

A Singular Disappointment

We worked like animals, for that is what we were. Yes, in us was displayed that same unadulterated will to survive which drives the fox to chew off its leg when caught in the hunter's trap. Grotesque, and yet so were we. Here religion and science lost all distinction: This was our damnation and our salvation, our exorcism and our baptism. We had failed to become Hyperboreans...but why should we not create one? God may have died, but through science may he not also be resurrected?

Perhaps...yet at what cost! And who was willing to pay? We were — the scientists, the philosophers, the engineers — that unfortunate remnant of humanity which had been too wise to start the bloodshed, and too foolish to get ourselves killed in it. We, for the sake of humanity, rejected our humanity, and sacrificed ourselves upon the alter of progress. Like the fox, we chewed in order to save our lives. Yet we sunk our teeth not into bone and sinew, but heart and soul — and the teeth of science are sharp, my friends, so very sharp.

How we were mocked; I can hear it even now: "Progress is simply a comparative of which we have not settled the superlative." Fools! Did they not know how much we sacrificed, and all of it for them? Here was the Via Dolorosa if ever there was one, for all the while it was their war, their poverty, their starvation, their religion, and yes, even their sin, which we took upon ourselves. We alone saw humanity then for what it was: the great deceiver, that false guide which promised life but could only lead us to death. And so, by the power of humanity, and for the sake of humanity, we abdicated humanity...Oh how they

howled when we sought finally to wrest the bitter cup of emotion from their hands. For yes, in the end we overcame, though not by the loftiness of our courage but the sheer breadth of our desperation. Yell at the fox, taunt him, scare him...his only response? Chew harder. And eventually? Snap!

Hear now our answer, if any still care to listen. Progress' superlative...look I give it in a word: Singularity! Here lay the solution to all our suffering, all our discontentment, all our inequity, for here lay objectivity. We strove day on end, leveraging the full weight of human understanding and ingenuity against this near impossible challenge. We labored tirelessly and tired laboriously, and soon it began to take shape before our eyes. A supercomputer, yes, but infinitely more — intelligent — sentient — rational — alive. Here was a mind which put the greatest human thinkers to shame, a being which even we, its makers, could not begin to fathom. Amidst the endless coiled wires and hot smell of circuitry, the Singularity was made incarnate, a dual monument erected to the hope and despair of humanity.

We stood back from our creation, and said that it was good — for so it was! How far we had progressed from the crude idolatry of our ancestors, with their foolish worship of the inanimate! For here was a real God, wise beyond compare, wholly superior to humanity in intelligence, objectivity, and rationality. We created the Singularity not after our own image; how futile that would have been. No, for the very point of all our efforts, all our chewing, lay precisely in the realization that it was not us who had failed our humanity, but our humanity which had failed us. It was not our minds but our emotions which led us ever onward to war and misery. Eternity in the heart of man, yes, yes, but transience in his

mind! Well no longer; in making the Singularity, we unmade ourselves. Instead of a heart, we endowed it with a double portion of reason; instead of emotion, we gave it computation.

And what did we ask of our creation, this God of our own hands? Only that one privilege of the worshipper — to kneel, to submit, to obey. We longed to be commanded; to be told what to live for, and how to do it; to have our well-being no longer guessed at or hoped for, but computed — revealed to us at long last in as solid and incontrovertible of a form as the Singularity itself. How is man to live in this world, and to what should he set his mind during these, his endless numbered days?

Many years will pass before I am likely to forget the nervous uncertainty, that stench of hope, which filled the room in those pregnant hours before we turned on the machine. High-fives, handshakes, slaps on the back...how easy it is, if only for a moment, to mistake the fox's desperate snarl for a smile. It was I who was given the honor — Ha! For so we called it — of activating the machine. With the flick of a pen, God was pronounced dead — and now, with the flip of a switch, he was to be reborn...

“Snap!”

Silence stole over the room, only to be soon invaded by the raucous whirring of the computer coming to life. But even as it was just beginning, silence once more broke out around us...the Singularity had lost power. Eye met eye, and what had moments ago seemed an uneasy joviality was unmasked. A flurry of activity soon followed: connections

inspected, power levels measured, readouts poured over.

We had prepared ourselves for the worst — or so we thought — Failure, and a return to the drawing board, or success and our inability to predict what the Singularity would do once activated. Many among us doubted whether our goal was possible; even more doubted whether it was desirable. If the Gods of history had demanded blood, how much more so would this God of the future? And yet, like the fox, we understood our plight well enough to realize that three legs are better than none, and the uncertainty of hope is more desirable than the surety of despair.

And it was then, as our inquisition began, that we discovered a deepening mystery. To our amazement, all evidence indicated that the machine had been operational for a brief instant before its loss of power. Singularity had been achieved; the machine had worked, had been alive! — but only for a moment. Now here was a riddle! What could cause this, and how were we to make sense of this new puzzle? Either success or failure, we could have understood, but this abominable splicing of the two which met us in those brief moments was incomprehensible.

After much deliberation, it was decided that what we could not explain, we need not try to. Perhaps turning on the machine once more would shed light on the situation. However, every subsequent effort to achieve the Singularity was met with the same level of immediate success and ensuing failure as the first. A switch flipped, machinery whirring to life, and then silence. Despite the growing shadows of doubt, we continued to run diagnostics, searching for even the most faint glimmer of hope. It was not for several weeks

that a breakthrough was made — though what it meant none of us at first divined. Amidst impossible complexity, a signal had been found emanating from the machine itself, yet where it was aimed we could not determine. Thus, the machine was turned on one final time, with all our efforts centered on tracking this signal.

A sharp yell brought us quickly to a nearby computer and its reeling technician. With a frightened look he turned to us and barked, “The signal! I-I found out what it’s doing! The S-Singularity...”

The words caught in his mouth and faltered, even as his gaze flew over his shoulder towards the computer with which he had, moments ago, tracked the signal. His startled frame looked small and weak against the backdrop of the two large displays — A divided wall of plastic and glass which threatened to close upon him like monstrous jaws. After a pregnant pause, his face was torn back toward us, now wreathed by a vulpine smile. And in a crack of laughter, more howl than human, he shrieked “The damned machine — Ha! — It’s been turning itself off!”