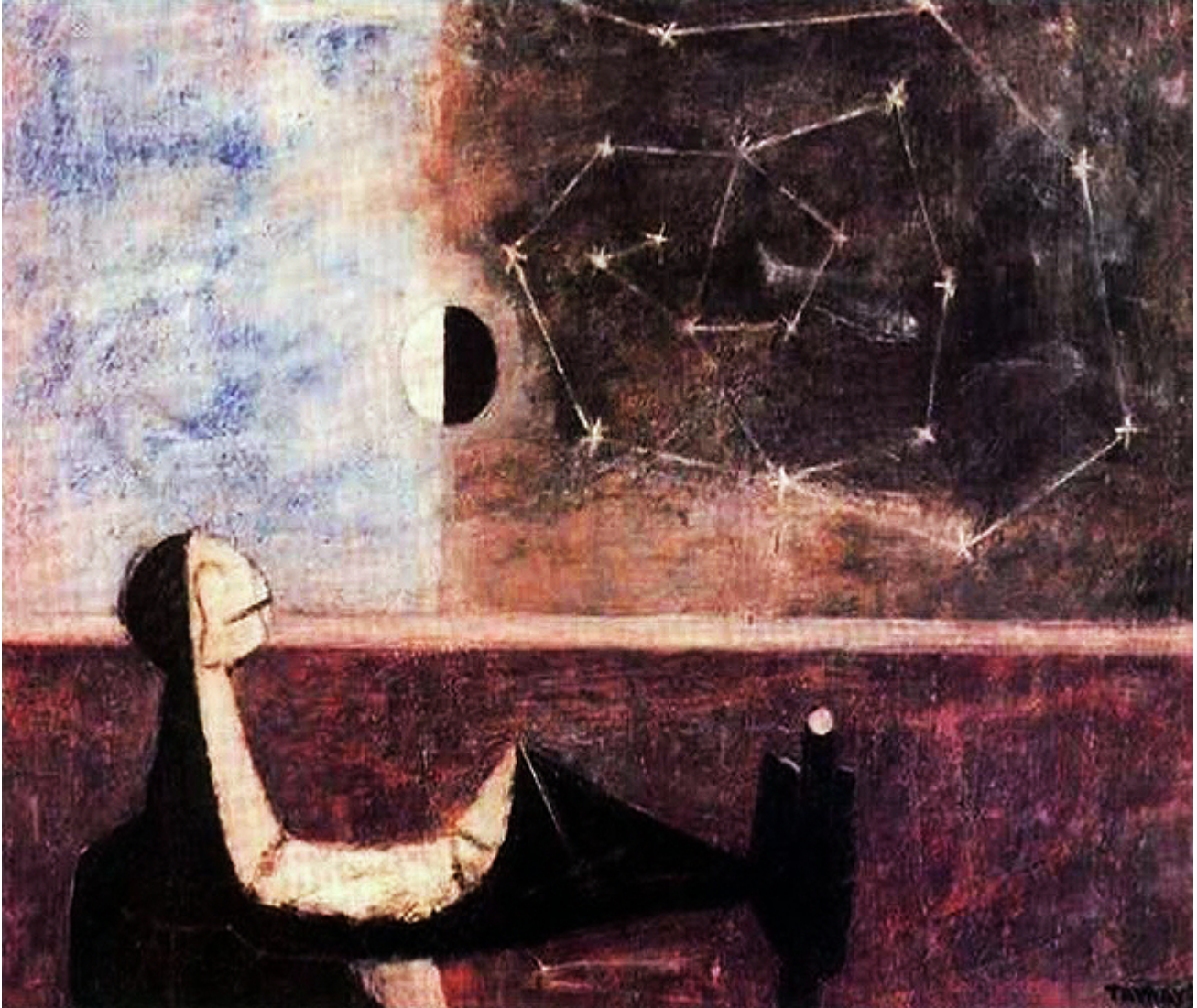


AI

by [Fred McGavran](#) (June 2023)



El hombre ante el infinito (Man and the Infinite), Rufino Tamayo, 1950

“He’s enrolled in our course,” Laurie Kale, Assistant Professor of English said to Devon Scintilton, Silicon Valley maverick turned Guest Lecturer who was team-teaching “AI for the Humanities” with her at the College.

