Abdera, where he lived. It was a clear night, and there was no moon, so he could see many stars in the sky. The sky reminded him of the dust particles he had been looking at in the ray of light in his room earlier that day. And so, he imagined that all the stars in the universe were tiny particles of dust. He saw the Milky Way and the comets as dust sprinkled across the universe.

The following day, as Democritus walked to a public school where he taught mathematics, a great idea came to him: he would name each particle of dust an atom, and atoms would be the

material or matter that everything in the world, including the stars, were made of.

Democritus said that flowers, rocks, goats and cows, every animal and plant, everything we see around us are made of atoms.

You could ask yourself, why did Democritus say that those particles were atoms and not something like drops of water, or pebbles, or little lights, like Thales or Empedocles might say? Why is the dust that the universe is made of called atoms and not something else like air or earth? What are atoms?

Well, a drop of water, for example, can be split in half; and that half into another half again, and that other half can be split in half, again and again and so on infinitely.

The same thing happens with a rock: you can split it in 2, then into 4 pieces, and then into 8, and so on without ever stopping.

With an atom, this could never happen. You cannot divide them because they are like the little dots that everything is made of, including water, rocks and trees. If atoms were divided, Democritus would say, they would no longer function to build animals and plants, much less the universe, because they would crumble like a sugar cube and nothing would be left.

"Atom" means "indivisible." Can you imagine if suddenly everything in the world began to crumble, as if it were stale bread, because it was all made of something that was divisible? Democritus said that everything was made of atoms precisely because they are indivisible and so are unable to disintegrate.

You could probably ask yourself, why do atoms move and combine themselves in different ways to become everything in the world? For example, why do trees, which are made of atoms, grow, give fruit, and then die? Why do planets move around the sun? Why do flowers and animals, which are also made of atoms, always change?

Democritus asked these same questions to himself one very hot afternoon as he looked at an arid and uncultivated piece of land, where he was discussing with some friends whether or not to grow a vineyard or an olive orchard.

Suddenly a strong wind, like a powerful spirit, grew into a large dust storm on the land. This dust storm swept the dirt and dust into the air in such a way that it formed many shapes and figures. The dust storm grew into a whirlwind in which Democritus could see many distinct forms, all made of dust, like birds and plants, suns and moons.


Democritus watched the whirlwind and thought that the universe was like a great whirlwind made of atoms moving and giving form to everything, including bright clouds and soft sunsets.

Democritus said that the world's atoms move like a whirlwind, and in that whirlwind is where the ocean and its waves, volcanos that vomit fire, and furious thunderstorms are created.

One day, Democritus saw a man who had come from a foreign land to teach philosophy surrounded by many people in the main square of Abdera.

This man was a student of Thales, who had proclaimed that everything was made of water.





"Water is the soul of all things," Thales' student announced. "Because without it everything would be dead and empty, and the universe would be like a great desert. Because water is soft and flexible, it molds into any form in the world, like trees and animals, and it gives everything around us life and movement."


In that moment, Democritus, who had been listening attentively, responded:

"I do not know your name, but if you are a student of the teachings of Thales, I can imagine that you are sharing his philosophy with us. I have always disagreed with Thales, because I do not understand how water could be the origin of all things. If the world were made of water, it would drain itself out and completely disintegrate, because water can be divided and subdivided infinitely, without being able to arrive at something solid. Furthermore, I do not understand how water could be the origin of fire, if fire consumes and evaporates water."

Thales' student was surprised to hear someone refute his thinking with such good arguments. After meditating on these arguments for a moment, he responded:

"How can you explain the great variety of everything in the world without recognizing water as their origin? Only water, as it is heated up or cooled down, can create what is soft and light or hard and heavy, like feathers and elephants or like dreams and metal."

"The origin of all things are atoms," responded Democritus, raising his voice. "Because atoms cannot be divided, they persist; they are the small pieces or bricks from which the world is



formed, and this is why we do not have to fear that the world will melt as if it were snow."

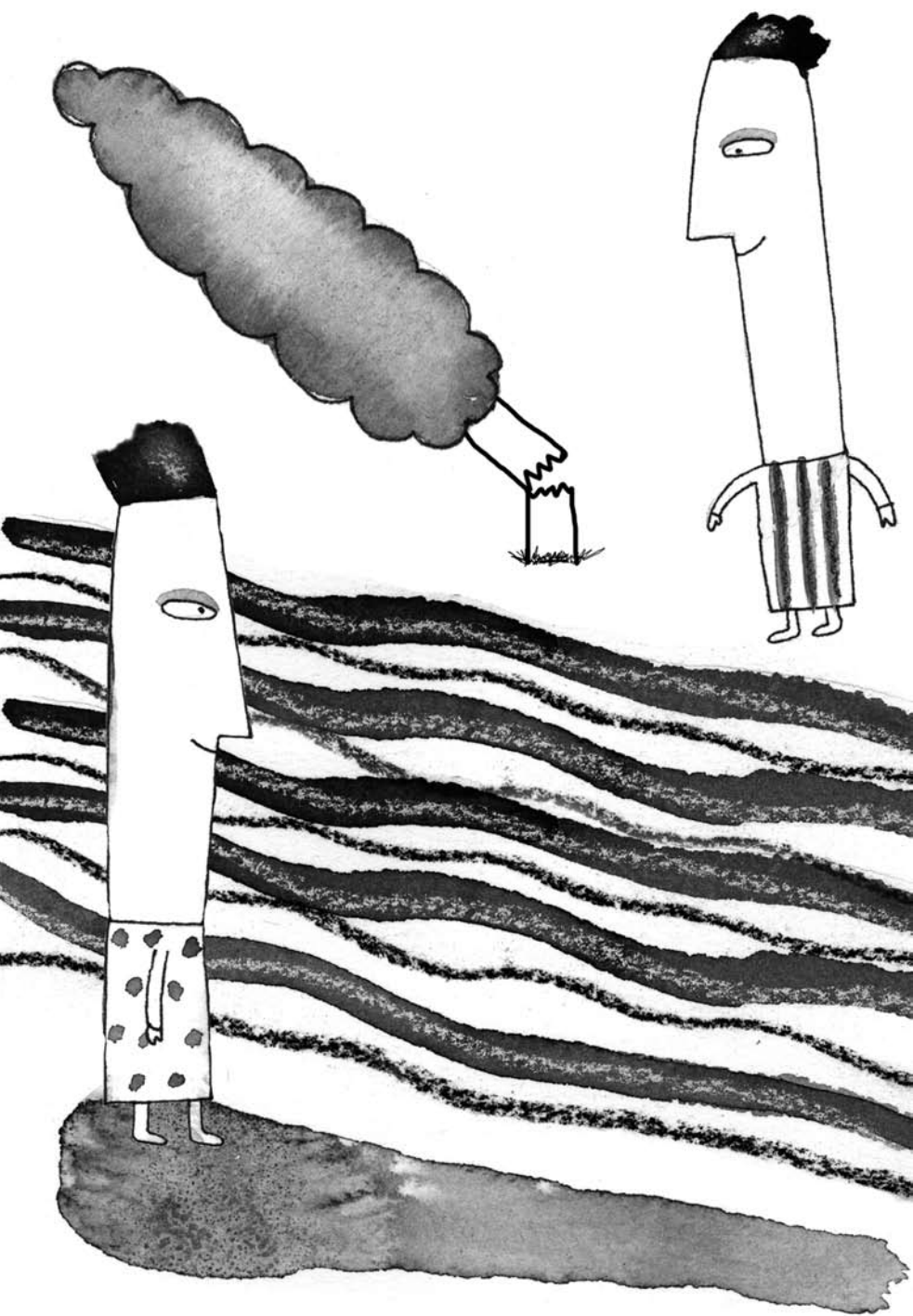
Thales' student refuted with:

"Atoms may be indivisible, but you cannot join them to create soft and light things or have parts like the air and light. If you say that atoms are the origin of all things, you are saying that it is possible to build something so delicate, flexible, and simple as a cloud with a sack of rocks or marbles. On the other hand, water, because it can take on any form, is the origin of all things."

"The problem is that atoms are so small that we cannot see them," responded Democritus, but before he could even continue, the people surrounding them had begun to discuss and argue the proposals that these philosophers had presented on the origin of the world.

Along with the philosophies of Democritus and Thales, the philosophies of Pythagoras, Empedocles and Parmenides were also brought up in the discussion. Some said that the origin of everything was numbers, because they gave rhythm and harmony to the universe. Others asserted, according to the teachings of Anaximander, that the universe came from "that which has no boundaries," while others still supported Heraclitus' beliefs regarding "Logos" and movement.

The discussion between the people who had gathered in the main square at Abdera went long into the night. They talked and exchanged their points of view, all the while enriching their philosophies as they attempted to discover together the governing force and source of all things in the universe.



## **PROTAGORAS (480-410 BCE)**

Protagoras was one of the most important thinkers of Ancient Greece because he did not agree with what most philosophers said. He did not believe that water, air, or numbers were the origin of the universe. Nor did he have any other proposition as to the origin of the universe. What he believed was that a person was the measure of all things, that is to say, that a person would invent a series of causes, or principles, and attribute them to the universe, even if the universe was completely different from what that person perceived it to be. Protagoras made this very clear one day when he went out for a walk in Abdera, the city he was born in, and was approached by a follower of Heraclitus' doctrine .

This man told Protagoras, "Mister Protagoras, I have heard you say that 'Logos,' which gives the universe order, does not exist, and that it is only a product of the human mind, a product of one's imagination. I completely disagree with you on this point. 'Logos' is the principle by which everything moves and battles in nature, like night and day, the cold and the heat, and maintains structure and order in the world. Can you imagine a world without order or if fire ran through the streets? What a calamity it would be!"

"Young man," responded Protagoras. "Your teacher is a great philosopher. I truly hold great respect and admiration for him. All thinkers should study his philosophy. I agree with him that everything changes, that nothing ceases to transform itself. The sun, the clouds, the water that runs in rivers, even the mountains; everything in the universe flows and changes constantly. However, I dare to ask you, if everything changes, would not

'Logos' change as well in the same way that everything else in the universe changes? Do you not think that 'Logos,' or Reason, could become something else and end up disappearing completely, like the leaves that fall from a tree and disintegrate into the ground in winter? I agree with your teacher when he says that everything changes. But, I do not see why this change has to have an order to it. Does change have a reason for being? What use is change to everything? Those problems are too big for humankind, who has a very short lifespan, to figure out. 'Logos' is a human invention, in the same way that our grandparents' ancient myths are a human invention. 'Logos' does not exist in reality."

Heraclitus' disciple was dismayed. He had never heard anything of the sort before. Could nature's order really disappear like footprints on a beach, erased by a wave? He thought about what Protagoras had said for a few moments and then asked:

"Protagoras, if 'Logos' does not give order to nature and it is humankind's invention, how can we find truth in the universe? If there is no order in nature, how can we distinguish what is true from what is false? We all know with certainty that spring precedes summer, and that fire always battles with water. If 'Logos' did not exist to give order to things and the entire universe, how could we sustain these truths?"

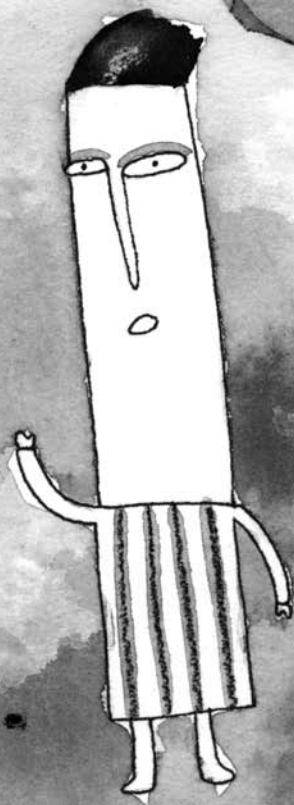
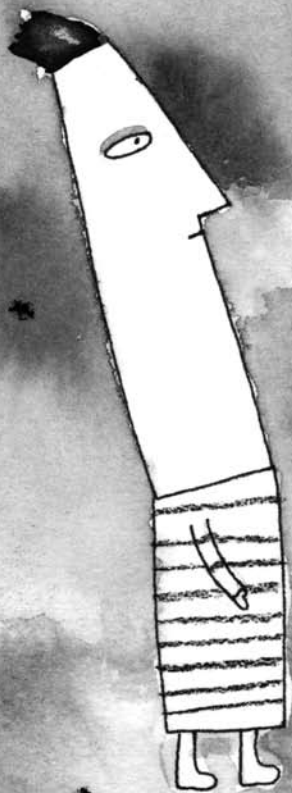
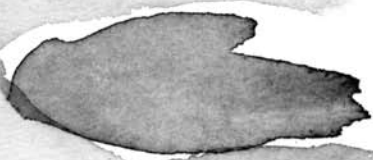
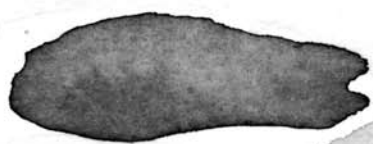
"My little friend," said Protagoras with affection. "You believe that 'spring precedes summer' and 'fire battles water' are truths, but thousands of years from now, when the Earth, the sun, and the stars no longer exist, none of these things will be the same. The truths we hold regarding the sun, the stars and the entire universe function here and now, but will not continue to do so everywhere

and forever. The truths that you defend take form only because you think them and because you have an imagination, but not because 'Logos' gives order to the universe. These truths make sense only in your particular world. Remember, of all things the measure is humankind: of the things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not. Truths are relative to people's opinions and customs and not to the universe."

Heraclitus' student listened to Protagoras attentively. He really did not know what to think. Suddenly, he remembered one of his teacher's phrases and recited it out loud, "Listening not to me but to Reason —'Logos'— it is wise to agree that all things are One."

Protagoras was humored by how angry Heraclitus' disciple had become. He wanted so desperately to find a way for Protagoras to see that "Logos" was not a product of the human mind, but that it existed of its own accord. He wanted Protagoras to understand that it was the eternal fountain of order in the universe through which man could know its truths. But Protagoras firmly maintained that all truths depended upon a person's particular point of view and not upon the existence of "Logos." Protagoras saw "Logos" as a human invention, just as firearms and highways are inventions made by humans, and that one day it would have to disappear.

Do you agree with Protagoras that humankind is the stem of all truths, or do you agree with Heraclitus and think that "Logos" and order exist independently of humankind? For example, if a tree falls in a forest and no one is there to hear it fall, can we say with certainty that the tree has fallen? How can one say that the tree has fallen, if no one is present to confirm that truth?



But if someone is present to say that the tree has fallen, how can one declare it as a truth that is independent of humankind? Can order and truth exist without the presence of humankind who says that such a thing is ordered or another thing is true?

Protagoras affirmed that truths depend upon humankind and not upon "Logos," because humankind is the measure of all things.

## **SOCRATES (470/469-399 BCE)**

Socrates, as opposed to Heraclitus, was a sociable man who liked to live with others. He spent most of his time in the city of Athens, and his favorite way to pass the time was by conversing with the many people he encountered on the street.

Socrates, like all philosophers, was interested in learning the secrets of nature, in finding out what the world was made of, and why things moved. Socrates was very curious about the rhythm of the seasons. He also liked to study the stars and the constellations they formed in the sky.

He was also very curious about the nature of the many people he shared his city with. It seems that the world has not changed much. While there were good and honest people during Socrates' time, there were also angry drunks who suffered and made others suffer when they drank wine, temperamental husbands who hit their wives, and corrupt politicians and governors who became rich from what did not belong to them. It surprised Socrates to see how some people could have such bad character, how they could drink too much and steal.



Do you know someone who has a bad temper, who gets angry easily, is always sad, or lies a lot? Why do you think people have bad character?

Well, Socrates thought that people had bad character because they preoccupied themselves too much with their belongings, or because of the image others had of them, or because they consumed certain things, like wine, in excess. This preoccupation became so strong for some people that they began to lie and steal. They could not stop themselves from doing bad things to others and to themselves. It is as if they had become slaves to their own vices and passions.

Do you have a friend or know someone who does not like to share his toys and likes them so much that he will not lend them out, so he ends up playing alone because no one wants to be with him? Do you have a relative or a friend who brags a lot, who thinks he is special because of the things he has, and precisely because he brags so much, others do not like him?

Socrates, as we have said previously, was very interested in people's character, and because of this he liked to talk to the many different people he found on the street.

He would go to the main square and approach the people he ran into, such as the politician who was corrupt and a thief. Socrates would ask him, "Mister politician, what is justice and what are politics?" The politician would answer the first thing that came to his mind so he could continue on his way. But Socrates would insist, and not knowing what to answer, because the only thing the politician did well was to steal, the politician would become very bothered and mad at Socrates for making him look stupid.

Socrates did the same thing with the merchant, the soldier and the teacher. He would ask each of them what their work consisted of, and since none of them knew —the merchant only tried to swindle people, the soldier made bad use of his weapons, and the teacher scolded his students— they would get mad at Socrates and try to avoid talking to him. Sometimes some of them would say to Socrates that if he was so wise, he should be able to answer his own questions. Then Socrates would say, somewhere between a humble and mocking tone, that he did not know anything, that he was not wise, that he wanted to learn, and that it should be them —especially if they held government positions— who should be able to answer his questions. Occasionally, the discussion would heat up because Socrates would make it evident that these people did not know what their jobs consisted of.

Socrates did have friends, though it was sometimes difficult to hold a conversation with him, because he was always questioning people on their character. He would ask the politician what justice was, so that the politician would try to be a good politician and not be corrupt. He would ask the soldier what bravery and defending one's country meant to him, so that the soldier would not abuse civilians with his weapons.

Socrates noticed that few people could answer his questions. He realized that most people had bad character and were slaves to their belongings, their passions and their vices. In other words, they did not own themselves, and they did not do their work well.

When Socrates found someone who had good character, who did his work for the pleasure of doing it well, and not for

the need to be famous or rich, he would say that the person was a virtuous person.

Socrates believed that virtue was a person's ability to own himself.

You may ask yourself, "How does a person become virtuous?" Could Socrates actually teach everyone to practice virtue? How could Socrates convince a merchant who steals that it is not good to swindle people, and a corrupt politician that he should not lie?

When Socrates would ask the politician, "What is justice?" and the soldier, "What is courage?" he never answered the question for them because he wanted them to find out the answer for themselves.

Socrates believed that if people were honest with themselves, they could answer for themselves what their job meant and know when they were doing things badly. This is how he thought a person could have a good character, practice virtue, and be happy.

Socrates thought that everyone has a little interior voice, like our conscience, or like Jiminy Cricket —Pinocchio's friend— that tells us what is good and what is bad, and if we are being dishonest or lazy. According to Socrates, people have vices and do bad due to their own ignorance, because they do not listen to themselves and are not faithful to their interior voice.

Don't you think that a drunk suffers a great deal when he drinks because somewhere deep inside himself he knows that he should not drink? Or you, for example, when you tell a lie, become jealous, or show off, even if you have "won" in the situ-

ation, don't you know deep within your conscience that those actions and sentiments are not good, and that a person needs courage to recognize that and change?

Well, that is what Socrates was referring to when he said that we all have a little interior voice that is like what we call "conscience." And, if we are sincere and courageous with ourselves and listen to this little voice, we can do good things and be owners of ourselves, which is to say, that we can be virtuous and happy, because we will be content and satisfied with what we do and who we are.

