Lecture 6 - The Singularity

James Rising   MIT OpenCourseWare

What did you think of the reading?

Is the singularity likely? Is it inevitable? Will it happen in 10 years or 100? What technologies will drive us toward singularity?

How fast can humans handle change?

Remember when the cell phone hit MIT? One year, all the frosh came in with their new-fangled devices; by the next year, all the upperclassmen had them too. How significant of a cultural shift did that technological change produce?

What will the approach to the singularity be like?

As we approach the singularity, not only will technological change become more rapid; so will scientific, political, cultural, and artistic change. The nature of work, play, and relationships will change– as they always have, at a slower pace– now over the course of years instead of centuries.

What technological shifts will characterize the early singularity?

- Nanotech: nanobots will permeate our bodies and the air; we will interact with nanotechnology in home and work.

- Artificial Intelligence: A.I. will become a normal part of everyday life, as you interact with it in your home; science will begin to be progressed by A.I.

- Biotech: We will use technology to augment our minds and our bodies.

Note that many of these trends have already begun.

Are we already there, as far as humankind is concerned?

The rate of progress in science outstrips our ability to keep up with it. Far more technological and informatic inventions are produced than we have the capacity to embrace. Maybe the singularity-proper won't appear any different from this.

Do we want the singularity? Can we stop it?

Is the singularity good for humanity? Could we choose to roll-back certain kinds of progress– like the Japanese after inventing the gun– and keep progress on a human level?

ES.256 The Coming Years
Spring 2008