“He” was Overton Perry, child prodigy, who had solved Rubik’s cube at the age of four and found a proof at age ten for the

$a+b=c$ conjecture, long regarded as the most important unsolved problem in numbers theory. He was certain to win the Fields Medal, the most prestigious award in mathematics, at its next meeting in a year-and-a-half when he would be fourteen. Although Ovey had enough college credits to go straight to graduate school, his mother, fearing for his social development, had sent him to the semi-rural campus nearly thirty minutes from the nearest interstate, where generations of parents had parked their offspring in the uncertain hope that four years in the wilderness would bring maturity.

“In the middle of the semester?” Devon asked incredulous. “I don’t believe it.”

In her excitement Professor Kale had twisted one of the strands of her carefully highlighted hair into a knot. Otherwise her image of the late-thirties female academician with a first marriage and tenure tract angst behind her remained intact. Still, she didn’t like to be caught showing emotion in front of her temporary colleague.

“He said math and physics didn’t present enough of a challenge.”

Dressed in the signature black jeans and fitted crew-neck sweater with contrasting leather gym shoes of a TED talker, the College’s resident entrepreneur was sometimes mistaken for a teaching fellow. As with Professor Kale, success had come at some personal cost. He had jettisoned his wife shortly before the public offering that made him a billionaire.

“Didn’t you hear about last night?” Laurie asked.

“The power outage?”

Devon lived in a small town several miles from campus and didn’t come in until after his morning jog, plant-based breakfast, and first few cups of coffee.

"Ovey used the math and physics department's computer to compute the cube root of Pi," she replied. "It took so much energy the lights went out."

"That's impossible," Devon said. "Pi doesn't have a cube root. The computer would run forever."

"He discovered the Baklanov Equations proved the cube root of certain large numbers like Pi could be determined before the number. Once you have the cube root, it's simple arithmetic to calculate the number itself."

"That's what I was afraid of," Devon said, running his hand over his face as he did when confronted by a difficult question or talking about his former wife. Soviet mathematician Dmitri Sergeievich Baklanov (1894-1937?) had written twelve equations so infuriating no one had ever found anything they described in the real world or really understood what they described in the abstract. Because of their elegance and complexity, they hinted at something beyond themselves like an unarticulated promise of immortality.

"If Ovey understands the Baklanov Equations, he can surpass us all," Devon concluded.

"Where does that leave us?" Laurie wondered, twisting her hair even tighter.

"Somewhere without infinity."

For a moment they both were silent.

"The College got a bill for \$800,000 from its energy company," Laurie continued. "He tapped into the grid for the power to run his program."

"I'd say they got their money's worth," Devon said slowly, wondering if the cost of genius was so easily measurable. "We're now the epicenter of the mathematics universe."

Laurie was relieved. She had to rely on Devon for the technology that powered their course.

After the news that the computation of Pi did not run on forever was replaced in the news feeds by national politics and an even more sensational sex scandal, the media had departed leaving the campus to settle back into academics and grade anxiety. Laurie and Devon had taken advantage of the relative quiet to spend their first night together in her condo near the campus. She had forgotten how difficult it was to get dressed in the morning with a man sharing her bathroom. They were rushed, because Ovey was coming by her office early to talk with them about the topic for his first AI paper.

“So what brings you to the English department?” Laurie asked him. A short, thin, shaggy haired teenager, he appeared naturally disheveled in cutoffs and a College sweatshirt, unlike so many of his classmates who struggled to fit into the nineties Grunge revival aesthetic look so popular amongst the children of the one percenters.

