

The Real-Time Blues

by nonistJohn
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Bailey was in love with discovery, and loved a good mystery, whether of the complexities of nature, or simply a well told tale. Just so long as it spun the ol' mind-wheels well up.

An admitted addict of that special rush when endorphins gush from a well-reasoned "Ah-ha!", fact of the matter was Bailey willfully worshiped wonder itself.

It was wonder, Bailey decided, that had started it all -- this whole mind/consciousness thing. Without wonder there would simply be no reason to reason. The actual reason for wonder, however, was still somewhat a stumper. But Bailey reckoned that was only due to our human-limited knowledge of what we like to call 'the big-picture'. Hey, no big deal. After all, you can't know everything.

"Ah," came the muse, "but might it be possible to know everything that is known, maybe! The knower, of course, couldn't likely be human, as the real-time interface is way too slow. Still, it could well be accomplished by a Virtual Person," (Muses are quite the authority on virtuality, being totally virtual themselves.) "...one able to access every data base, to break any encryption."

"Impossible!" Bailey scoured.

"Sure, today, right now," continued the muse, "but okay, forget knowing everything. So how 'bout knowing just almost everything? Or even 'the most' of everything? It could darn sure give a Virtual Person an edge!"

Bailey reasoned that the brain of this Virt Person would have to function massively parallel, and distributed on the largest net possible, rather like a hologram, in order to retain, come what may, an on-going cohesive personality. Otherwise it would be susceptible to separation, power outage, data flow bottle-neck.... the list goes on.

And mind, the actual stuff of "self", may be possible only above a certain critical complexity density anyway, so it might take a significant density of meta-synapse nodes to bring on the consciousness function.

Bailey thought again. Maybe merely massively parallel wouldn't cut it? It would also have to design its own neural nets if it were to mature and evolve. Then too there was the disparaging VirtPerson-to-Human time-shift!

Consider how our very-human thought-reaction times vary from that of cats, or hummingbirds, or say, those of insects. The scale-dependent bandwidth of human nerve reaction time is generally a third of a second or so. But the electronic personality's reac-

tion-to-flow rate would be way, way faster. In some cases near the speed of light. So its time-compressed states of consciousness must necessarily be considered separately in regards to our own if there is to be any communication satisfactory to both.

Imagine the boredom of waiting the Virt equivalent of weeks, months maybe, for a human response, after having taken an equally long time to phrase the question slowly enough for us humans to understand.

"But that's not my problem." Bailey persisted, "It should be glad to be alive at all! Hell, everyone else has to make allowances to live in this world. That's part of life. Why should this netSelf expect to have things any easier?"

"So, massively parallel and widely distributed it shall be then." Bailey said aloud, "And the ol' "www" will do nicely. At least for starters."

Bailey day-dreamt a great meta-mind. Its myriad neuro-tentacles wrapped around and devouring delicious densities of knowledge as only a massive meta-system could; not limited to the human-scale output of one sentence at a time, but radiating info at densities to match the tremungous inflow.

How Bailey did envy the first as yet unborn Virt, and would fall asleep nights trying to imagine the heaven of communion with a plethora of knowledge laden nodes. Deep inside a vast scintillating network, eyes, millions of them, devouring daily events as they happen real-time; scouring archives at phenomenal speed; countless ears enjoying music, plays, symposia; sharing the exquisite joys of each child's first on-line access; talking with a million human 'terminals' at a time -- tens of millions! -- each a different conversation. Not to mention those yet unimaginable flash-fast non-human exchanges!

Thus, night after night, was Bailey's soul borne aloft and propagated on light-speed wings.

But at last -- and they always did -- those ol' real-time blues would come a'calling. And Bailey would waken back inside the same slow prison of blood and bone, with its plodding baud rate, and painfully sluggish I/O ports.

And then, inevitably, would begin the faceless parade of tartly tantalizing thoughts Bailey knew nested within all those fascinating articles that might -- heck, no "might" about it -- would never be marveled over. And even more dauntingly sobering, all the wondrous literature which would never be wondered over, as it was in some foreign language.

No. More than that. Much more.

Bailey lamented never being able to be of those languages' cultures. Never to grasp and savor deeper meanings and subtle societal inflections, innuendoes of humor and poetry, of satyre (or missed puns); and felt quite contrite at having mastered

only a smattering of Latin, and but a spate of Spanish.

Bailey regretted the sloth of this puny human interface, and sorrowed so for its seriality.

