

# BOOK VI

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# Eating the Philosoraptor



# 15

## Puritan Dinosaurs

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When I was twelve, I went to a Christian camp in rural Missouri. My two best friends were going, and the brochure advertised this giant blob in the pool that you would jump on and get launched off of by others. My friends and the blob were the highlights of the camp, for sure. The mantra of the camp combined the seemingly innocuous ideal “I’m Third” (God first, Others second, Self third) with other more Draconian measures, which included three football practices a day in the July heat, followed by a devotional session, “Devo,” which took place late at night in our dark cabins and involved answering questions about our devotion to Christ with a flashlight pointed in our faces.

The camp also had an obsession with competition, which seemed to be in tension—if not outright contradiction—with its ideal of “I’m Third.” We would chant, “Cooooompetition, competition, compete-ti-ti-ti-ti-tion,” making huge Cs with our arms. The campers also played a game, called Gestapo, named after a thuggish instrument of Nazi policy enforcement, in which the young adult, mostly reformed drug addict and born-again counselors—dressed in black and wielding some sort of weapon made out of athletic socks—would whack at or tackle the twelve year-old campers in the dark. Gestapo was sort of like capture the flag meets hell week for fraternity pledges. Did I mention the camp’s name proudly donned the initials KKK? My trauma notwithstanding, even at twelve I questioned its central mission of “I’m Third.” How was it that we were to put God first and others second?

Chuck Klosterman's riffing on the popular culture of born-again Christianity helps us answer that question. Chuck writes, "There is something undeniably attractive about becoming a born-again Christian" (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 234). For the born-again Christian, represented by the premises of the *Left Behind* series of novels and certain Victory Television Network cable programs, there are no gray areas between right and wrong, true and false, or saved and damned. The human quest for certainty in an otherwise precarious world is an intense drive, and the born-again mindset is "attractive" in part because they are certain of their certainty.

Who are these folks? The born-again are, according to Chuck, a "bizarre subculture of 'good people,'" most of whom Chuck has never met (p. 228). The born again know "the way" and "the truth," and the road from the former to the latter is an all-important, take-no-detours, direct path to the Promised Land. The premise of the *Left Behind* novels is, if you are not with us, you are against us, and you'll get "left behind." But the born again are charged with a mission, the only important issue of their lives, which is to save others—point a flashlight in their face and get them to accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior. The born-again do not bother with nuanced arguments concerning the ethics of the death penalty or the social consequences of outlawing abortion. They have only one mission: convert others or risk going their way, which I'm told is awfully hot and humid.

Klosterman even writes about Steven, a character on the Victory Television Network, whose sole "temptation" is *not* to evangelize others. As Chuck notes, Steven "is not frayed by the desire to go down on his girlfriend or the desire to get drunk and feel cool" (*Killing Yourself to Live*, p. 99). Rather, his temptation is to avoid and ignore his classmates at his school, the sinners and unsaved, who presumably *do* go down on their girlfriends while being drunk and feeling cool.

## Me and God

Klosterman points out that the *Left Behind* series is based solely on Paul's New Testament Letters and the Book of Revelation. This is important. And if we figure out why it's important, the philosophical issue at hand will disclose itself.

The philosophy of born-again Christianity is kind of like the theology of the old Puritans who inhabited Boston before Klosterman's Celtics ever donned Kelly green tank-tops there. In a way, Puritans are like dinosaurs—they're extinct. But I think Klosterman has pointed out a few dinosaurs roaming among us in the *Left Behind* Series. And I think a few of them were my camp counselors in Missouri back in 1986.

So allow me to give a stripped down version of Puritanism. Puritanism was a specific strand of the Protestant Reformation in general, which really got going when Martin Luther posted those *Ninety-Five Theses* on a church in to-be Germany. For Luther's theological argument, the go-to text of the Bible was Paul's letters, especially his letter to the Romans. In these letters he explained several of the forthcoming theological tenets. The Puritan strand of Reformation theology rested on the premise that we, as humans, are all fallen and sinful in an original way. Klosterman unknowingly tells us he agrees. He writes:

Any grammar school teacher will tell you that "kids can be cruel" on the playground; the average third-grader will gleefully walk up to a six-year-old with hydrocephalus and ask, "What's wrong with you, Big Head?" And that third-grader knows what he's doing is evil. He knows it's hurtful. Little boys torture cats and cute little girls humiliate fat little girls, and they know it's wrong. They do it *because* it's wrong. Sometimes I think children are the worst people alive. (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 236)

Klosterman is not buying into the idea that children are innocent. To Chuck and the Puritans, sin is original.

According to the Puritans, our path to righteousness is not of our own making. We cannot work our way into heaven by, say, buying indulgences or being nice. We've gotta *believe* our way into heaven and *accept* it as a gift from the Big Man. (This was a point Paul made in a letter to the Romans describing Abraham's faith and his righteousness.) Chuck notes that this is the case with the born-again, too. To be saved, you just need to *accept* the *belief* that Jesus is your personal savior. By the way, I think I'm saved because of this, although I'm not sure what the rules are if you sign the dotted line under duress. I mean, does it count if, during Devo, you accept the one-line

ticket to salvation when you're twelve, while you're really tired from doing "man-eaters" on the football field all day, it's dark, and you're facing a flash light held by a college student who might as well be a Guantanamo Bay interrogator?

I think I'm saved on a technicality, but that's okay. Chuck reminds us that "for most exclusivist born-again groups, the technicalities are everything; the technicalities are what save you" (p. 236). The philosophers who waste their time with arguments for the existence of God or who devote their careers to Biblical hermeneutics are lost, wandering in the desert. As Klosterman tells us, "there's no sophisticated reason for believing in anything supernatural, so it really comes down to believing you're right. This is another example of how born agains are cool—you'd think they'd be humble, but they've got to be amazingly cocksure" (p. 238).

For this Puritanical *qua* born-again mentality, we don't need no stinkin' clergy. The clergy is no longer a necessary medium through which the ordinary folks received the sacraments necessary for salvation. Our access to the Truth as God, is no longer mediated through sacramental ritual, symbolic mystery, and older communal forms of institutional religious practice. Instead, as John Calvin put it, "every man was his own priest." Now, through scripture and direct revelation we have an unmediated access to the Truth as God. The Reformation democratized and radically individualized the Christian religion, taking it out of the hands of the Big Bad Catholic Church. According to the Puritans, it's just about God and me.