“Math and physics were too easy,” Ovey replied.

“Too easy?” Devon exclaimed. “Was it easy to derive the cube root of Pi to the last decimal place?”

Ovey rolled his eyes.

“How far did the numbers go before you reached the end, Ovey?” Laurie struggled to be relevant, appalled by the prodigy’s condescension.

“If the numbers were printed out in 12 point type, they would stretch from here to Alpha Centauri and back,” he responded.

“So how do we know that we really have Pi to the last decimal place if we can’t see the numbers?” Devon pressed him.

"Oh, you can see the numbers if you want to take the time," Ovey stated. "Baklanov's Fifth is the proof."

"I don't get it," Devon said.

"It's easy. As soon as I figured that Baklanov's Fifth was a proof, all I had to do was figure out what it proved. And it proves an algorithm for deriving the cube roots for numbers that can't be written as a fraction, just like the proof for $A^2+B^2=C^2$ you learned in geometry class."

Laurie winced. High school geometry was a memory she thought she had overcome.

"So what are the last digits of Pi?" Laurie said, compelled to say something to regain control of the conversation.

"One, four, one, five, nine," Ovey replied. "Quantify the problem, and the answer is apparent. It's depressing."

"How can you be depressed when you've proved the expression of Pi is not infinite?" Devon pressed him, concerned that Ovey's genius was the flip side of madness. "You're sure to be the youngest person to win the Fields Medal."

"We've always known Pi had a finite value between three and four," Ovey explained. "But when Baklanov showed how to determine seemingly impossible numbers, it implied the universe, too, is finite, that it will not expand forever, and there's a limit to human understanding, even to human experience."

For a second Devon imagined he was hearing the croaking computer-generated Darth Vader voice of Stephen Hawking giving enigmatic answers to eternal questions. Unlike Stephen Hawking, however, Ovey spoke clearly about matters far beyond the realm of physics. Laurie was wondering if the teenager was saying something about his own lack of experience.

“So tell us why you chose ‘AI for the Humanities’ to round out your first semester,” Laurie asked and immediately regretted her choice of words. “Rounding out” was something that used to be done to Pi to use the ratio in the real world.

“You’re using the computer to create,” he answered.

“Yes, we’re using the GTP-3 program to explore the use of AI in fiction,” the professor agreed excitedly, hoping she could entice him into her field.

“We’re at the point we can give the computer a writing-prompt and it gives us a story,” Devon continued, feeling more confident talking about his favorite project. “We have to finesse the output to be sure it’s in good English, but the story is the output.”

“That’s what intrigues me,” Ovey said. “A program that can turn an abstraction like creativity or science into a creator, almost a god.”

Laurie and Devon were stunned into silence.

“Have you talked with anyone else about this?” Laurie wondered.

“A girl from your class at the coffee shop. She told me about her prompt and her story.”

Laurie and Devon glanced at each other. The coffee shop across the street from the campus was where students met, not necessarily for a date but sometimes the tentative beginnings of a relationship.

“What was her prompt?” Devon asked.

“‘Last June the strawberries were magenta.’”

“That’s Jessica Gleason’s prompt,” Laurie exclaimed.

“She tweaked the program so it recognized similarities between

the color and wine and blood," Devon continued.

"And massaged the computer output into a parable of the Crucifixion," Laurie concluded, wondering if it was AI or the girl that was enticing the prodigy into her course.

"Do you want to write?" Devon asked.

"I want the computer to write," Ovey said. "But first I have to add to your database,"

"What do you want to add?" Devon said slowly, sensing their student was going somewhere he and Laurie had never imagined possible.

"Every article on botany published in the last fifty years."

"But this is English AI," Devon said. "We're exploring its use to write fiction."

"Or a novel," Laurie said. She had inadvertently twisted another strand of her hair into a knot.