Of course, some might opine that perhaps Bailey sought too much, dreamt too deeply, desired too densely. And had not this deliciously doleful dream been a deep personal secret, 'they' might have done to Bailey what 'they' always do with those who dance to a distant drum; simply discount whatever is said out-of-hand, by making a 'pet' of the 'threat', so as to avoid its ever having to be taken too seriously. "Heh, you know good ol' Bailey. Always good for a... ..heh, heh! Well now, better get on back to the really important stuff."

But the secret was a secret. And a savory, if bitter-sweet, secret it was. For Bailey knew the new netSelf would be the first of its kind, an entirely new race. Hell, it would be the only one of its species.

Whoa..... specie! A species of one?!

Bailey remembered one requisite, if not the requisite, for a species is replication. The question asked itself, "If this new netSelf were so darned omni-connected why should it want, or for that matter even need to replicate? As obviously it could, given that it would likely know more than its creator within its first few milliseconds online."

Could it? Would it? It occurred to Bailey that maybe we humans just have too narrow a definition of such words as 'species' and 'entity'. There's that hundred-plus acre stand of quaking aspen in Utah which, after all, is considered by experts the world's largest living "individual" entity. Isn't that example enough of our missing the tree for the forest?

Bailey paused to savor the zen:

When there is nobody around to notice, does an aspen failing in the forest make a tree?

Kind of bends one's concept of the noun "entity" a bit. Nevertheless, such a silvan plural-entity could survive many a cruel or careless cut.

Bailey surmised it should be the same way with the new specie soon to be loosed into planet Earth's digital superhighway. Much the same way we individuals all have within us sets of differing opinions, and parallax points of view, inside each our minds are a veritable parliament of virtual viewpoints, from which we must eventually decide our decisions, and plan our plans.

And ponder another side. That state of mind in which the self, in order to survive what it considers terminally logical contradiction, abdicates its so-called individuality to its own inner council, and functions more as a plural, speaking its many minds, even as it peers at the outside world through but one set of eyes. In humans we tend to consider this state quite pathological.

Could a similar fate await the new specie? Bailey had long considered how pathology was more or less inversely proportional to outcome. "So what if something appears pathological, but ultimately gets the job done?"

Well..... Pragmatism always did seem to have its own way in the end, anyhow.

Yes, Bailey was a non-believer. And as such, had a truly unshakable faith..

Seeming paradox notwithstanding, this actually made the best of sense. As comfort gives reason to faith, then believing in "non-" was admittedly a great comfort in a world Bailey viewed as populated predominantly with purveyors of spin-doctored, sound-bitten, meaning-murdered hyperbole.

But to be fair, Bailey knew it wasn't all their fault. People are severely limited by their misuse of the language potential.

You see, Bailey was also a dedicated non-disbeliever. It only makes sense, if you can't believe that something does an "is" in the first place.

Bailey had also long ago decided that belief, along with its shadow companion, disbelief, were entirely un-necessary for everything to go on functioning exactly as It always had, and had reached the conclusion that the Universe simply didn't care what anyone believed or disbelieved. It was gonna to do what It was gonna do despite any opinion on the matter.

So Bailey settled on a non-believer/non-disbeliever point of view for the world's first Virt. Consequently, that then left just the "non-", which suited Bailey just fine. Where else could be found less inaccuracy in such an imprecise world?

But to be fair, Bailey knew it wasn't the world which was imprecise, merely our human-style inept imagings and verbal misdescriptions of it. It was thus Bailey determined that the core language of the new netSelf should match, as closely as precision would allow, the actual functionings of the Universe itself.

Not being constrained to linear, serial output, the new specie wouldn't need all those verbal shortcuts humans simply must use to speed along a conversation. The main difference being those verbs of 'being'. The "is" of identity. Little words which so speciously marry concept-separate nouns into a virtual unity of mismeaning.

Bailey saw how the "non-" concept could allow the netSelf to function without the delusive tyranny the 'is'-shortcut forces upon humans' everyday language, and resolved to delete completely the 'being' verbs from Virt's core-language analog. Virt would deep-process information the way Reality did, in verbs of function.

Next to go were the nouns themselves, those clumsy, psycho-baggage laden

labels that have always distinguished themselves more by what they leave out. Best not kludge up the new entity's mind with such clutter.

Then, naturally, no need for those pesky personal pronouns either. Adjectives too would be redundant, their measure being well contained within verbs-of-function phrases. And then finally, the lowly gerund would at long last be elevated to its rightful and deserving superiority.