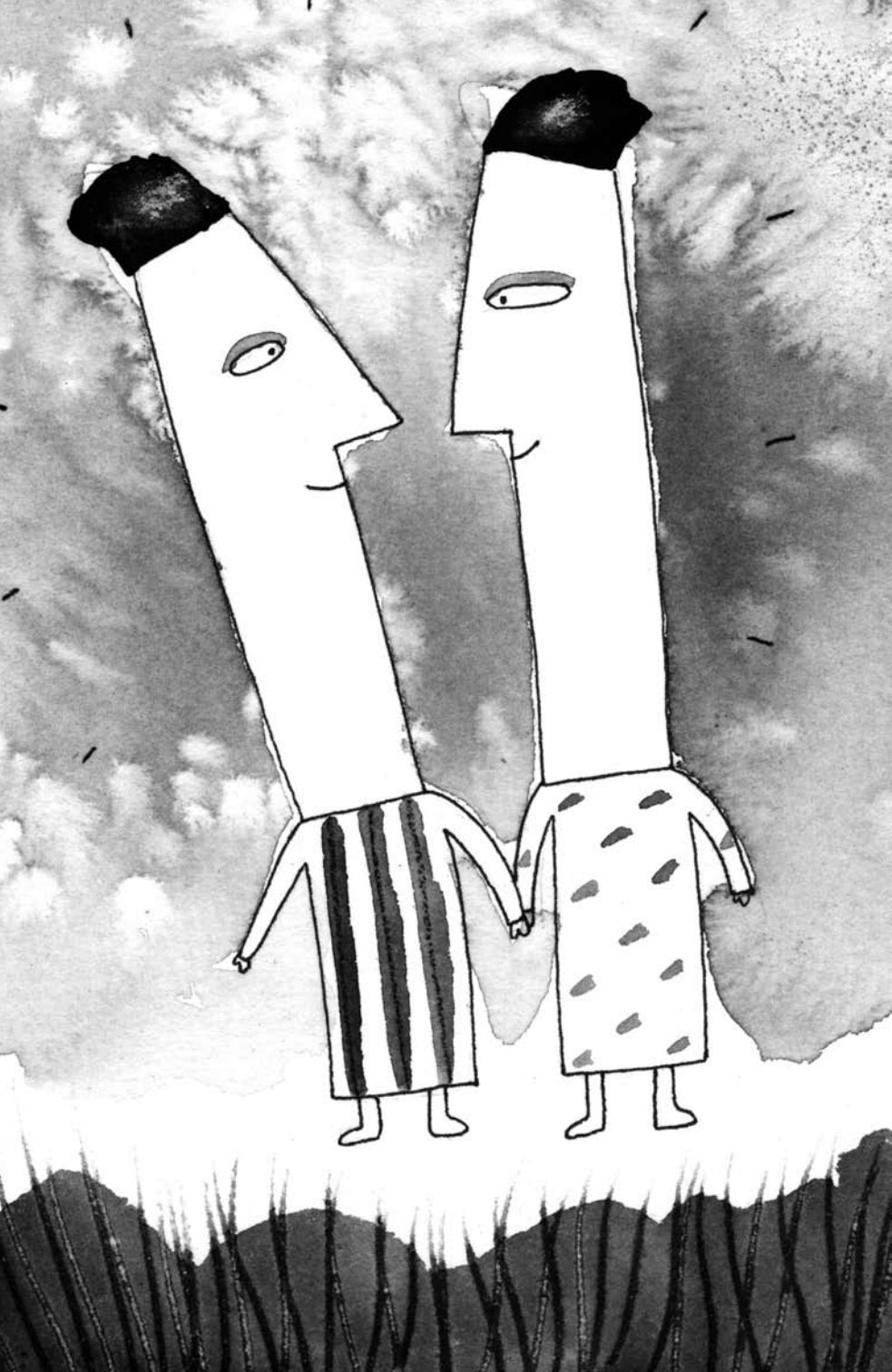
## **PLATO (428/427-347 BCE)**

Plato, like the other philosophers, spent a lot of his time contemplating the sky, studying the stars that decorated the night and watching the sun sink into the ocean.

Plato was also a very strong and healthy man who had defended his city, Athens, against the Persian army as a soldier. He was very interested in politics and wanted to live in a rich and prosperous city.

One afternoon, Plato was talking to Socrates and a friend of theirs named Aristophanes on the street in Athens. While they talked, they noticed how the people who passed by seemed distracted by their own activities. Plato, Socrates and Aristophanes observed how people always kept busy whether they were working, shopping or eating in a restaurant.

At that moment, Plato asked his friends:



"Socrates, Aristophanes, why do people need to keep busy by working, or going to the gym, or having long conversations? Does it not seem to you that people are very restless? Why are people so restless?"

Socrates responded:

"People are so restless and always work, exercise and go out to be entertained because they are looking for something that is missing within themselves. They feel incomplete, so they do all these things to try to fill that void."

Socrates made Plato and Aristophanes see that people do their activities, like studying, working or going for an evening walk, as a way to fill their lives and feel complete. He also taught them that people desire objects, like furniture or nice clothes, because they think that these objects will fill their incomplete lives.

Have you ever really wanted a pair of skates or to go to the circus?

Have you ever noticed how adults always want so many things like a big house or to go on vacation?

Why do you think people feel incomplete and try to fill that sensation of incompleteness by having and doing so many things?

What do you think people want?

Socrates, Plato and Aristophanes were asking themselves these same questions when Aristophanes remembered an old tale that his grandparents had told him one rainy night by the fire.

"Friends," Aristophanes said to Socrates and Plato. "I am going to tell you a story which may answer our questions:

"Many, many years ago, mankind was so powerful and strong that every person had four hands, four legs, two heads

and two sexes. These people were double, so they could move about and accomplish great tasks, like reaching unreachable tops of mountains and swimming across great oceans.

"But one day, these people, who were very proud of their strength, wanted to climb up to Mount Olympus and live amongst the gods. Nothing seemed to get in their way as they climbed the mountain with their four legs and four arms.

"But the gods took notice of these people's great pride and hubris. They were offended that these people would not be satisfied with their strength, their two heads and eight extremities, and would actually want more from the gods.

"As punishment, the gods split the people in half. And so now we only have one head, two arms, two legs, and one sex. That is why we are always searching for what we are missing—the other half that made us feel strong and complete.

"Our navels were left as reminders that we were once joined to our missing half and were complete and powerful."

Plato and Socrates were impressed by Aristophanes' story.

What do you think of Aristophanes' story?

Why do you think that humans want and do so many things? Do you think that we are missing half of ourselves, and that is the reason why we are continually trying to fill that emptiness?

Socrates and Plato were about to ask Aristophanes a few questions, when an old woman who had been listening to the conversation introduced herself. She said her name was Diotima.

Even though this old woman was skinny and hunched over, she had a beautiful face with a bright smile and vibrant eyes.

"This story is very interesting," she said with a sweet voice. "I would only like to add a few observations, which may give you a bit to think about:

"Because people are incomplete, they are always looking for what they are missing. They are always trying to find the half that they once lost.

"However, there is an intermediary between the gods and humans, a demigod called Eros, or Love, that can give people what they desire so that they may find plenitude and happiness.

"For example, when a person finds a partner he likes and that partner likes him, it is said he is in love, because the demigod Eros grants him love and permits him to find the part of himself that he needs so much. When a man feels that he can create beautiful works of art or sees himself united with God in mystical ecstasy, it is said that he is enlightened because Eros or Love has permitted him to satisfy his desires and to feel strong and complete, just as when he was able to climb Mount Olympus.

"Eros, or Love, son of 'Poros' —Abundance— and 'Penia' —Poverty— occasionally brings people to their lost half, allowing them to feel the unity they have longed for. Eros may sometimes take a person to his lover, but this union may not correspond with his needs. So, that person may become thin and lose sleep, and even go mad, because he feels life has abandoned him since he is unable to have a relationship with the person he loves."

Socrates, Plato and Aristophanes listened attentively to Diotima —so much so that at times they forgot they were on the street surrounded by many people. They were so excited



by the story that the old woman was telling them, that they felt as if they were inebriated or separated from time.

Do you think that love is a gift from the demigod Eros who allows people to feel full and happy?

Do you think that love allows people to find what they are missing and to satisfy their desires?

Do you know anyone who has made you feel full, or have you played a game that excites you? Diotima would say that the person and the game make you feel happy because Eros, or Love, united you with them, making you complete because you have found your missing half. Would you feel rejected if the person who makes you so happy did not want to be with you anymore?

Socrates, Plato and Aristophanes were about to comment to Diotima on the story she had just told them, but she interrupted them by saying:

“One must be careful with Love, because there are actually two types of Love—a good one and a bad one. One makes people truly happy, and another only causes temporary pleasure, which quickly disappears and leaves behind emptiness and frustration.

For example, a love that permits the satisfaction of creating, like the enlightenment a sculptor feels when making fine statues, is a love that produces never-ending plenitude. A sculptor owns his talent, which he will practice whenever he wants, and can enjoy just by looking at beautiful forms. Or for example, the mystic love that some people feel for God or for 'Logos' creates complete satisfaction, because such a person unites himself to God by participating in God's eternal perfection and goodness.

On the other hand, there is another Love called 'bad love,' which occurs when someone wants a passing thing; this love ultimately makes the person unhappy. People who only want to drink wine try to feel better with the more wine they drink, but only end up feeling sad. Or people who always want a lot of money and work incessantly to have it, feel that their lives are worthless when they spend or lose their money and so are never completely satisfied with themselves."

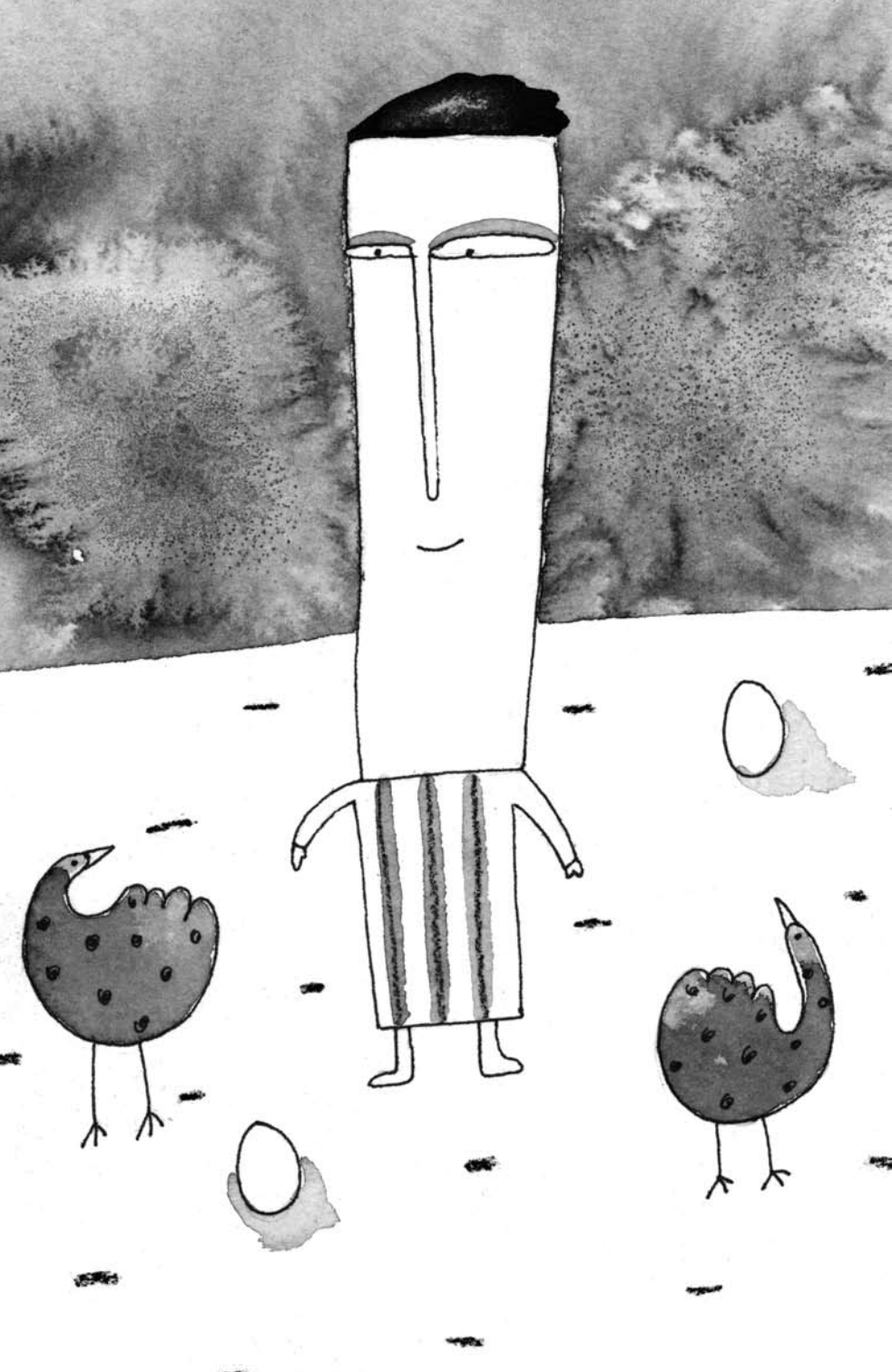
Socrates, Plato and Aristophanes listened attentively to Diotima's story on good and bad love.

Do you think that it is true that there are good loves and bad loves? Do you think that the love a person has for virtue and doing things well is the same as a love for something that can do a person harm, like the excess of wine or material goods?

Diotima said that there is bad love, even if at first it may appear as good, because not everything is good for a person's heart.

Before giving Socrates, Plato and Aristophanes the opportunity to say anything, Diotima said goodbye and quickly disappeared amongst the many people on the street. Socrates, Plato and Aristophanes never saw the woman again.

The three friends remained silent for a while, looking at each other and thinking about Diotima's story. It was nighttime by then so they all went home. Plato kept thinking about the story as he prepared for bed. Little did he know that one day he would write a beautiful book called *The Symposium*, in which Aristophanes and Socrates would appear as the main characters, who at a banquet would tell the story of old Diotima.



## **ARISTOTLE (384/383-322 BCE)**

Aristotle was one of Plato's students, and like Plato and all philosophers, he frequently observed nature: the fierce ocean, the clouds that played and changed shape in the sky and the landscape that disappeared into the distance.

One bright and diaphanous afternoon, Aristotle was finishing a meal at his kitchen table in front of a large window from which he could see a few olive trees. He was eating a deliciously cooked fish with olives and rye bread accompanied by a glass of good wine and enjoying the view of the sunset on the horizon and how the wind outside shook the olives from their trees. He contentedly sucked his fingers as a few olives remained on his plate.

Suddenly, when Aristotle took from his mouth the last olive pit and looked outside at the great old olive trees filled with their fruit, a peculiar thought came to him. He marveled at how such a small seed could be planted into the ground and, with a bit of time, sun and rain, become a robust and leafy tree. He thought it was amazing that he was holding between his fingers, in the form of an olive pit, a potential tree that could live for many years.

Have you ever planted a tree's seed and then watched it grow into a small plant and then into an enormous trunk full of leaves?

Aristotle thought about other things in nature and realized, for example, that like the potential tree found in an olive pit, rain was a potential in a cloud and milk was a potential in a cow and wine was a potential in a grapevine.

Aristotle thought that things are always in a potential state in nature before they become a reality. For example, mud



is a potential, and all it needs is rain to wet the earth for it to become an actuality.

Aristotle thought some more and realized that everything that is an actuality, like the seed from which the tree will sprout, or the cloud from which the rain will fall, was also at one time a potential. For example, the cloud from which the rain falls was a potential in the water that evaporated in rivers and oceans, and the seed was a potential in an older tree.

It is like the chicken and the egg: the egg is a potential in the chicken, but at the same time the chicken was a potential in another egg, and that egg in another chicken, and so on infinitely.

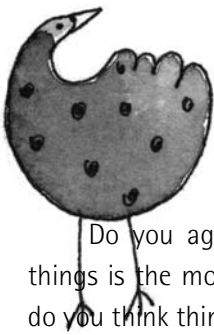
Aristotle noticed the way everything in nature moved and thought that this movement was the result of how everything, like tree seeds and chicken eggs, passed from potentiality into actuality.

Rain falls on the earth and makes grass a potential; grass grows because of the rain. A cow will eat grass and have milk as a potential; the cow can give milk because of the grass. From the milk, cheese can be made. The cheese is a potential in the milk. At the same time, the cheese can be used to make a cake. The cheesecake is a potential in the milk that came from the cow, which ate the grass, which grew in the field where the rain fell, which was a potential in the cloud.

Can you imagine all of this occurring so that we can eat a delicious cheesecake?

Do you see how things move from potentiality into actuality?

This is how everything moves according to Aristotle, it passes from potentiality to actuality, such as a child who is a potential adult and then becomes an actual adult; or how an adult who is an old man in potential becomes an actual old man.



Do you agree with Aristotle that the movement of all things is the movement from potentiality into actuality? Why do you think things move?

Aristotle, like Plato, was one of the better known and studied philosophers in the Middle Ages. His ideas on movement —on the passage from potentiality to actuality— were always remembered because he said that before every act and every potential there was an actuality that came from no potentiality. For example, before all the eggs and all the chickens in the world existed, and all the rains that came from clouds, and all the clouds that came from rivers, and all the rivers that came from snow melting off the mountains —and so on infinitely— before all of these things, there was an initial act, an initial force, which made everything in the world move, without anything having moved beforehand.

This first act, this first motor of the universe, which made everything in the world move and which allowed for seeds to rise to trees and fields to bloom with beautiful flowers, Aristotle called "pure actuality" or God.

The philosophers of the Middle Ages were most concerned with the idea of God, and because of this —even if their God, who is called Christ, had nothing to do with Aristotle's God, "pure actuality"—they always considered his ideas when they responded to their "Why?" questions.

Do you believe in God?

Do you think that God is like an initial motor which makes everything and every person move and pass from potentiality into actuality like the black night that becomes a hot day or a sad winter that gives way to a colorful and happy spring?



## THE MIDDLE AGES

The Middle Ages was a time that succeeded Greek and Roman Antiquity: a time of kings and castles, of enchanted forests and imposing cathedrals.

All the philosophers in the Middle Ages, like all the Greek philosophers, liked to contemplate nature, take in the beautiful colors at sunset and listen to birds sing. The philosophers of the Middle Ages were interested in contemplating nature and attentively listened to it in order to learn its secrets. Like the ancient Greek philosophers, the philosophers of the Middle Ages were very good observers.

At the same time, there was something else that was very important to these philosophers and helped them answer their "Why?" questions, and that was the Christian religion.

Thales, for example, asked himself what the world was made of when he contemplated nature and answered that it was made of water. When Heraclitus saw that everything in nature was ordered in a certain way and he asked "Why?" he said that the order was due to "Logos" or Reason and that force governed the world.

On the other hand, when the philosophers who lived in the Middle Ages contemplated nature, they took into account



everything that Christianity told them before answering their “*Why?*” questions.

Rather than ask themselves if the world was originally made from water, air or atoms, medieval philosophers believed that God had created everything from nothing.

Do you think that God created the world or that it is a product of an element like earth or fire?

Do you think that the world is made of atoms that move in an eternal whirlwind, as Democritus said, or do you think everything is a creation of God?

Do you believe in God?

When the philosophers of the Middle Ages tried to answer their “*Why?*” questions, they always took into consideration what the Christian religion had taught them.

Do you belong to a religion? Why do you think that people have religions like Christianity, Judaism or Hinduism?

The Christian doctrine was very important to the philosophers of the Middle Ages because it helped them answer all their “*Why?*” questions.