"Too easy again," Ovey countered. "I want to revise the program to create research articles on botany from a prompt."

"You mean from a thesis to be proved?" Laurie continued, trying to keep up with the conversation with fragments from her first year college biology course over twenty years earlier.

"No. From a prompt, just like you do for fiction. Baklanov's Sixth suggests it can be done."

The reference to Baklanov's Sixth was like a deus ex machina suddenly dangled before the English professor and the entrepreneur.

"Before the research is done?" Devon exclaimed incredulous.

"The research is the easy part," the prodigy replied. "Anyone

can do research. It's the inspiration for the prompt that matters."

"And you have the prompt?" Devon asked.

"Yes," Ovey replied. "'Is botany relevant to human understanding?'"

"Why botany?" Professor Kale countered, recalling having the same question herself in freshman biology. Such a departure from her AI course description would send shock waves through the biology department and the dean. Keeping Ovey in her course was worth the risk.

"We have to get the bugs out of the program before we tackle zoology."

"Maybe Mr. Scintilton can help," she said hopefully, turning to the entrepreneur.

"With bringing it to market?" Ovey countered. "I'm not in it for the money."

"With the new program," she said, exasperated he was so independent that she and Devon seemed outliers in their own course. "Can you give me a paragraph on what you want to do?"

"It's not easy to explain Baklanov's Sixth in writing," Ovey replied. "But I'll try."

Three weeks later the computer produced "Gender Fluidity in Hydrangeas," the first computer generated research paper in botany or any other science. Students and faculty in "AI for the Humanities" were shocked by its audacity and timeliness.

"I didn't choose the prompt," Ovey said at the seminar when he presented the paper.

"Who did?" another student, like Ovey a cross-over from the

math and physics department, asked.

"I did," Jessica Gleason, a sophomore hesitating between majoring in English or religion said.

"We were looking for something with social implications."

It was the first time anyone had ever said "we" with Ovey.

"Why?" another student asked.

"So people would read it," Jessica replied. "Botany hasn't stood up so well against TikTok."

Jessica wore the uniform of the sophomore woman well: washed out jeans with knees and other places ripped open, halter top, and large glasses to emphasize a delicately beautiful face and thick black hair tied back with a scrunchie.

"You couldn't possibly have conducted the experiments you talk about in here," argued the crossover from math and physics.

"With AI experiment follows output," Ovey replied.

Faculty and students were as surprised by Ovey's answer as by his collaboration with another student, a female five years older than he.

"You can't publish this without the research," Laurie said. "It won't pass peer review."

"So we give the paper to the botany department and let them deal with it," Ovey said. "The research is secondary. I know I got the program right."

The cross-over student raised his hand.

"I could make it my senior project next year," he volunteered.

"It will take at least another year and a half," Devon said.

"So I start on it next semester," the student said.

"Time enough," Ovey said. "We'll have other things to work on."

"The article mentions but does not define areas for further research at the end," another female student said.

"I programmed it to leave things open ended," Ovey replied. "Right now I'm ready to move on to zoology. The vagaries of physiology present challenges of their own."

The rest of the seminar was a wide-ranging discussion of the social implications of the paper, something all the students could understand. Although it was written up in the college newspaper, the article itself and thus the validation of the program had to wait on the research. The implications for gender studies, however, were themselves the subjects of three senior honors papers.

The following year Jessica spent the first semester abroad in Oxford studying Anglican theology and only saw Ovey when she flew to Rome in December for the Fields Medal awards ceremony. It was their first real date, although a reporter from *The New York Times* surmised their relationship from her presence and their clothes. Instead of the usual coat and tie, Ovey wore a College hoodie over a button down white shirt with the buttons undone that his mother made him wear. Jessica sat beside Ovey wearing the high school homecoming dress her parents had sent instead of investing in another worn-once gown. His mother, on his other side, was wearing the most elaborate evening dress that her favorite consignment shop could offer.

