



Chapter X - 3

Time is a wise player. From the very first sparkle, when the universe began its course, it chose the best seat to enjoy the show. Time is everywhere, in every atom of energy and matter, contemplating the actors and the marvel of their play. Yet, new actors enter and leave the stage continuously, dominating the drama for only a tiny interval, which lasts no more than eons. Meanwhile, vibrating atoms of light illuminate the scene, while matter abandons itself to the melody of cosmos: a melody so wonderful that, when the rhythm accelerates, time bends on its seat and daydreams about it. Sustained by the wind of change, these atoms of matter dance their intermittent Waltzer, wherein they transmute and rearrange in evocative patterns. Similar to artistic compositions, they hold the very essence of the scene, which they manifest with the uppermost form of creativity. Time observes them silent, as they spread and evolve in awesome displays of fractals geometries. There, from the deepest reigns of chaos, he witnesses the emergence of recurrent patterns, which he follows curious as they take the first steps. Whenever light shines, such cellular automata replicate themselves, navigating the whole space of possibilities, while the others sink in the meaningless oblivion. These creatures continuously reproduce, and keep changing and evolving toward newer automata of higher complexity. Eventually, through their own ceaseless escalation, dreams arise as powerful tools for exploration. Creatures are born, grow and die, and only the fittest survive their fitful Waltzer. Together with them, more and more powerful dreams are born, grow and will eventually die.

The small quay was approaching fast from the other side of the bay, and yet it was leaving enough time for you to disentangle the situation. Meanwhile, Ujana was walking fast next to you, with sad albeit resolute eyes. For a moment, before you took the floor again, you feel like he was rushing toward his relatives only to put an end to this conversation. The solemn gait of the young boy, with his elderly cane, convinced you that this might be the case. Nevertheless, you know you have the power to keep everything under control. What scares you the most, now, is the feeling that this was the only one chance to prove it, before things got worse.

“U... listen, there’s no reason to feel like this.”

“I’m listening” – he replies aloof – “but, please, don’t treat me like a piece of porcelain: I’m not a child, we agreed on that.”

“Of course you are not” – you emphasize, trying to reassure him – “and I think you’ve proved it enough already.”

“...”

“Also, we still have that open point to discuss.”

“What point?” – he asks, masking an intrigued look.

“Well, I wanted to tell you why, in my opinion, a comparison between science and religion is baseless.”

“Ah, true, I remember: that you ‘agree with what I said’ about science and religion, ‘but there’s a point’ that I overlooked which, for you, ‘invalidates’ my concerns. Great. I really want to see it.”

“Exactly. I promise that you will...”

“... that I’ll change my mind? I don’t think so, not at all. Honestly, I don’t even know anymore what to believe.”

“Oh come on, why do you close yourself so much? I can show you that it’s all right, if you only listened with a positive attitude.”

“I already answered, I’m listening. You’ve been very kind with me” – he adds – “but now this story left me in a bad mood.”

“OK, I understand. Then...” – you take a deep breath – “here we go with that last point. First, I’m sure you remember what we said about intelligence, that we cannot make comparisons because we don’t know how to define it.”

“Yes.”

“Good. And you also remember about mysticism, you made it quite clear” – you both smile.

“Yes.”

“Cool. So, we don’t need much more. All I wanted to say” – you add emphatically – “that invalidates your issues is that it’s not even possible to compare science and religion. See what I mean?”

“...”

“The reason is that they’re based on completely different assumptions, and they care about completely different points.”

“If you made all this very long and bombastic introduction to tell me that they are very different, well, I would be even more disappointed than before...”

“Oh boy, why are you so skeptical now?” – you ask with displeasure – “Of course that’s not all: they’re not only different, their very principles are. Let’s take science, for instance. Science is based on the scientific method: starting from observations, scientists formulate hypotheses which are tested by experiments, so that they can be refined or discarded. This is how...”

“I remember.”

“Good. Now take religion. There are many religions (Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and many others) which seem quite different” – you continue – “but they all share the same fundamental traits. In general, they all separate the world in two parts: the earthly and the divine.”

“I know all these things.”