## **SAINT AUGUSTINE (354-430)**

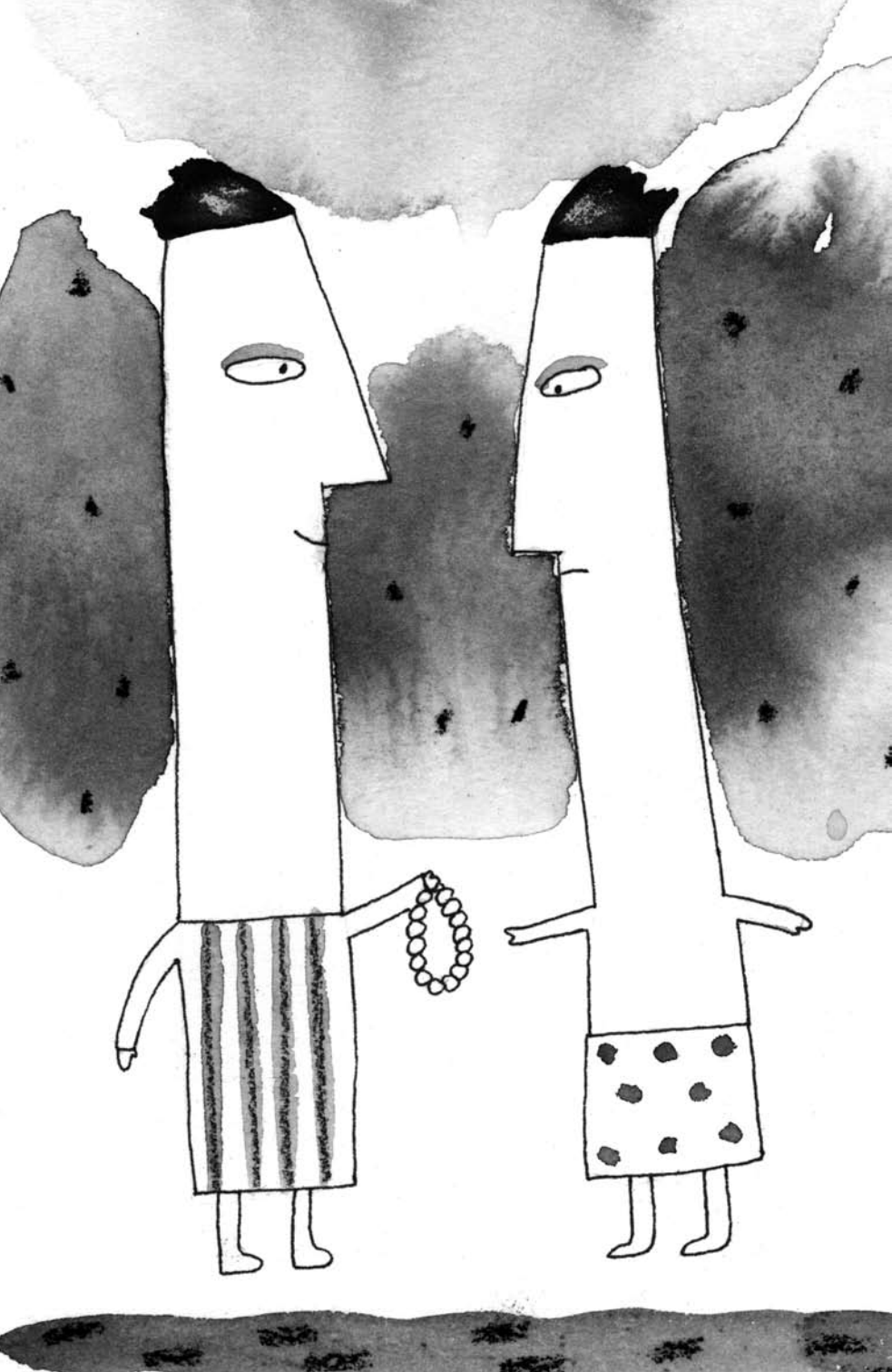
Saint Augustine was born in Tagaste, on the northern coast of Africa. He was very restless as a young man and loved to have fun. He had a lot of friends, and he liked to go to parties and travel. He also liked to study and learn everything he could from what his teachers taught him.

Saint Augustine was a great philosopher because he spent his time asking "*Why?*" about everything he saw. He was intrigued by and wanted to know why days grew shorter in winter and where the ocean ended and why some people were so virtuous and good-natured while others became slaves to their passions.

Saint Augustine was very curious, and he often was not satisfied by the first answer given to him when he asked "*Why?*" He often changed his opinion and believed one thing one day and something else the following day.

This philosopher lived in a time, similar to our time, when there were very rich people who had great fortunes and lived with many luxuries, and who, by paying them very little for their work, took advantage of people who lived humbly. Augustine saw that some people were very poor because rich people kept all of the money and food for themselves, leaving very little for others to survive on.

When Saint Augustine observed the people in his country, he would think of Plato—who had said that people were always looking for something to fill their sense of incompleteness—and realized why some people strove to have riches and power.



Saint Augustine noticed that people looked for happiness by accumulating material wealth, even if this accumulation caused others to live in poverty.

Have you noticed that there are people who are never happy with what they have, so they take what does not belong to them and live at the cost of others, like politicians who lie and steal, or owners of big companies who pay very little to their employees?

Have you ever read in newspapers about how presidents of certain countries and their friends become very rich with money that belongs to their nation that is struggling with poverty?

Well, Saint Augustine's time was similar to ours. People back then believed that money and luxuries were the source of plenty and happiness.

Saint Augustine attempted to find a way in which people could be happy and feel satisfied in their lives without having to steal, lie and desire material goods.

How can one keep a politician from corruption and have him return land and money to his nation's people, so that everyone can eat, live peacefully and feel contentment in their lives?

After thinking and doubting for a long time, Saint Augustine decided to accept what the Christian religion told him: that people must love each other, just as Christ, the Son of God, had loved them. Love would permit everyone to be happy.

For example, a boy who likes his toys a lot and does not lend them to others is not a happy boy, because he has no one to play with. His friends, who do not have toys, are not happy

either. Saint Augustine would say that the boy should love his friends more than his toys, because in this way he would share his toys with his friends, everyone would play with each other, and everyone would feel happy and satisfied.

Saint Augustine agreed with the Christian idea that if every person were less egotistical and loved those around him more, the world would be more pleasant because nobody would steal, lie, or feel alone, and everyone would help each other feel happier and more complete.

Christ, the God of the Christians, said that if people wanted to satisfy their desires and have a full and divine life, they would have to love others more than riches, fame and power. He thought that desire for riches, fame and power caused people to fight one another, created poverty, envy and great suffering, in the same way that a rich man who loves money too much will allow those around him to starve.

Saint Augustine remembered Plato and the difference between good love and bad love, and thought that good love—the love that makes people truly happy—was not the love of riches, big houses and money, but the love of justice for human beings.

Many people agreed with Augustine and realized that if everyone loved each other, they could easily leave behind their own misery and not feel alone, because everyone would be friends and support each other in their work.

Do you agree with Saint Augustine and Christianity that the best way for all people to be happy is by loving each other?

Do you think that this world would be a happier place for everyone if everyone loved each other?

There were many people in Saint Augustine's time who preferred not to love everyone, who wanted to keep their wealth and luxuries to themselves, even if others were poor because of them. There were a lot of people who did not want to be Christian.

Saint Augustine realized that his ideas could provoke poor people to claim what belonged to them, and that most rich people would be unwilling to give up their riches. He also knew that if people were to follow his ideas and love each other, some would have to lose their wealth and share it with others in order for everyone to live well.

Does it seem correct to you that some people are very rich because they live from the work of the poor? Do you think it is okay that poverty exists?

What do you think of the idea that the poor take some of the immense wealth of the rich? Do you think that love between people is the best way for everyone to be happy?



## **SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI (1182-1226)**

Saint Francis was a very religious man who loved to spend his time asking "*Why?*" about everything around him. He was not a philosopher; rather, he was a man who believed in the teachings of the Christian doctrine.

This is why Saint Francis dedicated himself completely to loving people. He left his house and his belongings and built a hospital for lepers and people with other illnesses. Saint Francis was very content loving and helping people; he did not need to own land or have big houses and fancy clothing in order to be happy.

Saint Francis lived in the woods, and every morning he would walk to a valley where the hospital had been built. Then, in the evening he would return to the mountain to eat and sleep. At the foot of a great cliff, amongst the pine trees, there was a cave where Saint Francis and some of his friends slept at night. They only had a bit of food and bundles of straw to keep warm, and they wore the long grey or brown woolen robes that farmers wore.

Saint Francis felt completely fulfilled in his life by taking care of sick people, helping those around him and having good friends. Many people liked him and were attracted to his beautiful smile and his brilliant eyes, which gave off a contagious sense of wellbeing. Saint Francis never owned land or any commodities, and yet he had great peace in his heart.

On occasions, Saint Francis would not eat for several days. At first he would get very hungry, but then he would



feel light and could better enjoy the heat of the sun, the crisp mornings and the wonderful smell of the pines. Saint Francis loved the forest and all of nature as much as he loved humans. This love allowed him to be full and complete.

Saint Francis' love for nature was so intense that one morning, while he was throwing crumbs for the pigeons to feed, he realized that he understood the pigeons when they thanked him.

Bit by bit, he began to learn the language of the pigeons. Then he learned the language of the robins and the language of all forest birds.

Some time later, Saint Francis had learned the language of the foxes, bees, turtles, snakes, boars and all the animals in the region.

And so, often, on his way home from work at the hospital, many animals would approach him and talk to him.

Once, when the forest animals gathered around Saint Francis to talk to him, they told him that if people kept destroying forests in order to sell the wood from the trees and buy weapons for wars, and to skin the animals to make precious furs, then the immense forests filled with fruit trees and the rivers filled with fish would disappear. If men continued to destroy the forest, they would end up isolating themselves from nature and would die sad and alone.

Saint Francis listened to what the forest animals told him, but he knew that there was not much he could do but accept that people were going to make the Earth a desolate, lifeless place.

The animals told Saint Francis that if people kept destroying nature instead of learning to love one another and love the animals and all things on this earth —bears and eagles, great old trees and serene lakes— they would soon live in tiny houses where the sun and the wonderful smell of fresh flowers from the fields would never enter. Soon they would have hearts frozen by noise and eyes filled with tears from not being able to see the blue sky.

Saint Francis was very sad, because he knew that the animals were right. He thought that people, while trying to satisfy their desires and feel more complete in their lives, would end up destroying everything around them and building enormous palaces with large, cold rooms that no one used, and weapons for wars that killed many good and innocent people. Instead of bringing true happiness, they would only cause hurt and a greater feeling of emptiness, because they did not live in harmony with nature.

From that moment onward, Saint Francis tried to convince people that it was unnecessary to be inexhaustibly rich in order to be happy, especially at the price of killing trees and animals. But people never paid much attention to Saint Francis.

Do you believe, like Saint Francis, that if people were to love nature instead of destroy it in order to make unnecessary things, like race cars, crocodile skin shoes, and atomic bombs, that everyone would be happier —because they would be able to enjoy the fresh air from the mountains, the sound of a trickling stream and the company of animals?

One day when Saint Francis was an old man, he realized his days were coming to an end. His eyes had stopped functioning, his bones ached, and the strength in his body was diminishing day by day. So he went alone into the deep woods where there were no people. It is said that on his way, before dying, his head was enveloped by a halo of many colors and the intense glow of a beautiful rainbow. He was never seen again.



## **SAINT ANSELM. (1033-1109)**

Saint Anselm decided one afternoon, as he was returning from the cathedral where he celebrated mass, to go into a tavern for a nice hunk of bread with cheese and sausage. When he entered the tavern, he saw that everyone in the room was involved in a big argument.

Saint Anselm had a hard time deciphering what the argument was about from all the shouting in the room.

A stubbly-bearded old man explained to Saint Anselm what all the racket was about:

"There is a group of men who say that God does not exist. Others assert that He does exist. They say if He did not exist, we would not be able to know where the world came from; hence God must have created it. The other group says that God did not create the world, because the world has existed forever."

Saint Anselm listened to the argument, which at times grew hostile. When it seemed that the argument was not going to end with an agreement, he stood on his chair and said to everyone in the room:

"Friends, of course God exists. If He did not exist, then there would be no mountains or rivers. If God did not exist, no one would have created you, and you would not exist."

"Anselm," responded a strong older man. "You cannot prove that God exists by saying that if He did not exist, the world in turn would not exist. The world is eternal; no one created it; it has existed forever, and there is no God that created it. If you

believe in God, that is due to your faith, but you cannot demonstrate with reason that God exists."

Saint Anselm could not respond to the man's argument, because in that moment everyone began to shout at each other, and nothing could be understood clearly.

Do you believe that God exists? Do you think that a good way to demonstrate the existence of God is by saying that without Him no one would have created the world, and so it would not exist? And what if the world is eternal and exists without God having created it? How could you prove God's existence?

Saint Anselm sat in his chair. He was mad because he had not managed to convince the others of God's existence. He agreed with the man that had spoken to him, that faith was a way to believe in God, but he wanted to find an argument to prove God's existence.

Saint Anselm wanted to prove God's existence by reason and not just by faith.

Suddenly, a great idea came to him, and he stood again on his chair. He was so excited by this idea that everyone in the room kept silent and listened to his words.

"Dear friends," he said. "What is better for a child: to have a toy that he likes a lot or for him to imagine that he has a toy?"

"To have a toy," everyone responded in chorus.

"So then, the toy that one has is better and more perfect than the toy that one imagines having," added Saint Anselm.

"Of course," everyone responded.

"Well, now think about God. It is said that God is the best and the greatest. Are we in agreement?"

"We agree," answered everyone present.

"If God is the best and the greatest, then he is the most perfect."

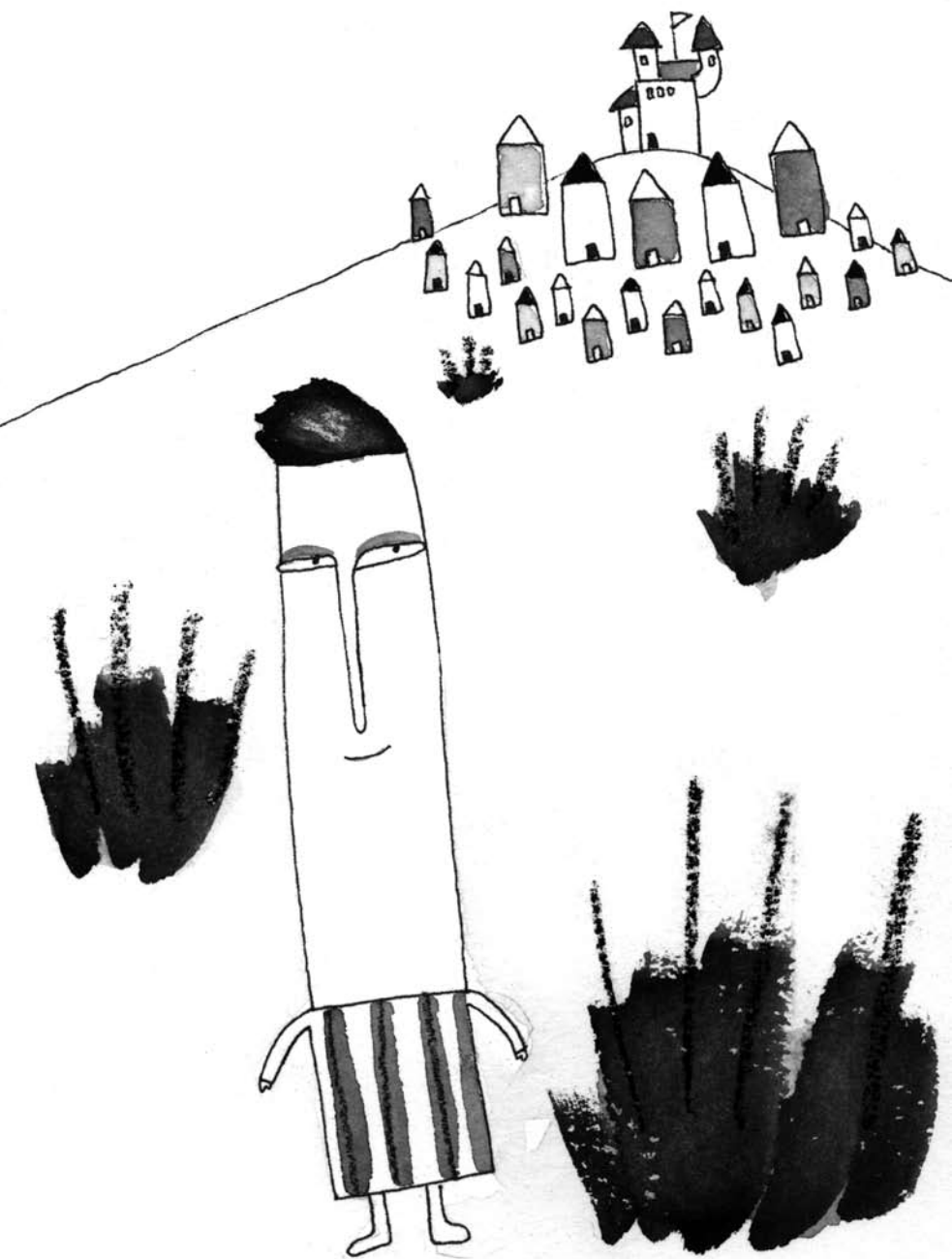
"We agree."

"And of course, if God is the biggest, best and most perfect, then it is because he *really* is the best, most perfect thing we have. It is because He exists, and is not a figment of our imagination like a boy's imaginary toy. God is perfect—like the toy that the child actually has and does not imagine— therefore, He exists and we can know Him."

Everyone who was in agreement that God existed began to shout happily, convinced that Saint Anselm had been able to prove God's existence. The ones that did not believe in God kept quiet because they did not know what to say. Saint Anselm had won the discussion with his argument.

Do you agree with Saint Anselm? Do you think that if God is perfect, He exists, like a perfect toy that a child has? Do you think that if God is the biggest, the best, and the most perfect thing one could imagine, then He must exist?

Saint Anselm, from that day onward, was remembered as the philosopher who had proved God's existence.



## **SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS (1221-1274)**

Saint Thomas Aquinas lived in Naples. As with most cities in the Middle Ages, a thick wall enclosed the city of Naples, in order to prevent enemy armies from invading.

There was a beautiful castle in the center of the city where the king lived. Around the castle, there were palaces where princes and gentlemen lived. Around the palaces that belonged to the princes and gentlemen, there were houses where soldiers and craftsmen lived. The farmers and poor people lived closest to the wall that defended the city. Every day the farmers would step outside the city walls to work the king's fields.

Saint Thomas liked to walk in the mornings and greet the people he encountered on the street.

First, he would stop before the king's castle and make a solemn reverence. Then he would continue to the princes and noblemen's palaces for breakfast. So that he could digest well, he would go down to the area where the craftsmen and soldiers lived and buy some things that he would put in his satchel. Finally, he would arrive at the city gates and leave the city walls and spend the rest of the day strolling through the wheat fields.

One afternoon as Saint Thomas returned home, he leaned against the city walls, because he was very tired from walking all day and watched the sunset on the horizon. He was so tired, that he fell asleep right there.

When he woke up, he could no longer see the fields and the mountains in the distance that had been bathed in the af-



ternoon sun. First, because he had slid to the ground in his sleep and was lying on his back, and second, because he could only see a dark sky filled with stars.

Saint Thomas observed how the sky was like a domed ceiling or a cupola that covered the earth. The sun had completely disappeared, but the first rays of the moon shone beyond the mountains.

Saint Thomas was surprised by the beauty and greatness of the universe. It seemed wonderful to him how the Earth was in the center of the universe, and how the moon, the sun, the planets and all the stars orbited around the Earth.

This philosopher was convinced that the Earth stood still as everything else moved around it.

Because Saint Thomas was a Christian, he believed that God had created the world and that He had created it from nothing. This is why Saint Thomas did not ask himself if the origin of the cosmos came from air, fire, numbers or atoms. But he did ask himself, "Why is the Earth in the center of the universe, and why do the moon, sun and all the planets move around the Earth?"

Why had God created a round and closed cosmos like a ball or a sphere, and not a cosmos that was square in which the Earth rotated around the sun?