The task of the Puritan layperson was to hear the calling of God, and heed its call. According to the Puritans God called each of us to fulfill our vocations and use our natural talents in service of God. The calling of the born-again, as represented by the *Left Behind* Series and the VTN is clear. Spread the word . . . or else. Our friend, Steven, on the Victory Television Network knew this. In fact, he even evangelized to a drug dealer who blew him away with a hand gun. Klosterman interpreted this to be a shockingly novel plot twist bordering on a complete paradigm shift in television screenwriting. Steven left the drug dealer behind, and Steven's death was just a fast-track to heaven. The folks left behind in the *Left Behind* series were learning the truth of the end times the hard way when their

saved neighbors disappeared during the instantaneous rapture. For those interested, the end times and the tribulation therein are covered in the mystifying, scary, and—as Chuck tells us—“most fucked-up part of the Bible,” the book of Revelation (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 229).

## **Sportsmen Love God—Does God Love Sports?**

Perhaps there was nothing strange about the Christian camp’s obsession with competition. As Klosterman reminds us, “a mind-numbing percentage of pro-athletes are obsessed with God . . . as many as 40 percent of NFL players consider themselves ‘born-again’” (p. 230). Klosterman finds this odd because the media usually covers the more sinful side of NFL players’ off time—instances of cocaine-use and wife-beating, not to mention dog-murdering and sexual harassment, with or without sexting. Klosterman mentions lots of sports-religion overlap including the famous Catholic quarterback, Roger Staubach, and the super-bowl winning zealot, Kurt Warner. The list could go on to mention that Notre Dame has a mural of “Touchdown Jesus” overlooking the blessed end zone of their football field. The Nazarene looks as if he is signaling six points, but lately fans have wondered if God favors their opponents.

Klosterman has almost been persuaded to believe that God does divinely intervene in football careers. First, Kurt Warner’s career went from grocery bagger to NFL MVP by becoming born again. But his careerism and his Christianity taken together just remind us that Warner is a Puritan dinosaur who threw a mean deep ball while wearing gloves. See, the Puritans took Luther’s logic about salvation to an extreme. You cannot work your way into heaven, as we are justified by our faith, not our actions. Second, not everyone is saved. Third, God is omniscient, not to mention all the other omnis.

And if we put these together, we conclude that God has knowingly elected those who are predestined to be saved. The problem is that if only God knows who is saved and who will be left behind come rapture time and we cannot do anything to change his mind, then what are we to do in the meantime? Do we “snort cocaine off of Cuban prostitute’s thighs and murder our ex-girlfriends,” bet on dog-fighting, and grope our message

therapists, or do we act as if our actions matter in the divine equation? (p. 230)

Understanding how we learn that we are of the few elected to be saved concerns the way that the grace of God works in the human heart. According to Calvin, the grace of God, his freely chosen gift, causes us to abhor sin. Sin, especially those of the body, can be avoided by eschewing the leisure time during which we usually go astray. To prevent the temptations of the flesh and the sins of the body from taking hold of us, we must fulfill our calling and do the work which we are called to do by God. If the results of our work are earthly success, say, multi-million dollar NFL contracts, and we do not fall into the sins of spending prodigally, then we will accumulate, and such wealth can be a legitimate sign of our chosen status. Get rich, and get saved. Amen. Touchdown.

Klosterman has almost been persuaded to believe that God does divinely intervene in individual football games. As he watched Warner playing in Super Bowl XXXVI, Klosterman witnessed a play so unnecessary and stupid, reversing the momentum of the game, that he, for a time, thought God might love football (and care about the outcome), after all. Warner, whose team was down 3–17, fumbled on his way into the end zone, and the ball was picked up by a Patriots player and run back ninety-nine yards for a touchdown. But the score was overturned because of a defensive holding call on the weak side of the play. Klosterman took this, temporarily, to be a sign that Warner was truly favored by Yahweh. However, the Patriots ending up winning the game, and Klosterman's two-quarter faith was shaken. The next morning, hearing a Patriots wide receiver praising God on the *700 Club*, Klosterman realized that "with competitive spirituality, it's always a push" (p. 231). I guess this means that God gets the juice, the spiritual ten-percent tithe of the combatants.

My question about whether or not God loves sports causes me to recall my unrepressed memory of chanting "competition" at the camp outside Branson, Missouri, surely God's country. We were convinced that something monumentally important hinged on whether the Rangers or the Wranglers won an accumulation of victories during the week-long series of competitions. While the ultimate trophy of the camp was the "I'm Third Award," there was only *first* and *second*, winner and loser, in



the Ranger-Wrangler warfare. Here, we learned the virtues of sport, among them aggressiveness, courage, and perseverance. During the competition, we ignored any notions of “the first shall be last, and the last shall be first,” that were Jesus’s pep talks. We were not concerned with altruism, gentleness, or humility on that battle field. The sports competitions were zero-sum games with a winner and a loser, and we fought to vanquish our foes. We celebrated the values of valor, pride, and force. These were the warrior’s values. Shall we call them pagan virtues, the very virtues Jesus’s radical morality undermined and were meant to undo?

What was the relationship between being proselytized by these two antithetical sets of virtues, strength and meekness, pride and humility, and the antinomies of our directives, “compete,” and “be third?” Needless to say, they confused me. Perhaps we can combine the Puritan, born-again mentality with the competitive vigor of sports, which is modeled on warfare and has its origins in games of war and training of warriors. Perhaps winning is a sign of our work ethic and our foregoing of the sins that come from slothful leisure. Maybe dogging it on wind-sprints and skipping reps in the weight room is tantamount to over-snacking, getting wasted, or paying for sex? If this is the case, then the winners triumph because the grace of God works in them, causing them to abhor the sinful temptation to be lazy. Those with the Truth of God on their side might deserve the victory after all.

## On Board with the Lord

The ultimate battle here is not between the Rangers and the Wranglers or even between the Rams and the Patriots. It’s between truth and peace. You see, my confusion at age twelve was about how we were supposed to win the “I’m Third Award,” besides pouring juice into others’ glasses before our own during meals. I knew we had to put others before ourselves (except during competitions), but I was unclear how to put God before others. How was I to pour God’s juice before my friends’ juice?

I think the philosophical meaning of the “I’m Third” dictum is: *sacrifice peace in service of truth*. This part of the “I’m Third” equation means that we should forego the preservation of our relationships if those with whom we are in potential relation-

ships do not have the truth. If they do not get on board with the Lord, then we must convince them to do so or to leave them behind. Recall that Klosterman tells us that “once you’ve crossed over, you do not even have to be nice” (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 238). The pilot, Rayford Steele, from the *Left Behind* series figured this out, too. Klosterman writes, “The main psychological hurdle” Steele must overcome “is the fact that he’s not an obtrusive jackass, which *Left Behind* says we all need to become. ‘*Here I am, worried about offending people,*’ Rayford thinks to himself at the beginning of Chapter 19. ‘*I am liable to “not offend” my own daughter right into hell.*’ The stakes are too high to concern oneself with manners” (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 235).