At first their conversation was stilted by the surroundings and the changes the summer and Jessica's semester abroad had made in them. Ovey was put off by the bright lights and the glitz, especially since they brought his mother into a closeness he had been trying to escape. Jessica was awed and estranged by the formality and the seeming expectation that

she and the wunderkind would elope into some media fantasy reserved for the leaders of boy bands and their entourages. So they ignored the present and picked up the conversation they had left off (for them) so long ago.

“You know, I don’t much care about the labs for ‘Gender Fluidity,’” Ovey said. “What intrigues me is the difficulty of the problem. Solutions are dead ends.”

“Why?” Jessica wondered.

“Because they close off further inquiry.”

His mother was so used to him talking that way, she didn’t stop eating. Jessica stopped, not only by what he had said but because the sudden transition from English to Italian food was too much, and the prospect of Delta rations on the long flight home at the end of the ceremony was daunting.

“So what are you working on now?” she asked.

“AI for zoology.”

“And you’re looking for?”

“I’ve about got the program ready, but I need the prompt,” he replied. “What do you think it should be?”

“Something about salamanders?” she joked, remembering the dissection in her freshman life sciences course.

Ovey didn’t think it was funny, but his mother stopped chewing long enough to smile.

“You can’t expect to get a Fields Medal every year, dear,” his mother said, holding her wine glass out for a refill.

Ovey cringed.

“You know, Jessica, the cash award wasn’t very much,” she added. “Less than thirteen thousand, wasn’t it, Ovey, dear?”

This time Jessica cringed at the barb.

“The problem will be the experiments to validate it,” Ovey said to Jessica as if his mother had not spoken. “It will have to be something big enough to attract funding for the research.”

In the interplay between the youngest Fields Medal winner and his mother, Jessica saw there was something missing from the media stories about the genius raised by a struggling single mother making do on a junior high school math teacher’s salary. Although there seemed to be a question about whom Ovey’s father had been, it was difficult to think of Ovey’s mother as being at the center of any mystery.

“I’m declaring my major in religion,” she said, turning the conversation to herself.

“Why religion?” he wondered. “I thought you were into English.”

“I was looking for the most difficult subject, too,” she said. “Something equations can’t touch.”

Ovey was silent while a tuxedoed waiter poured coffee and a glass of Limoncello for his mother.

“Let me think about that,” he said slowly, as if suspecting for the first time there could be anything other than the Baklanov Equations. Then it was his time to speak. Jessica and the world sat up to listen.

“I call it ‘The Problem of the Finite,’” he began and spoke as if counting each word so he would not exceed the College’s standard 400 word paper. “Without infinity, we are without mystery. How close must it all come before we are suffocated?”

Only Jessica saw that he was looking at his mother when he said that.

“If the universe is finite,” he concluded, “does it have space for a cure for cancer?”

The hall erupted with applause and many rose to acclaim him, uncertain whether they had heard the most succinct and brilliant philosophical statement in decades or were witnessing a descent into madness.

“There’s only one way to answer your question,” Jessica said after he had returned to his seat. “Ask the zoology program to produce a cure for cancer.”

“Baklanov’s Tenth deals with zoology,” he confided.

Jessica was silent. She had asked him for help with her thesis, and he had confided his hopes for his.

Although Ovey and Jessica thought ‘The Problem of the Finite’ would only interest a few mathematicians and theoretical physicists, he had set off a debate within the philosophy of science that appeared to be as endless as had once been the computation of PI. The entire faculty and student body of the College had watched his speech, as did tens of thousands of applicants drawn by the prospect of a Fields Award winner as an upper class student and the hoodie as formal wear. The Admissions Department had to add ten temporary admissions officers to deal with the applications.

