

# [Existential Risk / Opportunity]

# Singularity Management

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## Voluntary Firefighters As A Metaphor For Our Quest

by James Blodgett

Small villages with populations of a few hundred people can rarely afford the cost of paying the salaries of several firefighters. The solution is often a voluntary fire department. Local volunteers meet regularly to train. When a fire happens, an alert is issued. Volunteers leave their local jobs to rush to the site of the fire.

I was never a voluntary firefighter, because I never lived in a small enough town. I learned of such things when I lived in a moderately sized town, and attended summer carnival events that volunteer fire groups in nearby small towns put on to raise money.

Volunteer firefighters are local heroes. Occasionally they save lives, and that is well known to be part of their job. However, the rate of deaths from fires, or even from accidents to which voluntary firefighters might respond, is really quite low. It is fairly unlikely in a typical year that a life is actually saved in a very small town.

Our work has a similar effectuality issue. We can think about existential risks and potential singularities, but does our thinking help to avoid the former and enable the latter? The answer is the same for us as for firemen. We are the good guys. Our efforts are directed towards improving the situation. We try to steer toward the good outcomes and away from the bad. Our efforts make the odds a little bit better, sometimes more.

The butterfly effect suggests that efforts directed towards the good might set off a chain of events, some with bad outcomes. However, steering improves the odds of reaching the destination towards which one is steering. Effectual steering, if achievable, guarantees arrival. Individual effectuality can be low when dealing with humongous issues, but heroes of history have accomplished great things, often by working together.