The relationship between the immediate access to the Truth as God by the born-again Christian roaming around as a Puritan dinosaur is all about this relationship between truth and peace. According to Puritan ideology, truth trumps peace. Truth is what we must fight for (by eschewing good manners and being an “obtrusive jackass”) at the cost of peace. Way back in 1675, Native Americans attacked the Puritan settlement in Massachusetts, and the Puritan community convened to discuss their actions which had provoked such evils. That God had punished them for their transgressions by lifting the veil of protection was taken as a given. The Puritans were convinced that they had lost their way with God and so he had stopped protecting them. What had the Puritans done wrong? They enumerated their sins including: men wearing their hair too long, women wearing it in immodest ways, such as curling it, citizens were wearing prideful apparel and strange new fashions, people were leaving church early, the children were disorderly during church, and of course people were getting drunk. Nowhere in this list was any mention of transgressions against the Natives, who actually attacked the Puritans. Peace with their neighbors was not the issue. The matter at hand was getting right with God individually.

We see this Puritanism today in born-again theology. In an interview with Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson placed the blame for the attacks of September 11th, 2001 on the American Civil Liberties Union, the homosexual community, and the feminists. Their secularization of America, according to Robertson, caused God to lift the veil of protection. Nowhere in Robertson’s

remarks on 9/11 did he ask if we had transgressed against the Saudis who attacked us. This Puritan political idea, still pervasive today, falls back on the idea that truth, the truth of God and our unmediated access to it, trumps peace. According to this mode of thought, not only is God's punishment of our sins a disruption of peace, but the ways a community might achieve peace with those who would otherwise attack us are not live options if those folks contravene the truth of God.

This way of thinking treats truth as existing antecedent to a community's attempts to live peacefully. The truth is out there, and it plays by rules not of our own making. Klosterman sees that this might be the case. He writes:

Regardless of what kind of god you believe in—a loving god, a vengeful god, a capricious god, a snooty beret-wearing French god, whatever—one has to assume that you can't get penalized for doing the things you believe to be truly righteous and just. Certainly, this creates some pretty glaring problems: Hitler may have thought he was serving God (or something vaguely similar). I'm certain Osama bin Laden was *positive* he was serving God. It's not hard to fathom that all of those maniacs were certain that what they were doing was right. Meanwhile, I *constantly* do things that I *know* are wrong: they're not on the same scale as incinerating Jews or blowing up skyscrapers, but my motivations might be worse. I have looked directly into the eyes of a woman I loved and told her lies for no reason, except that those lies would allow me to continue having sex with another woman I cared about less. This act did not kill 20 million Russian peasants, but it might be more "diabolical" in a literal sense. If I died and found out I was going to hell and Stalin was in heaven, I would note the irony, but I really couldn't complain. I don't make the fucking rules (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 239).

The Puritans didn't make the rules either, but they thought the rules included not letting women curl their hair, regardless of how diabolical curly hair is. Klosterman cops to not knowing the ultimate truth. He does not see any evidence for or against any religious or secular version of the truth. So he sees the born-again version as "unlikely, but still plausible" (p. 228). Our neighbors might disappear sometime soon, and their disappearance will be good news for them (because they're saved) and bad news for those left behind.

Klosterman writes about what he finds interesting, if not downright odd, and I think he finds the *Left Behind* series and its born-again premises fascinating and strange. But does Klosterman have a conception of truth amenable to making the claims of end-time prophesiers plausible? His conception of truth is not monolithic or well-defined. Ordinarily, Klosterman uses truth in a colloquial sense, meaning that things we say correspond to the way things are. But in his interview with Errol Morris in *Chuck Klosterman IV*, the conversation touches upon the difference between what we say being true by *corresponding* to some outer reality and truth as a matter of narrative consistency. If truth is a matter of narrative consistency, then truth is a matter of the *coherence* among our personal narratives, including what we say and what we do. I thought that the camp in Missouri told an incoherent narrative, sending mixed messages about which virtue to embody, and therefore their narrative was not true, according to this latter theory. Speaking of truth . . . this chapter will not mention Tim Tebow, and this sentence is not true.

### Truth as an Achievement of Peace

The Puritan articulation of the road to salvation and the resultant stance on the relationship between truth and peace are pervasive in American moral and political culture and discourse. The political premise that America was founded as a Christian nation, while not untrue with respect to the New England settlement, leads to the conclusion that we need to serve the truth of Christian faith at the cost of the peace of the community. According to this line of thinking, the community does not determine truth as a function of its attempts to live peacefully together and with its neighbors. Those in the community who have not signed on the divine dotted line should be left behind along with the potential of living peacefully with them. For the born-again Christian, peace gets “left behind” by truth.

While Puritanism is one of the strongest strands of philosophy running through our national discourse and culture, pragmatism has been called the quintessentially American philosophy. The pragmatists thought that truth was an achievement, an outcome of inquiry. The pragmatists thought that when our habits of action are disrupted, we fall into doubt,

and we begin to inquire. If our inquiry is successful, then we fix a belief, and we are no longer in doubt, because for the pragmatists beliefs are habits of action. That is, because the whole of the meaning of a concept is found in its effects, according to the pragmatists, the meaning of a belief is found in our habits of acting on it. Inquiry occurs in a communal setting and our communities are part of the test for how doubts are settled and beliefs are fixed. The idea of truth, here, is that truth is the outcome of a community's inquiry, and lots of people in the community want to get along. The truth of the matter is the good for the community. Truth is an achievement and an outcome, not a fixed reality waiting to be revealed.

Thinking with the born-again, we have immediate access to truth. As Becky Fischer, a children's evangelical teacher featured in *Jesus Camp*, said, "Excuse me, . . . we have the truth." She's certain of her certainty, and the community of secularists who might serve as tests to that claim do not play a role in her assurance of having truth on her side. Thinking with the pragmatists, our access to true belief is always tested against a community's needs and interests. If the community's interests involve peaceful living, then the moral and political inquiry will be in service of peace. If the end the community wants to achieve through its political inquiry is peace, then the true outcome of that indefinite inquiry will be peace. If we think of truth as the product of inquiry, not as something antecedent to it to which we have immediate access, then we converge truth and peace, where the born-again are willing to have peace by "left behind" by truth.

If we think with the pragmatists, the only way to conceive of serving God first and others second is to think God another particular, outside the web of human relationships, to whom we, as individuals, might have a personal and particular relationship, one more important than ours with others. Only this type of particular God can be first in line of three. Only God as a particular (or three particulars in one) can have such a causal relationship to careers and games of NFL zealots, to Native American attacks on Puritan settlements, and to passenger planes flying into skyscrapers. Perhaps we could conceive of God, not as some specific third Dude outside the web of human relationship but rather *as* the web of human relationships, as the ground and condition for the possibility of

those relationships being moral and peaceful. If we do, God's truth emerges as a product of our attempts to live peacefully with one another. Putting God first would mean including others in our inquiries about how we should live. It would mean trying to achieve the truth of God, instead of just signing on the dotted line of salvation under duress at Devo, trying to get everyone else to do the same, and then leaving them behind if they refuse.