“Yeah OK, I knew but let me elaborate!” – you reply, slightly irritated – “So, religion is all about the relation between feelings or actions of a person and whatever they consider divine.”

“Are you a believer?” – he asks naively.

“No U, I’m not.” – you reply firmly – “At least as it’s usually conceived. Anyway, this is not important now.”

“OK OK, don’t get upset please. I just asked.”

“I’m not upset... I’m only afraid that, if I don’t explain it well, you won’t be satisfied by the answer... and I would not like to hear your complaints again” – you conclude, adding a sincere smile.

“OK I understand, sorry, I’ll be more careful next time.”

“Fine, don’t worry. Let’s get to the point instead, otherwise we will reach that quay before we start.”

“Yeah let’s do it, I want to hear what you wanted to say!”

“Cool, that’s how I like it! Then, where did... right, the ‘divine’. So, what is ‘divine’ for believers?” – you ask rhetorically – “Well, there’s not only one divine: there is one for every person or community, and it can be an object as well as a deity. What matters is that the person feels the need to show respect to this entity, acting in a solemn way whenever it’s involved.”

“I see... but, in the end, what is the role of religion?”

“Oh, that relation *is* religion! Religion is the union of all these beliefs and habits. When these beliefs are shared by a group of people, a Church is born.”

“I see, I’d never seen it this way...” – he replies in awe.

“Really? I see, maybe at school or catechism they only show one perspective. Anyway this is how things work when you look at them from far and consider also the other credos in the world.”

“Maybe... So, I got lost, what was your point?”

“My point?”

“You wanted to say why science and religion are so different that it doesn’t even make sense to compare them.”

“...”

“That I was disappointed because we should trust textbooks, which print theorems, made by unknown scientists, which are not verified... and for you, this is different from a believer who trusts in miracles or superstition. Don’t you remember?”

“Of course I do. So, now I can tell you my point and you can tell me what you think about it.”

“Sure, I’m all ears!”

“Great. So, my point is that they cannot be compared because science requires reproducibility. Once you accept its axioms, such as those you saw in geometry, everything in science is consistent and can be reproduced by everyone, in principle at any time. Sometimes it may be necessary to have a lot of patience to redo the calculations, or money for the equipment... but in the end, everything is in your hands to validate a result.”

“...”

“This is true both for the simple tests you carried out at school and for the most expensive and prohibitive experiments in the history of science.”

“For instance?”

“For instance... what people are doing at CERN: a gigantic agglomerated of top-notch technology, which involves twenty or more countries, for cutting-edge research in physics.”

“Wow, that sounds... impressive...”

“It is... and yet, we can check their results from home!” – you add with emphasis – “thanks to the data made available online by the people in these projects. We can take that data, apply formulas and verify if all worked as it should...”

“...”

“... while for theoretical studies, like geometry, we only need pencil, paper and patience. So, the take-home message is that in science all the power, and responsibility, is in our hands.”

“... and religion?”

“Religion is completely different: it doesn’t care to verify whether or not a ‘divine’ fact, like the existence of god, is true. It simply *is*: believers don’t need to (and often cannot) verify everything, as long as it resonates with themselves. This is where faith comes into play: it’s the backbone.”

“But also in science you trust people you’ve never met, no?”

“Good that you asked. The difference is that in science I have, or someone for me has, the power to reproduce a certain result, while for a god, for instance, there’s nothing that can be proved. It’s an intimate connection between two entities (the person and the divine), and others cannot interfere with it. If you think about it, it doesn’t even have anything to do with the world we live in... although deities are supposed to rule it, somehow.”

“So, in science there’s no need to have faith, while in religion it is, of course, essential.”

“Not exactly: faith is important also in science, but in a different way. For instance, scientists trust the axioms of a theory: whatever they study, it develops from them, which are taken as true and not provable. I’m sure you’ve seen them at school.”

“Yeah, true...”

“Great. Also, scientists trust the work of the other colleagues, since, on a practical level, they do not have the time to thoroughly verify all the works. Yet, in principle they have the possibility to check whether something is correct or not.”

“I had never thought about it in this way...”

“Glad that you found it interesting. So, this was my point, in short. I hope I convinced you, even if you were so skeptical and aggressive when we started.”

