

Mini-Giants

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Owners of a free, original and coherent thinking process, children have the ability to give serious and controversial matters alternative viewpoints. Unlike most adults, they are not tied to stereotypes, nor do they embrace any religious or political creeds. This being so, they may –and very often do– carry out a brief but comprehensive analysis of human behaviour and natural phenomena, following their natural instincts and exercising pure common sense. This enables them to ask naïveté challenging questions. When they are deep in thought, these “mini-giants” jump to logical and sometimes far from erroneous conclusions.

Human beings of all ages have forever been posing controversial and sometimes unanswerable questions. The origin of the universe, for instance, has always been a thorny dilemma throughout history. Once a seven-year-old boy asked his mom who or what had created the world and everything in it. His mom replied that it was God who had done it. After giving the matter a moment’s thought, the child said: “But if God created everything, who created God? He can’t possibly have created himself out of nothing.” This is one of the several areas of disagreement between religion and science, and also a philosophical debate. It is similar to what Parmenides once stated: “Nothing comes out of nothing.” Lacking academic knowledge but not deep thinking skills, this “mini-Parmenides” leapt to the same conclusion as the famous philosopher.

How long did the Earth’s rotation remain a mystery? For years, the sun was believed to orbit the Earth until the world of science, in the light of solid and irrefutable evidence, proved that it was the other way about. Hence the Copernical heliocentrism was proved true. This gives rise to our following mini-giant: the “mini-Copernicus.” One day, a five-year-old girl and her father were deep in conversation in the park. It was a cloudy day. “This is the first time in my life the sun hasn’t followed me, why does the sun follow us, Daddy?” asked the girl. Little children tend to follow their natural instincts and they may be – and usually are – unable to detect things that go beyond their senses. The question sounded absurd to her father and he rolled with laughter. He apparently forgot that, had he lived some centuries earlier, he would have leapt to a similarly erroneous, not to mention pathetic, conclusion. “I’m standing on the shoulders of giants” Sir Isaac Newton once said, but the girl’s father seemingly did not remember this, or so we may believe... Great and central dilemmas of mankind have been solved thanks to the realization that if something is actually tangibly, it does not mean that humans have the means to experience it. In this case, the Earth is rotating so leisurely that we cannot detect its movement through our senses. Thus this little girl, the “mini-Copernicus”, by simply wondering whether her senses were deceiving her, took the preliminary steps which might have been – and very frequently are – followed by the vast

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majority of scientists when pursuing the achievement of a discovery in their own fields.

Sooner or later, every human being has to witness and experience birth and death. The meaning of life, or the reason why we die, are and will always be open-ended questions. This being so, many writers and philosophers have been -or are- in search of the meaning of life. Virginia Woolf did so in her novel *To the Light House*. Children -more often than not- approach sensitive topics like life and death as well. This gives way to the "mini-Woolf." One day some years ago, two sisters (aged seven and nine) were pondering upon the meaning of life, following their grandfather's death. Finally, the younger one asked their mother: "Why do we live if we're all going to die in the end?" Those words seemed to stick in the mother's throat. The elder sister had the sudden impulse to tackle the question by replying proudly: "Because life does have a meaning. The meaning of life is what you make of it, what you want it to be; nobody can decide for you and that's why living is worth dying." The mother stared at her in awe and admiration. Human beings, especially adults, are virtually always worried about death; they tend to feel a desperate craving to live as long as they can. Death usually fills them with fear, for it is usually (and probably wrongly) associated with sorrow and misery. When somebody whom adults are fond of passes away, they are frequently unwilling to find solace to feel better. Conversely, on many occasions, children's freedom of thought may lead to positive and even comforting answers when a tragic event unfolds in their lives. This may be -and most probably is- one of the main reasons why they tend to lead happier and more fulfilling lives than adults.

Children possess an admirable inner quality which tends to subside when they grow up: they explore and contemplate the world with a naked eye; they judge concrete situations without being dazzled by blazing dogmas or social stereotypes. Their innocent viewpoints may be detected in their awkward and -more often than not- unanswerable questions. When children bombard adults with seemingly naïve yet complex questions, they end up entangling their elders in the most exhilarating dialogues. It is not unusual to find that these "mini-giants" provoke deep, analytical thought in their parents who -having lost the wisdom of innocence- have (unlike Alice) been rendered incapable of seeing things through "the looking glass."