

Imagine You Were God

Imagine you were god. Would you like your world to be perfect, or would you let it run totally on its own? Make no mistake: the consequences of your decision are difficult to grasp in their entirety. Let's assume you take the more obvious route and pour out endless love and well-being on your creation. It would be a peaceful existence, where everything was focused on the good. Science had all the answers, and uncertainty would be unheard of. The bad would exist, but only for contrast. People would use a standardized truth, and everybody had free food and do as they pleased. Love, peace, happiness, and freedom. Does that sound like paradise to you? Isn't that the perfect solution? But what might happen if you created the world on a less productive day, or if you experimented to change things up a bit? Maybe you could ask yourself what humans do on an empty stomach or how they react to desperation and turmoil. Will they be able to adapt and survive on their own? Although logical thinking and science are great, people would be drawn to other sources of information as well. When the world was hostile and uncertain, humans would look everywhere to find the truth, not just in one place. Magical thinking and searching for patterns could inform creative solutions and would be more productive. If everybody knows something and nobody has all the answers, there is no other way than inquiring until things work. This scenario wouldn't be as perfect, and people would have to figure stuff out all by themselves. Life would be chaotic and order a rare event. Some things would function—however, only in a raw and incomplete state. But why stop there? Universal uncertainty brings all kinds of issues with it. The truth would be malleable and people couldn't talk to each other in a congruent way, because every individual would have their own map of the world. And although they would likely get along somehow, it wouldn't be as productive as before. That would result in a uniquely creative lifestyle, but it also came with a price. These people would have to live in a strange world, full of odd and mysterious things, just to be able to look at paintings and listen to music. Art would quicken their souls; suffering would come with it, though. Have you made up your mind yet? Let's go back to the first one. How will they develop a culture and move forward in life? You showered them with the good stuff already, but now they won't move the slightest bit. Why? Because they have everything and live in complete peace and harmony. They are also

omniscient, which is a little bit boring and would render you obsolete as a god, but this won't be such a big problem at first. Later, on the other hand, there will be no religion and spirituality, which is a major factor for connecting humanity through ritual and celebration. Perfection will break down often, and you will have to intervene frequently to keep them in the blissed-out state you originally made them to be in. Forcing more and more goodness into them to satisfy their ultra-high standards, which they had become so accustomed to. And after a while, you may decide for a totalitarian government with vast coercive machinery to make them happy no matter what. Or even better: you might sneak in through the back door and manipulate their entertainment. Administration would be easy and fun. But some people might still become judgmental toward others, since your world has only one truth, and all of them would perceive it differently. As a result, they'd try to force their truth on everybody else as well. If everyone thinks they know the truth and nobody would ever admit to being wrong, there would be a lot of disagreements. This might even cause a silly war on who's right. A miserable and self-destructing fight to defend the truth against everyone else. It would be all against all, but as a public-spirited god with highly magnanimous idealism, you would care for all of your creation equally, right? Seems like you're in trouble now. You don't want to love them to death, do you? But the answer may be simple. Since this is going nowhere without something to make them crave for a better future, we will make it happen by conducting the world in a less perfect way. We will invent a problem here and there to keep them moving. Demanding as little as possible but as much as needed, since they're still your creation and words cannot describe how much you love them. Or we leave them to their fate...

“What a stupid idea.”

Gordon puts the book down and looks around anxiously. It's rather quiet in the bookstore, so safety first. The Japanese can't stand making a fuss in public, and foreigners always stand out. He's normally always switched on and mindful of his surroundings. Feeling a little embarrassed, but totally upset at the same time, he begins to think.

You can have it all. Why not? Guy is a jerk. If I would be god, I would make it happen. Everyone deserves a good life. Suffering is not how it's done. Forget all these

shitty problems. Let's have a party. Endless beer, hammocks, and no work. I'm much more intelligent than all these amateurs.

Gordon makes an accomplished face at the store ceiling.

Don't overdo it, though. Maybe the guy is not as stupid as you think. Why move at all? Would you do something? Would you? Rather not. What if it's fun? What's fun anyway? Isn't it better to have success? Success is fun, but I also have to go for it. Work is definitely no fun. Being a CEO. That's it. Not doing much and getting all the cash. Damn. You know quite well that CEOs work their asses off.

He decides to call Steve a little later to ask him what he thinks of this mess. He's an expert with this complicated philosophical and spiritual stuff and most certainly knows how to dissolve the conflict.

Gordon leaves the bookstore and takes a walk to get something to eat at one of his favorite ramen shops. Tokyo is full of them, and he loves all different kinds of noodle soups and street food. There's just so much to discover and explore. It never gets boring. But a longer stroll will have to wait until next time. Today, it's Tonkatsu Ramen from the corner shop on the way home. Their broth is simply the best, and he's also very curious for Steve's take on the god problem.