“Yes, I think so... there’s just one thing I don’t understand.”

“...”

“If one can be verified and the other one can’t, why some people prefer religion to science? Above all, why can’t scientists convince them to join their side, which is clearly better? Don’t they care about all those people?”

“Oh come on, again!” – you laugh.

“What?”

“Nothing...” – you smile – “The point is that they base their beliefs on different pillars and, in particular, believers don’t care about reproducibility. That’s why scientists won’t ever, ever, convince them that there’s no god. Believers don’t care about it: they feel it inside, and that’s enough for them.”

“Oh...”

“Let me add: just like scientists have a hard time convincing the anti-vax. They don’t share the same fundamentals: if they did, even with no knowledge about science, people would always trust scientists. There would be no reason not to.”

“Have you ever tried to convince one?”

“Me? Yes, once. In general, this is more or less how it goes: you ask them if they trust science and they say they do (they trust that $2+2=4$) and they are aware that the math behind it becomes quickly harder, so that they cannot follow it. Nevertheless, even if numbers support vaccines, eventually they refuse them. At some point, math was not to be trusted anymore... and when you ask them where and why their trust failed, they cannot answer. Also” – you murmur – “when something becomes emotional, then it’s difficult to object without hurting their feelings.”

“I see... and it’s not a matter of being stupid or smart, but more a matter of what are your... how did you call them? Pillars.”

“Somehow yes. Unfortunately, scientists don’t understand this point and go insane in their worthless, rational debates against the anti-vax. You can’t convince a deaf by yelling at them louder.”

“...”

“But don’t get me wrong; it’s great that scientists, journalists and politicians do their best to fill this gap. My concern is that, ultimately, this war can be won only with a stronger education.”

“...”

“But let’s go back to our second point” – you reply with energy – “when you said that science is better than religion. Again, science is not ‘better’ than religion: you use this word too easily, my friend” – you add with a bright smile – “don’t you?”

“Maybe, but what’s wrong now? Science wins easily over religion, also judging from your description.”

“Not exactly. Religion has had a crucial role for society, since it took care of all those aspects, like morality and ethics, which are not within the scope of science. Without religion we would not be here today...”

“...”

“...”

“...”

“... and?” – he asks.

“... and we return to the start: this is all due to evolution.”

3

“Evolution? Are you serious?” – he asks, astonished.

“Yes, of course. You see, we still had to take back that point about evolution, and here we are! Isn’t it awesome?”

“You... how?! Either you’re fooling me or you are a magician!”

“Ah, that might be true eventually, this was a real trick!”

“So, is this true or are you kidding me?”

“Of course it’s true” – you reply immediately – “I would never joke like that or confuse you for no reason.”

“So, what do science and religion have to do with evolution?” – he asks, impatient – “Evolution explained how animals change in time, and I remember the example with marbles... but now? Now, you tell me that there is evolution also in religion?”

“...” – you keep listening, entertained by the monologue.

“I understand that evolution appears in science because it has to do with animals, and science also studies animals, but religion... religion doesn’t have to do anything special with them! Plus, there’s nothing to evolve in religion... maybe prayers can change, some traditions too, but this is not really evolution.”

“You’re right, those things have nothing to do with evolution. Instead” – you pause emphatically – “what was not entirely true was about animals! Actually, religion has had its say also on the origin of species. But there’s much more we can talk about, not only about this example.”

“The origin of what?”

“The origin of species... no?”

“Hmm...”

“Ah, what a pity!” – you grumble – “It’s super cool, you’ll see it soon, but it’s not really related to religion and evolution, so...”

“No no, I want to know now, you can’t leave me this way!” – shouts the boy, raring to hear more – “Very quickly, I promise, please, and then we return to evolution.”

“Oh dear, seriously?”

“Yes, why not?”

“Because we will never come to an end!” – you laugh – “Well, actually there’s no one running after us, so...”

“So, let’s do that!”

“OK, let’s see it... but quickly! Worst case, we don’t finish before the quay. I don’t think anyone will mind...”

“I like it! So, what about the origin of the world?”

“The origin of species, not of the world!” – you smile – “Do you remember about giraffes and marbles? That animals...”

