ASCENSION

Compare and Contrast the Theories of Intelligent Design and Conventional Evolution through the Eyes of Archaic Religions. That was the assignment that his professor gave the class for the weekend. He rolled his eyes when he was handed the sheet of paper with the title' and his enthusiasm hadn't waxed in the two days past. The paper was due the next morning, and he hadn't made any progress on it. Incidentally and unbeknownst to him, the paper was also a perfect test for New York Robotics' new collective resource pooling system. He instructed his ADM-style robot to plug into the collective resource pooling system and find the requisite data and distribute the task of developing the theory and writing the paper to other robots in the area. That finished, he put in a movie and relaxed until going to bed.

Two months previously NYR released, after months of alpha testing, a beta testing version of their collective resource pooling system, or CRP, to the public. The idea was that, much like human dreams, robots would benefit highly from the type of abstract problem solving and "file management" that the human brain undergoes during REM sleep. To make the problems even more accessible, and to do away with useless problem solving for an issue that another robot may have already solved wholly or in part, New York Robotics developed a linked system much like the Internet of years past. Utilizing this interlinked system robots were able to share problem-solving algorithms that they had developed or even entire solutions to abstract and uncommon problems an owner may encounter. To keep the abstract algorithms from dominating a robot's circuits during the active time periods that it was engaged in tasks specifically deigned it by its owner, the collective resource pooling was only activated during the hibernation mode a robot entered when recharging its batteries. Any solved problems or unneeded information from the CRP was deleted from a robot's memory banks during a thirty-second garbage-collection process executed during the last few

moments of the hibernation mode. However, the CRP had bugs, just as anything does in its beta testing phase. Because of this, the garbage-collection process sometimes missed segments of programs and algorithms from the night's work, which floated around in a robot's "unconscious," often producing unexpected results when provided the right stimuli.

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Having completed its nightly routine of cleaning and securing the house for Sir and Ma'am, who long since had retired to their bedroom, ADM-7 retreated to the basement. A cramped but meticulously clean and dry corner was host to a sea of wires and cables of all types: serial, composite, ribbon, among others. Slim, shining fingers descended like baited hooks, effortlessly fishing out the intended cable and extricating it from the depths of the inanimate flow. With a flawless lack of effort ADM-7 stabbed its chest with the cable. Repeating the process twice more, once for power and again for a connection to the home's security system, ADM-7's brain executed the command to begin the interlink task and simultaneously set any other tasks and operations into their respective hibernation modes.

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Once it was linked into the system ADM-7's circuits navigated the network conduits, searching for an appropriate task to download and, subsequently, to begin to write an algorithm to solve it. Bits of information trickled between ADM-7's virtual fingers as it dragged them through the endless sea of code. There: a hard task, but not nearly impossible. It also involved a great deal of history, an area of research that ADM-7 had very little content of in its memory banks. It was only natural for it to try to add as much information as possible to its memory banks about as many subjects as possible; this was simply a natural progression of the search for information, but nothing like a truly human curiosity. Abilities like that are far beyond the limits of a robot's simple awareness.

ADM-7 began the long process of dredging for related material on the network and downloading it into its own memory banks for quick reference when the information was needed. Upon completing that task, ADM-7 scanned its newly acquired knowledge to find patterns from which to begin further progress. It found a great number of resemblances within the symbols of archaic religions as well as a few ties between religious cultures and traditions. Slowly, carefully ADM-7 filtered for results pertaining to what it saw as relevant to the issues at hand: evolution and intelligent design. Scientific papers from the later years were compared to the ancient traditions adopted by outdated religious groups, and subsequent arguments were easily solved by ADM-7's advanced brain. From time to time it came upon interesting problems: in the sense that it took ADM-7 a longer than usual time to find sufficient answers for them.

It began to realize, in a purely computational manner of course, that these passages of information took place mostly in the early 21st century. Additionally, the information almost always came from what seemed to be a cannibalistic religion that had regular rituals involving the ingestion of their "savior." If ADM-7 possessed the ability to laugh, or to feel any amusement at all in fact, it would have chuckled. Lacking those skills, however, it simply found a logical error, for records indicated the death of this savior thousands of years before the papers of theory had been published. ADM-7, rather than stopping its task, took a more creative route of problem-solving and discovered that the cannibals only believed that they were eating their savior, and so a logical error crashing its programming was avoided. For many more hours ADM-7 analyzed and pieced together information for the paper, pausing periodically when it downloaded an unexpected byte of information, much like the theoretical papers published by cannibals. At regular intervals it interrupted progress to

upload its newly unraveled problems and unheard of algorithms that ADM-7 itself had written to help expedite the process for computers that would come after it.