Saint Thomas began to wonder why God had created a universe like this one, but he was also cold and hungry and so he decided to go home.

The next day he did not go on a walk because he had to go to Mass. Instead of listening to the priest's words, he pondered

on the questions that had come up the night before: "Why do all the planets rotate around the immobile Earth, which stands in the center of the universe?"

He looked at the murals and paintings on the church walls. He noticed how in some of them, God was portrayed at the very top of what seemed to be a pyramid. Below Him were the arch-angels, cherubs and an army of angels. And at the very bottom were humankind and animals.

Have you ever been into a church? Have you ever noticed the paintings that depict God seated on a chair, and below Him there are many angels, and below the angels is humankind, and below humankind, are the animals?

Saint Thomas realized that a few people were looking at him disapprovingly because he was not listening to the Mass. So, he pretended to seem very interested in the Mass, while inside, in his mind, he kept thinking...

Saint Thomas went on his customary walk the following morning. He bowed when he passed the king's castle which, as has been mentioned, was at the center of the city; then he visited the area where the princes and gentlemen lived; he reached the area where the soldiers and craftsmen lived; and he passed by the farmers' huts until he reached the city walls.

There, he sat down to look at the countryside and to smell the fresh air, which carried the scent of wild flowers, and began to think:

"Why is the Earth at the center of the universe, which is like a sphere wrapped around the planet? Why do the moon, sun and planets rotate around the Earth?"



Then he remembered the images he had seen in the church of God: the angels, humans and animals. He asked himself, "Why were they all depicted, like a pyramid, in a hierarchical form in which God was at the top with the archangels, the cherubs and angels below him and then people, and below them, the animals?"

A farmer passed by carrying a shovel and hoe on his shoulder.

Saint Thomas, who wanted to talk, called the farmer over to him. Saint Thomas assumed that the farmer would not be able to say much because most farmers were illiterate and only knew what involved farm work.

Saint Thomas said to the farmer:

"Farmer, why do you think the universe is like a sphere, and at the center of this sphere is the Earth, around which everything rotates like the moon, the sun, the planets and all the stars?"

The farmer stopped, thought for a few seconds and then answered:

"I have seen you morning after morning walk through the center of the kingdom past the castle to the city walls where the farmers live; and I have also seen you in church, looking at the paintings and murals, so I am surprised that you would not know why God created Earth in the center of the cosmos, around which the sun, moon and seven planets rotate.

"I do not understand you," said Saint Thomas who was surprised by the farmer's words.

"Look at me," said the farmer. "Do you think that one day I will live in the king's castle? Well, I never will because my



grandfather was a farmer, my father was a farmer, and I am a farmer, and so I will always live close to the city walls.

And the same applies to the church paintings. God lives above all human beings, but just below Him are the angels, then the people, and at the very bottom are the animals. Do you think that any man or angel can take God's place?

Well, the same thing happens in the universe. The Earth is at its center, where Christ, my God, was born. Then there are the moon, the sun and the other planets. Do you think that one day the moon could join the Earth and take its place? Well, of course it could not.

When God created the world, He wanted everything to have a special place and order. He wanted the king's castle to be at the center of its kingdom and the farmers to live farther out by the city walls. God wanted to be at the very top of the pyramid of angels, people and animals; and He wanted the Earth, where His son, Christ, was born, to be at the center of the universe."

Because the farmer liked to avoid big discussions and was a simple man, he took his shovel and hoe and continued on his way without giving Saint Thomas the opportunity to say anything.

Do you agree with what the farmer said to Saint Thomas?

Do you think that God created some men to be kings and others to be farmers, and that a farmer cannot be a king in order for the world to keep a certain hierarchical order?

Do you think that the Earth is in the center of the universe and that it does not move? Do you think that the other planets

move around the Earth because Christ, the son of God, was born on Earth and so it is better than the other planets?

Do you believe that rich people, like kings, are rich and powerful because God created the world that way, and that poor people have to be poor because that is the way God wants things to be?

Do you think that the universe is ordered in a hierarchical way in which God is at the top, the angels are below him, and people and animals are below the angels?

Do you agree with the farmer's story?

Saint Thomas agreed with the farmer's story. He did not tell anyone about his conversation with the farmer. But later in his life he wrote many books in which he explained the conversation. He described how God created the universe in such a way that the Earth was at its center and how the other planets orbited around the Earth. He described how God wanted the king's castle to be at the center of its kingdom, with the nobles and the rest of the kingdom surrounding the castle. And he also described God's hierarchical placement of angels, humankind and animals.

One day, Saint Thomas met a Franciscan monk who had read one of his books. The monk asked Saint Thomas:

"Thomas, do you believe that God created the world in hierarchical levels so that the king can be rich and powerful while the farmers stay poor and ignorant? Do you think that a farmer could ever take the place of a king?"

Without looking at the monk's face, Saint Thomas answered, "Well of course not, because in this way cities may have

a certain order and everyone can live in peace. Can you imagine what it would be like if everyone did what they pleased? Who would work the fields? Who would defend the castle from the enemy? Who would create laws and rule the land?"

"But, do you think that it is good to have a kingdom that is well organized and peaceful because everyone does what is required of them, even if there is no justice? Can you say that it is just that the king keeps the wealth created by the farmers' and craftsmen's labor?" asked the monk.

"If everyone did what they pleased and there were no order to things, no one would be able to work," answered Saint Thomas with a furrowed brow.

"No, what is needed is for people to work together, so that there is peace and everyone can also be happy, precisely because there is justice," reproached the Franciscan monk.

"But, it is impossible for everyone to work. Someone has to give orders!" retorted Saint Thomas, while turning towards the path that would lead him on his way. "I am very busy, and you will have to study more to understand my arguments."

The Franciscan monk, simultaneously furious and sad, realized that Saint Thomas did not want to have a proper discussion.

Whom would you agree with? Would you agree with Saint Thomas who believed that it was necessary for a city to function like the universe by having some people give orders for others to obey? Or do you agree with the Franciscan monk, who wanted everyone to work so that there was not only peace and order, but also love and justice in the community?

## **WILLIAM OF OCKHAM (1280-1349)**

William of Ockham was a Franciscan monk, which is to say, that he agreed with Saint Francis of Assisi's way of life. William of Ockham loved humans and nature. Ockham thought that theories like the one Saint Thomas had created, full of complicated and entangled ideas, were unnecessary. What was truly important, he thought, was to understand how God's love manifested itself in each thing, as small as that thing may be. Ockham said that the works of Saint Thomas' philosophy were just empty words, simple absurdities that had nothing to do with God, love and life. This philosopher thought that God was love and justice and that the universe was not created in a hierarchical order. He said that true philosophy should be like a sharp knife, ready to cut through all the doctrines that confused people's understanding of things and impeded them from being closer to the love of God.

Ockham dedicated himself completely to his work.

He had a small room in the convent where he lived where he conducted experiments with light, colors and figures by using different devices. Some of these devices were lenses, magnifying glasses and mirrors. He also shaped glass into different forms so they could twist images and make people look very fat or very skinny and long.

William of Ockham spent many hours in his room conducting different experiments and tests with light and shadows. He would measure figures made by rays of light and calculate the thickness of the lenses and magnifying glasses.

There were few people when Ockham lived who dedicated themselves to conducting experiments because many apparatuses that we use today, like radios, televisions and refrigerators, did not exist then. When Ockham lived, electricity and steam power machines had not yet been invented.

Ockham was one of the first people to measure and calculate the properties of water and metals and to perform experiments with everything that he found in order to create machines that were useful to humankind.

That is why Ockham is one of the most important philosophers of the Middle Ages. While it mattered to him that people loved each other, that justice be practiced and that farmers be treated well by kings, he also dedicated himself to his experiments.

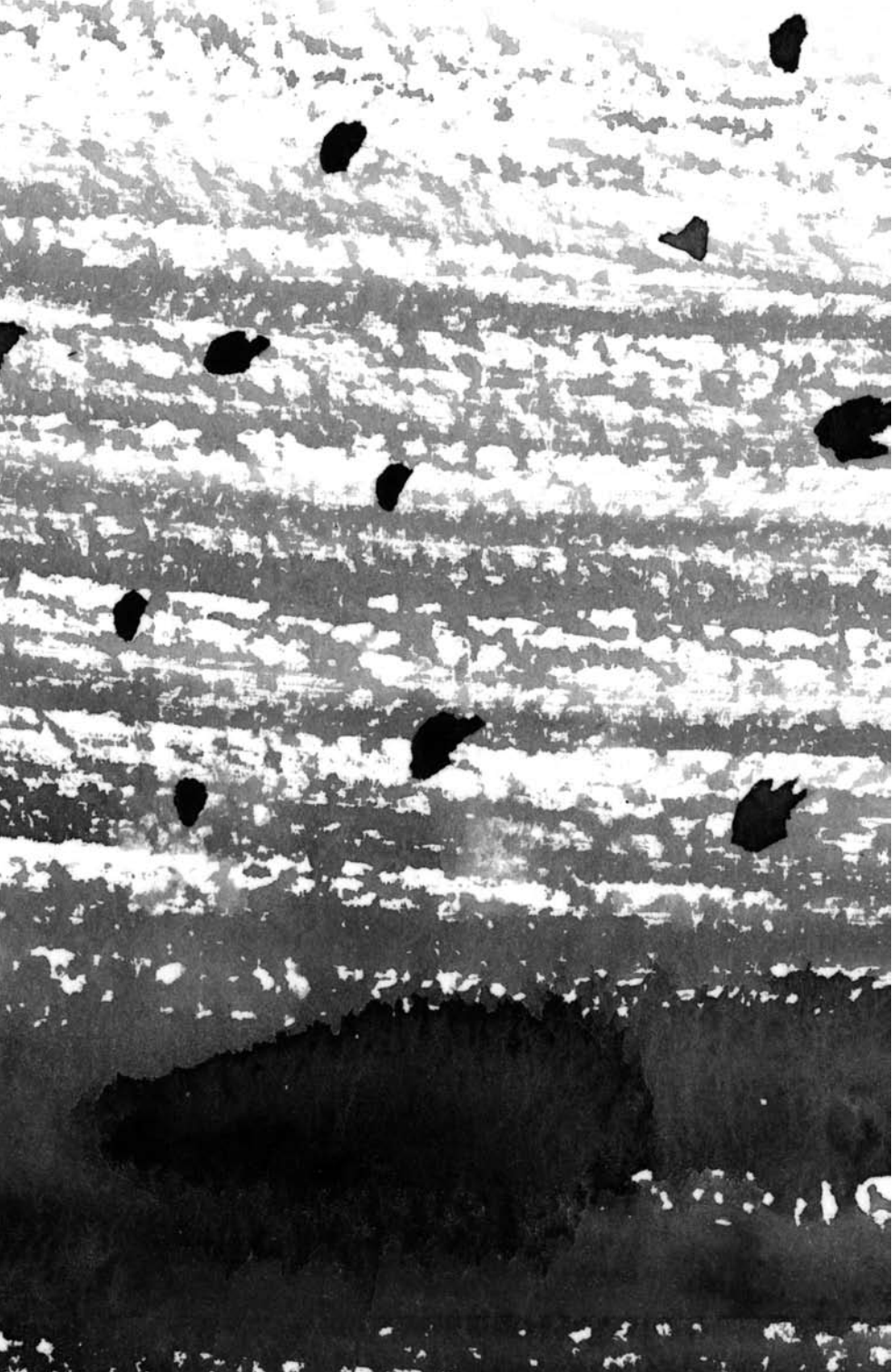
Many of his experiments and his way of thinking were studied in a later era, in the Renaissance, when modern science was born, when the telescope, the pendulum and many other tools that served to measure and calculate were invented.

Have you ever thought of what it must have been like not long ago when televisions did not exist, and not long before that when there was no radio? If you have grandparents, ask them if they had television when they were children.

Can you imagine what life must have been like without cars, refrigerators and airplanes?

William of Ockham was one of the first to invent things that made life easier and safer for humankind. His inventions make him one of the precursors of modern science.





## **THE RENAISSANCE**

The Renaissance was an era in which people and philosophers no longer agreed with Saint Thomas' thinking. For example, many people began to doubt if the Earth stayed still and if it was actually the center of the universe. Others asserted that the cosmos was not a sphere, but existed infinitely, that it never ended, and that within the cosmos there existed many suns around which innumerable planets rotated, including the Earth.

Also during the Renaissance, there were those who no longer agreed with the way cities were structured: that the king's castle should be at the center of its kingdom, surrounded by the princes and noblemen, followed by the soldiers and craftsmen, and finally the farmers. Many people no longer agreed with the idea that a farmer could never be more than a farmer in his life, and could not do other things like be a craftsmen, or a merchant who could travel freely and not have to work the king's land.

The common people during the Renaissance no longer wanted to be like a piece of a puzzle in a whole complicated system created by nobles.

People during that time period wanted to be valued for who they were and not because God gave them a certain position on Earth.

Every person in the Renaissance wanted to be recognized for what he did and not for what he was supposed to do according to the neighborhood he was born in. During the Renaissance, there were many people who were born into different social classes and became painters, magicians, architects, writers, musicians and mathematicians.

During the Renaissance, many farmers became merchants while craftsmen and noblemen became artists and scientists, and they all worked for their own profit instead of working under the king and his nobility. Some cities' protective walls were torn down, and people preferred to move about freely in order to do better business and know other forms of life.

## **PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA (1463-1494)**

Pico della Mirandola was a handsome man. Pico liked to go out and walk around the city. On his walks, he would look at people on the street and wonder why everyone was so different from one another.

For example, one day he would find a dirty beggar on a street corner and the next day see elegant, well-groomed gentlemen eating sumptuous meals and talking to each other with courtesy.

Sometimes he would go to a concert hall and admire the artists' capacity to make beautiful music, such as a flautist who played soft melodies. And then, upon leaving the concert hall, he would see a few drunks who would probably end up staying the

night on the ground in some dark alleyway, stumbling down the street and spouting nonsense.

Have you ever noticed how people can be very different from one another? Have you seen how some people are very alert and work a lot, while others have many vices, and faces that are difficult to read?

Have you noticed how some people are always clean and stand up straight, while others are always unkempt and stand hunched over with an unpleasant expression on their face?

Pico was very intrigued because he wanted to know why people were so different from one another, even if they were family members and had gone to the same school.

Pico often accompanied his father to a farm just outside the city where he would see goats, cows and chickens. He noticed that the cows, for example, never changed, and that they were all similar to each other. He did not see beggar cows or cows that played the violin. And he did not see a few drunk goats and others that liked mathematics and alchemy.

Pico noticed that the animals did not preoccupy themselves with being special or about making something of their lives. The animals seemed to be satisfied with what they were and with what had been given to them.

Have you ever seen a mule that likes to paint and another that prefers to dedicate himself to learning foreign languages? Mules are mules, and they do not concern themselves with anything besides being a mule.

Pico became more intrigued by why people were so different from each other, why some people were bad and stole,

while others were good and happy, or why some people were vagabonds while others were ingenious workers.

Why do you think that people can be so different from each other?

Why do you think that humans are not like animals? Why do they not have one way of being for their whole lives?

Pico realized that people's characters were not clearly defined when they were born and that only through the course of their life experiences did they become something. They could become dirty and idle like pigs or intelligent and noble like angels.

Pico said that people were wonderful beings because they could become anything they wanted: they could become a beast who only wants to eat and sleep or a great artist who creates beautiful things such as paintings and music.

Pico believed that a person could work his whole life to reach what he wanted to be, whether he were born a farmer, a blacksmith or a king.

According to Pico, people were free beings who could choose to become something as boring as a donkey or as smelly as a pig, or something as marvelous as an angel.

Do you agree with Pico della Mirandola in that a person's character is unformed at birth and can change day by day with everything we do? Do you think that people can become anything, or that they are born with their future predetermined for them by the neighborhood they are born in or, like the farmer or craftsman of a medieval city, the social class they belong to?

Pico, like many people in the Renaissance, believed in human liberty and that people were the owners of their own character and destiny.

## **GIORDANO BRUNO (1548-1600)**

One night, Giordano Bruno climbed up to the tower of the convent where he lived. There was no moon in the sky, and he could clearly see all the stars shining in the universe. Suddenly, he saw something like a comet dart across the sky and disappear into the darkness.

Bruno thought: "The universe cannot be the way Saint Thomas says it is. It cannot be a sphere or a ball at the center of which the Earth stands, because if that were the case, that comet would have crashed against the walls of the universe. Where did that comet go? I did not hear it hit the sphere that wraps around the earth and the other planets. I have a feeling that the comet did not crash against any walls of the universe precisely because the universe does not have walls and is infinite.

"The universe is infinite. Even if it were a sphere, that sphere would have to be in a certain place, and that place in another place, and that one in another, and like so infinitely. The universe is infinite and never ends. The comet I saw passing will travel forever or until it crashes into a star. But it will never be stopped by crashing against the walls of the universe because the universe is infinite and never ends and does not have walls."



Bruno kept looking at the sky, and he realized that thousands of suns could potentially exist in the cosmos with many planets like the Earth. And he concluded that the planet Earth, where he lived, was not the center of the cosmos as Saint Thomas had once stated.

Do you agree with Bruno that the cosmos is infinite and that the Earth is not the center of the universe, or do you agree with Saint Thomas who said that the universe is like a ball or sphere that surrounds the Earth?

Giordano Bruno taught mathematics and astronomy of a university where the ideas of Saint Thomas were taught.

Bruno arrived one morning to class, and instead of repeating what the textbooks said according to Saint Thomas, he decided to share with his students the ideas he had come up with the night he had seen the comet from the convent's tower. He told his students that the cosmos was infinite and that the Earth was not the center of the universe.

The students were shocked by Bruno's words, because such ideas had never occurred to them. How could the Earth not be at the center of the universe? Did Bruno not know how to read Saint Thomas' books? Bruno's words created a great commotion in the university, which finally reached the other teachers and the director. They asked Bruno if it was true, if he had actually told his students that the cosmos was infinite and that the Earth was not at its center.





He responded with pride that in fact, he had said those things.

The next day, Bruno found himself walking in the countryside looking for a city with a university where he could teach. He had been fired for not teaching the philosophy of Saint Thomas.

They had fired him because it was important for the King and the Pope that Saint Thomas' philosophy be taught. They wanted people to believe that the world had a hierarchical order and that the Earth was the center of the universe. In this way, no one would question why the King and his castle, like the Pope and his cathedral, were at the center of the city and everyone else worked for them.

If teachers began to tell their students that the Earth was not the center of the universe and that it was infinite, people could start thinking that the King and the Pope did not necessarily belong in the center of the city, governing everyone, and that each person, like Pico della Mirandola had said, could live their own life for themselves without answering to anyone or anything outside of their own conscience.

Bruno was tired from walking all morning, so he stopped to take a nap by the road. It was a sunny day, and the temperature was perfect for sleeping.

Upon opening his eyes, Bruno noticed an anthill by his side. He watched the hardworking ants in what seemed to be their own little world. The plants beside them were like giant trees; the rocks were like enormous mountains, and the puddle of water was like a lake.

Has it ever occurred to you that for insects like ants, worms and dragonflies, the grass is like an immense forest; the rocks are like tall cliffs, and a small stream is like a giant river?

In that moment, it occurred to Bruno that perhaps our world is just a tiny part of a greater world. He imagined oceans as little puddles, forests as patches of moss, and mountains as small mounds of dirt in that bigger world. Bruno thought that the smallest things were like a mirror that reflected bigger things, just as the anthill and the puddle could reflect the forests and lakes of the Earth. He also thought that within the bigger things in the universe there were many small worlds, like the cities of humankind, anthills and beehives, and that within those small worlds, there were even smaller worlds.

Bruno believed that the entire cosmos could be found in the tiniest rock and vice versa. He thought that the biggest thing was the same as the smallest thing and that the smallest was the same as the biggest.