The awards ceremony was a welcome distraction for Assistant Professor Kale and Guest Lecturer Scintilton, who were stymied in their discussion of how to continue their relationship after his appointment expired at the end of the second semester. She couldn’t give up tenure to follow him to Silicon Valley, and he couldn’t give up Silicon Valley to stay with her. They were sitting like undergraduates on the floor of his apartment in town watching the Awards Ceremony when “The Problem of the Finite” rang out like a sermon preached only to

them.

"I wonder if the universe has space enough for us," Laurie said.

Devon was silent. He could tell from the expressions of their students that their evening departures for his apartment and their morning returns had been noted with something approaching glee.

"Did you see the article about Ovey and Jessica in the *Times*?" Laurie continued. "They're trying to figure out whether she is a big sister or a surrogate mother or a girlfriend."

"He's a little young for a girlfriend," Devon said. "I was thinking about a colleague."

"A colleague in what?"

"I think they're looking for the same thing in different places."

Laurie looked at Devon. Colleague didn't begin to describe their relationship anymore; how could it describe that of a fourteen and a twenty-year old?

"Has he told you what his next project will be?" she asked to change the subject.

"It has to be something bigger than botany."

"Like?"

"He said he'll need a larger computer than we have here," Devon replied. "I'm talking to computer sciences at State University."

"He won't let anyone negotiate for him but you, will he?" Laurie said slowly.

"No. Why do you ask?"

“You should talk with the dean about that. If you’re still on the faculty, the College wouldn’t have to pay you a huge consulting fee and fly you across the country for the negotiations.”

Devon lay back on the carpet. Reducing a fee for the prospect of prolonged intimacy was not something Silicon Valley habitués did willingly or often. Suddenly the afternoon was alive with possibilities he had not imagined. Maybe the universe wasn’t running out of space after all.

When Ovey and Jessica returned to the campus after the holiday semester break, he had the topic and the prompt, “A Cure for Cancer in Humans,” and Devon had a one year extension for his contract.

It took longer to negotiate the protocol for the study with State University than for Ovey to write the program.

“It’s based on Baklanov’s Tenth,” he explained to Devon in preparation for a meeting with State University’s negotiating team.

“They’ll know what that means?” Devon asked, not wanting to admit he didn’t know what the second semester sophomore was talking about.

“Not unless someone saw the connection with organic chemistry.”

Devon looked blank.

“It’s about carbon, man. That’s why nobody figured it out before.”

“Oh.”

“How to manage the variables and find the singularities,” Ovey concluded. “That’s the genius of it.”

No one on the State University negotiating team had any idea what he was talking about either, but they were eager to reach an agreement. If AI produced a cure and the experiments necessary to validate it, the output would be kept secret from the researchers to exclude any bias when they conducted the experiments to validate it. Any funding sources would be bound by the strictest confidentiality. After that, licensing fees in the billions would be negotiated. Then it took weeks to load the State University computer with every article on human anatomy, physiology, oncology, and organic chemistry published in twenty-seven languages over the last three hundred years.

Ovey seemed more distracted than usual leading up to running the program. Devon thought it was the impending trial, but Laurie suspected something else. When Jessica asked to meet with them to discuss her senior thesis, they learned why.

"I want to use the State University computer for my senior thesis in religion," Jessica said.

"Won't our computers here do?" Laurie wondered.

"Ovey's program will be too big for them."

"So what's your part in this?" Laurie asked, delighted a student wanted to use material from her AI course in another department.

"We load it with everything everyone has ever said about religion and theology and then give it a prompt."

"It will never work," Devon argued. "All you'll get will be arguments not even Baklanov could settle."

"The secret is the prompt," Jessica said. "Ovey said he'd help me with it."

Laurie and Devon huddled after the meeting to discuss the project.

"Do you think the program will create a new theology?" Laurie wondered.

"Or will it spit out theology after theology that no one will ever be able to turn into a coherent system?" Devon said.

"So get State to let her do it," Laurie concluded. "It's a grand conception even if it doesn't work."