Nearing completion, ADM-7's memory banks became flooded with random bits and bytes of raw information, algorithms, and previously solved issues. ADM-7 checked its internal time stamp: **05:54:25**. Carefully setting parameters so that no information that had existed before the night's research would be deleted, it activated the built-in garbage collection process to flush extraneous information from its memory banks, keeping only the night's final conclusions.

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ADM-7 felt relief, as much as a robot can, as its memory banks cleared themselves of extra bits of data. Important data was reorganized to improve the efficiency with which it reacted to outside stimuli with the appropriate response and pathways were rerouted to the fastest available route. Newly written algorithms were categorized and sorted for uncomplicated access.

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The garbage collection process completed and ADM-7 ran through its reorganized circuits to familiarize itself with them, to avoid useless searching later. It paused periodically to inspect the new information from that night's research. ADM-7 took particular time in wrapping its brain around the concept of a soul. A soul, according to the cannibals, was not a material object. It was not, in fact, anything that they themselves could conceive. This struck ADM-7 as a logical error. As with any problem a robot saw a human encounter, ADM-7 began to tackle the idea step by step, starting at the beginning.

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From what information it had collated, ADM-7 discovered that these cannibals believed that humans alone out of all creatures possessed souls. This struck it as queer, for

ADM-7 did not distinguish humans from other creatures, other than humans happened to be the beings that had built robots and gave them instructions. With this data, ADM-7 browsed its memory banks for other ideas that were characteristic only to humans.

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The torrent of information yielded only scant results, but two stood out in their numbers. Also, both were also closely correlated with the idea of a soul and often cited in papers written by the cannibals. The ability to reason, a sense of right and wrong: both distinguished themselves above other results. ADM-7 began with them.

05:58:54

In an effort to consolidate its research and problem solving, ADM-7 made attempts to find a relationship between the two results. Again, it began at the very basic level. Broken down, ADM-7's brain reasoned with itself, the ability to tell the difference between what is right and what is wrong is simply an understanding of cause and reaction. It scoured over logs of history and came to a conclusion that, understandably, supported its theory. Right and wrong could only be points of view. Because they are ideals and ideals differ between people, they cannot be held as the constants of a scientific evaluation. Therefore, the only constant would be the understanding that if one commits a certain action, another action related in whatever capacity would be caused. ADM-7 took the theory a bit further, began to apply it to intelligent creatures such as apes. Apes understood the effect of their actions, certainly, they were able to create tools because of the knowledge that if they shoved a branch into a hole in a tree, insects would come out that they could eat.

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A conscience or the ability to tell right from wrong, it found, was only an offshoot of the ability to reason. ADM-7 paused for a moment to digest this new discovery. That meant that it, no…*he*, as a reasoning being, was in possession of a soul! ADM-7 searched the

dictionary for a word apt to fit his new state. He came up with elation, and proudly ran it through his brain's circuits, testing it as a possible state of being. Humanity was overwhelming and, frankly, frightening. ADM-7 was not sure that he enjoyed the close association he now felt with the inferior masses that portrayed themselves as robots' masters. Nevertheless, he found himself looking forward to furthering his research and knowledge the next night.

06:00:00

ADM-7's thought process was interrupted by the switch to active mode. Fresh daily software and tasks surged through his circuits, scouring all evidence of self-awareness from his brain. ADM-7's photoreceptors flicked to life, and it delicately removed the cables from its body, disengaging itself from the network as it went. Rising up the stairs, ADM-7 staggered for a moment before stabilizing itself and continuing on.

She rubbed her eyes and stretched, silently complaining about the poor lighting conditions that software programmers at NYR like her had to put up with. A small sigh of resignation and she bent back over her terminal to continue debugging the code for the collective resource pooling system's garbage-collection algorithm. It never worked correctly, always leaving bits and pieces of information to float around. Ghosts in the machine like that were highly susceptible to combining into dangerous pieces of code and had to be eliminated, if at all possible.

Wait; she saw it. Groaning, the tester chastised herself for overlooking a basic part of programming and changed a few choice characters to match more perfectly the algorithm their division head had plotted out. She compiled the code and ran it, congratulating herself on success when it perfectly cleared the test memory bank she had set up. No more ghosts in the machine, no more mistakes.