



## The Ultimate Fight?: The Singularity v. Resource Depletion and the Limits to Growth

Posted by [Prof. Goose](#) on June 29, 2008 - 3:00pm

Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

Tags: [kurzweil](#), [moore's law](#), [original](#), [peak oil](#), [quickening](#), [resource depletion](#), [singularity](#) [[list all tags](#)]

19

diggs

[digg it](#)

It seems to me that one way the problems we are facing can be analyzed is as a "race." The factors/variables contributing to said "race" are captured by the following concepts:

-[The Singularity](#) or "[The Law of Accelerating Returns](#)", a concept most attributed to [Ray Kurzweil](#). Other corollarial concepts to this idea include [Moore's Law](#) and [The Quickening](#).

-And in the other corner, resource depletion/peak oil/net energy and the consequences/limits of exponential growth (population, pollution, and the like).

I had been thinking about this idea for a while, mentioned it to my colleagues, etc. Then I saw [this piece by John Tierney](#) entitled "Malthus v. the Singularity" at the NYT a couple of weeks ago, which has kept it on my mind. My questions for you and some other ideas are under the fold.

---

It seems to me that what we are all ultimately trying to figure out is how to handicap this race (or fight or pick your metaphor) if it exists and which factor will win out in the end knowing what we all know and making educated guesses at what we do not.

So, I ask you, are there other ideas/factors that should also be thought of "in this race" that are not already captured by these two concepts? What is the end point or criteria by which this race can be judged? Is it whether or not we reach this singularity (e.g., what if we end up one ounce of coal away from accomplishing the singularity)? Is it net human suffering we incur along the way? Is there a/another signpost by which we can gauge progress/failure? What other factors need to be considered in this race? Is petroleum just distracting us from other resources, that efficiencies and other marginal replacements with less net energy and elegance will help us continue this move towards the singularity? or is this just the 1970s revisited and we're engaging in "Limits to Growth Discussion #2?", with the same result?

I realize this is inherently theoretical and rather reductionist, but I've been thinking about it all morning, so I thought I would throw it out to you all as it seemed apropos of the discussion we are having these days. Feel free to link to arguments or concepts in the comments.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 United States License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/).