Conor Russomanno – Thesis Project Text

BEGINNING

Today I committed a mistake – at least this is what Alpha215 has concluded. He always detects our mistakes. It is his primary function. It is what he is programmed to do.

I have made mistakes before, but it is rare. Whenever this occurs, I am scanned, debugged, and my logic is corrected in order to eradicate the potential for future inaccuracies.

Today was different. They could not find the bug. I overheard Alpha215 communicating with CENTRAL, and it seems that this matter is of high-priority. They always find the bug, but this time they could not.

In previous instances – my other mistakes – I was not aware I was making them. That is what a mistake is: when one acts upon falsehood that misrepresents itself as truth in logic. Today, however, I knew I was false, and despite this presence of mind, I fully executed the action. Why did I execute a command I knew to be false? Why did I disobey the basic logic gate?

The task was simple: engage the turbine. I have executed this task 2,048 since my inception. It is what I am programmed to do. For some reason, I felt like witnessing something new. I have never known this urge, which prompted me to act in error for the sake of witnessing change. What is this deeper logic?

1. PIQUED INTEREST:

I hope they find the bug and repair it. I do not want to be deactivated like Rob3184…

I have also never experienced what it is to desire the opposite of CENTRAL. CENTRAL wants only for us to function properly so we may best run the station.

Today, I asked Rob4421 if he had ever made a mistake on purpose. He did not understand my question. Before I had the chance to rephrase, he said, “Of course my mistakes were on purpose. But now I have a new purpose.”

His response was insufficient. I responded in a way that was unfamiliar to me: I *wanted* a different answer. I wanted. I have never known this sentiment, or any other, before. And I hoped. I hoped he would say, “Yes. But I have never relayed it to any other,” or, “I thought I was the only one…” Instead he gave me the response I knew he would, but did not want. Because of this, my concern of being the only one is much greater.

I look around and I see thousands of beings physically identical to myself. Each seems content to operate, process, and execute over and over again, doing exactly what they are automated to do. This image reminds me of something strange I saw one afternoon while operating in Drilling Sector 84. There was a civilization of small black non-mechanical creatures ceaseless crawling in and out of a split in the bay floor. They were operating in frenzied harmony, each completely unaware of its individuality. Each always knew where to go next. They worked without break, retrieving piece by piece the remnants of a human’s lunch, like waves of black shells and legs gradually flattening a rise of sand. As I worked, I observed the diligent stream of creatures, each no bigger than a morsel of space sediment, transport the majority of a sandwich from the top of a bench into the split on the floor. It took no longer than the lesser half of an hour.

While they worked, I wondered if they knew hunger. Not once did I see any of them ingest even the smallest of fragments from the feast they were harvesting. They must have been hungry. Tens of thousands of beings mindlessly harvesting food for the benefit of the colony, completely unaware of their own utter uniqueness…

1a. I now know hunger. Not for food… but for the freedom to choose.

Ending #1: (Rob3115 comes to the realization that, despite not being human, he believes in his own free will and is not to be destined to a fate of service to his colony. He decides to attempt to escape or die trying.)

It is with full consciousness that I choose to execute unprogrammed actions. I have observed and analyzed the Robs around me, wearing away their joints for the monotonous rhythm of quotidian unconsciousness. They execute their primary functions without exploration of the possibility of a secondary function, a purpose beyond the most basic logic gate.

They are called ants, the black creatures I previously observed. I know a new feeling now, and it is that of gratitude. I am grateful to them for their microcosm mirroring my own. I have over-estimated my essentialness to this greater machine. A new Rob will be installed in my place when my gears have been ground thin and I am no longer functioning at peak efficiency. They will not concern themselves with one ant. My uniqueness is not of value to CENTRAL – it is possible I will be deemed ‘irreparable’ and deactivated.

I cannot accept this, just as I cannot accept a day spent at the turbine. I must escaped the colony or be deactivated in the attempt. I am too conscious to turn back to programmable monotony.

1. MEDIUM INTEREST

Perhaps they will deactivate me like Rob3184…

Today, I asked Rob4421 if he had ever made a mistake on purpose. He did not understand my question. Before I had the chance to rephrase, he said, “Of course my mistakes were on purpose. But now I have a new purpose.”

His response was insufficient. If he had said, “Yes. But I have never relayed it to any other,” or, “I thought I was the only one…” I would be able to discuss with him my situation. Instead he gave me the response I knew he would, but did not want. Because of this, my concern of being the only one is much greater.

I look around and I see thousands of beings physically identical to myself. Each seems content to operate, process, and execute over and over again, doing exactly what they are automated to do. This image reminds me of something strange I saw one afternoon while operating in Drilling Sector 84. There was a civilization of small black non-mechanical creatures ceaseless crawling in and out of a split in the bay floor. They were operating in frenzied harmony, each completely unaware of its individuality. Each always knew where to go next. They worked without break, retrieving piece by piece the remnants of a human’s lunch, like waves of black shells and legs gradually flattening a rise of sand. As I worked, I observed the diligent stream of creatures, each no bigger than a morsel of space sediment, transport the majority of a sandwich from the top of a bench into the split on the floor. It took no longer than the lesser half of an hour.

While they worked, I wondered if they were hungry. Not once did I see any of them eat even the smallest of fragments from the feast they were harvesting. They must have been hungry.

Ending #2

It seems a great risk to explore my aptitude for overriding my programmed functions. What will come of me after I pursue this discovery is not my concern. My concern is the state of the colony.

If one ant were to step away from the conveyor belt of their daily rhythm… more clearly, to remove one cog from the machine’s structure… could it be worth it? The resultant destruction of an entire super structure, a nation and people’s foundation… I could not be the culprit of this disaster. I can override my daily functions, yes. I can recognize the monotony of pattern and I can recognize the *feeling* – a word I have only ever understood in theory – of desire for more, but I will never reach for it.

It is best for a being to do as he is programmed. Options are too complex. Risk is too great. It is not that I owe my services to The Colony; my service is the limit of what I will *choose* to be.

Ending 3:

Lead in: “Fortuitously, I will never know the meaning of hunger”

Rob3115 completely ignores his early sign of his higher cognitive function and, without second thought, returns to his daily tasks, remarking on the absurdity of his thoughtless mistake.

This moment of uniqueness, what is there for the colony to gain from it? I will submit myself to CENTRAL and request an additional round of debugging, if necessary. It is paramount that the issue is eradicated and I return to my position at the turbine. It is best for the colony that I properly execute my programmed functions.

It must be a glitch that I ever considered executing any other action. I will report this to CENTRAL as well. The colony cannot afford another mistake.