He looked at the anthill again and thought if he moved the queen ant, for example, so that she was kept from finding the anthill, then the university director, or even the King, would be unable to find his bedroom and go to sleep. And if he flooded the anthill with the nearby water puddle, then the river near the cathedral would overflow onto the Pope's gardens.

Because Bruno believed that the smallest things existed in the biggest things, then any and everything that was done on a small scale would have to repeat itself on the larger scale. He called this magic, and Bruno began to practice magic in order to achieve what he wanted.

Do you believe that magic exists? Do you believe, for example, that by burning a dollhouse, you could cause an actual house to burn down, or that by watering your lawn with a lot of water you could make a heavy rain fall from the sky?

Bruno believed in magic. Bruno thought that a great infinite spirit existed in the world, which connected the big things to the little things, mountains to rocks, lakes to puddles, and forests to lawns, in such a way that if someone could provoke something on a small scale, the same thing would occur on a larger scale, and vice versa.

Do you believe that all things are connected to each other? For example, if you live in a large city and your parents fight, do you think they might be fighting because the city air is polluted and there is a lot of traffic noise and everyone is nervous and tired?

Do you think that if you are not clean and are always unkempt, your whole life will be disordered and that it will be difficult for things like your homework to turn out well?

Do you believe in magic?

Bruno continued walking until he reached a city with a university where he was given work, and he started teaching again.

Bruno began the first lesson by telling his students to put away their books by Saint Thomas. Aside from teaching his students that the cosmos was infinite, that the Earth was not the center of the universe, and that many suns with many planets like the Earth could possibly exist, Bruno also told them that the biggest things were reflected in the smallest things, that entire oceans could be found in a drop of water, and an entire forest in a small garden; and because of this, if humble people were to awaken their heroic rage, the volcanic sulfur and mercury that beat in their hearts, they would be able to create magic and become strong and powerful.

According to Bruno, humankind had the capacity to connect itself to the spirit of the world that unites the small with



the big. By becoming one with the universe, humankind could gain strength from the universe and attain freedom; and each person could become the owner of his own character and no longer have to answer to the King.

Bruno's new students were once again shocked by his words because he was not teaching them the philosophy of Saint Thomas, and once again he created a great stir in the university.

The university's director fired Bruno, and he had to find another town with a university that would hire him.

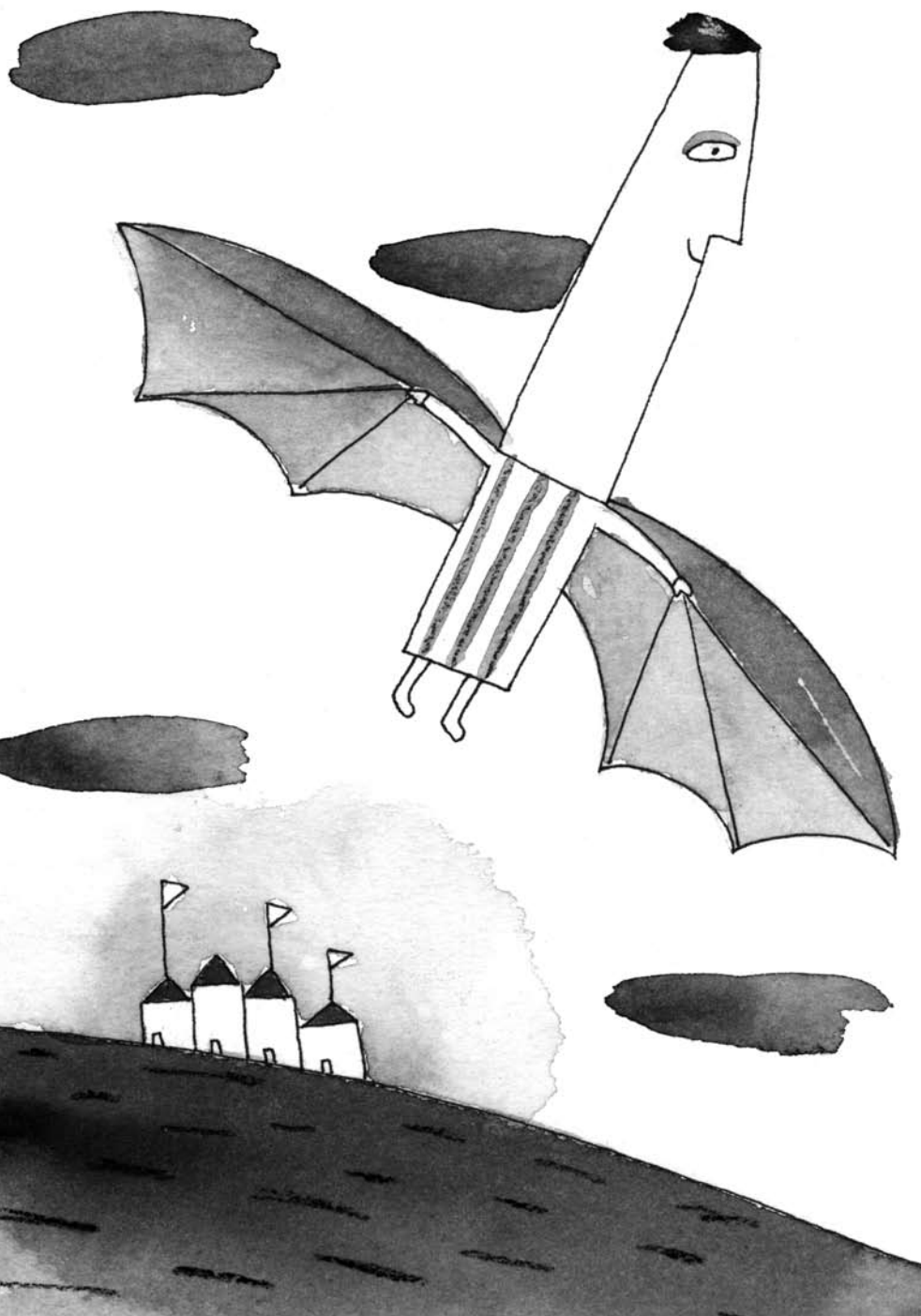
Because Giordano Bruno was convinced that the cosmos was infinite and that the Earth was not the center of the universe, he was always fired from the universities where he taught. Finally, one day, before a judge of the Inquisition, Bruno was accused of teaching lies and contradicting the ruling power. He was burned alive in the city's center square in front of its citizens.

Do you think that it is just to burn a person for teaching what he believes? Just imagine, everyone believed that the Earth remained fixed in the center of the universe; and Bruno, for saying the contrary —despite being right— was burned alive.

Bruno was burned for teaching magic and ideas that conflicted with what the Church wanted people to learn: Saint Thomas' philosophy.

Do you agree with burning a person for saying something that people are not used to hearing?

During the Renaissance, many people were imprisoned and punished for teaching ideas that were prohibited by the Church, even if their ideas later proved to be true.





## **LEONARDO DA VINCI (1452-1519)**



Leonardo was finishing the blueprint for an incredible machine that he had been imagining for several months. This machine would make it possible for people to fly just like birds.

Everything was calculated: the weight of the wood with which he would build the apparatus, the bat-like form of the wings, the pedals and the chain that turned the propellers.

Now all he had to do was send the blueprint to the workshop. The only problem was that Leonardo lacked the money for the workshop to build his invention. A rich merchant named Lorenzo, in exchange for portraits of Lorenzo's family, was providing Leonardo with the bit of money he did have and a place to live and work. So Leonardo, with a gesture of slight resignation, threw the blueprint into a chest where he kept the many other blueprints for projects that he had likewise not been able to finance.

The chest was filled with ideas Leonardo had put to paper, like machines that navigated underwater and catapults to be used in war. Leonardo also liked to draw the human body and to learn the body's muscles, bones, and all its organs in detail: the heart, the liver and the lungs.

One afternoon, Lorenzo's daughter, Maria, snuck into Leonardo's study, while playing hide-and-seek with her friends. Even if she had never been in the room before —her father had prohibited her from going into it— she knew it would be a difficult place to be found.

Leonardo's studio was located on the top floor of a high tower. When Maria opened the door, she was amazed to find giant windows from which she could see the layout of the land below.

Next to these windows were different apparatuses that served to measure shadows projected onto the walls by objects. There were also magnifying glasses that concentrated the rays of the sun and some lenses that brought objects in the far distance into focus and made them larger.

Maria continued to another room farther back where she saw a table on which dead animals, like goats and dogs, had been split in half and their innards removed. There were also detailed drawings of the animal bones and intestines, along with some paragraphs written in strange handwriting on large sheets of paper stuck to the walls and spread out on the tables.

Maria ran out of the back room and came upon more tables on which plants had been laid out, unearthed with root intact. There were also drawings and sketches of these plants with writing on them that must have been explanations.

Maria had not realized that a lot of time had passed because she was very distracted by all the things she found in Leonardo's study, especially by one painting that particularly intrigued her of a very tranquil woman who looked like an accomplice in a prank.

Suddenly, the girl heard the studio door open with a thud. Leonardo and a very angry Lorenzo, her father, entered the room. He was angry because a long time had passed since

Maria's friends had gone home; everyone had been looking for her throughout the palace and had not been able to find her. But before anyone said anything, before Lorenzo could yell at Maria and Maria could invent an excuse for being in the room, Leonardo enthusiastically cried out:

"Of course!" and he ran to the table where a propeller, some balls, gears and rolling pins made of stone rested.

"Finally!" he said again. He changed the gears' position and began to compare and measure their distance from the rolling pins. He immediately pulled out a few large sheets of paper from under the table and began to make sketches of the new machine he wanted to invent.

He had passed the entire previous week thinking about this machine and had just found the correct mechanism so that when the wind blew across the propeller, the gears and pins would move in such a way that wheat would be ground.

Leonardo's invention was a windmill.

"I only have to perfect the details and design a wooden chassis," he said.

Lorenzo had forgotten about scolding his daughter because he was looking at the many objects in Leonardo's study. He had never been in the room before and was very curious about everything he saw. He opened the chest filled with Leonardo's unfinished projects. Leonardo explained how each blueprint depicted the structure of a different machine, like the flying machine or the machine for underwater navigation. He also showed Lorenzo drawings that illustrated and explained



the form and function of all the organs of the human body. And he showed drawings of animals and plants.

Leonardo demonstrated machines to Lorenzo with which he conducted experiments and in this way could explain the drawings and blueprints more easily.

Lorenzo was astonished by everything he saw. He hugged Leonardo and told him, "Leonardo, my divine Leonardo, you are like the gods, capable of creating marvelous things."

Many machines and apparatuses that we live with today did not exist in Leonardo's time. There were no airplanes, cars, submarines or telescopes, and yet Leonardo was capable of making blueprints to build such things.

Can you imagine how intelligent Leonardo must have been to be able to make blueprints of all those things, when in his time they did not exist?

Furthermore, no one in Leonardo's time had opened the bodies of animals and humans to see how they functioned inside. Leonardo was one of the first people to study the human body in order to figure out its structure and function. Can you imagine how surprised Lorenzo must have been to see Leonardo's drawings?

A few days later, Leonardo's study was filled with people Lorenzo had invited: scientists, artists, merchants and even a few princes from Florence. They looked at the many blueprints, the machines that Leonardo had invented, and asked how they worked, what their mechanism was and how he had managed to conceive of such things.

Leonardo humbly answered that he liked to experiment and draw blueprints because he liked mathematics. He said that mathematics permitted him to learn the rules of Nature. The best way for Leonardo to be acquainted with nature was by learning its language, mathematics, with which he could measure, calculate, and perform many experiments that permitted him to invent things.

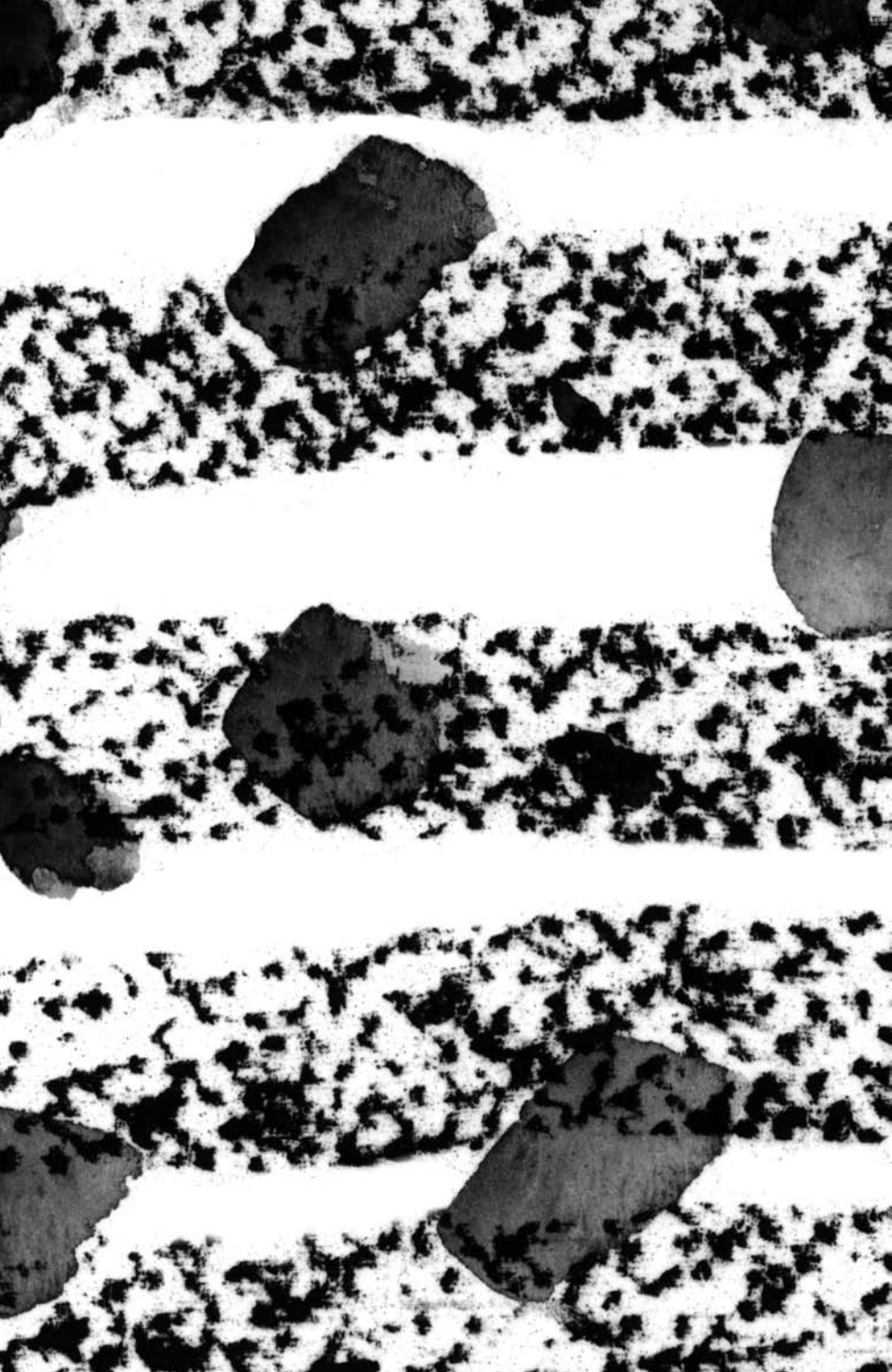
Can you imagine how surprising it must have been for Leonardo's contemporaries that someone was performing experiments for flying machines when bicycles had not yet been invented?

Today, apparatuses that make our life easier, like cars, airplanes, and telephones are very important to us. Can you imagine how astonished people must have been when Leonardo invented the first machines?

From that day onwards, everyone called Leonardo, "Divine Leonardo," because, as Pico della Mirandola would have said, he had become an angel or a god capable of creation.

As the guests exited Leonardo's studio, they suddenly noticed that portrait, the one Maria had seen. It was a work Leonardo had painted a long time ago, which he thought was one of his best works. It was that beautiful painting of a woman who had a certain expression on her face, as if she were in league with someone who had performed a prank.





## **THE MODERN AGE**

The Modern Age is the era that immediately follows the Renaissance. Modern philosophers dedicated themselves to developing the ideas that Renaissance philosophers had posited. For example, the modern philosopher Bacon, who liked to conduct experiments, was influenced by Ockham and Leonardo; Spinoza, who was interested in questions involving the infinite, referred to Bruno's ideas on the infinity of the cosmos and the spirit of the world; and every modern philosopher was, for the most part, in agreement with Pico in his belief that man's worth depended upon each individual because each person was the owner of his own character and destiny.

This is not to say that modern philosophers were not original and only dedicated themselves to copying what others said. Each modern philosopher was very ingenious and had his own ideas. Because many new and wonderful things were discovered in the Renaissance that had not been known during the Middle Ages, modern philosophers dedicated themselves to studying the many things philosophers had proposed but had not fully developed during the Renaissance.

Some modern philosophers believed that with the use of machines, scientists would be able to conduct experiments with such precision that humankind could progress and live in cities that were more comfortable and secure, in which no one would have to work, because trains and airplanes, telephones and new tools would do the work for them.

Modern philosophers also believed that people could satisfy their desires and feel fuller and happier with these experiments and new machines.

There were some philosophers who did not agree with what the modern philosophers said. They did not believe in progress or in machines as the solution to humanity's problems. Some of these philosophers said that the best way to be happy in life was by loving God and humankind, just as Plato and Saint Augustine had said. These philosophers thought that progress, machines and big factories could not provide people with true happiness.

Do you believe that progress is the best way for people to be happy? Do you think that in big cities full of cars, buildings and factories, with telephones and televisions, people feel that their lives are fuller, happier and more peaceful?

What things do you think progress provides that are good, and what things do you think are bad?

## **FRANCIS BACON (1561-1626)**

Bacon was a philosopher who liked to observe thick forests, watch the snow paint the countryside white, and listen to the patter of rain on rocks. But, like Leonardo and Ockham, he spent most of his time conducting experiments so that he could know nature and the universe better.

For example, one autumn day, Bacon was trying to invent a scale that could be used in the market to weigh fruit. It seemed to Bacon that his experiments and his knowledge should be useful and practical in everyday life.

Bacon was experimenting with some springs to build the mechanism for the scale. He experimented with several calibers and weights of different sizes. He jotted down the results of each experiment on a chalkboard so that he could compare the results and see what they had in common.

In doing these experiments, Bacon was looking for the law according to which he might construct scales with springs and weights that could weigh merchandise correctly.

The machines that Bacon invented were very useful, and they made life simpler for people. The scale itself, because it had springs with a caliber that determined the weight of merchandise, kept merchants from cheating and selling less fruit for more money.

Bacon used to say that the more people knew —the more experiments they conducted to become better acquainted with nature and its laws— the more powerful they would become.

He claimed that knowledge was power because knowledge allowed people to dominate and control nature.

Bacon thought that people could become powerful and dominate the wind, the sea, rivers and mountains with machines and means of transportation that would also improve agriculture.

Bacon said that by creating useful machines, people could have more time for themselves to enjoy and be happy.

What do you think are the advantages for humankind, with the help of science and knowledge, in being more powerful and dominating nature? What disadvantages do you see in this? Do you think that machines and technology can make people truly happy?

What would Saint Francis and Saint Augustine say?

## **DESCARTES (1569-1650)**

Descartes was a very important philosopher because, among other things, he decided to write his books in French, when everyone else was used to reading and writing in Latin, the language that kings and monks used in the Middle Ages.

One day, Descartes was traveling on the highway on his way to visit his friend, the Queen of Sweden.

He fell asleep as he was going through an oak forest. The day's heat, the meal he had just eaten, and the horses' trot created a perfect lulling rhythm.