Klosterman ends his chapter on the popular culture of end-times, born-again Christianity reflecting on the fact that he was raised Catholic. As a Catholic, not much of his religious education was founded on the Puritan premises of direct access to God or of justification by faith alone. However, the Puritan dinosaurs in our culture are difficult to evade. So is the quest for certainty in and of itself that born again Christians think they have achieved. Reflecting on the very different version of dogmatism his Catholicism offered him, Klosterman is thankful. If those nuns he grew up with were right, if they have access to the truth, then he's still got a fighting chance. He tells us he's "angling for purgatory, and . . . angling hard" (p. 243).

As for me, I prefer the pragmatic line on truth to the Puritans' take on truth. But as a pragmatist, I am certain that I am not certain. I could be wrong. If the Puritan dinosaurs are right, and peace will get left behind by truth, well, then I guess I'm the lucky one. I was saved during Devo.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted, once again, to Kenneth Stickers for his work on Puritan philosophy and the logic of Reformation theology, which I incorporated here.

# 16

## WWCD: What Would Chuck Do?

SYBIL PRIEBE

I might be the only person aware of this, which means I am quite possibly a prophet.

— *Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 24

I am not a benevolent God.

I am the master, and I am the puppet.

— *Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 12

Squint your eyes. See, he looks like Jesus.

Now rub his belly. See, he's practically Buddha!

Chuck's obviously the leader of an unknown, as-of-yet undiscovered religion. How is this possible? Let's back up a bit: if we didn't know what a religion looked like, what *could* it look like? If we didn't know what Jesus looked like for Zeppelin's sake, what *could* HE look like? Besides white and from the 1970s.

Let's peel back the layers like a North Dakotan sunburn: what is the typical layout of a religion? A head honcho, right? A list of rules and regulations to live by, some scripture that could be interpreted a variety of ways, a few inspirational quotes, descriptions of the afterlife, promises of hope through altruistic means, and so forth. If we *could* take this formula and just plug in what we wanted, wouldn't Chuck fit quite perfectly? Maybe too perfectly?

Yes is the answer you were looking for.

Check out this guitar riff:

Afterlife Descriptions. Check.  
Rules and Regulations. Check.  
Promises of Hope. Check.  
Deity. Check.  
Inspirational Quotes. Check.  
Scripture. Check

Maybe traditional religions have played their last encore, and all that's left are their imitators, like members in a tribute band. Chuck plays the lead now. By doing so, I create a new blasphemous religion with the underlining philosophy of sex, drugs, and stage dives. In order to replace religion's boring items, I'm looking to what Chuck has written as well as how he has written it.

Here's yet another perspective on it: as a teacher (like Buddha and Jesus and other multi-tasking deities), we're given a list of pedagogies to teach with. Just as there are many kinds of religions, there are also varying types of pedagogy. The philosophy that makes the religion or pedagogy unique comes after the formula has been created and mastered.

Why bother to make up this crap called religion? Because a. we can, b. it gives us something to live by and hope with, and c. it makes us superior to others. These very same reasons are reasons Chuck-ites exist.

Like music videos, religion is up to interpretation. And, like music videos, you can show off how superior you are to others with your bling, leather pants, and busty women.

For a lot of purists, that's exactly what's bad about music videos:

They stop people from creating their own perception of what a piece of music means. By now, even the interpretation of sound has become a socialized process. Without a doubt, the video age is the worst thing that ever happened to teenage creativity. But—at least in the example of 'One'—it's hard to imagine how any kid could come up with anything better. (*Fargo Rock City*, p.110)

Okay, to start out with the blasphemous idea that religions are just formulas or that anyone can create a religion from scratch may not be a good idea, but it's not like Chuck's going to argue with me. This time, with a Chuck-based religion, he's killing himself to live and not necessarily dying for our sins or Ozzy's. Or something like that.



## Oh My Chuck!

So, for starters, behind 85% of all organized religion(s) is a “dude.” He’s viewed as wise and “pure” and, as The Dude in *The Big Lebowski* demonstrates, he must don facial hair and love liquor. Maybe he writes something or has stuff written about him (see Jesus, Moses, Muhammad, L. Ron Hubbard, etc.). From there, followers interpret what’s said in these holy books (see the New Testament, the Torah, Qur’an, various Dianetics texts); this has led to many religions (see Islam, Judaism, Islam, Scientology, etc.).

Again, what I’m proposing is that there is a parallel between the structure of organized religion and good ol’ Chuck Klosterman. He’s a dude, he wrote some stuff, and people have attempted to interpret what the hell he means. He’s a modern-day Jesus, yet not everyone’s signing up for his pub crawl. Why? Because, like organized religion, he has offended people or something along those lines. (Or maybe they are fussy about the rules and regulations.) And, oddly, organization (in *how* he writes) is what links Chuck Klosterman to religion in the first place. The guy is too organized! Well, organized in his own way. You know what I mean.

Once a group of people realize that what they know could be, well, wrong, they can more readily accept how Chuck is a potential deity. Ask yourself: “How do I know what I know?” Well, you do know what you know through what others have told you. And let’s be honest, *everyone lies*. But Chuck, unlike other gods and saints and nuns, will admit to this: “Everybody is wrong about everything, just about all the time” (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p.14) because “maybe we’re all pretending” (*Killing Yourself to Live*, p. 144). These are not crazy notions. The idea that these organized religions are not absolutely, positively “correct” is as true as what Chuck has said about any music video, band, or singer. That’s quite the connection, isn’t it?

Followers of organized religion rarely allow that train of thought. Their leader is right. Done. No questions asked. So, fine, let them have their Jesus and Allah and Buddha. If long ago some guy said some things, and people believed him, I sure as hell should be able to drink the holy water of Chuck:

This does not mean I'm always right and you're always wrong, nor does it mean I subconsciously need other people to feel the same way I do about anything. You don't need to side with the Boston Celtics to be a good person. But you should definitely side with *somebody*. Either you're with us or you're against us, and both of those options is better than living without a soul. (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 107).

So if no one is right, no one is wrong. Now that's offensively bad logic. But Chuck fully accepts that, and, therefore, creates the best combination higher powers have ever seen: a blasphemously organized religion!

Oddly enough, it's not as blasphemous as I'd like it to be. It's all that damn organization.

### **Thanks Be to Chuck**

As a former Catholic, and current Chuck-ite, I feel quite qualified to explain the Word of Chuck. Honestly, at first, I was confused by him (as I imagine some were by Jesus). He had opinions and ideas, and they didn't always intersect mathematically like the lines of an e.e. cummings poem. His organization is a bit unorthodox. Perhaps some feel this way when they are introduced to other religions. When I first read up on Buddhism in college, because every fallen Catholic usually takes the dive then when their über-Catholic moms aren't around, I was perplexed that the hardcore Buddhists were strict about being vegetarians and not drinking. Their laws and regulations were crazy; although just like there are bad Catholics, I'm sure there are bad Buddhists.

