

Sample

Everyone lives in their own fantasy land.

Okay.

Stick with me here.

These are not streams of consciousness-es, they are more like epiphanies, experiences, or inspirations from recent conversations; many times they happen while I'm in the midst of something else, whether it be at work, folding laundry, or on a drive home where I realize that I've heard the music I'm listening to so much that I can't bear to listen anymore. If they were streams of consciousness, you would get the full effect of, "blah, blah, blah, connected to yadda ya—green light... yak yak—where's my other sock," etc. And what I like is that, the inspiration to write these, comes from—I'd like to think—the same place that the authors of Freakonomics got their inspiration to write Freakonomics.

(That was wordy and likely an improper use of commas.)

For those of you who haven't heard or read Freakonomics, it's basically connecting a series of seemingly unrelated things together. The chapter titles alone say it all, "what do school teachers and sumo wrestlers have in common?" Though, in all honesty, if you want the gist of the book without reading the whole thing, you can read the introduction and they'll explain everything (except the last two chapters). The chapters just flesh out the detail on how they really get from point A to point B. And I love that; the whole, coincidence and similarities. This is why spirituality—synonymous with religion—means a lot to me because there are so many recurrences and exact margins that to have anything even slightly off would be the end of existence. I mean this is also how formulas and theorems are made, right? By seeing how formulas work on other variables. We draw from what we know.

Okay.

I'm getting there.

I go through spurts of religious determination. One of the firsts was when I was a kid and my mother was working on her novel. She asked me what I thought about my father's death and being a blind, unquestioning child, I said that I didn't really mind because I would see him in heaven in 70 or so years and that doesn't seem like a long time. This was in middle school or so and it permanently latched itself to my mind. I kept thinking about death; not in the suicidal sense, but in the, what would it be like to die and stop existing. What will happen to my memories? Will I

live forever in a heaven above? What will I do there? If it's eternity, how long is that really? If I'm forever happy what would be the point? If I'm reincarnated, will I still remember who I am? Do I start fresh? Do I simply exist as a soul, ball of light with no eyes, no legs, just that feeling of being? What is that and what's it like? And no I'm not the first to think about these things, but I legitimately couldn't handle it and, since it always had to happen at night—where our nightmares are—I would bounce out of bed in a dizzying stupor and puke. This happened for weeks until my mom finally found out. Of course, she was worried and I wanted answers. I wasn't ashamed of a lack of faith, but wasn't sold on this idea of paradise. And it was clear, especially at the time, that these were things I wasn't capable of thinking about. My step-father gave me a tape by some pastor, which I listened to and ignored. My pastor at the church told me that there was a place for me in heaven and all I could think about was a hotel with a room exactly like mine on this earth, and when I asked him what we'd do there, he said we'd spend half the time learning what god is. But half of infinity is what exactly? Not comforting. My mom told me not to think about it. That I shouldn't be thinking about these things yet. I couldn't help it. I didn't want to think about them, but it was all that was on my mind. However my mother's honesty is what sold me, she told me that, hopefully when you're older, you'll be too busy to think about these things. And I knew she was right, but I wanted answers. Needless to say, it quenched my thirst for a little while and whenever I felt my mind drifting into that dark and mysterious territory, I'd jar it away as it ALWAYS made me queasy—and often ended with me chundering into an echo-filled toilet bowl.

The next spurt happened around when I was in high school and suffering the adolescent disease known as the invincibility fable—also known as, “too young to die.” I could do whatever I wanted because it wouldn't affect me, not until I'd lived a full life. Makes sense... to an adolescent. But then, I was shown a graph of dots, with one red dot in the middle amongst hundreds of black dots. This EXTREMELY liberal high school teacher—so biased, nothing against him, but impossible to conceal—said that the every one black dot was equal to one red dot, begging the question, “Why's the red dot red then?” He said that all the carnage and firearms and explosives in World War II were equivalent to that red dot and that all the black dots represent how much power and destruction we are capable of dishing out today. Blew my mind. Possibly exaggerated, but regardless, it was scary. Suddenly every other word I heard was, “imagine a nuclear war,” “atom bomb,” etc. And it started up the religious bit again so I took a world religions course. At this point, I finally saw the bright side of religion because we got to have a Q & A with experts in their religious fields: there were Jewish rabbis, Jehovah's, monks, typically all were on different nights but one night held a

fundamentalist catholic with homosexual catholic—bumping heads professionally of course. I took a lot from that class and got a pretty good knowledge base for the more well-known religions (Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.) but the biggest thing I took from that class was the people. There was a monk who had given up all his worldly possessions except one: a harmonica. And he played like the devil! All these people, regardless of beliefs, believed in something with so much honesty that it made them comfortable. They didn't have the worries I suffered from because they had answers. And even if I didn't believe in what they were saying, they sure did, and they were happy. Every single one of them was so comfortable and enjoying themselves—even things that could easily be taken offensively.

Then I went off to college and started drawing Scatterbrain, basically, a religious superhero.