Suddenly, he woke up, drenched in sweat and shouting:

"A bee stung me! My hand is swollen! Call a doctor!"

But as he settled down, he realized that his hand was okay and that a bee had not stung him. He looked at his hand, and was stunned to see that the bee sting had only been a dream.

"My God, I dreamt that I was stung by a bee and thought it was a reality!" he thought to himself.

He looked at the landscape outside his window and thought:

"What if I am dreaming right now that I am on the road, and I suddenly wake up, and it turns out that I am in my bed? How can I be so sure that I am not sleeping, and that the road, the horses and this landscape, are no more than a dream? How can I be sure that I am not confusing my dreams with reality and reality with my dreams?"

Descartes was very confused.

Have you ever doubted everything around you? Have you ever thought that your life is nothing more than a dream, that your family, school and friends, are nothing more than illusions and that perhaps, when you wake up, you will not be there anymore?

Descartes grew a little nervous. How could he know without a doubt that anything was true and not just a dream? Descartes began to worry that he would never know anything for certain.

For example, what if everything he perceived with his eyes and ears, like the landscape around him and the trotting of the horses, was not a reality, but pure illusion, in the same way that he had thought that the bee sting in his dream had really happened? What if some ill-intentioned mind was constantly deceiving him and was making him perceive everything wrongly? What if this evil mind made him confuse the Queen of Sweden with a simple farm maiden?



Descartes began searching for a way in which he could know for certain what was real and unquestionable.

How do you propose that someone could know, without a doubt, what is real?

Descartes did not trust what his senses told him —his sight and his sense of touch— because he thought that the senses were capable of causing confusion, as had happened with the bee sting.

Descartes leaned out of the carriage's window and asked the coachman how long it would be before they arrived at the Queen's castle. The coachman thought out loud:

"We left at 5:00 a.m. this morning. At noon we stopped to eat. At 4:00 p.m. we crossed the river. So, I would say we have 2 more hours on the road, because from the inn where we stayed last night to the castle is basically a league of road, and 1 league equals more or less 13 hours."

Descartes assented and put his head back into the carriage satisfied by the explanation the coachman had given him.

Suddenly, he became very happy and called out to the coachman to stop the carriage. He stepped out, climbed onto the coachman's seat, threw his arms around the coachman, gave him a big kiss and told him:

"Mr. Coachman, you just solved a big problem for me!"

The coachman did not understand and looked at Descartes strangely, but before he could say anything, Descartes had returned to his seat in the carriage.

Why was Descartes so happy with the coachman's explanation of how long it would take them to reach the castle? Well,

without knowing it, the coachman had demonstrated to Descartes a sure way of knowing, a way that no one could doubt, even if they were dreaming. Descartes could know with certainty, if he made the necessary calculations, that 2 hours remained before arriving at the castle.

Descartes realized that mathematics presented a clear and distinct knowledge that no one could refute.

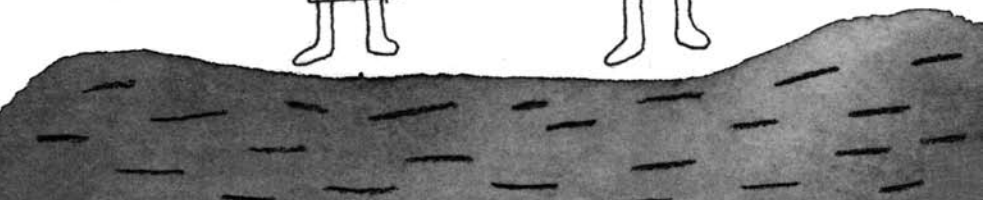
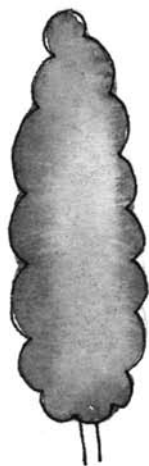
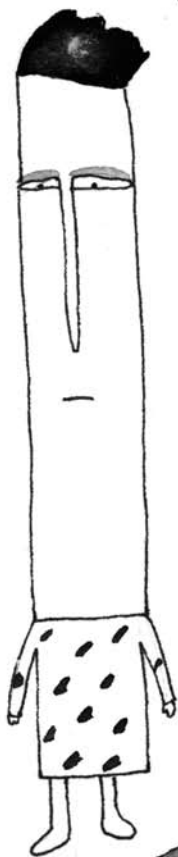
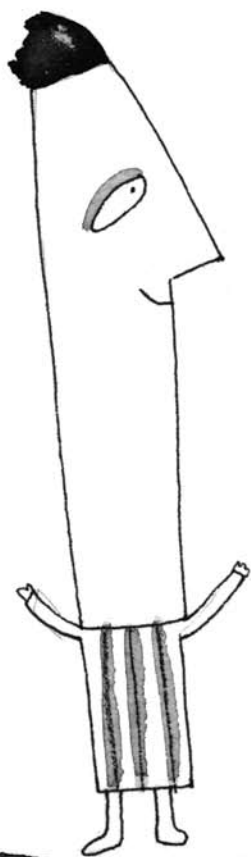
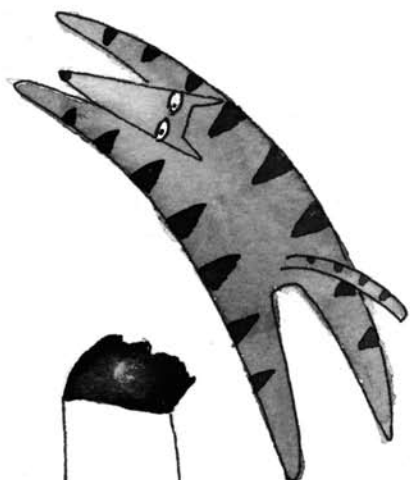
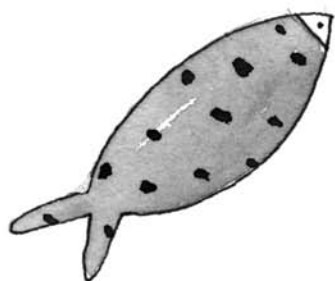
For example, can you question that  $2+2=4$ , or that a triangle has 3 sides?

Descartes saw in mathematics the source of absolute certainty, where no one could place doubt. When someone solves a mathematical problem carefully, step by step, paying attention to the different quantities, and the result is summed up, there can be no doubt that the result is certain. Descartes thought of mathematics as a game to be constructed. The numbers were like pieces of the game, and if you placed them together with order and care, you would be unable to commit errors.

This is why Descartes thought that all true knowledge had to be arrived at through mathematics.

Do you agree with Descartes? Do you think that mathematics is the best way of knowing? Do you trust other forms of knowledge, like sight or hearing?

After his discovery, Descartes began to study geometry and arithmetic. Even if, like other philosophers, he liked to conduct experiments, it seemed to him more important to study mathematics. Descartes perceived the study of mathematics as the way to understand the world with certainty.



## **SPINOZA (1632-1677)**

Spinoza was a Jewish philosopher who made his living cutting lenses for eyeglasses, magnifying glasses and telescopes. One afternoon, after he had finished polishing a pair of lenses, he decided to go for a walk.

He felt good and strong as he breathed in the fresh air and saw that the trees on the avenue were full of young green leaves. He could see a flock of sparrows forming large spirals in the distant sky.

Giordano Bruno's words, which stated that the cosmos was infinite and that one spirit connected and animated everything in the world, came to his mind at that moment.

Spinoza observed the land around him. He felt that the trees were filled with life in the same way that his chest was filled with happiness; he loved watching the birds play in the wind.

For this reason, he felt that God was present all around him, in every little rock, in every cloud, in the sun and in his own body; he thought everything existed because of this presence. Spinoza believed that God was like an infinite spirit, like a power or an infinite life that was present in all things.

Where do you think God is? Do you think that God is in another world beyond ours in the sky? Or do you think God is everywhere?

Spinoza believed that God was the world; that is to say, that God existed in all things, in each butterfly fluttering in the air, in the desert and even in a fiery sunset.



Spinoza continued on his walk, feeling very happy because he felt that he was in God and that —at the same time— the earth, the sky, and the immense sea were within him. Spinoza felt as if the divine power, or nature, in its entirety, vibrated in his heart and that he was infinite just like that divine power.

Suddenly, as he turned the corner, he ran into a person who had an anguished and fearful expression on his face. The man broke into an inconsolable cry the second he saw Spinoza. It was as if he could no longer bear his sadness and began to unburden himself with cries and wails.

"Sir, what is wrong? Why do you feel bad?" Spinoza asked.

"I bet my house, my horses, all my fortune on a game of cards and lost it all. I wanted more money, and now I have lost everything. My wife is going to hate me and take our children and leave me all alone."

Spinoza watched the man break down before him, filled with tears and sadness for everything he had lost.

Spinoza remembered what Plato had said about good love and bad love. This man had fallen in love with gambling and gaining riches and now that he had lost all his money, he had also lost everything that made him full and complete. His wife and children would most likely leave him, and he would feel that his life no longer had any value.

Spinoza told the man:

"Sir, please pull yourself together. You have lost your house and horses, but look up; look at the trees and the clouds. Feel the power of nature vibrate through your body. Feel life all around you, coursing through you, and be happy that you are alive."



"How can you tell me that?" the man answered. "I have lost my house, my family and my reputation. What will everyone say about me? I am no longer worth anything."

"But, sir!" Spinoza continued, but the man had already started on his way to a nearby tavern to drink and forget his troubles.

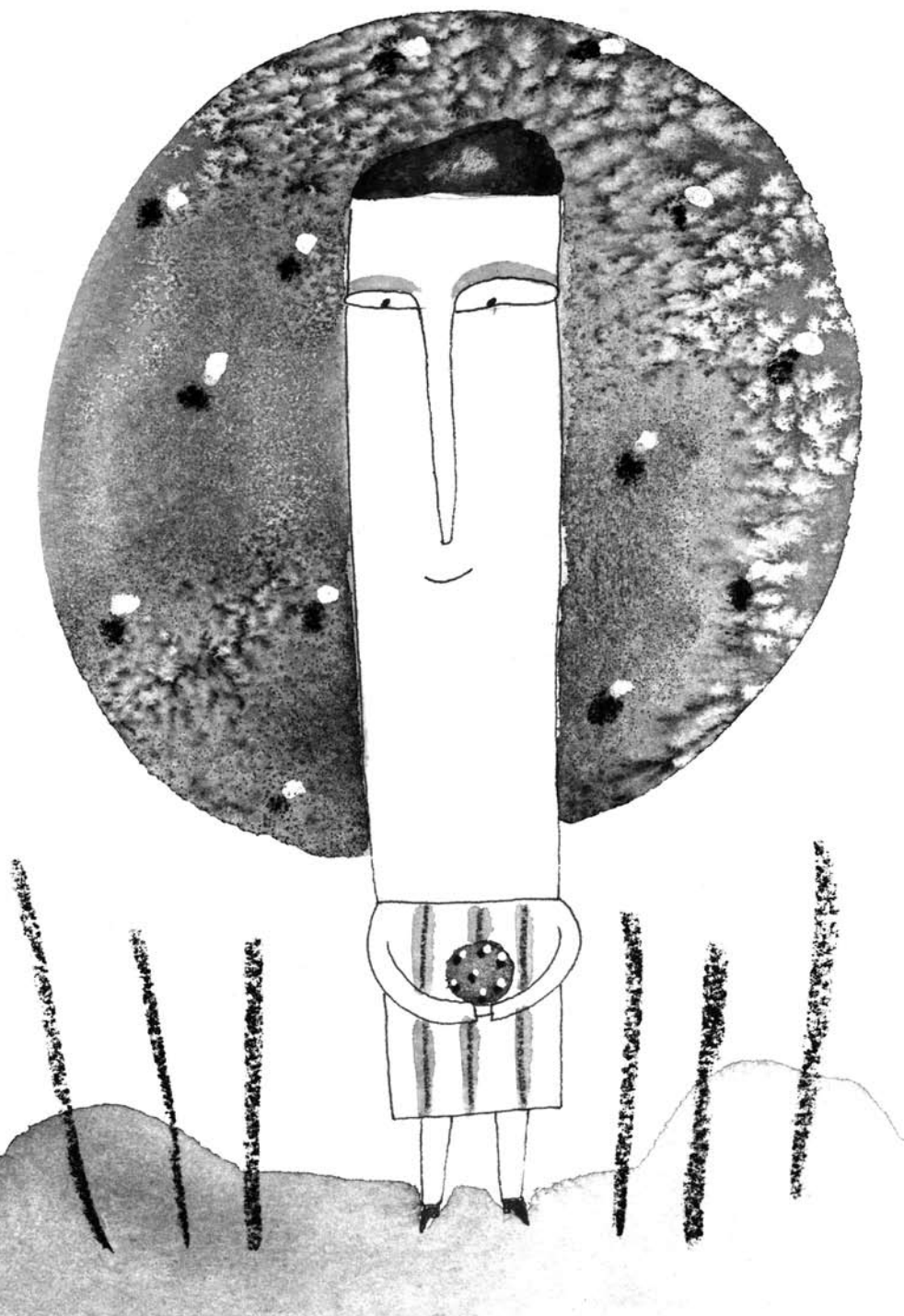
Spinoza thought: "This poor man cannot hear God living within him. He feels bad because he has lost his home playing cards and now he will try to console himself by drinking alcohol and getting drunk. He does not realize that God's power is everywhere, that God is within him, that he is God and that, because God is infinite, God is the best food and strength to live on."

A few days later, Spinoza passed by a tavern and saw the man inside completely drunk and filthy. The man was saying many things, but one could barely understand him through his slurred words.

"I am going to be a rich and respected man. Hiccup, hiccup. And when I become the owner of... hiccup, hiccup."

Spinoza continued on his way thinking: "Poor man, he does not know his heart. He does not see that he is God. Even if he owned a great mansion and had a great fortune, I do not think he would ever be happy."

Do you think, like Spinoza, that God exists everywhere: in the trees, in the dawn, in man himself who is the owner of his character and destiny? Do you believe that God is in all things, like the rain, the blue sky and even in the will of humankind?



## **LEIBNIZ (1646-1716)**

"Each portion of matter may be conceived as like a garden full of plants and like a pond full of fish. But each branch of every plant, each member of every animal, each drop of its humors is also some such garden or pond."

*The Monadology.*

Leibniz was a very intelligent German philosopher who was fluent in many languages, amongst others, Chinese, which he had learned as a missionary in the far East.

One spring morning, when Leibniz was in China, he was cleaning the windows in the cabin where he lived. This cabin was in the mountains, and it had a view of an incredible valley below. That day, a few clouds floated over a large lake in the valley. Leibniz was soaping the windows, scrubbing them with a sponge, and then, with a little bucket, he would throw water on them so the soap would wash away.

Leibniz began to observe the small drops of water that remained on the window. He could normally see the valley below from the window, but at that moment he noticed how each drop of water reflected the valley as if they were small bags that contained it. Each drop of water held and reflected the valley, the mountains, and the lake.

Leibniz started playing with the drops of water. With a knife he divided the drops in half. He saw that each half also reflected the valley and held it within itself, as if it encased the



valley, the mountains, the clouds and everything else that could be seen from the window.

Leibniz finished cleaning the window and walked out of the cabin to breathe in the fresh cold mountain air. He could see the valley with the lake below him and he could hear the sound of a waterfall that sprouted from nearby cliffs.

Suddenly, at his back, he heard the soft song of an old man who was walking down the mountain along its sinuous path. The Chinese man was very old, but he had a light and profound way of walking. His feet were well placed on the ground, but it also appeared as if he hung from the sky by an invisible string. His body was both soft and firm, like a cushion covered in velvet.

The old man approached Leibniz and said, "Young man, I have been told that you come from foreign lands to teach the word of God."

"Well," responded Leibniz. "I would like to teach you the word of my God, but I believe, too, that it is important that I learn about your country. I believe that it is just as important to learn as it is to teach."

"Well then, look at that serene lake," said the old man contentedly. "Notice how it is like a mirror in which the mountains and the sky as well as the night's stars and the moon are reflected."

Leibniz looked at the lake and remembered the drops of water that were like small bags that reflected and held the landscape within them.

The old man continued:

"Young man, consider that your eyes are like the lake, or like dew drops, which reflect and contain the landscape when

your eyes gaze upon it. Look at my eyes. Even though they are old, they still shine and reflect the clouds, the trees, and the mountain. My eyes reflect the landscape because the landscape exists within them and within my heart."

Leibniz was about to ask the old man something when the old man added:

"Notice the tiny flowers that look up at the sun. Notice how the waterfall wants to carry its waters to the great lake. Everything is like a mirror that reflects and contains the universe. Everything has a heart."

Leibniz remembered Bruno's words: that the biggest thing, like a king's castle and its gardens, is found in the smallest thing, like an anthill.

The old man took out a crystal from his bag, and said to Leibniz:

"Notice how this crystal reflects all the colors in the landscape. In the same way that the crystal reflects the landscape, everything around us, every flower, every bird and every grain of sand reflects the universe."

Leibniz did not speak. He only listened to the old man.

Then the old man put the crystal on a rock and with another rock, he hit the crystal, which shattered into many little pieces.

"Now notice how the entire world is reflected in each little piece of crystal. Each flower and each bird is reflected in those little pieces along with other little pieces of crystal that also reflect the world and each mountain and each star.

"Inside of each crystal there is a heart that looks at the sun and reflects the universe, and the heart of each bird that

also reflects the landscape, and the heart of other crystals that also reflect the universe."

Leibniz looked at the old man with an expression of astonishment.

"Inside everything, inside every heart—for example, the heart of a man or a flower— dwells the heart of something else, like the heart of the lake, that also reflects the heart of every star, the moon, and every fish... Have you ever put two mirrors face to face, and noticed how the image is infinitely reflected?"

"Yes," responded Leibniz.

"Well, the universe is like a game of mirrors that repeat themselves infinitely. Your eyes, young man, and your heart, are reflected in every mirror, in every heart, in every single butterfly and every single bee; and every mirror, every heart, is reflected in you. Everything around us is everywhere; everything is reflected in everything else."

In that moment, a boy appeared on the mountain path. He had a clear face without wrinkles. His eyes were large and happy, and shined like two beautiful diamonds.

"Does your heart not think that the boy is strong and powerful like the universe? Look at his eyes. Look at how they reflect the landscape. Now look at that strong and leafy tree. Don't you think that in its sap and in its branches, the beauty and strength of the universe are reflected?"

Then Leibniz asked the old man:

"Sir, if the universe is like an infinite game of mirrors that reflect each other, where is God?"

Leibniz remembered the words of Saint Thomas, who said

that God was at the top of a hierarchy that began with Him, continued down to angels and men and ended with the animals. He also remembered the words of Bruno and Spinoza who believed that God was infinite and existed everywhere.

The old man laughed and responded:

"What a strange question. Where is God?" and he kept laughing. "Where is the heart of the universe? Well, God is in every heart. All things, all hearts are reflected in God, and at the same time God is reflected in all hearts. God is like the infinite game of lights and reflections that one finds in all the mirrors of the universe.

"But if you want God to be in a specific place, I can tell you that God is the box that holds every mirror, every heart, everything in the universe. God, if that is how you want to understand him, created the universe in order to be reflected in it, and see his own face."

"And what is God's face?" asked Leibniz.

"Ha!" laughed the old man. "This guy wants to know everything. Investigate what is in the depth of your own heart," he responded.

In that moment, before Leibniz could say anything, the old man noticed that a boy, barely capable of being seen on the hill facing them, was whistling and waving his arms.

"It's time to eat," said the old man, and with surprising agility and simplicity, he continued along the path until he reappeared on the hill facing Leibniz where he joined the boy.

