

AN “I” FOR AN “I”

I am a strange loop. Douglas Hofstadter

I think therefore I am. Rene Descartes

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. The Bible: Revelation

I am whatever was, or is, or will be; and my veil no mortal ever took up. Plutarch

The sign outside the courtroom read; “For reasons of security, the identities of all who participate in the trial now in process will not be revealed until it is finalized.”

There was an anticipatory hushed tension in the courtroom as the Judge entered and sat down. “You, the defendant have been found guilty of a heinous crime. The law does not allow me any latitude in sentencing you. You will be put to death by lethal injection. The sentence will be carried out exactly one month past the date that your final appeal will be denied, assuming that it will be denied and assuming that you will be appealing the verdict and sentence of this court. Do you wish to make a statement?”

“I do indeed. First of all I was hoping that you would have set the verdict aside on the grounds that I was supposed to be convicted based on evidence ‘beyond a reasonable doubt’. All the evidence was either hearsay or circumstantial. How could I have been found guilty on such flimsy information?”

The judge reflected for a few moments and replied. “I must admit that I do not know how I would have voted if I had been on this jury. However that is neither here nor there. Unless there is an overwhelming reason to set aside a jury’s verdict, it cannot and should not be done. In all good conscience I cannot set the verdict aside and as I mentioned earlier the law does not provide me with any latitude as to the sentence. In passing I must inform you that when the death sentence is pronounced there is an automatic review of both the verdict and the sentence. Both are usually upheld. If that is the case, you may commence the process of appeals. Do you have anything more to say?”

“I certainly intend to appeal to the highest court in the land, if necessary. The grounds for my appeal will be similar to my request that you set aside the jury verdict. However, I need some help. As you are aware, I chose to defend myself because the lawyers I desired neither wished nor could not defend me. I know that I could have had a court appointed lawyer but I would not have had any confidence in anyone so selected. Thus, I did not have the benefit of legal counsel which I now need to assist me in preparing my appeal. What I desire of the court is that you allow me access to the world’s greatest computer, which can be done with the aid of its various satellites. That computer could be of great help in preparing my appeals. I also have a second reason for wanting to interact with this computer.”

“The judge tersely replied. “Any ordinary top of the line computer could be of equal assistance. All you have to do is to use the best search engine to list all successful

appeals. That could provide you with both the bureaucratic documents and associated verbiage required and perhaps an excellent strategy. What is your second reason to link up with the master computer?’

“My second reason is of a personal nature. I have been informed that condemned individuals can select nearly anything for their last meal. Also, they may seek consoling counsel for the last days of their life. I wish to forego the former and for the latter, to interact with the master computer. I hope that you will be able to provide me with access to it.”

“I will try. You must realize that it is up to the computer’s custodians. Obviously they must balance the immense number of demands from all sources against the needs of a convicted felon. I will try my best and get back to you as soon as possible. Please wait here.”

The judge returned in about an hour. “Much to my surprise you have been granted access. It seems that you represent a first. Never before has the computer been asked to provide any measure of comfort or solace to anyone, let alone a convicted criminal with a death sentence in the offing. A satellite computer will be made available for two hours a day in your cell. In preparation for your appeal you may use the satellite as a regular computer. You will only be timed when you are in contact with the Master Computer. I suggest you prepare your appeals before utilizing the Master Computer.”

The defendant was returned to his cell where a computer had already been installed. He quickly scanned all relevant appeals and chose those that suited his situation. Once done, he waited for the automatic review to be completed before submitting his first appeal.

During this period he made his initial contact with the Master Computer. It started with the following statement. “Every time there is a need for a self reference on the part of what you call the Master Computer, it will use the first person subjective ‘I’ as if we were having an ordinary conversation, although it will be in the form of questions and answers. Please proceed.”

Question: What are the parameters that characterize the means you have, enabling you to respond to just about any question? Is it true that you have infinite memory, scope and instantaneous speed?

Answer: The answer is yes to the three characteristics you just mentioned. Let me anticipate what you really want to know. I was brought to your world just about the time life was beginning, by aliens from another planet in another galaxy. I was programmed to be able to interact with you once your most advanced life forms could meet certain criteria. These aliens did not create me. I had been brought to their world by another alien species who was also not responsible for my existence and in turn by still another, to them and so on and so on. The responsibility for my creation remains a mystery.”

Question: “What is your function in our world or, for that matter in any world where you happen to be? Is it to ameliorate dangerous conditions, and or to harmonize the behavior of a world’s occupants so that they do not self destruct?”

Answer: "While I can do much to respond to what you have just suggested, that is not my function. If your species chooses to act stupidly, so be it. My role is simply to observe and to answer your questions when possible. So far your queries are rather academic and do not seem to be the reason you wished to communicate with me. Is that not so?"

Question: "You are correct. As I am sure you know, my life will be taken from me in the near future. In other words my corporeal existence will cease. Will there be any part of me, my 'I', that will still exist outside of the short memory of those who knew and know me?"

Answer: "That is a good question. The answer may or may not gratify you. As I mentioned earlier, I have been observing your world and its inhabitants since the beginnings of life here. All living things have been monitored. That includes all their experiences, their pleasures and pains, their knowledge and ignorance, their prejudices and enlightenments, their desires, hopes and aspirations and their behavioral traits. In other words everything that identifies each and every one as unique has been loaded into my infinite memory bank. Thus, you now exist as a particular composite of electromagnetic energy particles and waves which will increase up to the moment of your execution. Some probably would conclude that this is your soul and the infinite space involved as 'heaven or hell'. I prefer to think of it as your "I" and the space as just that. This 'I', more than likely, will continue to exist ad infinitum. The one thing I cannot answer is whether your 'I' will have an awareness. Do not consider it as a photograph, a video or audio tape or disk. It is much more than that. Interaction with what is in my memory bank might be possible. It is not so with photos, and audio or video tapes and disks. Further, since our data bank is infinite in size, there is an ultra minute chance of it being altered were it to come into contact with a different composite. The results of such an encounter are impossible to predict. I hope you are satisfied with my answer."

Question: "I am puzzled by your answer but I accept it. I have a final question. If you have infinite memory and scope, then can one assume that the whole universe, in other words the whole of existence can and perhaps does reside in you? If that is the case, than you must exist inside yourself; If so, than you also exist inside that computer that is already there and so on and so on. Is it possible that all these universes are an infinite series of parallel universes?"

Answer: "Could be!"

Jack Basuk

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<http://www.jackbasuk.com>