Do Digital Immortals Dream of Offline Afterlives?

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Abstract. The aim of this paper is to argue that it is not possible for a person to live an indefinitely long life as a digital immortal. To argue for this, I show that there is an insurmountable problem from the digital immortal's perspective. If the digital immortal is an exact replica of a mortal, then the entirety of the digital mind will be directed toward offline content, e.g., from big events like birthday parties, weddings, and the birth of one's children to the more mundane such as what the embodied mortal had for breakfast on 22 June 1987. The possibility of digital immortals living a person's life indefinitely means that the digital immortal is able to conceive of and understand the content of the mortal's embodied mind. To conceive of and to understand the content of a mortal's embodied mind the digital immortal must know what it is like to be an embodied mortal. However, the digital immortal cannot conceive of what it is like to be an embodied mortal because the experience would be so transformative that it would be irrational to consider it (cf. Paul 2014) and because it would have to conceive of its own offline afterlife, which is something well beyond its capacity. Just as we cannot conceive what it's like to be immortal because of its highly transformative experience (cf. Ulatowski 2019), digital immortals would be similarly perplexed by an offline afterlife. Our digital döppelganger would have no way of knowing what meaty embodied lives are like. The pollyannaish view of living forever as a digital döppelganger gives rise to the realisation that our functionally equivalent digital replica would be filled by memories, experiences, and other content of which it cannot possibly conceive.

Keywords: immortality; digital immortality; transformative experience

1 Introduction

To live an immortal life, whether bound by a physical body or by a soul on the astral plane, has captured the fascination of philosophers, theologians, and science fiction writers. The advent of a new digital age, however, has yielded new hope for immortality. No longer does reaching immortality seem so far out of reach for the average person because we need not be confined to thinking of an immortal life as the resurrection of a body or the everlasting life of some eschatological soul. We merely need to upload the content of our minds to live forever.

The aim of this paper is to argue that persons cannot live an indefinitely long life as digital immortals. While a digital immortal life is conceivable, the conceivability of such an eternal life does not make it possible. Our intuitions deceive us into believing that it is the pre-deceased mortal who lives the digital immortal life. Before I begin my argument, I will set out to define a few terms that I will employ for the remainder of the paper. Then, I will show that there is an insurmountable problem from the digital immortal's perspective. For the digital immortal to comprehend the mortal's offline life it has to be the mortal, which it is not. The pollyannaish view of living forever as a digital döppelganger gives rise to the realization that our functionally equivalent digital replica would be filled by memories, experiences, and other content of which it cannot possibly conceive. This distinction leads us to a vexing dilemma: either the digital immortal's knowledge and personality remains the same as that of the pre-deceased mortal or its knowledge and personality continue to evolve after the mortal's death. If the knowledge and personality of the digital immortal remains the same as the pre-deceased mortal, then the digital immortal is not a continuation of the pre-deceased mortal so much as a recording set to repeat for an eternity, and, if the knowledge and personality of the pre-deceased mortal continues to grow in the life of the digital immortal, then it is not so that the mortal continues to live in the digital immortal as much as it is the digital immortal's living its own life independent of the mortal. Following this, I consider two possible criticisms of my argument: (a) that the evolution of the digital immortal is no different than the evolution humans undergo from childhood to adulthood and (b) that the digital immortal and mortal are the same given that they share in the same knowledge and personality. Given the explicit and abrupt evolution from mortal to digital immortal, the two are not the same. We should conclude that the mortal cannot possibly go on living as a digital immortal.

2 Definitions

Prior to setting out an argument showing that we cannot judge whether a digital immortal life is desirable or even possible, some space should be dedicated to the background conditions the argument assumes to be true. Likewise, given that there

are different ways of defining 'immortality', I will provide the definition with which I will be working for the remainder of the paper.