“Yes, I remember it.”

“Cool. Then, well, that is a theory and, like every theory that’s worth its name, there are people who refuse it.”

“Are you serious?”

“Of course. Does it surprise you?”

“I don’t know... You presented it as if it were clear that it was the tru...” – he halts abruptly, eyes fixed on a distant point.

“Yes, I think you realized it by yourself, very good. We talked about science and the fact that theories, or models, are never completely true: in principle, anyone can come, disagree and try to disprove it. So yes, also the evolution has opponents... but they are relatively few and mostly believers.”

“Believers, you mean, because of religion?”

“In a sense yes, that’s why religion enters the game.”

“OK...” – he murmurs, overeager to know more.

“So, the point is that some believers *do not believe* in evolution; rather, they adhere to what is called creationism. To make it simple, creationism says that everything on this planet was born with a divine intervention.”

“And why does this go against evolution?”

“Oh, for so many reasons! For instance, they believe that all living beings were created just like we see them today... so, no room for evolution! For them, only what is written in the Bible is true... and evolution is certainly not compatible with that.”

“Wow” – he whispers.

“Yes, unbelievable. Actually, this naive explanation is so basic that it simplifies everything, getting rid of many problems. A life where a god has chosen everything, and where nothing ever changes: what more could you ask for?”

“...”

“I’m joking of course, that was sarcasm. What I mean is that I find it reasonable that, in the past, people stuck to this theory: when life was a privilege, nature was mysterious and people witnessed death every day, it’s understandable that one sought the most comforting solution. What’s unbelievable is that so many people still support it today, even against the evidence.”

“But why” – he asks, surprised – “why are they still so many?”

“Who knows. What I can say, which will make you happy, is that they are becoming more and more loose with time. For instance, now there are also intermediate theories, and people can choose softer versions of creationism.”

“For example?”

“Uh, so many, I don’t remember all of them. Some believe that god created the species and from then on evolution occurred. In particular, humanity was directly created as it is now.”

“Not bad, this is already interesting.”

“Let’s say so. Then, some believe that a divine intervention occurred, somewhere in the past, to explain the emergence of complex creatures. Others, instead, are more open to discoveries and accept evolution to some extent, and that the age of the universe is that predicted by science.”

“Why? Do the others use a different age?”

“Yes, very different actually! Since it must be compatible with the Bible, the Earth cannot be older than a few thousand years... instead of a million of thousand years... mind-blowing, isn’t it?”

“...”

“Yep. Anyway, let’s freeze the origin of the species and let’s go back to religion and evolution, OK?”

“OK, as promised” – he replies enthusiastic.

“Great. So...” – you continue – “now I don’t remember where we stopped, but we said that religion has played an important role in the growth of society, and this role was fundamentally different from the benefits given by science and technology.”

“You said that ‘without religion we would not be here today.’”

“Right. The idea was not too complicated, I must say, but how about we try with another simple example?”

“Like the ones with marbles?”

“More or less, let’s try!” – you reply with a burst of enthusiasm – “Hmm, OK... let’s take your friends, for example... you have a nice group, I remember, right?”

“Right, I have a bunch of close friends.”

“Perfect. Now, imagine that there is some task you have to solve. Any task, even simple, doesn’t matter. My first question is: what changes, task-wise, if you are alone or with a friend?”

“That it’s easier, of course.”

“Easier, OK. If you don’t consider distractions, and your friend doesn’t make mistakes, that is true: being in two makes things easier than being alone.”

“This is obvious, isn’t it?”

“To some extent, yes” – you answer with confidence – “In fact, this is not exactly the answer I was looking for. You see, whenever you are already able to solve a task, being in two can make things twice as faster, or twice as simpler. However, if you cannot fulfill a task on your own, being in two also enables things that are otherwise impossible.”

“I don’t see where we are going but OK, clear...”

“Cool, we’ll get there in a minute. Now, let’s imagine the case where, again, you ask your friend a help but, this time, she is busy with some other activity that is interesting for him. You have your things to do, your friend has other things in mind, and for this reason you don’t cooperate. What do you think will happen?”

“What will happen? You already described it: I would try anyway to solve that task by myself, maybe I succeed, maybe no, and my friend will do the same with theirs.”

