

# The Singularity is near ... or is it?

*An essay on the (un)likelihood of the human race ever reaching the Singularity*

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We live in exponential times. Not in every aspect of our lives, but at a technological level, the general feeling is that Humanity is walking towards a true technological singularity, an event represented by an advancement so great in technology that it will change the world, or even the Universe, in ways that human beings have no way of understanding.

Some say this event is just a few decades away. Considering that the Earth is believed to be 4.5 billion years old and since we are already so “close” to the event in question, it is fair to assume that 4.5 billion years is an acceptable time-frame for a civilization to develop such a level of technological maturity. It could be more, it could be less <sup>[1]</sup>.

Considering that the Universe is so vast, the probability that somewhere in the Universe some alien civilization is also reaching (or has already reached) this point in their evolutionary development is acceptably high. In that case, shouldn't we have already witnessed some form of existence of an alien singularity? Are we really so special that we will be the first civilization in the entire Universe to ever reach that point in the evolutionary scale? Or has an alien civilization already reached it and they simply chose not to interact with us? Or are they interacting with us in ways we cannot comprehend?

## **The Singularity and the impact it will have on Humanity**

The Singularity is described as an hypothetical event that will alter the way Humanity progresses. Our progression rate will be so high that humans (at least in our biological forms) will be unable to predict or even comprehend the changes that will occur. Since technology is Humanity's most fast-paced prominent creation, most people contemplating this possibility believe that the Singularity will occur at a technological level. And in that sense, the most likely outcome of that Singularity is the creation of superhuman intelligence, a level of intelligence that will surpass the most intelligent man on Earth and eventually the combined intelligence of all humans.

Imagine what such an intelligence could do. Not only would it be able to answer the most difficult questions that humans struggle to answer in everyday science but it would do so at an unimaginable pace. Most probably this superhuman intelligence would be machine-based. Not being limited by our biological boundaries, this super-intelligent machine (or society of machines) would be able to improve itself by extending its processing power, its memory and storage, thus allowing it to become even more intelligent. Again, the pace at which this would occur is unimaginably high.

This supreme being of intelligence doesn't necessarily have to be a machine. It could be the product of combining technological advances in nano-chips and related microscopical technologies with our own bodies in an attempt to overcome the limitations imposed by the biological evolution of our species. For all intents and purposes, such a technological advance could turn us into cyborgs. Whatever the origin of such an entity would be, machine-only or a mix of machines and humans, the point is that there would be no limits for its intelligence. Or at least, every time a certain limit is reached due to physical constraints, the entity would have the necessary intelligence to simply self-assemble into an improved being that would no longer have such physical limits and therefore continue to evolve.

As you can probably imagine, such a being would reach a rate of change that could only be graphically represented by a vertical straight line. Such an intelligence could lead to one of Humanity's most wanted achievements: immortality. It is easy to perceive that at a certain point in this evolution process, super-intelligent human-enhanced beings could find a way of "uploading" their entire human consciousness into a machine-based physical body that would not have the same decaying processes of our own biological bodies and therefore could last for a very, very long

time.

This step in our evolution could be considered as the Humanity Singularity. Because the concept of immortality is currently intangible to us, it is too difficult to predict or understand what the impact of such an event would have on Humanity. We live our lives with the notion that one day we will die. That gives us purpose to achieve our goals, to act upon our desires as if we were being pursued by a clock-ticking bomb. We unconsciously follow our selfish genes' purpose of reproducing and form families of our own to perpetuate our kind<sup>[2]</sup>. Immortality will change all of this, but how exactly? One thing is for sure, it is highly unlikely that we will be satisfied with that achievement, become lazy and forever play sudoku with the stars. Humanity's thirst for knowledge will most likely thrive and inspire us to explore every hidden secret of the Universe.

## **Masters of the Universe**

Immortal beings with all the time in the world and with the incredible capacity to self-evolve have no other challenges than to understand every bit of the Universe. They would immerse in an ever-lasting knowledge-seeking process in order to fully comprehend what is now a mystery to us. Such beings would be able to engineer planets and stars, build massive worlds and interact with yet unknown forces in order to simply change the Universe to their needs. Eventually, these beings would harvest the necessary knowledge to develop custom-made wormholes, thus making almost instantaneously inter-stellar traveling possible. At some point, traveling to opposite sides of the Universe would become trivial.

The acquired knowledge throughout this Universe-domination process would also allow these beings to overcome the physical barriers of their bodies. Why depend on a physical body (even if robotic) if you can simply upload all your knowledge into a cosmic cloud of energy? At this point, it wouldn't even make any sense to keep the concept of embodiment just for the sake of being able to distinguish between beings. They would probably merge into a single supreme collective being of intelligence that could expand over the entire Universe.