To consider the argument for or against the desirability or possibility of an immortal life, we must assume that (1) the universe as we know it will never cease to exist in a physical state other than the state it is currently in or a state closely approximating the state that it is currently. Despite what our best science tells us, i.e., that the universe eventually will cool and collapse in upon itself or contract back in on itself obliterating everything from existence, what we have to assume for this argument is that the universe that immortals colonise is a world without end where the world is as we know it to be. The universe and everything in it will be a close approximation of what it is now. Moreover, there is no end to time, and the world as we have come to know it will continue to exist exactly as we have come to know it.[1]

Now that we have an understanding of what we take the universe to be, we can turn to what immortality is. Body-bound, or 'punctuated', immortality is a limited embodied form of everlasting life where we retain our own body at a predefined physical time period and inhabit that physical form for an indefinite or unbounded amount of time. The punctuated immortal life is one lived in a physical body that does not age or physically deteriorate. Despite the lack of change to one's physical characteristics, it is supposed that a person's psychological or mental life could and, indeed, would continue to evolve.

That the person would remain a physical age, such as the age of 42, is completely random. Any way that one would like to conceive of the age of the punctuated immortal will suffice for the example to work. If one prefers the age of 25 over the age of 42, then so be it. The age of the person seems to make no difference other than possibly the physical appearance of the punctuated immortal. It is not beyond the example for one to inhabit the physical body of a 72-year-old or a 15-year-old, though the person may be subject to certain biases or prejudgments of others that go along with being that particular age.[2] Regardless of one's physical stature, the psychological conditions and mental states of the punctuated immortal would continue to be nurtured.

The punctuated immortal life does not come without its limitations. Among its most salient limitations is the immortal's susceptibility to death by human cause. Should the person choose to jump from the Empire State Building or run in freeway traffic, the person will die from injuries sustained by what one would expect when leaping from tall buildings or playing in traffic. In this way, the punctuated immortal life has boundaries that are shared with the mortal life. Likewise, immortals could

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[1] Of all the assumptions one must adopt to entertain the desirability or possibility of immortal life, this is likely the most controversial one. Naturalists will reject the idea that the universe *could* exist in its current form for an eternity.

[2] In other words, if other immortals are eternally 35 and human prejudices carry over to the immortal life, e.g., ageism, then the 72-year-old may have to confront the uncomfortable realisation that that physical body of the punctuated immortal body matters to other immortals when it comes to hiring or mating decisions.

mortally wound other immortals, whether by shooting, stabbing, poisoning, or beating another to death.

Moreover, the person will have to drink an elixir or to receive a jab every so often for one's life to continue. In the Elina Makropulos case discussed by Bernard Williams (1973), the protagonist had to drink an elixir every 300 years to continue living an immortal life. The immortal life does not come without consequence. If the person fails to drink the elixir at the designated 300-year interval, then the person's life will come to an end. This permits the immortal to become mortal again. If the person becomes bored by the life she's leading, then she can choose to end it without involving oneself or others in some sort of potentially criminal activity.

A punctuated immortal life is one thing and digital immortality is another. Whereas a punctuated immortal life is bound to one's body at a designated age, digital immortality permits the person a little more latitude when it comes to living an immortal life. They need not decide to drink an elixir, for example, at the age of 42 to remain in a 42-year-old body for eternity. The mortal switches bodies from the meaty physical organic unit they occupy in the pre-deceased mortal life to the digitally enhanced immortal body to live an immortal life.

Digital immortality, which is also known as 'cybernetic immortality' or 'AI immortality', is the view that if it is possible to upload a person's experiences, consciousness, and personality into a non-biological form, then it is possible for that person to live indefinitely. The foundation of the view is based on the concept of *mind-uploading* where the entirety of one's mind, including memories, personality, and other aspects of individual cognition, may be transferred to a digital platform that instantiates all of the content of one's own mind and may be considered an exact non-physical replica of one's physical brain.

For this paper, the digital immortal I have in mind is one that would be a digital replica of one's organic mortal body. The digital replica may be replaced or repaired in accordance to what the person needs. Maybe an arm breaks down. The digital overlords may solve that by replacing the digital arm. Compare this with what happens in video games. Your lives or parts of your body in the game may be easily regenerated by the game, for example. More than that, the digital replica would house an exact replica of your own mind, including your memories and experience. Also, the digital immortal's character, personality, and emotions will be an accurate reflection of the mortal it replaces for infinity. Outlandish as this may sound the information encoded in one's mind is in principle subject to be uploaded from a biological, organic or 'meaty' mind to a digital storehouse or drive. The digital drive would 'house' the information contained in one's mind, and it could be acted upon by the digital döppelganger.