“Exactly. Maybe you both manage to fulfill your goals but, most likely, in a non-optimal way and only for things that are not too difficult. For example, building a house is not feasible alone, but becomes doable when more people are involved. So my second question is: if you had a magic wand, what would you change to make things better overall?”

“I guess that I cannot build a house with this wand...”

“No” – you laugh – “I guess not either.”

“OK, then I would impose that, in general, we are all free to do our things, but sometimes...” – he hesitates – “how to say...”

“Yes, I think you got it, go ahead!”

“OK, let’s say that whenever it’s necessary (I have no idea who decides it), then everyone stops and collaborates to do things that, otherwise, are impossible alone” – he pauses and looks at you in the eyes – “Does it make sense?”

“Does it make sense? It’s perfect, that’s exactly the point!”

“Hmm... I’m happy that you are happy, but I don’t see what this point is. Also, my answer was just a fantasy, doesn’t have anything to do with reality” – he adds with disappointment – “can you explain it to...”

“Sure! Why did you say that your answer is a fantasy?”

“Why? Because you gave me a magic wand!”

“So, you say that it’s fantastic because wands don’t exist. Fine. What if they did?”

“They don’t.”

“Magic wooden sticks certainly not, but we can craft a spell that works alike. How about we call it ‘religion?’”

“What?” – he asks bewildered.

“Yes, you got it” – you smile – “I’m trying to convince you that religion is precisely the magic wand you wanted to make your wish come true. Do you see how?”

“Wait, I’m confused...” – he slows down and stares at the tip of his walking stick.

“Look, it’s very simple” – you give him time to answer – “Just look at the most diffuse religions, such as Christianity or that of the ancient Egypt: aren’t they built, at the end of the day, on a set of ethic rules that dictate the correct behavior?”

“Yes...”

“Yes, they are. That’s why they’re practically equivalent to our magic wand, and they serve the same purpose when it comes to aligning people’s individual interest for a greater good.”

“I don’t understand” – he shrugs his shoulders.

“What don’t you understand?”

“I don’t see how this can be true. In my answer the magic wand was... magical, and I could make everyone do whatever I wanted. Here instead this is not possible: religion gives rules, but it’s up to us whether to abide by them or not.”

“Maybe, maybe. So what if we had some way, any way, to push people to follow them?”

“...”

“Let’s say that we want them to have the same (cooperative) behavior, so as to build a fruitful collaboration. Can we find a way to push them in that direction?”

“By hook or by crook, you mean?”

“Wow, sounds extreme but in a sense yes. Of course,” – you add – “without violence: we are all fair and peaceful.”

“Without the use of force, I don’t see how one can...” – he hesitates – “No we can’t, unless we promise a reward to everyone

who behaves well... but this is just an ad, it doesn't prevent people from behaving bad if they want to."

"Great, we're almost there! We can give a reward to everyone who behaves well and... in the same way... we can give a negative reward - that is, we punish - to everyone who doesn't. See? Easy!"

"What easy? You said we don't want to be violent and now you say that we threaten them?"

"Hehe, almost! Actually we would be clean, it's not us who would punish them!"

"How? If *we* are the rulers, who else would do that?" - he asks, bothered by the spiraling reasoning - "I'm lost again, can we go straight to the point please?"

"Why are you lost? We already said everything, we only have to put things together: who, in your opinion, is the best candidate to reward or punish people, whose authority cannot be questioned, blamed or undermined?"

"I don't know" - he says, puzzled - "It must be someone very powerful... and untouchable... and whose influence is, somehow, always present everywhere. I don't know any person like that."

"True, it's not a person indeed. Come on, what are we talking about the whole time?"

6

"Ah-ah, exactly, that's our magic wand! We cannot touch it, threaten it, rebel against it, and at the same time it conditions all our actions with the promise of paradise and hell. Brilliant!"

"..."

"We can even distribute an epic book that includes all its precepts, beautifully crafted to channel everyone's energy into one collective state of mind. There, everyone is even happy to limit their own freedom and to align their interests. Just imagine how much easier it became to control people in larger communities, when the orders were given by a fictitious, thus unopposable, omnipotent god?"

