PERSONAL STATEMENT EXAMPLE #1
RELIGION AND SCIENCE

"Dev, what's your religion?"

I felt hot; my heart quickened. I tensed with apprehension while hurriedly reviewing possible answer choices in my head—atheist, agnostic? Lurking much farther down the list—Muslim? Although my family is Ismaili, part of a small sect in the Shia branch of Islam, I couldn't identify myself as such. Not only did I fear that doing so would alienate me from my friends, but I also struggled to truly buy into the faith.

What I'd heard of my religion from the outside world seemed to stand in stark opposition to what I had seen at home and at the mosque: that Islam cherishes peace and pluralism, charity, and compassion. Teachers and friends denounced it as a religion rooted in violence; nightly news anchors reported on a seemingly unending avalanche of terrorist attacks, supposedly affirmed by messages of hate in the Quran. Left with scant parental guidance, I wondered if they were right. I wondered if extremist groups really did represent the religion of my parents and grandparents, if their religion really was one of intolerance.

As I tried to fit into my largely Judeo-Christian community, my disenchantment towards my family's faith evolved into increasing self-consciousness about my heritage. When asked about my background, I wouldn't say that my father's family is Ugandan, but that they were expelled from the country by the dictator Idi Amin. I wouldn't say that my mother's family has links to both India and Pakistan. I would instead say that I'm British, a true statement to be certain, but also one more easily digested by my American friends.

Somewhat detached from my religion and heritage, I searched for other philosophies to make up for what I had lost, eventually finding that faith in math and the sciences. I learned of the computational complexity of the human mind, discovered the simple elegance of calculus, and found myself awestruck by the grand scale of the cosmos. I investigated the inner workings and processes of the internet, sparking my fascination with computer science.

Yet, my notion of science and religion as opposing forces was challenged by a TED Talk in the winter of my junior year. As the speaker discussed potential consequences of artificial intelligence and machine learning, I was struck by his belief that A.I. might be the last truly human invention as the technology itself diminishes the contributions of our species. The troubling assertion that humans have little intrinsic value made me wonder—What does it mean to be human? What, if anything, makes us valuable? These were questions to which science did not have the answer.

I then realized that the belief that humankind is unique and extraordinary is rooted not in science, but rather in faith. I now approach my faith differently from my parents and grandparents, centered on the conviction that the human soul, and the innate sense of ethics and justice it provides, is ultimately what endows us with worth. But that's not all religion has given me.

When asked about my faith now, I still feel hot; my heart still quickens. Yet, now I'm able to recognize why I find my faith valuable. It has helped me to connect with my heritage, foster my sense of charity and civic duty, and better appreciate the unique importance of human values. It is with faith in those human values that I look towards a future in which the abilities of machines far outstrip my own and remain resolved to realize a future that is not only technologically advanced, but also morally sound.