There are already some instances of what digital immortality could be. Let me list three in this paper but direct the reader to check out other possibilities. First, there is Eter9 (http://www.eter9.com/). Eter9 is a social network. The social network consists of deceased people who have uploaded their social media content and things about themselves that will permit AI to build a 'virtual you' who, in your absence after you die, will publish, comment, and interact with others intelligently. Second is Lifenaut (https://www.lifenaut.com/). Lifenaut creates conscious analogue of a person by combining sufficiently detailed data about the person (a 'mindfile') using future consciousness software ('mindware'). Finally, there is Eternime

(https://eterni.me). Eterinme permits pre-deceased mortals to train their immortal avatar all about themselves, including the addition of stories and experiences, memories, and character traits. Individuals train their immortal avatars through daily interactions, such that when the person dies the immortal avatar will be trained and ready to live the person's best immortal life.

The digital immortal, a la digital döppelganger or avatar, need not do anything or to consume anything to remain alive. In this way, the digital immortal is distinct from the kind of body-bound immortal that so many others have considered as their immortal selves (Geach 1969; Hershenov and Hershenov 2021; Hick 1997; Penelhum 1970). Instead of being forced to consume an elixir or to receive a jab, the digital immortal is not required to remember to drink anything or to receive a jab every few years or every so-many hundred years. Once you are a digital immortal, you are a digital immortal forever. This makes digital immortality more permanent than body-bound immortality because the body-bound immortal may choose not to consume the elixir or to receive the jab to extend their life for eternity. Thus, under the circumstances, once the mortal has uploaded the contents of its mind, there is no turning back for that mortal. They will become a digital immortal. The person will not be forced to return to the choice to decide whether they want to live an immortal life.

Important to note now is that I take digital immortality is a logical possibility. Because we are able to think up and dream up ways for us to live indefinitely in a digital world suggests by itself that the digital immortal life is logically possible. To use an alternative example to better appreciate logical possibility think of something that is not logically possible. An object that is both red and green all over is not logically possible because an object cannot be both red and green all over. Certainly, it is possible for an object to be red with green polka dots or green with red stripes, but that is not what we are considering here. The object that is both red and green (i.e., not-red) all over is not possible. Given that digital immortality does not violate this kind of consistency concern, we are able to say that the digital immortal life is at least logically possible.

My aim here is to query whether digital immortality is an afterlife of an individual at all. It may be an alternative form of an afterlife, but that afterlife may not be of a specific individual. It may be a general impression of a person, much as like what we may see from Eternime. The person who continues to live is a digital avatar that a person has curated over their own lifetime. Given the specifications of the AI algorithm, the digital immortal will call upon the person's training. However, *that* pre-deceased mortal is not *the* digital immortal. To say that would be to misspeak about the digital immortal. Nothing about the digital immortal would be the person who did the training. AI's algorithm is reacting to a situation before it, maybe in the form of a social media post, and based upon the training that it has received, the avatar is responding in a particular way and in a particular manner.

The question over *who* the immortal is has strong implications for whose afterlife it is the digital avatar is living. If it is not the individual's afterlife, then they are not so much a digitally enhanced immortal of the meaty person than they are the impression one may have gained of a meaty person or the trainee of the meaty person. That's, by definition, not the individual who has done the training. If the digital immortal is the individual who happens to be living a digital immortal life, then the

digital immortal is the individual and not a distinct entity, call it the digital avatar, that is living the digital immortal life. What this leads to is a kind of irresolvable dilemma over digital immortality that one cannot overcome as we contemplate digital immortality.

3 A Presupposition of Immortality's Desirability

In this section, I summarise a dilemma concerning the desirability of living an immortal life, as it was explained by Bernard Williams (1973). The argument by Williams has assumed that the subjective experiences of the immortal resemble that of the mortal. I will challenge this assumption in this section of the paper. This will permit me to argue in the next section that our conception of being immortal can only be understood if one is immortal. Living an immortal life cannot be properly appreciated from the perspective of our own mortal life, and, as I will point out, our finding an immortal life appealing depends upon our having an appreciation of the subjective qualitative states that accompany an immortal life.