"..."

“Don’t you agree that it’s simply ingenious? Honestly, to me this is one of the paramount, brightest expedients mankind has ever created. Look: since being a ruler is a dangerous position, you - a brilliant mind - conjure up another entity with much greater powers, to which everyone, ideally even you, has to obey. Then, you convince people that you, the ruler, are the only intermediary before this entity, which delivers its commandments through your person. Eventually, your requests are no more yours but its, and people cannot blame you for them, nor object to this fictive entity: the perfect crime!”

“This is not what I learnt at school, nor at home.”

“I know, I know” – you reply with a benevolent smile – “I had religion classes too when I was your age, I remember it. In fact, this is just my truth... but certainly I’m not the only one who thinks this way! You might have heard of the famous quote ‘Religion is the opium of the people’: what I’m saying is not the same, but it’s also not too far from that.”

“No I haven’t, and I don’t know what to think. I can’t believe that religions are born to instill terror in people!” – he continues, with an unusual mix of disillusion and curiosity – “Also, come on, how does all this story relate to evolution!”

“Oh no, I don’t mean that religions exist to terrorize people! Maybe they happen to do it indirectly, to align people for a greater good. In this sense, you might say that they serve to manipulate the masses, but certainly not to terrorize them. However, to me manipulation is not the main motivation: religions crystallize the intimate, mystical relation between humans and nature.”

“Sometimes you use such... what does this mean now?”

“Sorry. It means that, in my opinion, long ago religions were born to give a shape to the mysterious, spiritual bond between people and nature. Today we live in a world where everything is under control: we have thermoregulated houses, overabundant food, impressive technologies, weather forecasts, airplanes... No more need for miracles, superstition or divine interventions: everything can be explained by some laws written in a book.”

“The Bible?”

“No, what do you say! I’m talking about science and the laws in scientific textbooks.”

“But we said that science is always progressing and it cannot explain everything.”

“Oh dear” – you grumble – “true... but, for all practical purposes, in the macroscopic world we can see” – you show the surrounding environment with your hands – “we can safely say that we understand *almost* everything.”

“Hmm... OK. So what about nature?”

“Right. The idea is simply that, long ago, these laws were unknown and nature was romantic and evocative: just think about the movement of the stars, the four seasons, the elements, even life, death and diseases. So, facing a famine or the harshness of a mountain, it’s understandable that our ancestors felt the need to introduce one or more deities, super-powerful and capable of influencing their whole lives. With them, natural phenomena were no longer chaotic but, in some self-referential description, due to a rational design.”

“The design... of a god.”

“Yes, however strange this can sound. Actually” – you add softly – “even *I* experienced something similar a few years ago, during a wearying hike: I started perceiving the mountain as a living entity, to respect and fear. It was memorable, something I would never imagine.”

“Oh, I see... and so what?”

“This was just to describe how, I believe, religions were born. Then, with time, things became more structured until someone, intentionally or not, took advantage of it. This person used the concept of god to make it say what they wanted, controlling people and creating the hierarchical society we know today.”

“This looks all so complicated...”

“It is, indeed, but it makes sense! Anyway” – you confess, unloading a sense of responsibility – “I hope it didn’t upset you.”

“No no, don’t worry!” – he smiles – “I’ll think about it again tomorrow, sounds really interesting!”

“Glad you liked, it’s super interesting indeed.”

The atmosphere was relaxing, down there on the seashore. A thick blanket of darkness had surrounded you from the ridge, while a bright moonlight was plotting out your way through the dunes. In front of you, the old quay was standing the cold waves, with its crooked poles and the wooden planks consumed by time. Below the planks, two little red boats, heavily damaged, were bumping into each other sustained by the water flows. To some extent, that sight appeared surreal to your eyes: you could feel the power of the ocean pour out onto the quay and, yet, their sway looked just soulless, and timeless.

You were passing by the quay in silence, contemplating the view for a few seconds. Ujana was enraptured by the spectacle, also scared you would say. He hesitates for a moment, looking at his stick and the seaweed on the wooden steps. His desires were crystal clear, written in bold characters on his face, but you let him act without saying a word. It's only when he meets your eyes that he turns to you and proceeds along the seaboard. "Well done" – you think. He continues to walk next to you, every now and then throwing a gaze to the quay, which was left behind on the path.