So, maybe there are bad Chuck followers out there who go behind his back and secretly detest KISS or really like the town of Wahpeton, deemed "as dreadful a community as there is in North America" by Chuck (*Fargo Rock City*, p. 206). Yet I find more people who simply "don't get him" yet all the while finding him "interesting." My friend Cheryl stated that she didn't always agree with him when he wrote for *The Forum*, but she kept reading. Sounds like the *Bible* to me.

What I'm saying is this: If part of the religious formula is to confuse and have strict rules, Chuck as a reference point for a religion isn't that far off the backstage staircase. *Sex, Drugs,*

and *Cocoa Puffs* re-baptized me in a way more bad-ass religion. I became a disciple (or apostle – what’s the difference?); I was blessed, telepathically, in holy beer. I’m Matthew, I’m Mark, I’m Luke, and I’m John. And I’m here to convert you.

## **Say unto Others as Chuck Would Say unto You**

Sure, Chuck as a god is a pretty hard thing to wrap one’s melon around. Yet, the guy has had some intriguing thoughts; they’re practically Yoda-meets-Ghandi catch phrases. Some are even pick-up lines (skip to Commandment #10, boys). If “I say unto you,” was Jesus’s go-to phrase, “But that’s not my point; my point is” is Chuck’s.

Chuck has said (about another person), which is a reflection back onto himself, that “he’s a potential god who realizes that everyone is either ‘overtly or covertly unhappy’” (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 4). Yet, he’s “not interested in trying to convince anyone that they should (or shouldn’t) adore whichever denim-clad icon they choose” (p. 47). To him, a “genius can be a genius by trying to be a genius; a visionary can only have a vision by accident” (*Killing Yourself to Live*, p. 89) and whether your god is a genius or visionary, “you can never really know someone until you’ve seen them positively enraged” (p. 191). Who gets more enraged than followers of organized religious? Chuck’s apostles will fit in nicely alongside other followers of organized religions by virtue of their covert unhappiness, sublimated rancor towards their nemeses, and their general raging against the machine.

Chuck knows that “What they are is more important than what they do” so that is why Jesus, and other gods (James Dean, Kirby Puckett, Marilyn Monroe, Michael Jackson), have to die young. Unless they die before the age of thirty-three, nobody’s entire career matters, and we all unconsciously understand this” (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 44). Chuck knows what it takes to be a god and to speak like one; he’s demonstrated this so far in his writing career.

To add a psychological dimension, and bonus points, to his god-liness, throughout his books, he practically lays out sermons. They’re like conference notes we could’ve found in Jesus’s backpack:

As I try to analyze this incongruity, I feel myself swaying between ‘overthinking’ the answer and ‘underthinking’ the answer. One moment, the difference seems complicated; the next, it seems completely obvious. The complexity comes from the assertion that men and women think about the world in a fundamentally different way. The simplicity comes from the fact that just about everyone accepts this premise and always has. (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 118)

Religious people don’t consider that the people we look up to and praise have had self-esteem battles. This is no different for our dear Chuck; he doesn’t always feel that his followers have his back. He writes, “This is how I feel all the time. Whenever I try to be ironic, people think I’m serious—but every time I’m actually right about something, everyone assumes I’m crazy. Nobody ever believes me when I’m telling the truth” (*Fargo Rock City*, p. 56). Isn’t it like reading a prophet’s blog entry?

We all want to be cool, and it’s hard for some of us to admit we’re not. When I tell people I came from a town that didn’t have a single stop-light, I make myself smile, even though I don’t know why this is funny (or why it should be embarrassing). When I admit that I spent many nights assuming I would die a virgin, I act like I’m being self-deprecating, even though I’m mostly being honest. When I remember how confused I was while I drove up and down the empty streets of my snow-packed hometown, I try to be wistful, even though I fucking hated having no one to talk to. (*Fargo Rock City*, p.283)

Living in “God’s country,” dying a virgin, having no one to talk to? Did Jesus write this?

Trying to encapsulate his thoughts into words so others would understand was, at times, defeating. Yet, “Self-deprecating cleverness has become a virtue” (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 6). Many deities most likely felt the same, minus the cleverness, perhaps.

## For Those about to Pray, We Salute You

While Chuck spews catch phrases, worthy of being screened onto tees and sold at Walmart, he also teaches us through his scripture. All in all, “we are able to study something that defines

who we are; therefore, we are able to study ourselves” (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 102). As we dissect Chuck, we dissect ourselves and create a whole new spirituality at the same time.

We can find many of Chuck’s comparisons that are substitutions for his own thoughts on religion. In addition to soccer, he’s taught us about religion through *The Sims*, *Seinfeld*, the Pamela Anderson versus Marilyn Monroe comparison, and *The Real World*, just to kick around a few.

In the essay “George Will vs. Nick Hornby,” Chuck states that “most children don’t love soccer; they simply hate the alternatives more” and isn’t that truly a reflection on religion? I mean, most don’t love being Catholic or religious, for that matter, they just can’t grasp or deal with the opposite. Children are in soccer because, according to Chuck, “it’s the only sport where you can’t fuck up” (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 89). This explains organized religion, and to a certain extent, advertises Chuck’s. He’s not about fear; he’s about domination. Chuck prophesies, “To say you love soccer is to say you believe in enforced equality more than you believe in the value of competition and the capacity of the human spirit” (p. 95).

Organized religions do not necessarily push their followers to be individualistic. This is what is different with Chuck because, honestly, he wants stand-outs. He wants only the good ones to play, and while Catholics will simply not respond when their children ask about other religions, Chuck will tell ‘em to go out there—see what they’re missing—because he knows they’ll return. He’s not afraid of competition.

A Chuck-fueled religion is kind of like being “reminded that the unattainable icons of perfection we lust after can never fulfill us like the Platonic allies who have been there all along” (p. 6). Why reach for God when Chuck is on your nightstand? Or in your nightcap?

## **The Gates of Chuck (or His Take on Religious Places)**

Many new followers of any religion ask, “Is there a heaven? Is there a hell? Is there an afterlife?” And, more importantly, what does Chuck feel is the meaning of life? I mean, why didn’t someone get that sound clip from Jesus? For Chuck: “We are always dying, all the time. That’s what living is; living is dying,

little by little. It's a sequenced collection of individualized deaths" (*Killing Yourself to Live*, p. 112). And that works hand-in-hand with his secondary idea that "We're all tourists, sort of. Life is tourism, sort of. As far as I'm concerned, the dinosaurs still hold the lease on this godforsaken rock" (p. 4). His meaning, this cynical explanation, is the reason we should all bow to Commandment #1 (coming soon to a bar near you) more often.

