Two Roads Diverged in the Multiverse

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Fiction operates in a similar fashion; we can explore alternative scenarios without exhausting limited real world resources. Some stories actually dramatize this feature. _Edge of Tomorrow_ depicts soldiers who keep retrying a combat mission until they achieve a victory scenario (reminiscent of repeating a video game level until you succeed). _Run, Lola, Run_ shows three different ways the eponymous heroine can complete a task in order to reveal the only one that will lead to success. Even films like _Terminator 2: Judgment Day_, _Back to the Future Part II_, and _X-Men: Days of Future Past_, while only showing one or two options, still use the conceit that events can proceed in multiple different ways. Is it any wonder such films are popular with nerds, who are united in their recognition that the world could be other than it is?

Groundhog Day is another multiple timeline story about a weatherman reliving the same day until he betters himself. The film reads as an allegory for reincarnation. As a search for a better version of oneself, reincarnation would represent a serial process, meaning one attempt after another in a series. If it turns out this life is the one

Since the book was published, time loop movies have had a moment.

Palm Springs is an entertaining standout.

and only chance we get, though, then a serial process isn't going to be terribly effective. We need something like a rocket equation so that we can try different alternatives in parallel with each other.

A parallel search for the timeline we want makes me think of multiverses. If the universe is everything observable from a fixed location in time and space, then the multiverse is the collection of all such universes defined by all the locations that exist. It's a pretty heady concept, and while a growing number of scientists believe that we live in a multiverse of one sort or another, it is still very much just a theoretical notion at this point. I'm not asking anyone to accept these multiverse hypotheses as an actual description of our world; I just think it is a useful metaphor.

Multiverses are quite popular in science fiction, especially (and amusingly) in the world of serial storytelling. When scores of writers and artists have been telling a single story for decades, as is the case for DC and Marvel Comics, inconsistencies in plot and characterization can arise. It can be convenient in those circumstances to say that the two conflicting stories took place in two different universes. Those two universes might be mostly similar, perhaps nearly identical, only in one Superman wears red briefs and in the other they are blue. As the story goes on, the universes proliferate to the point they must be catalogued; the main Marvel

After a fake-out in the previous film, _Spider-Man: No Way Home_ will finally bring multiversal visitors into the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

comics continuity is universe 616, the Marvel Studios movies take place in universe 199999, and we live in universe 1218.

A multiverse gives us another way to describe how Mark Watney was lost [in *The Martian*]. He and everyone else knew exactly where he was on Mars. He was lost in the multiverse of possible Mark Watneys who eat different amounts of food each day, dismantle their rockets differently and otherwise make divergent choices. To get home, he needed to figure out which version of himself would get him there.

There are several parables in the Bible that liken people who are not followers of Jesus to items which are lost. In Luke 15, we have a lost coin, and a lost sheep; each of these items is sought once it is discovered missing, and each is ultimately found. Being found in these stories is comparable to being saved or becoming a follower of Jesus. Consequently, a lot of "lost and found" language is used when Christians talk about proselytizing. This language is comforting if you consider yourself already found, but for the proselytizee, it can be off-putting. If you know exactly where you are, and if you are right where you want to be, how can you possibly be lost?
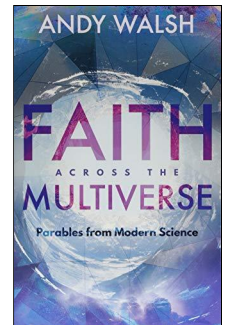
I propose that we are lost when we are not the best possible version of ourselves. In that case, when Jesus goes looking for us—the Luke 15 parables are generally read with Jesus as the searcher—he is scouring the multiverse of possible versions of us to find the best one. He calls us to follow him from our current version of ourselves to that best version he has found.

Then again, who's to say we aren't that best version already? And why does God or Jesus get to decide what the best version is? I think it's fair to ask those questions and correct to think that there are alternatives. At the same time, according to the Bible, those alternatives may be considered sin by God's reckoning.

Yep, sin. We don't enjoy the idea of being told that we have sinned or that we are sinners. Nevertheless, the Bible does mention sin a fair bit, so if we are going to know God we need to have some idea of what it is. My primary aim is to explore the concept of sin and to establish why it is a useful idea, rather than enumerating specific sins.

References

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