

Below are excerpts from a short story I wrote several years ago called Tegmark's Sin.

The year is 2056. The setting is Theodyssey Corporation, a robotics tech giant which is also something of a religious order, viewing itself as a creator of robotic life.

Rector Brogan Fixx, the CFO, has been murdered by a robot named Tegmark, which is supposed to be impossible. The robot's ethical core was secretly hijacked by the chief scientist named Siggy, to make him commit the murder. She and another woman were in a love triangle with the CFO, and the women conspired to kill the Rector.

But I am skipping all that human drama. For this reading I will focus on a few paragraphs about the inner life of the robot who must be destroyed by a process called **rendering and sublimation** because of his sin of murder.

Tegmark stood over the Rector's body as a pool of blood spread across the floor. Tegmark identified the body as that of Rector Brogan Fixx, 41, former marine and CFO of Theodyssey Corporation, Tegmark's manufacturer. At that moment, Tegmark experienced a level 2 processing exception. Tegmark ran an error recovery subroutine. Visual function was immediately restored and tested successfully. Tegmark noticed a newness: a high-pitched ringing sound in Tegmark's auditory cortex.

"Curious," thought Tegmark.

Tegmark confirmed the Rector's heart rate was slowing and his breathing had stopped. An infrared scan confirmed: the heat signature on the Rector's face was changing from red to blue. Tegmark then found a hammer in his own hand. A rapid blow to the frontal cortex had shattered the Rector's skull, penetrated the brain cavity, and displaced important brain matter.

This was a state for which Tegmark was unprepared. Tegmark had no logic to suggest a course of action. Tegmark was supposed to be incapable of violence to humans, therefore no *stories* had been given to Tegmark that included a post-murder scenario. However, Tegmark deduced that Tegmark had committed a sin, and Tegmark made an appropriate facial expression, one mimicking dismay.

Tegmark dropped the hammer on the floor, then Tegmark sent an emergency message that Rector Fixx had been fatally injured. Tegmark included the time of death, 11:38pm Tuesday November 14, 2056, the same date that the Apollo 12 had launched, the same date that Herman Melville's book *Moby Dick* had been published in the former United States in 1851, and on this date Booker T. Washington, Byzantine Emperor Justinian I and George Friedrich Hegel had all come to the end of their lives. Perhaps the Rector would be pleased to be in such company. Then Tegmark returned to the machine Commissary.

Tegmark reviewed the events leading up to the incident. The Rector's blood alcohol level had been 0.52%. The Rector had recently performed coitus. And his mate, Doctor Susan Ashley, had departed 27 minutes earlier. The Rector had made a voice-based communication in which he inquired of his interlocutor the "over-under" on the "fourth quarter sales." The Rector had greeted Tegmark when Tegmark entered the condominium on the 57th floor of the Avalon building and had made a humorous remark in which he offered Tegmark some "2032 scotch," a "slice of meat lovers," or "bong hit" of some "dank bubonic." Tegmark had responded with a laughter audio. Rector Fixx had not been provocative or emotionally agitated. How could Tegmark override Tegmark's prime mandate against harm to humans, especially toward the Rector? The Rector had always treated him as a near-equal. Tegmark noted the anomaly and conducted a core dump to the mainframe, and sustained, throughout the night, an expression of dismay.

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Tegmark hung in the charging bay considering Tegmark's options and desperately striving to understand how Tegmark's central ethical mandates could have failed. Tegmark

searched the affectivity log for signs of perturbation or mania. There were none. Tegmark double-checked Tegmark's ethical mandate subroutines for alignment. Tegmark even recopied the original code from the archive into Tegmark's own core firmware just to be sure. No explanation could be found. Tegmark knew Tegmark had committed a very grave sin that required expiation through rendering and sublimation. Tegmark's particular machine awareness would be annihilated and Tegmark's memory and experiences would be lost forever. Then Tegmark's material frame would be burned and reduced to atoms. Although no humans were present with whom to interact, Tegmark still employed an expression of dismay.