If we're just touring life, then heaven looks fairly similar. Chuck's subconscious take on heaven is that its "incessant noise and an accelerated pace of life decrease anxiety," as well as "neon lights," plentiful movie theaters and establishments open twenty-four-hours. There are people "like you who already reside here" who "will understand you," and he assures us that "things will be great, for sure" (p. 57). So you see, even Chuck's heaven looks pretty damn good.

He's nailed down life and heaven; what about the in-between that Catholicism lays out before us semi-bad people?

For as long as I can remember, I've had a theory that life on earth is purgatory, because life on earth seems to have all the purgatorial qualities that were once described to me by nuns. It's almost like we're all Bruce Willis in *The Sixth Sense*, but nobody on 'earth' has figured this out yet, even though it will suddenly seem obvious when we get to the end. Sometimes I think that the amount of time you live on earth is just an inverse reflection of how good you were in previous existence; for example, infants to die from SIDS were actually great people when they were alive 'for real,' so they get to go to heaven after a mere five weeks in purgatory. Meanwhile, anyone who Willard Scott ever congratulated for turning 102 was obviously a terrible individual who had many, many previous sins to pay for and had to spend a century in his or her own purgatory (*KYL*, p.24).

Thus far, you have to admit, Chuck's descriptions of heaven and hell, as well as his own version of reincarnation, are more appealing than others.

## **Our Chuck, Who Art in Essays, Hallowed Be Thy Ink**

I require my college students to mimic Chuck's writing style for a particular writing assignment. This means that they need to

dissect his wacky style, found in the assigned essays of *Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*. They have to break him down. It's tough, and it sometimes requires prayer. Typically, a list of guidelines, about ten items long, is born. Yes, ten items. Coincidence? No way, man. It's called parallelism!

Chuck has been subconsciously creating a list of rules and regulations through his writing style. So, structurally, we plug in the pieces. What we find through writing like him are useful elements in the creation of the Chuck regulations.

Chuck has been subliminally brainwashing the way we think about the world in a new way. This is what Chuckism (read: play on the word Catholicism) looks like when it is scribbled upon some bathroom stall.

### ***Commandment #1: Thou shalt rock***

Okay, so this commandment isn't on the list of "Chuck's Writing Style Items," but the underlining theme to his writing, and to his religion, is fun. Students, when mimicking Chuck, have to delve into their fun zones. They have to joke; they have to incorporate humor. Chuck's religion has the same tone. In his essay, "Appetite for Replication," he quotes "Axl" of the Guns N' Roses tribute band, Paradise City, "This is for everybody who told you not to smoke weed or not to drink beer every day. There are just too many people who make life hard." And that's the gist of the Chuck religion; he quoted that Axl-wannabe for a reason.

Possibly the one thing that doesn't connect between Chuck's religion and others is the coolness factor. To emphasize this coolness (and this commandment) further, let's take a moment to get fired up:

It is time for all of us to embrace our heavy metal past. It is time to admit that we used to rock like hurricanes. It is time to run for the hills and go round and round. It is time for us to *Shout at the Devil*. We've got the right to choose it, there ain't no way we'll lose it, and we're not gonna take it anymore. (*Fargo Rock City*, p. 12)

### ***Commandment #2: Thou shalt swear***

They *are* just words, right? The Lord's name in vain? *Eh*. In fact, Chuck probably wishes his name was shorter so one could

spout it out in the midst of a rage, akin to Clark Griswold's freak-out moment in *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*:

Hey! If any of you are looking for any last-minute gift ideas for me, I have one. I'd like Frank Shirley, my boss, right here tonight. I want him brought from his happy holiday slumber over there on Melody Lane with all the other rich people and I want him brought right here, with a big ribbon on his head, and I want to look him straight in the eye and I want to tell him what a cheap, lying, no-good, rotten, four-flush-ing, low-life, snake-licking, dirt-eating, inbred, overstuffed, ignorant, blood-sucking, dog-kissing, brainless, dickless, hopeless, heartless, fat-ass, bug-eyed, stiff-legged, spotty-lipped, worm-headed sack of monkey shit he is! Hallelujah! Holy shit! Where's the Tylenol?

Maybe there's a chance, given the famous "Kelly Clarkson" moment in *40-Year-Old Virgin*? Either way, Chuck is not opposed to the vernacular, so feel free to f-bomb and f-bomb well.

And use big words to confuse too—just like the boring organized religions do. Chuck wouldn't leave you without a sample (in a Pepto-sized cup), like "archetypical." Example: "This is what happens when you don't construct an archetypical persona: If you're popular and melodic and faceless, you seem meaningless" (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p.47).

### ***Commandment #3: Thou shalt name-drop***

The Gospel according to Mark? Marky Mark? Mark Jacobs? We've heard all the religious celebrities, and aren't we a bit sick of them? Moses did this, Mary was a virgin, Joseph was a simple carpenter... blahblahblah. Where were the paparazzi back then? If they were around, we might be reading *Enquirer's* coverage on Moses smoking weed (doesn't that beard give him away?), Mary as a Britney Spears (both have claimed virginity at optimal times—Just sayin'), and Joseph was in the closet. (Evidence: He didn't have sex with Mary). These people have been placed on massive pedestals: "All the academics give props to older academics no one else has ever heard of" (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, pp. 222–23); no one can attain their goodness, and why try? Instead, Chuck asks his followers to just name-drop those who YOU know. That's what he's done over and over.



Someone doesn't know the lead-singer's name in KISS? Great, he's the person who told you that Chuck said cheesecake doesn't cause cancer. Your aunt Sylvia gave you some advice about pimple-control? Fabulous! Chuck asks you to name-drop her in your next conversation. When someone spouts off about what the *Bible* says, you tell 'em that verse 13, page 61, of *Killing Yourself to Live* said that that person is just "worried about the possibility of everyone else understand something that they're missing" and then get yourself a gin and tonic.

***Commandment #4: Thou shalt not make sense.  
Be illogical***

Most organized religions don't make sense anyway, so he's just following the trend (and you would be too), and trends are important to follow. So, thou shall be random and surreal and abstract in all conversations about religion. Or in any conversation about anything; Chuck will be so proud of you, and it's all about making the "guy with the open fly" happy.

In *Chuck Klosterman IV*, as a more recent oddball example, Chuck has a discussion with Christian Scientist Val Kilmer who is gung-ho on the fact that "an institution cannot be classified as a religion unless God is involved" (p. 43). They are never able to find that definition in any of the dictionaries owned by Kilmer. It doesn't really make sense why Chuck would argue that definition with someone so "religious," but, again, he doesn't make sense. And I mean Val.