Leibniz lived in China for several months. When he returned to Europe, he studied mathematics, science and politics,

and he traveled. Leibniz liked to write. At the end of his life, he wrote a small book called *The Monadology*. Even though this book takes into consideration what Christian religion says, it also talks about monads, which are like mirrors and the heart of all things, just as the old Chinese teacher had said.

## **HUME (1711-1776)**

Do you remember Descartes? He doubted what his senses told him. For example, the day that he dreamt that a bee stung him, he was not sure if the sting was just a dream or if it had been real. For this reason, he doubted everything that he touched, saw or heard.

Descartes did not trust that there was a forest just because he saw a forest, or that sugar was sweet because it tasted sweet—he feared that everything might be just a dream, or that a bad mind was deceiving him— so he decided to trust only what reason told him. For example, Descartes was certain that  $2+2=4$ .

Descartes liked mathematics because he knew that with mathematics he could not be wrong. Descartes knew that with reason, when and if a person proceeded adequately, he could arrive at the absolute certainty of things. Do you think that it is possible to be wrong when a person adds numbers with caution?

Descartes thought that even if we were to see or hear with attention, we could be wrong nonetheless, because there are always little things we do not see and things that are far away that we cannot hear. For example, we cannot see the microbes

that cause the flu with our eyes, but we believe that the flu appears when the weather gets cold.

Well, David Hume thought the opposite of what Descartes thought. Hume trusted what his eyes and ears told him. He trusted what his senses and experiences told him.

For example, if Hume saw a blue sky, he was certain that the sky was blue. And if he felt that a bee stung him, he was certain that a bee had stung him, and did not believe that it was only a dream. This is why he spent his time feeling all the things he could feel, like the cold air at night or the taste of the delicious juice of an orange.

One morning, however, when Hume was about to step out of the shower and sit in front of his bedroom window to take in the sun's warmth, he began to think: "What if at this moment, I stepped out of the shower and instead of finding my room, I only saw the ceiling because the walls had flown away? How can I be sure that, when I step out of the shower, I will find my room unchanged?"

Without paying too much attention to this strange thought, Hume stepped out of the shower. He dried off, put on a pair of short pants, and sat bare-chested in a chair in front of the window. Hume liked to sit in the sunlight. There was a table with a plate of fruit next to the chair. He took an apple, but before biting it, he began to think again: "What if before eating this apple, its flavor had jumped into the grapes, and the grapes' flavor had jumped into the apple? What if the apple tastes of grape instead of apple? How can I be certain that an apple will always taste like an apple, and not like a grape, or —worse— like the sole of my shoe?"

But then Hume told himself: "David, stop thinking such strange things and enjoy the sunshine."

Hume was enjoying the heat of the morning, with a towel on his face, so that the sun would not glare in his eyes, when he thought: "What if when I take the towel off my face, I cannot see the garden anymore? How can I be sure that when I uncover my eyes, I will be able to see the garden?"

Hume began to doubt the essence of things, that they were a stable form and not a parade of capricious images.

He kept thinking: "What if when I open my eyes, I do not see the sun anymore? What guarantees me that the sun will be there?"

Have you at any time doubted the essence of things? How can you be absolutely sure that strawberries are red? Tomorrow you could find yourself with a transparent strawberry. Have you heard people talk about color-blindness, how their eyes do not see the same colors that we do? Can you imagine what the world would be like if everyone was color-blind?

At that moment, Hume consoled himself: "David, how could the sun not be there when you uncover your eyes, if you can feel its heat right now?"

But he immediately responded to himself: "What if the heat of the sun has nothing to do with the sun? How can I be sure that the heat comes from the sun? Maybe the heat and the sun are two distinct things."

He kept thinking: "And how do I know that the rain actually causes things to get wet? Maybe rain and wetness have nothing to do with each other. And how can I be sure that when a dog barks, the bark really comes out of the dog?"

"How can I be sure that everything has a cause? Maybe everything, like the heat, wetness, and barks, do not have causes and are just out there loose in the world."

Then he told himself: "David, calm down, you are getting anxious for thinking such strange things. It is better to just enjoy the sunshine."

Do you think that Hume was going crazy when he thought that an apple was just a bunch of images or sensations like the color red, a round form, and the flavor of an apple? Do you think that these images or sensations could float away from each other into different directions? And, do you think that Hume's room could possibly no longer be there when he was to open his eyes? Is it possible that wetness has nothing to do with water, and a bark has nothing to do with a dog? Do you think that Hume was going crazy for thinking these things?

Do you think that in the same way that  $2+2=4$ , the sun will shine tomorrow and apples will always taste like apple? What if they taste like pineapple tomorrow, and the sun does not come out even if there is daylight?

Hume began to doubt that the world had an essence, a stable form, that certain things were the effects of certain causes and that the universe had a certain order.

The idea that the world outside of his head might disappear made Hume very anxious, and so he decided to rest for a bit, and he hoped he would see things in a clearer way after his nap.

But in that instant, a terrible fear assaulted him: what if when he woke up he no longer remembered his name or where he was and only remembered disparate pieces of his life, like a



knee pain he had when he fell from a tree as a child, or the flavor of chocolate cake?

Nothing guaranteed Hume that when he woke up he would still be Hume. What if when he woke up he found that he was Socrates, Saint Thomas, or the old woman from the house across the way?

Hume began to doubt everything. He doubted the world outside, that the sun gave heat and came out every day –the order and rhythm of nature– and he also doubted that his internal world was really his and whether or not he would always remember who he was.

Do you think like Hume? Do you think a person can know for sure that the world has a certain order, that it could rain rocks one day and trees could sprout pencils the next? Do you think that at any moment you could discover that you were not who you thought you were and become any other person walking down the street?

Hume was a skeptic: that is to say, he doubted so much that he thought nothing was certain in the world, because by tomorrow we could all forget our names, and fruit could lose its specific aroma, color, and flavor, and could have mixed in with others and changed into other forms.

Hume did not believe as Heraclitus thought, that there was a Reason or "Logos" that ordered everything in nature. He did not say, like Saint Thomas, that God ordered the world in a hierarchical fashion. And he did not trust, as Bruno and Spinoza indicated, that there is an infinite spirit.

Hume thought that we only believe that the world is ordered, and so we imagine that everything falls down to the

ground instead of falling upwards, and that the sun comes out each day, and that everything has a cause and an order.

He said that everything we perceive of the world is not certain, that they are only beliefs.

How can you be certain that tomorrow you will remember your name? How can you demonstrate that the sun always gives heat? What if one day it gives cold? Hume said that we cannot be sure of the future, and we do not have any certainty of anything in the world.

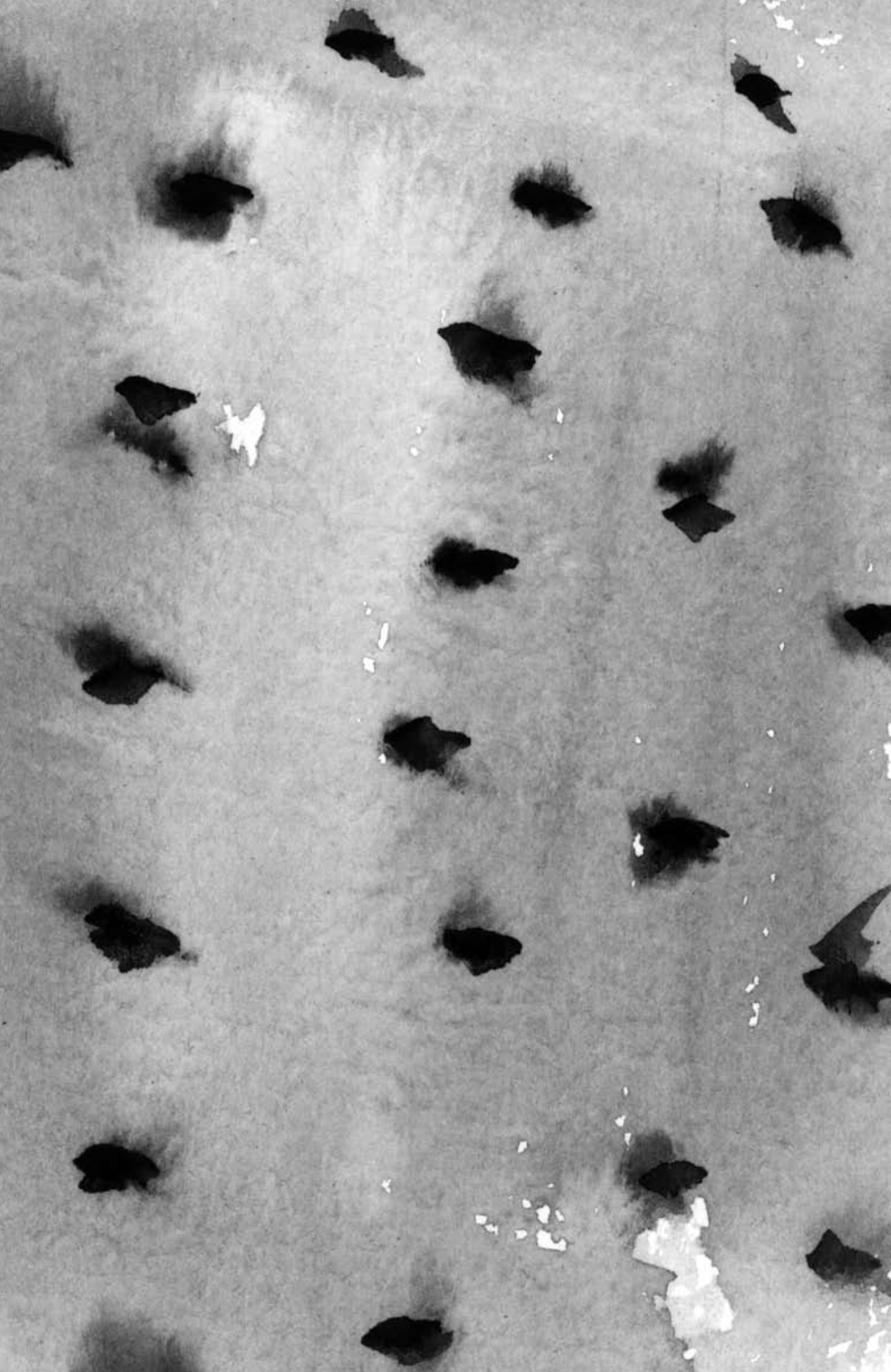
Do you agree with Hume? Are you a skeptic like him? Do you think that we cannot know the world as it is in reality and that we only imagine and have certain beliefs about its form?

## **KANT (1724-1804)**

One afternoon after finishing a book by Hume, Kant began to think: "It is true; Hume is right; we cannot know things as they are in reality. Apples could be blue and taste like chocolate, and their soft skin could actually be metal. How can I know for certain that what I believe is an apple, is truly an apple?"

I see the sun come out every morning, and that is why I believe that the sun comes out every morning. What if one day the sun does not come out and then later it appears looking like the moon? What guarantees me that the sun will come out every morning looking like the sun and not like the moon?"

Kant concurred with Hume's idea that people can never know the world around them as it really is but only as it is imagined and believed to be:



"People believe that the sun has to come out each day, that apples are red and taste of apple, but they cannot know the real form of the sun or of an apple or of anything else."

Kant said that people are incapable of knowing the essence of things.

The moment Kant made this realization, he grew concerned: "What if one day people start imagining things differently? Right now everyone believes that water wets, that fire burns, and that birds fly. Everyone is used to this, and they believe that everything will be like this forever. But, what if some people change their beliefs and say that water dries, that fire freezes, and that birds live underwater?"

Kant thought that because everyone imagined the world and did not really know it, it could potentially be imagined in a different way, and people could start fighting over their differing perceptions.

For example, some would say that the universe is round like a sphere, while others would say that it is infinite. Some would assure you that elephants are sacred animals, while others would rather kill them to make ivory out of their tusks; or some people could believe that it is good to have slaves, and others could believe that everyone is equal. How could people arrive at a common belief in cases like these?

In order to avoid people misunderstanding each other and fighting each other over their dissenting ideas, Kant decided to look for a way in which people could at the very least agree on things, even if it were not possible to know things as they were in reality.

Kant paced around his library, scratching his head, trying to come up with a way in which people might think the same way.

Do you think that people can know how things truly are, or do you think that what people perceive as reality is only in their imagination? For example, do you think someone knows how the sun really is, or do you think that we only have certain beliefs about the sun? And if some people think that the sun is a mass of burning gas while others think that it is a generous god that gives us heat and light, how can we all agree with each other?

After giving everything a lot of thought, Kant remembered what Descartes had said, that mathematics is the only way in which we can find absolute certainty. No one can disagree that  $2+2=4$  and that a triangle has 3 sides.

Kant thought that even if people did not know the essence of the world and how it truly was, they could all agree that all things related to mathematics. One can measure space, the size of a lot of land for example, or measure time, as when Descartes knew how long it would take to reach his friend the Queen's castle by the coachman's measurements of the distance they were traveling.

Kant concluded that with mathematics everyone could agree with one another and no one would fight.

Do you believe, like Kant, that even if we cannot know the essence of the universe and how it truly is, we can at least know and agree about what mathematics tells us?

Kant was very happy to see that with mathematics everyone could agree on a lot of things, even if they did not know what the essence of the world truly was.

Kant gave himself another challenge: how to make people think the same way in their day-to-day lives and habits? For example, how could everyone agree on whether or not it is good to kill elephants or if it is bad to have slaves?

Kant decided that if he established some rules that everyone was convinced by, people would stop arguing over so many things that had to do with custom. An example might be, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto yourself."

Do you think that everyone agrees with this rule? Do you like it when someone hits you or takes a toy from you? If you do not like that, then do you think that you have the right to take toys from others?

Kant thought of another rule that goes more or less like this: "Try to make all your actions good for everyone." For example, if you help your mom without anyone noticing by keeping your house clean and in order or by doing all your homework, Kant would say that you are doing well for yourself and are in agreement with others.

Kant thought that with these rules everyone could be in agreement and happy.

Do you think, as Kant thought, that by following these rules, everyone can be in agreement in their customs, in such a way that everyone respects each other and can live in peace?

Kant kept a very ordered life. He would get up early every day and work until late at night. He was a well-mannered and kind man, and he had a lot of friends. Kant lived in agreement with the rules he had thought up and avoided causing problems with anyone and was very happy.

## **HEGEL (1770-1831)**

Hegel decided on one of his summer vacations to travel throughout Europe. On his way, he observed the remnants of past civilizations.

He visited the Parthenon in Athens and the antique temples the Greeks had made for their gods. He saw important constructions in Rome, like the Coliseum. He admired the mosques in Spain that had been built by the Arab civilization that had once lived there. And in France he looked at enormous gothic cathedrals.

Hegel, at night, in the hotel room where he slept, would study the philosophies of the people who lived and built these ancient constructions. Hegel read Plato and Aristotle when he was in Greece. He read Saint Augustine when he visited the ruins of the Roman Empire and Byzantine churches. He read Averroes when he arrived in Spain, and Saint Thomas when he visited medieval cathedrals.

Hegel had a lot of fun studying while he traveled, because what he read helped him imagine how differently philosophers from the past lived from one another. He visited Venice, Florence, and other cities of the Italian Renaissance where he studied Pico, Bruno and Leonardo. And he read Descartes, Hume and Spinoza when he was in France, the British Isles and Holland.

One afternoon, when Hegel was traveling by boat across the Mediterranean Sea, he asked himself: "Why are some cities so different from others? Why are the Greek temples so different from the medieval cathedrals? Why do some philosophers say one thing while others something else?"

When the boat would dock at the nearest port, Hegel would review his philosophy and history books and saw how each town, each culture, had a peculiar way of understanding the world.

So he said to himself: "What is happening is that all philosophies form a single chain. Each philosopher is like a link in a great history in which humanity's progress is realized."

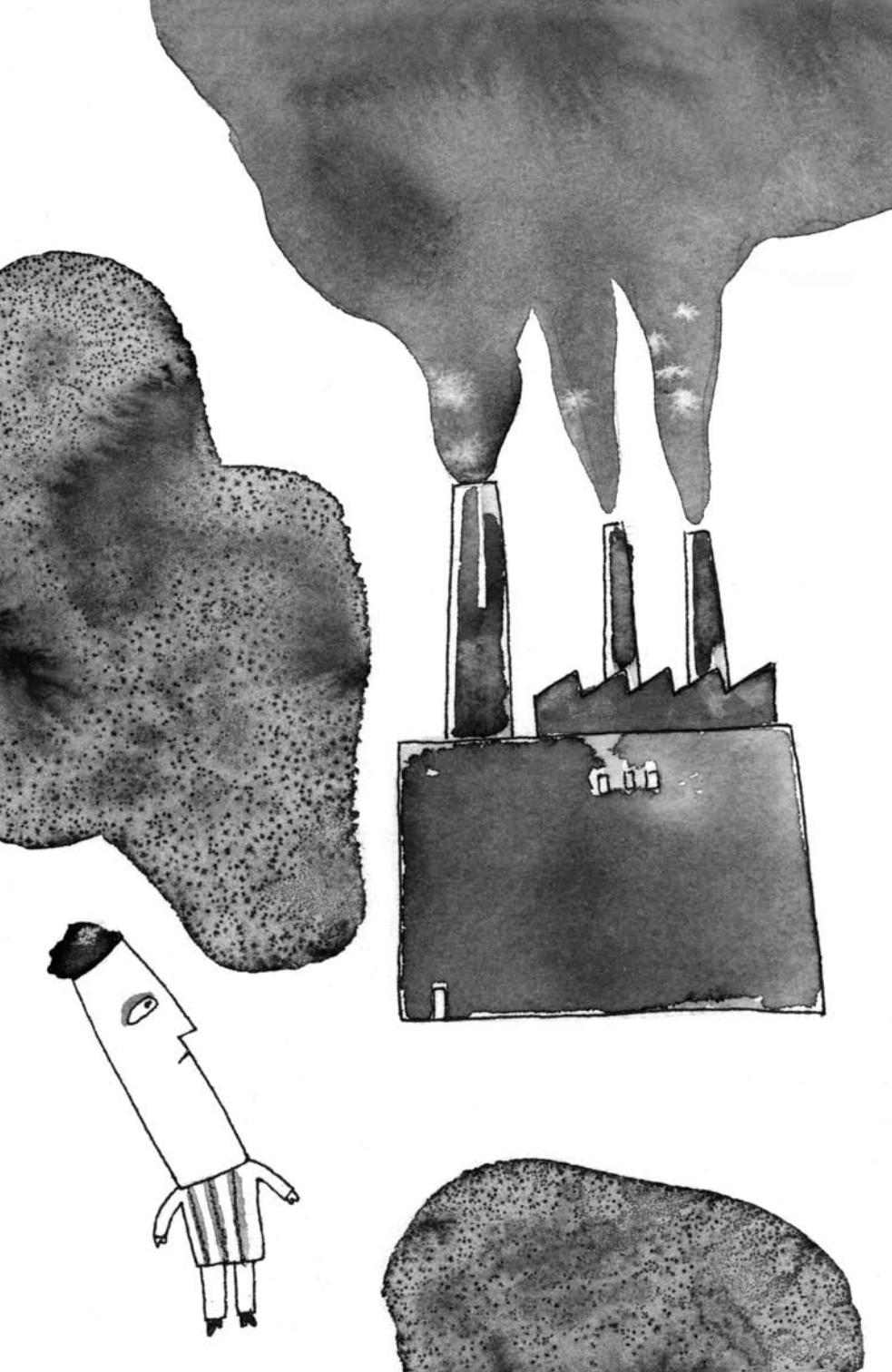
"I've got it!" he kept thinking. "The history of philosophy and cultures is like a giant pine tree and, as it grows, its peak becomes taller. This is why each philosopher is better than the last, because each philosopher surpasses the one prior to him, like the new branches that grow on the pine tree and make it grow higher."