He throws his keys into the bowl next to the little shoe cabinet. His small flat near Hiroo Station isn't famous for comfort, but the neighborhood is one of the most expensive in Tokyo. He lives in walking distance from his job at an international supermarket, and even though rent is hardly affordable for a middle manager like Gordon, he refuses to move. Instead, he's trying to negotiate with his boss for a higher wage for more than three months now. At least it's a paradise for food enthusiasts. He opens a beer and unpacks the food to devour it instantly. He sinks into the couch and starts to eat while TV and funny videos run in the background. The TV shows in Japan are ridiculous. Endless talking heads on every channel, telling audiences what to think and how to react. It's all totally positive, and it feels fake and obviously staged compared to American or European TV shows. Everything is incredible and delicious; awful sound effects populate the background, and superfluous text is plastered all over the screen. But Gordon got used to it over the years and even enjoys it from time

to time. Three minutes later, he's rummaging through his fridge in the hopes of finding a custard pudding. They were perfect with a sip of beer and a nice movie. Especially after a bowl of ramen. He's surprised and delighted to find two of them in the vegetable compartment and inhales one instantly, while searching the fridge. As he sits down to eat the second, the phone rings.

"Hello."

"Hey, Gordo, how are you?"

"All right, I guess."

"Why? What happened? Are you still thinking about that girl?"

Mentioning Linda bothers him.

"Stop it, please."

Steve is smelling something.

"Calm down. Everything is okay. What is it?"

"Well, I just finished my dinner, and believe it or not, I wanted to call you right now."

He talks slowly as always.

"Great, I guess you need guidance from a friend?"

Gordon sighs audibly.

"How do you know?"

"Are you joking? You're always brewing something up in your head."

"Stop knowing me so well."

He starts explaining the god problem and tries to be as equitable as possible, because he wants to know what Steve makes of it, without him coloring the matter beforehand.

"So what do you think?"

"Looks like a great problem to discuss over a few beers."

Gordon slouches into the couch.

"Totally. Just tell me your first impression. I'm sure this is going to haunt me over the next days, so it would be great if you had a little clue for me."

Steve's eyes go into infinity mode. It seems like an interesting problem, but he primarily tries to find an answer to help his friend.

“Steve, are you still there?”

“Yes. Of course. Just let me think about it for a second.”

Gordon plays with his empty beer can.

“Let’s look at it from the side of the people. The perfect world had unlimited resources and certainty, but no diversity. The chaotic world had unlimited diversity, but total uncertainty. I have to say this is a no-brainer for me, and I’m truly disappointed you even thought about living in so-called heaven.”

“Why are you saying that? I tried to be as neutral as possible.”

Steve changes to a more serious voice.

“Of course you did. Of course. You. Did. Let me put it this way: I would want to live in hell any day, as long as it’s full of color and creativity. Not to mention your heaven is inhabited by atheists. And even though I’m a Buddhist and god is not as important in our worldview, as compared to a more Christian-oriented belief system, I think the notion of something greater is needed to live a rich human life.”

He tenses his slouching posture a bit. It baffles him that Steve was rigorous like that.

“There must be a way to have it both. I’m sure the guy was missing something. We can find solutions for heaven, if we think hard enough. I’m not saying it’s perfect as it is, but it could be.”

“Why are we doing this all the time? Don’t you have more important problems?”

The discussion is canceled. He sinks back into the couch.

“Yeah, whatever. Maybe you’re right, but this is not the end. Let’s go for beer next Saturday. I’m not working on Sunday, and we could grab a few beers or even a few more and talk this through.”

Steve gets more cheerful.

“Why not, sounds fun. Is Peter coming as well?”

“I don’t know, but I’m going to ask him. I’ll let you know.”

“Great, looking forward to seeing you, Gordon. Now tell me about that girl.”

“Man, would you leave me alone with her?”

“Of course not. Of. Course. Not. We both know you’re desperate for a girlfriend. Don’t be afraid.”

Gordon twists his face.

“All right. I’m going to ask her for a date, but I’ll need a drink to get in the mood first.”

“Great. You should also wear that navy-blue shirt. Looks way better on you than these polos.”

“What’s wrong with my polos?”

“Nothing. Trust me, the shirt looks better.”

“All right. See you on Saturday.”

“See you.”

Gordon opens another beer and watches the cheerleading championship over satellite. Everything would be fine, if he didn’t promise to ask her out. Steve will insist. The light of Tokyo illuminates his room as he stares at the ceiling with wide-open eyes.

Do I really want her? Enough? Is it right to ask her out? It’s most likely a no anyway. I knew it. Fuck. I’m killing myself, if she says no. She is quirky and says stuff only I can understand. Maybe not, but it feels that way. It really feels that way. And those tits. If I do right, we might have a kid or something. But she won’t be a good mother. I want kids. But freedom is also important. Your life will be hell for at least three years. Steve says it’s the best thing that ever happened to him. But he’s still drinking. Damn, what now? Calm down and make a plan. Or ask Peter. Yeah, Peter.

It is going to be a long night.

Ready For More Adventure?

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Thanks for going on this little journey with me.

Much love,

Stefan