



“Musing from the Hill” by Susan Crossett

as seen on the *Dunkirk Observer* on Fridays
and the *Jamestown Post-Journal* on Saturdays



My Singular Take on a Very Small Part of My Universe

Published February 26, 2021

My column on Singularity brought two recommendations of books I might like to read. Surprising myself, I happily succumbed to both suggestions.

Saving dessert for last, I turned first to “The Singularity is Near” by Ray Kurzweil. The author defines his term as “a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed.” “Although neither utopian nor dystopian,” the author continues, “this epoch will transform the concepts that we rely on to give meaning to our lives, from our business models to the cycle of human life, including death itself.” “We will be able to reengineer all the organs and systems in our biological bodies and brains to be vastly more capable.”

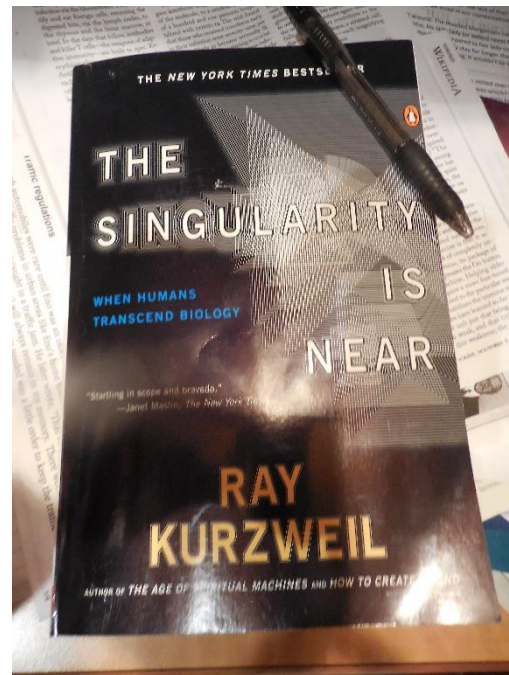
What we'll gain will be physically introduced “to see inside [the brain], model it, and simulate its regions. . . We will ultimately understand the principles of operation underlying the full range of our own thinking, knowledge that will provide us with powerful procedures for developing the software of intelligent machines.” And by “intelligent machines” he means us.

“The human brain is a complex hierarchy of complex systems, but it does not represent a level of complexity beyond what we are already capable of handling.”

All this will be done by the introduction of billions of nanobots (robots designed at the molecular level) into the capillaries of the brain. As Kurzweil answers: “In the 2020s we will routinely have nanobots in our bloodstream keeping us healthy and augmenting our mental capabilities. By the time they work well they will be inexpensive and widely used.”

I'm a bit squeamish thinking of gazillion little mechanical things zooming around in my head and had to wonder who this man was.

“Although I am now fifty-six, a comprehensive test of my biological aging . . . measured my biological age at forty. . . These results are not accidental; I have been very aggressive about reprogramming my biochemistry. I take 250 supplements (pills) a day and receive a half-dozen intravenous therapies each week (Basically nutritional supplements delivered directly into my bloodstream. . . Approaching this as an engineer, I measure dozens of levels of nutrients, hormones, and metabolic by-products in my blood



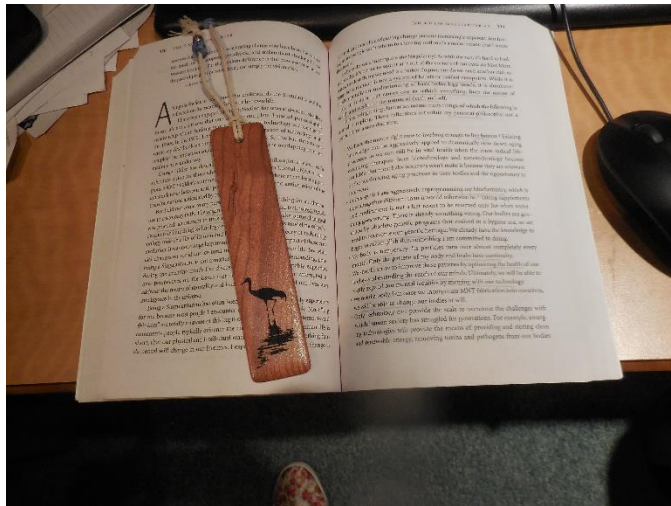
and other body samples.” How could the poor man have time to experience the world around him? Nowhere does he speak of personal enjoyment – beyond what his nanobots can eventually produce in our brains.

My personal opinion follows and is just that though I did find a few issues with which I disagree.

For starters, the author talks of antiquity with its horse and buggy, the vinyl record (which I'm reading is staging a comeback), the manual typewriter (hurrah for being able to correct without having to type over an entire page, the bane of my college years) but also the harpsichord. I very pleased it's still with us, hardly obsolete at all. I suspect the poor man also lacks the time or motivation to enjoy music.

“The most complex capacity of the human brain – what I would regard as its cutting edge – is our emotional intelligence. Sitting uneasily at the top of our brain's complex and interconnected hierarchy is our ability to perceive and respond appropriately to emotions, to interact in social situations, to have a moral sense,” and so on. I've done enough reading about “lower” animals (I'm thinking particularly right now of the elephant and of course dogs) who can also “respond appropriately” and then some.

Further on he hypes FutureGen as the “world's first zero-emissions energy plant based on fossil fuels.” “The Department of Energy is terminating financing in the FutureGen 2.0 projects, ending construction plans for one of the most expensive and high-profile carbon capture proposals in the world.” February 4, 2015.



Once immersed, however, I found this book hard to put down. It's impossible to skim – any more than a hungry man could take only one bite at the best smorgasbord imaginable. I'd recommend this book to anyone interested in such things – but as a talented piece of science fiction.

Once I was ready for the “frosting,” “A Singular Man” by J.P. Donleavy, I discovered I had enough on Kurzweil to more than fill a column.

The Donleavy novel. is not, to my sense, “excruciatingly funny” nor for those easily offended. Halfway through I had to set the book down long enough to find out more about this Irish author who, at times, seems to be channeling James Joyce.

More on this in the future.

Written December 20, 2020