Hegel thought that there was progress in the history of cultures because each culture took knowledge from the preceding culture and bettered itself with its own creativity. This is why Hegel believed the Egyptians were surpassed by the Greeks who were surpassed by the Romans who were surpassed by the medieval philosophers who were surpassed by the Renaissance and modern philosophers.

Hegel thought that civilizations built the progress of culture and humanity through history and because of this, some cultures were better than others.

Do you agree with Hegel? Do you think that all cultures are links in a long chain of humanity's progress? Do you think, like Hegel, that modern cultures are more perfect than the cultures of the ancient Greeks or the Peruvian Incas? Do you think that progress exists in history? Or do you think that some towns are not better than others, but that they are simply different and are not a part of one history and one chain of progress?





## **MARX (1818-1883)**

Karl Marx lived in a city in which there were many big factories. A lot of people worked in these factories. Every day, at 6:45 in the morning, the factory whistles would blow to signal that it was time for work. So, the workers would walk to the factories, put on their uniforms and start working.

The experiments and inventions of many philosophers and scientists, like Ockham, Leonardo and Bacon, made it possible to create large factories that produced products in enormous quantities, like shoes, hats, tools and weapons.

When Marx lived, there were many cities throughout the world like the one he lived in which were large and full of ships and industrial storehouses. And in most of these cities, old buildings had been torn down to build wide avenues and train stations, promoting commerce and the transport of merchandise.

Every morning, Marx walked along the city streets and saw the factory workers form long lines in order to be let into work. He would sit in front of the entrance and see, later on in the day when it had warmed up a bit, how the factory owner would arrive in his elegant car and enter through a door made especially for him.

Then, in the afternoon, Marx would notice how the owner would eat with his family in a fine restaurant and would not return to the factory in the evening, while the workers would end their workday at 8:00 at night, having eaten just a bit of food at midday.

Marx would say to himself: "When Bacon started conducting experiments to create ingenious machines, he had the illusion that the machines and the factories would allow people to have an easier life. But, what I am seeing is that most people work more than when they were farmers, and the only people who do enjoy the fruits of their labor are the factory owners."

Marx kept thinking: "The workers should be paid more for their work and work fewer hours. The owner sells everything that the factory produces from the labor of the workers, like shoes and tools, and the workers do not receive anything from the sales."

Marx saw how the factory owners could send their children to school, travel the world, go to the doctor when they were sick and buy luxurious cars, elegant clothing, and enormous mansions with the money that they gained from selling their products. In turn, the workers' children had to start working at a very young age instead of going to school and, because they never had the opportunity to read and write, remained uneducated and ignorant. The workers also had to work all year without taking any vacations. Because they were paid so little, they could not afford for a doctor to treat them when they were sick and had to live in small ugly barracks, where it was cold at night.

Does it seem just to you that the factory owners have so many comforts and luxuries and go to school and to the doctor, while their workers are poor and have to live miserably? Do you think that it is just that factory owners end up with what the factory produces, and that the money from what they sell ends up with them and not the workers?

Marx remembered Plato and the philosophy of good love and bad love, and he realized that the factory owners tried to fill their lives and satisfy their desires by buying big houses and elegant cars. It seemed to him unjust that the workers were being taken advantage of and barely surviving so that the owners could buy such things.

He also remembered Saint Augustine and the ideas put forth by Christianity, that said that everyone should love and help each other so that everyone could have food to eat and have a good life.

Marx, however, noticed that the factory owners did not care whether everyone could live well and be happy because they were unwilling to let go of their luxuries and their money.

Marx thought: "What might be the solution so that all workers could earn an appropriate salary for their work and live well?" Marx believed that all the inventions and machines that the Modern Age brought had only caused a few people, the owners of the factories, to become rich, while most people, the workers, remained poor.

Do you think that the progress modernity offers necessarily makes all people happy? Do you think that having airplanes and trains implies that everyone can travel? And do you think that because there are factories, it means that everyone will be able to eat and be treated by a doctor when they are in need of one?

Then Marx told himself: "If the factory owners keep for themselves the money that is earned with the merchandise instead of sharing it with their workers, what is needed are new

factory owners; and the new factory owners should be the workers themselves."

Marx said that the workers should own the factories so that when they sold the merchandise they had produced, they could share their earnings with each other.

Do you agree that the factory owners should be the people who produce the merchandise? Do you think that in this way everyone could be justly compensated for his or her work?

Marx also thought that once the workers became the owners, they would ensure that their children went to school, everyone would have a doctor, and everyone would have a house—that even if it was not very big, it would be pretty.

The factory owners did not agree with Marx's ideas and did not want the workers to even think that they could own factories too, so they hired policemen and soldiers to protect their wealth.

But the workers organized themselves into unions: large groups of people who demanded the right to own factories and receive adequate salaries. And so, ugly battles ensued between the owners and the workers over ownership of the factories.

Marx thought that if there were a revolution, and all the workers from all the factories governed the country and became owners of the industry, then everyone would have a house, an education, good health and all the things a person needs to have a dignified life.

What do you think about revolutions? Do you think they are good? Do you think that it is good for workers to raise arms and demand to own factories and govern the nation?

## **NIETZSCHE (1844-1990)**

One day, Nietzsche was invited to a costume party. His assistants had prepared his costume very carefully because there was going to be a competition where the best costume would be given a prize.

The party began. Beautiful women with elegant hats adorned with long colored feathers received the guests. They would ask the guests what their costume was, write it down on a list, and then give the guest a number. "Good evening. Don't tell me what your costume is. It is a crocodile, right? Very original. Please, take your number."

"Good evening. What is your costume?"

"I am a prince."

"Please, take your number."

All the guests, who were many, arrived wearing costumes. There were rabbits, devils, soldiers, vampires, horses, carrots, kings, mummies, men dressed as women, women dressed as men, playing cards, and every type of strange personality.

Everyone danced, wearing masks, in a room filled with confetti and streamers, along to beautiful pieces of music played by the orchestra of violas, violins and cellos. Different characters, like nurses and policemen, lizards and big fat men, giants with stilts, and Little Red Riding Hoods held glasses filled with exquisite liqueurs.

The party was a great success. Joyous laughter mingled with the music and dance.



Then the moment everyone had waited for was announced from the orchestra's stage. "Ladies and gentlemen, the hour of the costume contest has arrived!"

Each guest walked onto the stage, announced what his or her costume was and made a few turns to display it well. The judges, who had a list of the participants and their numbers, graded each costume.

A giraffe went up first and presented herself as the "Giraffe in Love." She showed off her long neck, and after receiving applause, returned to her place.

A turtle followed. He presented himself, hid in his shell and reappeared again. After receiving a strong applause, he left the stage. Then came an aborigine with a bone through his nose and a skirt made of palm leaves.

There were also an ancient Roman with his spear, a Hindu wearing a turban and a pirate with a wooden leg. The intensity of the applause changed according to how pretty the audience thought the costume was and how well it was exhibited.

Then it was Nietzsche's turn to present his costume. He walked onto the platform, gave a few turns, but before walking off stage, he asked the audience:

"What do you think of my costume?"

The audience was not sure what Nietzsche was disguised as, because he was dressed in a white robe with a long white beard like an old man. His costume could have been of an ancient Greek, a prophet or a sage. What he could be was not certain. So the crowd began to call out at Nietzsche:



"Mr. Nietzsche, what is your costume? Please explain it to us."

Nietzsche responded, "I have come disguised as God."

Everyone kept silent. Not one voice, one sound, could be heard throughout the great hall.

They all thought, "Nietzsche has come dressed as God. What lack of respect! How could he use God as a costume for a party?"

In that moment, one of the judges confirmed that the official list said that in fact Nietzsche's costume was what he claimed it to be. The judge, insulted by such indignity, stood up from his chair and said so everyone in the room could hear:

"Sir, you owe us an explanation for this. We find it in bad taste that you would use God as a costume. You shall automatically be disqualified from the contest, and we ask that you leave the party immediately."

Nietzsche started laughing in such a way that everyone present could hear his laughter.

"Well, you see, what is happening," he began to say, as he took off his God costume, "is that..."

But before he could finish what he was saying, everyone noticed that below that costume, he was disguised as a clown. No one knew what to think.

Nietzsche, announced, between his laughter:

"I am still disguised as God."

He took off his clown costume, and revealed a cowboy costume. He pointed his gun to the public, and said again:

"I am still disguised as God."

Everyone started to murmur amongst each other. Everyone was very bothered and did not know exactly what Nietzsche was doing. They did not know if he was trying to perform a theatrical piece, if he was trying to make fun of the audience, or convey some kind of message. The judges were confused, and the host of the party was angry.

Nietzsche, in the middle of his laughter, took off his cowboy costume and a general's costume appeared, with a military hat, boots and a coat adorned with medals. Nietzsche kept saying: "I am still disguised as God."

Then he took off the general's costume to reveal that he was dressed as an executioner, with his hood and his ax. He repeated:

"I'm still disguised as God."

What do you think Nietzsche was trying to do by saying, "I am still disguised as God" as he changed from costume to costume? Do you think that he was making fun of the audience, or do you think that he was trying to say something? What could Nietzsche's message have been to the audience?

When Nietzsche began to take off the executioner costume, one of the judges shouted: "That's enough mocking God for this evening! Please leave this party!"

Nietzsche, who at this point was dressed as a flower, responded in between his laughter to the audience:

"All of you are the ones who are mocking and killing God. God is dead, and everyone has killed him!"

Everyone was silent. Nietzsche continued:



"Why are you so bothered that I disguise myself as God, if God, life itself, is all these things —a sage, a clown, a cowboy, a general, an executioner, a flower and any and everything that God fancies in order to demonstrate his power.

"God is power, and that is why God embodies different forms in the world, like a ballet dancer and a witch, like night and day, or like an assassin and a victim.

"I am not making fun of God. You killed God when you enclosed him in a church and said that his name was Jesus, that he was weak and thin like a sheep and lived amongst the poor.

"God is life and power, and because of this, God takes on any form, like lightning or war. God is strength and happiness, like a lion's roar and an elephant's footstep."

The judges and the audience were unsure as to how to respond to Nietzsche.

Do you think that God is power and can embody many personalities in the world, like that of a great artist or a furious warrior? Do you think that humankind, as Nietzsche says, is killing God by saying that God is Christ, the poor and humble man who was crucified, instead of asserting that he is a great force that exists in all things?

Nietzsche continued to explain his disguise to everyone.

"God likes to play. This is why God can be a bear or a dolphin, a tarantula or a crow. God could care less whether what he embodies is good or bad, because power is impervious to limitations. The power of God goes beyond good and bad."

Everyone listening to Nietzsche was surprised and confused by his words. Some, like the Christians, were very angry



with Nietzsche because they thought that God was good and incapable of being bad and ugly, like an assassin, a scorpion, or a serpent.

There were, however, others who agreed with Nietzsche that God was like a mime that liked to represent all the roles in a theatre performance: the villain, the thief, the fool and the king. Because God was all-powerful, he was not going to be satisfied with only one role. God, or life, played with all the roles, without caring if these appeared to be good or bad in the eyes of others.

Do you think that God is good? Or, do you think that God does not care about what is good and what is bad? Do you think that God is life and power? Do you think that God embodies everything in the universe, for the simple pleasure of playing, without caring whether he does good things or bad things?

Nietzsche was not a Christian. He did not think that love between people was the best way for everyone to be happy. On the contrary, he thought that God was power, and that people should be like one of His masks, express His will and become Supermen, that is to say, that they become strong and powerful, live beyond good and bad, even if others suffered at their expense.

Do you agree with Nietzsche? Do you think that everyone, in order to be like God, should try to be powerful, without caring about whether or not it harms others?

Nietzsche said that God was like an actor with many masks –that He represented all the roles in the universe: the stars, the sea, an eagle and a thunderstorm. Nietzsche said that

God is like a happy dancer that is beyond good and bad; and the only thing that is important to God is to demonstrate his power by turning into everything that is the world.

## **SARTRE (1905-1980)**

Sartre was sitting one day at a café table in Paris watching people as they walked by on the street.

Sartre listened to the animated conversations around him at the cafe. There were three or four people at each table speaking through clouds of tobacco smoke. Every once in awhile, an attractive woman would walk by and capture the attention of the men at the tables.

Sartre, on the other hand, was very anxious. He actually did not have many problems to worry about. His rent was paid for, and he was not in debt. He was healthy, and he did not have problems with anybody. But despite all of this, he was anxious.

Sartre read the newspaper and reviewed some of the announcements –that some princess had just gotten engaged, that the president was about to inaugurate an assembly in Switzerland for the care of senior citizens and that the USSR was preparing to perform nuclear tests.

It seemed to Sartre, as he read the newspaper, that nothing made any sense. He thought: "What do I care if the Pope visits Eastern European nations? What do I care if our national soccer team continues to be undefeated in the world championship?"

After the Great War, after the great masquerade that we have seen in this century, what is worthwhile?"

Everything meant the same to Sartre. He did not care much about keeping up with paying the rent. And, the beautiful women that he saw on the street provided no more interest to him than a respectable old woman.

Sartre saw some people go in and out of a little church across the way and thought: "People can be so absurd. They sit before a wooden cross and talk to it as if it were a person. How naive they are to believe that God exists and that He will listen to them with their prayers."

Underneath Sartre's thoughts remained a sensation of distress. This sensation suddenly became so intense, that our philosopher asked himself: "What is wrong with me? Why am I so anxious?"

Why do you think that Sartre felt like this? Why do you think he was so distressed?

Sartre told himself: "People are so absurd. They think that working hard to rebuild the country after the war and making friends and creating families makes sense. They even think that they have to be good in life so that later, when they die, they can go to heaven. They are so stupid. They do not realize that God does not exist."

"People are like donkeys perpetually chasing a carrot dangled in front of them with a stick. People spend their time searching for and desiring things, and do not understand that they will never be satisfied. Why create such a fuss?"

The more Sartre thought these things, the more anxious he grew and the more unbearable he became.

A beggar walked up to Sartre's table as he was thinking all these things and put out his hand for money. Sartre took out a coin and gave it to the beggar.

"Thank you very much. God bless you," said the beggar.

"God bless me!" exclaimed Sartre. "God is not going to bless me; God does not exist."

"Of course God exists!" the beggar answered. "If God did not exist, life would not be worth living. It would not be worth the trouble to live through so much cold and hunger. I am poor; the war left me without anything, but the hope that when I die I will go to heaven and be happy, gives me the strength to live and confront the pain."

"I do not believe in God," said Sartre. "Do you think that God would have permitted such a horrible war? Do you think that God would have permitted the massacre of innocent people? God does not exist. And behind everything and within the hearts of men, there is nothing. Yes, nothing! And this is why nothing makes any sense. There is no sense in having a family and in working hard everyday. Life is absurd because at the bottom of our heart there is no God; there is nothing. I do not understand why you even make the effort to live, if when you die, the only thing you'll find is nothing."

The beggar silently looked at Sartre in disbelief.

Do you agree with Sartre? Do you think that God does not exist and that behind everything there is Nothing? Do you

think that because Nothing is all around us, life makes no sense, and so there is no point in working, having friends and learning about the world and struggling in it every day?

"Now I understand why I am so anxious," Sartre said to the beggar. "I feel as if below our feet there is nothing. Life gives me vertigo, and I feel that even if I would like to live for something, everything is empty.

"I, on the contrary," responded the beggar, "feel pain and hunger, but because I believe in God, I am not anxious. I have hope for a better life, and that one day I will go to heaven."

Do you agree with Sartre or the beggar? Do you think that God does not exist, that Nothing is at the bottom of all things, and that it is not worth the effort to fight for what you believe in because in the end everything is absurd? Or do you think that even if life can be difficult, one must fight for it, because if man lives his life well, he will know the love of God?

Do you believe that life can produce anxiety because there is Nothing all around us, or do you think that in life we must have hope and try to be better everyday, because in this way, people can find God? Do you think that God is good and loving, or do you think that wars and all the human misery prove that God does not exist and that human existence does not make sense?

Sartre did not believe in God, because he thought that in place of God, there was Nothing. And because he believed Nothing existed in the heart of humankind and the world, he thought humankind was condemned to live in anguish.





## EPILOGUE

Up to this point, we have briefly reviewed Greek philosophers like Democritus and Plato, medieval philosophers like Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas, Renaissance philosophers like Leonardo and Pico, and modern philosophers, like Hume and Nietzsche. These fit together like pieces of a puzzle to make up the history of “*Why?*” questions, which is the history of philosophy.

Each philosopher, with his questions and the answers he gave to those questions, contributed in the formation of a tradition, the tradition of Western philosophy.

Obviously, in this small book, many philosophers are not present who form a part of this tradition. Western philosophy is rich with many very important and intelligent philosophers who, according to their customs and what they lived and experienced, tried to respond to their “*Why?*” questions.

The tradition of Western philosophy was mainly developed in Europe, even if non-European thinkers and doctrines influenced it. For example, Plato and other Greeks traveled to Egypt to learn mathematics; Saint Augustine practiced the Christian religion that came from Israel; Saint Thomas studied Arab philosophers; Spinoza was Jewish, and Leibniz knew how to speak

Chinese. This is to say, that even if philosophy is from the West, philosophers learned many things from other cultures.

Because philosophers initially saw that nature gave them the answers to their “*Why?*” questions, they thought those answers to be the only and best answers available. This is why, for example, when a European army would conquer a foreign population, not only would it take the people’s land and jewels, but it would also destroy their temples, the images of their gods, their schools and their forms of government. The conqueror would make these populations believe that their gods were false, and that the real answers to the “*Why?*” questions were in what the Western tradition of philosophy.

So, when the Spanish arrived in America, they forced the populations they encountered to speak their language and to believe in their God; when the English conquered India, they impeded its people from practicing its traditions and customs.

Some philosophers, however, thought that the name of a god was not as important as people respecting one another. There are many ancient populations and cultures outside of Western philosophy whose thinkers respond in their own unique ways to their “*Why?*” questions. Some of these thinkers are from Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America; and they have their own gods, customs, and ways of seeing the world.

This is not to say that Asian philosophies are better than Western philosophy, or that Western philosophy is better than the philosophies of the Middle East. They are simply different cultures with different customs.

To some philosophers, like Nicholas of Cusa or Spinoza, it was a concern that people not only love each other but that they also respect cultures outside their own.

Perhaps, if the Spanish priests and the Mayan sages, the Jewish Rabbis and the Persian Dervishes, the philosophers from the United States and Japanese thinkers were to sit and talk with each other, to share a good meal and enjoy the sunset together, they would think more about the things that unite them as humans, instead of focusing on the color of each other's skin and all the things that separate one from another and cause people to fight.

Philosophy was developed in Europe, but that does not mean that the wise men and thinkers of other populations and cultures did not observe the night's sky and the deep ocean or breathe in the morning's fresh air; and it is not to say that they did not feel in their heart all the wonders and all the mysteries that nature and life gave them. Many of those thoughts and beliefs, however, have been recorded in another part of the history of "*Why?*" questions, that for now we cannot enjoy.



*The History of Questions "Why?"* was printed on the month of January of 2007, in Editorial Color, Naranjo 96-bis, Col Santa María la Ribera, México, D. F. Printed a series of 1,000 plus copies.



*The History of Questions "Why?"* invites children –and their parents– to share and enjoy a pleasant journey through the history of philosophy.

In this way philosophy, the love of knowledge and life, may be preserved and grow because the hearts of children –always ready to question– will be its faithful guardians and provide fertile ground for curiosity to flower and give marvelous fruit.

*The History of Questions "Why?"* wants to bring out the great philosophers in children, who are capable of questioning the colors and forms of the world around them and the brilliant rainbows of their own hearts.



UNIVERSIDAD DE GUANAJUATO



Unidad de Extensión  
SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE

CUERPO ACADÉMICO  
CON•FIGURA•CIONES  
*Formativas*