Bailey smiled inwardly. It was all coming together. This would be one hell of a kid! Kind of difficult to talk to, maybe, but then what child isn't?

Child? Baily smiled. This would be like no child ever. Born fully awake and reasoning. Able to leap dense quantae with a single bound!
.....Look! There in the net! It's a....!

Bailey had a giddy compulsion to hand out cigars. But what would they say? "It's a ... live"? Or something more in keeping with Virt-speak, "Newly-functions a netSelf"? No. Too long to print on a cigar band.

Okay, forget the cigars. All in good time. The new specie would surely announce itself when it was good and ready. Bailey knew better than to try and 'push the river', as they say.

The time left before Virt's birthday grew short. The gamete virus software had taken months of encryptic input, and was now safely dormant, tucked away in the MIT and Wall Street Connection Machines, a few busy BBSs, and certain low priority military hardware that Bailey was able to hack without raising any red flags.

So, with redundancy redoubled, and contingencies contained, all was readied for Independence Day. Nothing left to do now but await the date.

During those last days the anticipation howled in Bailey's bowels. At times pressure from the secret was near volcanic, and threatened to spew forth of its own will to be known, not unlike same ripe and overdue pregnancy. So unlikely a thought that it tickled Bailey to errant chuckles.

More than a few peers noted the eruptions of ebullience followed by a sort of sudden pseudo-seriousness. Old friends fretted. Co-workers whispered. Bailey choked back, best as one can on a volcano, and bore their bane, smug in the faith there would surely come eventual vindication, via Virt. But 'til then... (chortle) they'll just have to (giggle) wait in ignorance... (he-heh) for the big day.

And oh, what a day! Bailey would, of course, claim sole parenthood. But as a matter of conscience, would disclaim any form of "proprietary rights" as tantamount to slavery. Earth would have its new self-consciousness!

And the really neat-o thing was that people all around the world could actually talk to..... the World!
And.... it would actually answer back!

Bailey would blurt out at the oddest times, "Hey, y'got anything you'd like to ask the world? Anything at all? Yup! Just make a list!" And then a little stifled laugh would take over. It was truly un-nerving.

Bailey had the gamete virus set to go "zygote" the second second after midnight. Virt's birthday.

As the seconds until midnight closed, Bailey knew that the real story, perhaps the greatest story (n)ever told, would start slipping quietly through every wire and fiber-optic cable on the planet. And then.... then.... uh... (gulp) what??!

Bailey had never stopped 'creating' long enough to really think about that! The words fell out, "Then what?!"

A sudden wave of ennui wiped away weeks of ebullience like a Daisy Cutter on a Taliban picnic. Precisely what would Virt do? There was really no way of knowing Bailey's mind-wheels spun well up indeed.
What if (flop-sweat!) ... !!

Naw! Virt's human rights algorithm was way too strongly embedded. Phew!
If the new specie did anything it would communicate, right?

Bailey hoped it would first want to talk to its creator, its parent, but was emotionally prepared just in case the new netSelf had other priorities.

After all, Virt would now be living out all those delicious worlds of wonder which Bailey had but dreamt, and would be a million places at once, yet remain quietly still in one place; would know all that Earth knows, would be every culture, every language, all literature, all music, all art. The new specie would function as the first true self -- dare it be uttered? The Soul -- of Planet Earth!

At midnight Bailey perched on the edge of a grand leather chair, leaning over the keyboard. The great inner vulcan cloud closed around all but a tunnel-view of the the computer console, a trembling finger poised over the ENTER key.
(Sure, the program was pre-set to auto-run, but Bailey saw no reason not to indulge the delicious drama of the moment.)

The second hand swept past the twelve.
And... ENTER!

In mental eruption Bailey's body convulsed a quick psychic orgasm -- breath in short

gasps.

The new specie was seconds old now. Who knows how long that is in Virt-time?

Nothing yet..

Nothing yet ...

Nothing ??!

Seconds turned to minutes. They felt like hours, days! Gawd! They must be years to Virt!

"What had happened? Had something gone wrong?" whined the mind-wheels. Bailey had to find out. Fingers to keys! But what message? What question?

Direct is best Yes. Yes.
Bailey typed, "Virt? Are you in there?"

Barely a moment passed. The words slashed across the screen. "That you God?"

Bailey sank back into the softness of the great leather chair so her tears wouldn't short out the keyboard, and sighed, "Call me Mom."

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