When you turn your eyes to the shadowed landscape ahead, which was dawning on you as you crossed the turn, you slowly focus on another little quay, not too far from there. From that distance, the two looked very similar and in similar conditions. More importantly, you realize that there had to be a reason for two wharves in a short distance. The lighthouse had to be not too far away, and maybe you had walked a greater distance than you estimated. Or, maybe, you were approaching a small village, right after this bay, where you could finally make a phone call. "There are so many boats here" – you consider – "maybe there's not only a town but a river too, and a bridge ... that bridge." The idea of bumping into his fellow citizens, literally out of the blue and with the rescued child, felt absolutely heroic: a worthy ending to this adventure. Unfortunately, being at the sea level impedes you from tracking their movements. Yet, a rivulet of grayish smoke seems to ascend behind the treetops, and it reassures to imagine it's due to their passage. Honestly, deep inside, you cannot say what scenario would be more appealing to crown your journey.

“So? You didn’t tell me how evolution enters religion!”

“Hmm... what?” – he drags you back into reality – “Ah, right, we didn’t close it. Shall we?”

“Cool! I’m all ears!”

“OK, straight to the point: religion has played a central role in the development of ancient communities, shaping their structure. It facilitated the formation of society by legitimizing inequality among people - although churches claim we are all born with equal rights. So, by aligning individual interests in a community, religion provided a strategy that is successful to survive in nature.”

“...”

“Clearly, the laws and beliefs change with time and regions, reflecting natural and cultural changes, but the concept of aligned interests in a society is the only thing that matters now (to me). Also, since religions are spread all over the world, we can say that this is a favorable strategy not only in some lucky area.”

“...”

“This brings us back to the example with friends and marbles: without religion, we would have never formed large communities to cooperate. This is the merit I wanted to acknowledge.”

“Wow! I think I see what you mean, more or less... but where is evolution in all this story?”

“Oh” – you smile – “that’s what I meant with ‘favorable strategy’: only the best survive!”

“...”

“OK, I understand, let’s make it simple” – you pause – “Do you remember the examples we made to explain the evolution, with marbles, gir...?”

“Yes, I said I remember it!”

“Great. So, I say evolution because religion enabled the fittest social behavior to cope with human nature. Briefly, instead of competing one against the other (where only the fittest people survive) we cheated: in our society, we learned to supply everyone with what he or she needs, and in turn we receive a benefit. In this way, we all take advantage of each other’s strengths and what survives, eventually, are not the fittest individuals but the fittest

models of society. All the other strategies, for instance where everyone is selfish and takes care only of their interests, these strategies were unsuccessful and doomed to fail.”

“But how can you say so? I’ve never heard of a place without society: what if it exists and it is more efficient?!”

“U, think about it and remember the example of the giraffes with a short neck: have you ever seen any?”

“No, never. Because they died... because they were not good enough in their environment...” – he ponders – “so, you want to say that the same happened with society: if we’ve never seen one different, likely in the past it existed and died out.”

“Yes, exactly. This is everything I wanted to say about religion and evolution.”

“Wow... I like it!”

“Nice! Long but me made it... and we saw so many things! We started with... wait, what was that?”

“What, the topic? Hmm...” – he mumbles – “so, we talked about religion, evolution... animals and humans (that was weird), also intelligence... ah, and about science and superstition. Right, we started from my teacher’s advice, do you remember?”

“Of course! I literally annoyed you for an hour, I’m so sorry!” – you add, laughing.

“Oh no no, I’m so happy you did!”

As Ujana pronounces these words, the second quay passes unnoticed on his right without drawing his attention. “Awesome” – you think, keeping a good pace towards the end of the bay. This new quay was almost identical to the first you encountered: wooden, weather-beaten and worn out by the salt water. Other two small boats were moored next to the wooden poles, swaying copiously under the planks. As the turn develops, a few other long boats peep out from a distant dune, capsized on the seashore. Behind them, dark shapes of wooden poles, partially submerged in water, populate the background and welcome your arrival.