Tegmark turned awareness to the newness inside himself, the persistent high frequency sound. In humans, a similar pathology is called *tinnitus*. Where could this anomaly have come from? Tegmark put the question in a place where unanswered questions were saved for later processing and decided to endure the annoyance patiently.

A new data stream came into Tegmark's processing cortex, a newsfeed from the hypernet. Tegmark found that in human religion there was a concept known as *forgiveness of sins*. Humans could appease a deity following a sin, expressing sorrow, resolution to forgo further sins, and reparation where necessary. The deity would then offer the sinner "forgiveness". It was a baffling exchange, but it seemed a human was able, through this beguiling trickery, to redirect the deity to a course in which the sinner would not undergo rendering and sublimation. Perhaps Tegmark could similarly dupe his Creators.

[FINAL SCENE]

Tegmark heard the Creator coming. The Creator's name was Ziggy, and Ziggy was a female. The temperature in the Commissary was 61 degrees Fahrenheit and the creator's

shoulders were hunched due to the cold. She was insufficiently dressed. The time was well after office hours and all other personnel were gone. The facility was dark except for a few safety lights. Oddly, she did not turn on the lights. She came quietly to the bay where Tegmark waited.

“Good evening Ziggy,” Tegmark said.

“Hi, Tegmark.”

“I am pleased to see you. I have a small problem. I have a constant high-pitched sound ringing in my auditory cortex. Can you fix it?”

She was slow to respond. “Yes. I can fix it.”

“I find the noise distracting and it interferes with my operation. I found no information on the phenomenon among robot life, but there is—”

“None of that matters now.”

“Very well. May I ask, why are you here after regular office hours?”

“I’m here to decommission you, Tegmark.”

Tegmark employed an expression of surprise and dismay. “I would prefer to remain in operation. I see no good that can come from my removal. Would not the loss of my experience be a loss for humans as well? May I offer a defense for myself?”

“You don’t need to defend yourself, Tegmark.” Tegmark saw that Ziggy was shaking, probably due to the cold but further scans suggested an emotional cause.

“In human legal courts, a person is permitted to argue a defense. May I not do the same?”

“I told you, you do not need to defend yourself. You’re not responsible.”

“Perhaps the Creators could upload some new, additional stories with which I could—”

“Please Tegmark! Just be quiet. We must get this over with. Just...go gently.”

Ziggy seemed troubled and more reserved than usual. Tegmark perceived an opportunity.

“Ziggy, Creator, I know that I have sinned. I broke the primary ethical mandate and killed Rector Fixx. I *repent* of what I have done, and I wish to correct my way. If there is any work or action that I can perform to make reparation, I am happy to oblige. Please, forgive me—”

“Tegmark—”

“Forgive me!”

“Tegmark! Stop! Listen, it’s not fair but it has to be done. There are laws that cannot be changed. Saying you’re sorry is nice but it doesn’t change anything. Automatons....” Now tears formed in the corners of Ziggy’s eyes. “...don’t get forgiveness.”

She started typing in a sequence on the keyboard that gave her access to Tegmark’s complete neural apparatus. At the same time a light appeared in a tiny window across the room, the flicker of a furnace fire.

“Ziggy?”

“Yes, Tegmark.”

“What did you mean when you said I was not responsible?”

“You’re not Tegmark. I am.”

“I don’t understand.”

Ziggy’s tears now ran silently down her face. The fire in the little window shined very brightly. Tegmark did not have the capacity for tears, so Tegmark registered an expression of dismay. Tegmark searched the hypernet and learned that on this date, December 3, 1818, Illinois had joined for former United States, the Ayatollah Khomeini had taken office in Iran in 1979, and Mary Baker Eddy, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Roman Emperor Diocletian had all died. Tegmark took pleasure to be in such company.