Recently I finished reading Why Religion Matters, by Huston Smith, and god is not Great—with the writer, Christopher Hitchens, who is extraordinarily bitter, to the point where he purposely lowercases “god” in the title. It looks weird\*\*

\*\*Don't get me wrong though, Hitchens (atheist) has some good stuff in his book. Many of his arguments, even I can easily refute, but there are some things that do present another side to religion. Example, something I was unaware of is that Mormons have a ceremony once a week where they can convert dead people to their religion. So if you converted to Mormonism and wanted your deceased relatives to be saved, you could make them Mormon. Apparently, after WWII, the Mormons did this to many of the dead Jewish people. That's awful for 2 reasons. 1) Dead people can't choose what they want and 2) it is extremely offensive, even though the Mormons hearts were in the right place. And that even brings me to another factor. When religion is aimed to hurt or exclude, I believe it is a problem. Even Huston Smith writes about how everything is great until it's institutionalized: government, education, religion, etc. (For slight clarification, think of how higher learning is awesome, and then of how paying for books and the hassle with universities is not).

Anyway, just wanted to defend Hitchens a little bit because otherwise I'm the reverse side of things and I'm not.

When people ask me, “what religion are you?” I tell them I'm Allergic. That religion to me is like cats to a person who's allergic to cats. I think it's cute, affectionate, and I can see why people are attracted to it, but bring it into my house and I might die.

The movie Dogma really has some merit when Chris Rock, the 13<sup>th</sup> apostle (right?), declares, “I think it's better to have ideas.” And it really is.

Because when you think about it, Scientology is no more ridiculous than Judaism, and if it works for them then keep at it.

Whew.

Okay.

Onward to acting. There are slights against many occupations. Madmen has a great line about psychology where Donald Draper says, “He wants you to see a therapist? Jeez, doctors must be so happy that they now have a cure for “I don’t know.”” Brilliant! And, for a field I’m more acquainted with, people can call actors, liars, because all they do is lie and pretend. Granted that the majority of films now feature actors who can look cool doing something as opposed to actually acting---blah blah blah. But there’s a game in improv that I’ve recently had to tackle called “Did you say” and the game works... well, here’s an example.

A: I hope we don’t run out of firewood tonight, it’s getting cold.

B: I brought an extra blanket.

A: DID YOU JUST SAY, I brought an extra blanket?

B: No. I said, “I caught a giant, crank it.”

...

B: Crank it til he’s super huge and then we’ll burn him instead of the wood.

And that’s how it comes out sometimes—I should’ve used a better example—but anyway the way it works with me, typically is...

A: I hope we don’t run out of firewood tonight, it’s getting cold.

Derek: I brought an extra blanket.

A: DID YOU JUST SAY, I brought an extra blanket?

Derek: Yeah, I hope that’s okay.

Bear in mind, these are four to five minute long scenes, there’s no excuse for not knowing how to play and remembering the rules, but the point is, I believe it.

When I’m immersed in a scene or on stage, I genuinely believe that what’s happening is real. It’s why I gotta give out credit to the Lord of the Rings cast. I never read the books and was never a fan of the movies, and if I was on set—even in costume, with a landscape like New Zealand—and someone said to me, “hurry Frodo, we must make it to Mordor before the Orc army swallows us whole.” I’d crack up. I wouldn’t be able to do it. There’s no way on Earth (middle or otherwise) that I would be able to believe it! It could be an entire world but that’s a mindset of a character in a world that I can not grab a hold of. They did something I genuinely can’t and could never do! Probably because, as actors, they believed it.

We all live in fantasy lands.

Everyone has that friend, who is committed to something you know is going nowhere; or the person who truly feels that what they're doing is the most important thing in the world. Granted those are extremes... it's no more extreme than the person who mocks them for living it. There are varying degrees of reality. To quote Huston Smith, "when a child watches a violent program and turns to his father saying, "is this real?" That child is experiencing a different degree of reality." Smith goes on to say that a 6-year-old who drops their ice cream cone, that is the end of their world. Could it be that there are superior beings who feel the holocaust is but a dropped ice cream cone? Now, isn't that something? But bear in mind it all adds to the degrees of reality. Probably nothing explains it better than the Matrix. Even if the people outside of the matrix are really alive and to die in the matrix is just an astral projection kinda, they still die in the real world too because why-----it's a degree of reality. It's only as real as you make it, so says Morpheus (Lawrence Fishbourne). I had a pretty good knowledge base of the world religions, but not on religion as a whole until Smith's book, and I truly believe he says it all when he says that the problem with our increasingly scientific society is that it assumes that Man is the ultimate life form; that we can solve all the riddles of the universe; we are the pinnacle. Religion says that's not true, that there are things we can't answer and that there are creatures/beings out there who do know more than we ever will. Scientism limits while religion explores. WAIT!! I'm not saying that religion takes precedence over science, not at all. But it is an unfortunate side-effect that religion is beginning to look more and more unsophisticated. The two should absolutely co-exist and you can't have one without the other. If anything it strengthens peoples' faith to know that if the Earth was a mere "one" degree further out in orbit, the oceans would all have been frozen and life would not have existed. Had it four or five degrees closer, everything would have fried. But it didn't.

This update is long enough as it is and to really give my views on religion would require another update—perhaps later this month. But the point I wanted to make is that there are many degrees of reality and think twice about the people you mock because they are no more crazy than you.

Who wants some kool-aid?

-Derek Nahigyan