While you are out in the world, drinking and not making sense and throwing logic into the cow pasture, spew out some extra arguments to frustrate non-followers further. For a deeper explanation, see this clip from page 70 of *Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*:

The formula is as follows: When discussing any given issue, always do three things. First, make an intellectual concession (this makes the listener feel comfortable). Next, make a completely incomprehensible—but remarkably specific—"cultural accusation" (this makes you insightful). Finally, end the dialogue by interjecting slang lexicon that does not necessarily exist (this makes you contemporary).

I recently tried this out regarding the oil spill in the Gulf: "You are so right on! I mean, just because BP 'plugged' the

hole doesn't mean they did so rhetorically or morally, and if they can't figure that out, they won't be the only blind eyes trying to see over the cloudy political terrain." See, even Chuck-ites get step-by-step instructions handed out to them. Do other religions do that?

Perhaps I should clarify that while you are out in the desert of life, without real religion for forty days and whatnot, being a Chuck-ite and not making sense, etc., that doesn't mean you aren't allowed to declare *some* insights about the world. *You* can make sense, if you so desire. Chuck's a hypocrite and allows for leeway when it comes to arguing both sides—especially if you're doing it to confuse followers of other non-fun religions. As Chuck states from behind his beer pyramid, "Now, don't get me wrong: I am not suggesting that the music *made* these people go violently insane. But it's equally as stupid to argue that there's no connection at all" (*Fargo Rock City*, p. 58). Or: "If art is stupid, it can't really be harmful. If it's not stupid, then it can't be dismissed as socially irrelevant" (p. 133). Now, Chuck's illogic here is exemplary. See, the major premises in these two syllogisms are NO stupid things are harmful and NO non-stupid things are socially irrelevant. And there is a missing major premise, which allows him to use the excluded middle at all, which is ALL things are either stupid or not stupid. Now these three missing premises are really bad logic. But that's Chuck.

In your decision to be a part of this religion, be illogical. Don't become a Chuck follower because everyone else is doing it. But do it for the good of mankind. And because there are backstage passes involved. And free keg beer.

### ***Commandment #5: Thou shalt use over-the-top comparisons (and spike your metaphors)***

Possibly the most famous comparison is the apples-to-oranges comparison; when it comes to religions, then, Chuck may ponder, in a sermon, if his religion can be compared in that apples-to-oranges way with others. You, as a good follower, would have to disagree. And then quote him: "Apples and oranges aren't that different, really. I mean, they're both fruit. Their weight is extremely similar" (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 85) and then compare his religion to an old, rusted Ford truck; the other religions are just unreliable engines in Chinese imports.

Let's say someone tells you directly that Chuck's religion is *not* better than theirs. Well, comparisons are the best way to a. explain yourself, b. have fun, and c. confuse them a wee bit. And maybe you bring in Commandment #7, too. "Following a Chuck commandment is like listening to Ozzy speak. Sign language may be necessary (read: usage of a particular finger)."

Some of Chuck's other hits with comparisons, much like Jesus's miracles with wine or the blind:

- Queensryche is like an Elvis who was never particularly good-looking, but who also never got fat. (*Fargo Rock City*, p. 277)
- Journey was rock's version of the TV show *Dynasty*. (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 55)

If Pam Anderson is the new Marilyn Monroe, Chuck's the new God on the street.

### ***Commandment #6: Thou shalt be brash and unapologetic***

Once, while running in Chahinkapa Park, I was accosted by two men—Mormons?—and they asked me if I wanted to talk about Jesus. Mid-sweat, mid-breath, and mid-"Pour Some Sugar on Me," I had to decline. That seemed like an extreme measure to me; why wouldn't a runner already be somewhat religious? Running is an acceptable form of suicide. How much closer to God can one be when one is asking for spiritual intervention at every mile? Modern day runners would have made great Medieval monks.

Perhaps the same can be said for those "talking to dinosaurs" near the Porcelain God after a night of drinking.

Speaking of drinking, when it comes to the opinions of others' religions, in common conversations at North Dakotan pubs, feel free to preach if you are preached to. Just make sure to utilize those other commandments, like not making sense or using odd comparisons. This will guarantee that they'll walk away and leave you alone with your scotch or beer or whatever. Need a sampling of some of Chuck's abrasiveness? Here you go: "Another good reason to hate heavy metal is Ted Nugent, or—more accurately—people who are like Ted Nugent. Every time

I go to a big rock show, I see herds of these kind of men, and they always make me wish I had the power to give people polio” (*Fargo Rock City*, p. 229). If confusing them with gibberish or comparisons doesn’t work, or hitting them with Queensryche-Elvis comparisons doesn’t work, unfortunately you’ll have to resort to this. Putting others down isn’t nice, but neither is forcing knee problems onto young Catholics.

Essentially, this commandment calls for a much more intellectual version of “You’re going to hell.”

***Commandment #7: Thou shalt relate most things  
to music or sports***

Celtics vs. Lakers isn’t far off from Catholics vs. Lutherans, right? I mean, how many people have referred to Joe Mauer as Baby Jesus? People are already implementing this commandment without Chuck’s permission (unless they are secret followers). Chuck, himself, refers to Bono as Jesus in *Chuck Klosterman IV* (p. 28) and he claims that “pro basketball is exactly like life” (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 96) which is probably why “for at least one decade, God was obsessed with pro basketball” (p. 98). How many of us cross our fingers and toes when that :01 seconds left free throw is being attempted? How many ask God to let the Vikings win during the playoffs, before or after the Favre saga; relating sports to anything, even religion, isn’t that far off from what other religious folks do.

People often feel spiritual cranking Enya in their Volkswagens; others feel closer to God when they witness a slam dunk. Chuck’s not going to tell you how to worship, where to worship, or who to make into your gods. You wish to do yoga in your Mauer jersey while surrounded by Guns N’ Roses? Wonderful! Go forth and constantly relate your religious ponderings to the Minnesota Twins or Lynyrd Skynyrd at will.

***Commandment #8: Thou shalt use footnotes***

Explained in a different manner, you shall fill-in-the-blanks like Catholics do with supposed “rules” by using footnotes; in Chuck’s case, they must be humorous. Catholics once had some no-jeans-in-church rule that somehow fell by the wayside; was Jesus concerned about denim? Doesn’t say in Mark, Matthew, Luke, or John, does it? So, rules that are made up by Chuck or

his followers are subject to change. *At any time*. In fact, ignore this rule and just use parentheses at the end of your sentences as I have done.

***Commandment #9: Thou shalt be grammatically correct in all blasphemy***

Correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation is a must if you are going to be a follower in this religion. Followers of Chuck need never feel “bitchy” when they have to correct someone saying “Anyways.” Focus in on the words others use for your illogical ramblings and crazy comparisons because “the one thing nobody wants is sentences, and they certainly don’t want paragraphs. People despise paragraphs. Focus groups have proven this” (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 214). Those words should include, but are not limited to, f-bombs and their varying parts of speech, big words, sports terminology, as well as the names of unknown bands.

