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Criticisms Of Technological Singularity And Exponential Growth

In this set of articles I described the idea of technological singularity. This prediction asserts that progress in technology starts very slowly at first, then grows faster and faster. Eventually, technology will progress so quickly that the future will be completely unimaginable and different than it is today. Proponents of this theory say that change is occurring so rapidly in today's day and age that by 2024 there will be computers out there that are just as intelligent and capable of the human brain!

Of course, not everyone believes that the singularity is a feasible prediction. First of all, a number of people feel that no computer or machine will ever be capable of being as intelligent as a human being in the first place. Others argue with the theory of exponential growth, that in actuality, the rate of technological innovation is actually now declining rather than rapidly increasing. Some critics don't dispute that there is exponential growth, but feel as though it is not an adequate predictor of change. They are quick to point to the example of quantum theory. The quantum was conceived in 1900, and theory existed and was accepted around twenty five years later. But it took more than forty years to yield any meaningful numbers from the theory.

One very intriguing argument against technological singularity is a study of patents per thousand persons over the course of the years. The number of patents actually peaked in the years from 1850-1900, and has been on the decline since. The critics that adhere to this argument claim that as complexity grows, the more limited things become, and humans are growing less and less creative as a result. So the chances of human beings designing a supercomputer seems slim to none from this stance.

Finally, critics specifically find problems with the main proponent of the singularity theory, Ray Kurzweil's chart of progress. Kurzweil bases his theory that technology is progressing faster and faster on these charts. In his book "The Singularity is Near" Kurzweil provides fifteen charts of the history of human evolution from various experts and sources, all pointing to the fact that change occurs slowly at first, then gets faster as the gaps between moments of progress get smaller and smaller. Some critics claim that a chart that is set up like this is simply biased towards proving what he sets forth to claim, others say that many of the early evolutionary events on these charts appear to be chosen arbitrarily.

Whether you agree with the theory of technological singularity or not, there is no denying that it is indeed a very intriguing idea to think about. Are computers the next step in evolution? Is it simply typical human hubris to believe that we will always be on the top of the food chain? These are all ideas that will become more and more prevalent as the years go by and technology progresses.

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