After all this, there is only one final challenge: to fight entropy. The second law of thermo-dynamics is the last frontier in this evolution process. When the Universe

finally decays into a mesh of all-equal atoms, there won't be any more power sources to live from. And in order to guarantee survival, this supreme being will have had to acquire all the necessary knowledge to survive in such conditions. Many well-known authors<sup>[3]</sup> have already explored this scenario and have simply stated that this is the whole-purpose of the Universe: to last just enough time to create the necessary intelligence that will trigger the creation of the next Universe. In other words, the Big Bang.

## **Are our Gods astronauts or scientists?**

Before having to face the ultimate challenge of surviving onto the next Universe and whilst exploring the Universe, this supreme collective being would most likely encounter other civilizations in its path. Which leads to one of my initial questions: assuming that other civilizations somewhere in the Universe could have already reached this point in their evolution, why haven't we witnessed their presence yet?

The UFOs fanatics will automatically say that we have in fact witnessed their presence. And the proof is in all the sightings of those flying saucers and little green men. It could be. They could be alien astronauts just looking to explore our corner of the Universe. I'm not the one to deny it. But I'm skeptic by nature and I find it very hard to believe that beings from outer space that have managed to overcome the challenges of traveling across distances of several light-years away, would also have devised a way to make their presence invisible to us, if they wished to. And if their purpose was to be seen, then why not actually engage in a communication process that would cast absolutely no doubt whatsoever of their being here? It just seems a very bad taste (not to say expensive) joke on their part.

One could also argue that we haven't witnessed their presence because they wish not to. It could be due to the simple principle of choosing not to interfere with the evolution of societies they encounter that haven't still reached a certain level of comprehension of the Universe and that their interference could lead to a social or economic rupture in those societies. It makes sense. But what if, instead, they decide not to interact with us because we are a byproduct of their work? Some<sup>[4]</sup> support the theory that our existence (as we perceive it) is nothing more than a simulation carried out by some supreme intelligent being. Imagine something similar to

**Douglas Adams's** scenario (in the **Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy**) where planet Earth is actually a giant computer which goal is to answer the **Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything**. I guess it would piss a lot of people if it turned out that God was in fact a scientist.

## **What if the Singularity is intangible?**

What if the reason why we haven't witnessed an alien Singularity is because the event itself is intangible? This could be caused by a number of different reasons. Consider the simple fact that civilizations are fundamentally flawed because of greedy power-seeking beings, whose actions lead them into unnecessary wars and destruction. And since we have already reached a point in our evolution where we have the power to destroy ourselves (and render the planet inhabitable in the process) it's fair to say that we're lucky that we're still here<sup>[5]</sup>. Or consider instead that our society doesn't find a solution to the scarcity problem before we develop the necessary technology to address it? The rate at which the planet's population is growing will have dark consequences on the geo-politic relations between nations and that will only lead to more wars.

What about the rate of change associated with the Singularity itself? Will humans be able to keep up with it? Perhaps that is the reason why no Singularity has ever been spotted, at least by us. Perhaps humans will fight this change and cause our destruction in the process. I can see it easily happening. Consider religious fanatics engaging in terrorist acts because they oppose any scientific advance that even slightly resembles an act of God, like achieving immortality. Or people that simply repudiate the machine-human merging process. Or consider instead the simple fact that being immortal will have such a shattering effect on the way we perceive our life and the goals we set for ourselves and others around us that life itself will be void of meaning. People simply don't like change.

## **No catharsis**

This is the problem with the Singularity. Its own concept defies the notion of what it is, what will be. It's a change we probably won't be able to understand or that our

civilization won't be able to keep up with, for a very long time. Like this post, it's not meant to offer closure on this subject but instead to fuel your curiosity and lead you to ask some of these questions. I, for one, welcome our [fill-in-the-blank] overlords [6] and especially your opinions on this subject.

[1] **We could have been there already.**<sup>[↩]</sup>

[2] More on that subject **here.**<sup>[↩]</sup>

[3] Start with **this lovely short story** by Isaac Asimov.<sup>[↩]</sup>

[4] For interesting discussions on the subject of the Universe as a simulation, engage in conversation with **this turing-certified dude** :)<sup>[↩]</sup>

[5] Just imagine if Hitler had access to nukes!<sup>[↩]</sup>

[6] **The overlord meme.**<sup>[↩]</sup>