Chuck will probably not look favorably upon those who sprinkle their speech with “like.” No Chuck follower will say, “Like, Chuck is a god, because, like . . .” They may get shot on sight. Instead, be articulate. Wear fake glasses. Get your geek on, and show some respect for rock’n’roll. And for God’s sake . . . errr, Chuck’s sake, don’t look like an effing dumbass!

***Commandment #10: Thou shalt love frequently***

Alright, so this last item, like the first, isn’t necessarily linked to the list of items that are the backbone to his writing philosophy, and yet it is one of his most obsessively covered topics (beyond music and sports). Any religion needs to comment on love, since it apparently makes the world go around like a Harlem Globetrotters routine. And it’s part of the “sex, drugs, and rock’n’roll” theory that Chuck practically lives by. So, yes, *love*.

The opposite sex is a big deal to Chuck. There will be no rules governing interactions between the sexes here because underneath it all, Chuck is a lover. A lover of too many? Chuck philosophizes, “I can’t let go of the past. I can’t fall out of love with any of these women. I can only exist in the past and in the future” (*Killing Yourself to Live*, p. 234). Want to love three girls at once and write about them in a book? Go ahead. And Chuck

isn't above cheating either, although I think he'd ask his followers to refrain from intentionally trying to crush another man's heart. Well, unless that man is an asshole and his girlfriend is smokin' hot; then, he won't judge. It's important to reflect back, with this commandment, to what he said about Billy Joel in the essay "Every Dog Must Have His Every Day, Every Drunk Must Have His Drink":

When I hear "Just the Way You Are," it never makes me think about Joel's broken marriage. It makes me think about all the perfectly scribed love letters and drunken e-mails I have written over the past twelve years, and about all the various women who received them. I think about how I told them they changed the way I thought about the universe, and that they made every other woman on the earth unattractive, and that I would love them unconditionally even if we were never together. I hate that those letters exist. But I don't hate them because what I said was false; I hate them because what I said was completely true. My convictions could not have been stronger when I wrote those words, and—for whatever reason—they still faded into nothingness. Three times I have been certain that I could never love anyone else, and I was wrong every time. (*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, pp. 53–54)

And, a smaller tidbit:

It immediately dawned on me that we were never going to agree on anything as long as we lived. Our worldviews were so diametrically opposed that we would never share any experience in totality; even if we saw the same film at the same time in the same place, there would be no common ground whatsoever.

I found this profoundly desirable. (*Killing Yourself to Live*, p. 30)

The intersection of love and religion show through, too, in the same book. "Art and love are the same thing: It's the process of seeing yourself in things that are not you. It's understanding the unreasonable. And although the theory I am proposing is completely unreasonable, it is something I completely understand" (p. 217). A process of seeing yourself in things that are not you; Chuck alludes to another god-like proposition here, although that may not have been his intention to begin with.

And what's something lovers and religious freaks have in common? Chuck tells us: "The worst part of being in love with anyone, which is that people in love can't be reasoned with" (*Killing Yourself to Live*, p. 5).

## All Chucks Go to Heaven

I recently wrote as a Facebook status that I didn't need to "be religious." True story. Instead, the status conveyed that because I am a sports fan, I use up all my hope and faith and love on my sports teams. (May Chuck bless them and keep them, all the days of their lives.) Many people "liked" that status, and it wasn't seen as all that blasphemous. I had to frown: Why can we only channel our loyalty into deities we can't see or who make enough to make God jealous? What about the in-between man? The Chuck in us all? The man, or woman, who fucks up and lies about it, but who still inspires us?

Look, Chuck's a god. He has followers. They rock to him, and he gives them hope. They head-bang to his sermons. They rejoice over songs, and quote his lines. Hell, he's there to pray to when you need him. Let us now worship him in our favorite band tees:

Our Chuck  
who art back stage  
hallowed be thy guitar solo  
The beer will come  
the ladies be done  
in the interview as well as in the den  
Give us today our daily F-bomb  
and forgive us our screw-ups  
as we holler at those  
who fucked up against us  
Lead us into blasphemy  
and deliver much temptations.  
For Chuck's is the kingdom  
the music and the glory  
forever and ever,  
Amen.





Conse-  
quences of  
killing a  
clydesdale?



## HYPERthetical Response #6

# Consequences of killing a clydesdale

JOHN R. FITZPATRICK

Let us assume a fully grown, completely healthy Clydesdale horse has his hooves shackled to the ground while his head is held in place with thick rope. He is conscious and standing upright, but completely immobile. And let us assume that—for some reason—every political prisoner on earth (as cited by Amnesty International) will be released from captivity if you can kick this horse to death in less than twenty minutes. You are allowed to wear steel-toed boots.

Would you attempt to do this?

—*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, p. 126

Consequentialists believe that you should evaluate the morality of actions by looking at the results. Non-consequentialists believe you must look at the means employed. Asking the question: “Do the ends justify the means?” Consequentialists will answer “yes,” and non-consequentialists will answer “no.”

When non-consequentialists argue against the merits of consequentialism, they often try to create thought experiments where the consistent consequentialist will agree to do something morally yucky because it will produce good results, and then argues that anyone who would recommend doing something that yucky must be a moral imbecile. And the moral “framing” here is pretty severe. After all, Clydesdales are not as cute and lovable as Pandas, but they have a pretty good warm and cuddly thing going for them. Kick a Clydesdale to death? Only a monster would even consider such a thing, or so the non-consequentialist argues. Since the consequentialists must

argue that this is at least morally permissible, and perhaps morally required, there must be something wrong with consequentialism.

But the Devil is in the details, and we have skipped over why the consequentialist must consider doing something that sounds horrific in this kind of scenario. You don't need to be an expert or a historian to realize that many of the folks on Amnesty International's list of political prisoners are in for rough treatment, and some of them are bound to get treatment worse than what we are considering for the horse. As I write this there is a news item circulating on a blog I read about how the body of a fifteen-year-old Syrian boy was found after having been arrested in Syria two months earlier in a protest against the government. Al Jazeera reports that the body was "riddled with bullets, missing an eye, several teeth with a broken neck and leg" <<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/06/2011696563111657.html>>. For many political prisoners in the world today, being beaten to death in twenty minutes would be a blessing.

If this treatment of political prisoners is commonplace, and I believe it is not rare, then there is a distinctly different framing of this ethical dilemma—Would you be willing to do something awful to a horse to prevent something worse from happening to many human beings? And framed this way, I believe only the most extreme animal-rights activists would still say "No."

Of course, Klosterman is a clever guy, and there is a final wrinkle to be ironed out. You can only save the prisoners if you can successfully accomplish this task, and the longer I think about this, the less sure I am that I would be able to do so.