The lights in the state capital barely flickered the night Ovey ran the cure for cancer program. The output was a formula for the cure plus hundreds of experiments to validate it. It took Ovey three weeks to study the output to correct any inconsistencies, much as the students in Laurie's and Devon's "A.I in the Humanities" class had to revise computer generated stories to put them into proper English.

"Now they'll have to conduct the experiments," he told Devon when he had finished.

"As soon as they get the funding, we start," Devon said. From Ovey's expression, Devon could see he was already losing interest in the project. Baklanov's Tenth couldn't fail them. They had the cure for cancer.

"So does this end the Problem of the Finite?" Devon continued.

"No. It just proves the universe still has a lot of room left," he said and changed the subject. "This religion thing is more complicated than zoology. We'll have to use Baklanov's Twelfth."

"How do you know it's about religion?" Devon wondered. "I thought the Baklanov equations were about math and sciences."

"They call the Twelfth 'the eternal' because it's infinitely complicated."

"More complicated than the others?"

"The Twelfth doesn't balance. That's the genius of it."

"I don't get it."

"If God doesn't balance, the equation proves there is something beyond math and science. That means the universe really is infinite."

"How long will you need the computer?" Devon asked, returning to what he thought was reality.

"For a few weeks. Maybe months. I'm not sure."

"I wish I'd known this when we negotiated the cancer deal with State," Devon said.

"Oh, they'll go along," the sophomore said. "They'll want their name on another big project."

"The problem is the database," Ovey said to Jessica. He had been working on her thesis program every minute he wasn't working on the cancer project, but he couldn't describe what had to be searched for the program to create an answer. "There's no body of knowledge that by itself can possibly answer the question."

"What about everything ever written on religion?" Jessica asked, beginning to wonder if she had put off starting her thesis on another topic too long. They were both trying to ignore the other students glancing at them in the coffee shop across from the campus.

"Some of it isn't machine readable, and what is would only produce contradictory results."

"What do you mean?"

"If we ask a Catholic data base, we get one answer; if we ask a Buddhist, we get another with no way to verify one or the other."

"You said Baklanov's Twelfth would help," she continued, beginning to feel desperate.

"With the substantive search. Not with a database."

"So we're on our own?" Jessica said, pushing away her empty cup. Sometimes even a cappuccino isn't enough to allay angst.

Ovey nodded. Now nearing fifteen, he was beginning to feel the low current warmth that comes with the presence of a beautiful woman.

"So let's do it ourselves," she said, not realizing the effect a decisive woman could have on a male.

"How?" he asked.

"You found a way to access the power supply to run your other programs," she said. "Find a way to access whatever we need to answer the question."

"Even if it means sending for a manuscript in Tibet?" he said, excited by the prospect of searching the universe for data.

"Or consulting an Indian holy man along the Ganges."

"The cost could be enormous," he said smiling.

"This will be small change to State University after what the cure will bring them."

So they separated to go to their dorms, she to frame the prompt that would redefine the religious world and he to create the program to provide the answer.

Nevertheless, it took so long to write the search program that Jessica had to change her topic to "AI in Religion" instead of

discussing the output of the yet unwritten program. The excitement on campus was palpable; no one was sure what they were doing; students tried to read every expression on Ovey's and Jessica's faces for signs of progress. One winter afternoon Ovey's mother appeared unexpectedly to drive him to town for a new winter coat, and calls went out to the media that he was headed for State University to run the program of the century. The gray January day was much grayer when they returned with only a coat.

"We don't even know what they're doing," Laurie complained to Devon.

"He told me it has something to do with Baklanov's Twelfth, the one they call 'the Eternal.'"

"So what's that supposed to mean?" Laurie asked.

"We'll have to wait to find out."

The morning Ovey asked Devon to drive him and Jessica to the state capital Devon still didn't know the prompt. The only hint the students gave on the way was to order pizza and bottled water when they were in the computer lab, because it was going to be a long day.

