Common App 2019/2020 Essay Prompt #6: *Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?*

I was always skeptical of religion. Even as young as 12, I remember groaning and moaning as my mother almost literally dragged me out the door of our house and into a pew. None of it ever seemed plausible to me.

Even as I explored Eastern philosophy and ancient thinking, I failed to see how any of it could possibly explain our existence. I think that's why, when I came upon an article on the *New York Times'* website about Nick Bostrom's Simulation Argument, I felt that I had stumbled onto my own personal holy grail.

The Simulation Argument essentially posits that we are living in a simulation created by a super-advanced civilization. At first, it sounds overly sci-fi, like *The Matrix* and *Black Mirror* rolled into one. But as I read the article, it suddenly dawned on me: Maybe I had found the Creator that my mom and so many others had been looking for.

According to the Simulation Argument, if we can reasonably believe that there is a super-advanced civilization somewhere in the universe, and if we can reasonably believe that that civilization would create intelligent simulations—whether for fun, or to recreate its evolutionary history, for example—then it is a near mathematical certainty that we are one of the simulations that has been created.

The theory was so simple and elegant, and so relatable in our modern era of technological advancement, that it seemed absolutely obvious once I read it. I had never believed that we were alone in the universe; I had enjoyed reading theoretical physicists such as Michio Kaku talking about the likelihood of more advanced civilizations throughout the universe; and I had always felt that religions failed to explain our existence with sufficient accuracy. But the Simulation Argument fit perfectly.

In the years since I first stumbled upon this theory, I have returned to thinking about it with increasing regularity. Initially it was just a fun diversion, but lately I have begun to see examples of day-to-day life where the idea of a simulation simply works: people falling into predictable patterns of ideological belief . . . regularities in grammar across distant cultures . . . everyone just generally seeming to be constrained by the programming of their DNA and culture, which could themselves just be manifestations of the Ultimate Algorithm . . .

I have come to terms with the fact that the big answers to existence will never be answered in my lifetime, but I take a certain sense of satisfaction in the fact that Simulation Theory can at least provide a plausible answer to some of them. In recent years, this theory has become much more widely known and discussed, and many more papers have been written to buttress or refute Bostrom's original argument.

For me, I can say that in the Simulation Argument I have found a religion that I truly enjoy. I can spend hours upon hours going down the simulation rabbit hole, watching YouTube videos with highly produced animated explanations, or reading scientific papers and articles online. Sometimes I'll get lost when driving, watching the serpentine patterns of traffic operating with an eerie uniformity, as if designed by some distant higher intelligence.

When asked if he personally believed his own hypothesis, Nick Bostrom told John Tierney of the *New York Times,* "My gut feeling, and it's nothing more than that, is that there's a 20 percent chance we're living in a computer simulation." When I first read this, I was astounded that his estimation was so high. After years of research, I now think the likelihood may be much, much higher. Only time—or maybe Nick Bostrom himself—will tell.