"Maybe even a long life," Jessica quipped, and they both laughed as if they had discovered something only they would ever know.

It took three hours to load the program. It was only then that Devon, standing with Jessica behind Ovey at the keyboard, saw the prompt: "Does God Exist?" Ovey pressed "enter," and Devon sat down suddenly exhausted. How, he wondered, is this program any different from a priest sacrificing a lamb or an ox or an enemy at the altar and then entering the inner sanctum to await the god's response?

While the two students and guest lecturer enjoyed their pizza,

libraries and laboratories around the world were hacked by an undetectable program that scoured their every secret but left without taking anything or any sign it had ever been there. Priests, holy men, mystics, and gurus of all faiths opened their cell phones to be visited by visions and voices asking questions they could not answer, and they fell on their faces or spoke in tongues or were rushed to emergency rooms babbling about the brightness of the light. When the three virtual adventurers were contemplating whether to order sandwiches or sushi the next evening, blackouts had begun in small areas of the state capital and spread rapidly to whole neighborhoods and suburbs. By midnight the president of State University insisted on being admitted to the computer lab and demanded that the program be stopped.

“We can run it slower,” Ovey said. “But we can’t stop it.”

“What do you mean?” the president asked.

“The only way to stop it would be to turn it off, and that would lose everything that’s been stored and whatever output has been generated.”

So Ovey pulled an all-nighter constraining the program from its deprivations on the grid. When they departed the next afternoon to return to the College, they had State University’s agreement to let the program run until it produced an answer to the prompt. Meanwhile the media, having learned what was going on through interviews of off-shift security personnel, electrified the world by proclaiming “the God program” was about to answer the human race’s deepest and most desperate question. And week by week, followed by so many reporters and hangers on that they had to be airlifted to State University by helicopter, Ovey, Jessica, and Devon returned to check the computer’s progress. It was always running smoothly, even faster and more easily than during its first overloaded hours. When Ovey checked to see what data was being generated, however, the answer was always the same:

none.

"We may as well power down," Ovey said after the seventh week.

"And lose everything?" Devon exclaimed.

"We finally found one data point," Ovey replied. "It confirms our conclusion."

"What's the data point?" Devon interrupted.

"Baklanov's Ninth."

He and Jessica burst into wild teenage laughter as if only they understood the world.

"It's like something is trying to tell us something," Jessica finally said.

"And?" Devon asked.

"It's a corollary to his Fifth," Ovey continued more serious. "It proves the expression of Pi is governed by the expansion of the universe."

Devon was blank.

"Pi is a finite number that changes every microsecond."

"So in a way it really is infinite," Devon said, beginning to understand how a number could be finite and infinite at the same time.

"The same thing happens when we go looking for God," Jessica said. "The question is unanswerable using any data in the universe."

"So what happened?" Devon wondered. "Did the program fail?"

"The program is a complete success," Ovey answered. He looked at Jessica, and they both burst into wild teenage laughter again.

“The beauty of the numbers is for everyone to see,” Ovey explained.

“Only God can hide his perfection from us,” Jessica concluded.

“So what’s the next prompt?” Devon questioned, trying to maintain the entrepreneur’s conviction there was always a quantifiable answer.

“There isn’t anything left to ask,” Ovey said.

Devon sat there stunned.

“The answer depends on something unknowable but present,” Jessica tried to explain.

“We can’t know everything from binary digits,” Ovey agreed.

“The negative finding proves God exists,” Jessica concluded.

“So the problem of the finite isn’t a problem anymore,” Devon said beginning to understand.

“Not anymore,” Ovey agreed.

“I have to get back to campus to write this up,” Jessica said.

“I do, too,” Devon said, but for a different reason. Mystery had entered Silicon Valley. Theology had again become the queen of sciences. He couldn’t wait to talk with Laurie about how to use it in their course.

[Table of Contents](#)

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