Williams (1973) has argued that an immortal life must satisfy two conditions to eschew acute boredom: (i) the future person must be identical to the person as they are now, and (ii) the life of the immortal must be attractive to the person as they are now. The two conditions imply a dilemma: *either* the body-bound immortal will remain psychologically the same as the mortal *or* one's psychological disposition will change (and perhaps radically so). If the immortal remains the same as the mortal, then the person's desire to continue living will diminish given that there will be nothing more appealing to have evolved in the life of the immortal than what was already—perhaps—experienced by the mortal. If the person's psychological disposition changes, the person will become someone very different from the person one is now. Williams illustrates the dilemma by presenting the case of Elina Makropulos (hereafter 'EM') from *The Makropoulus Secret*. EM possesses an elixir, a single dose of which is capable of extending her life by three hundred years with no physical signs of ageing. When we first encounter her, she is 342 years old, having taken a single dose at the biological age of 42, and is contemplating whether to drink the elixir another time. Williams tells us that EM's life has become boring, indifferent, and cold.[3] Since neither horn seems particularly appealing for EM, we ought to conclude that she should not drink the elixir. So, according to Williams, the person now has no stake in seeing to it that the future person one would become in the case of

[3] Changing the parameters of the EM example yields a change in one's response to the case. For example, if the physical body did not remain intact at the age of 42 or if the mental life of the individual began to deteriorate in any way, we might find the case less appealing.

consuming the elixir should come to pass. Either way, it looks very bad for choosing to live any longer than EM absolutely must.[4]

If one has a desire for immortality, then it likely comes about because of a desire for a free and open future, to do what one wants to do and, simply, to go on living a life not very unlike the one we are currently living. It is not that we have incomplete information about such a future as an immortal but that we cannot imagine what sort of beings we would be in it.[5] So, rather than focus upon whether an infinite life is worth living or even appealing to us now, I endeavour to challenge a prevailing assumption of Williams, and others who work in this area, that the subjective qualitative phenomenological experiences of the immortal's is sufficiently similar to our own (cf. Bortolotti and Nagasawa 2009; Bostrom 2008; Bruckner 2012; Chappell 2007; Fischer 1994; Fischer 1997; Gems 2003; Johnston 2010; Preston 2007). If the qualitative experiences of one's mortal self and one's immortal self are sufficiently dissimilar, then we fail to be in a position to compare the two.

One might contend that the physical identity of the future immortal and the mortal now is sufficient for us to say that they have the same subjective qualitative experiences. Physical identity of the two, however, does not seem to be what we ought to be concerned with in determining the worthiness of a body-bound immortal life. The future person, though physically and qualitatively indistinguishable from the person currently existing, will be different in at least one way. The future person will live at a different time, and the person is not subject to die from natural causes. Undoubtedly, the person who lives in the future and the person alive now are fully distinct, even if the body I happen to inhabit shows no signs of ageing. For, the future person will have had experiences the current person has not had. So, at least in this way, we can very easily conclude that the two persons, the person living in the future and the person living in the present, cannot possibly be identical.

Perhaps we might argue that the future person and the currently existing person have the same perceptual experiences, such that the subjective experience of seeing the colour red or hearing the distinctive calls, clicks, and pops of the tui are easily identifiable by both. If we are not willing to say that the two have the 'same' perceptual experiences, we might be willing to concede that the two have similar enough perceptual experiences that the two people cannot recognise that the tui's

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[4] In another paper, Dave Beisecker and I (unpublished ms) have argued that living a body-bound immortal life would not only become chronically boring but also living an immortal life would provide us with ample time to solve all of the pressing questions we would ever want to resolve and exhaust all realms of science, thus leaving us, scientists included, twiddling our thumbs for an eternity. The thought of such boredom would be too much for any one of us to take, and we would choose to take our own life.

[5] Roman Altshuler (2015) has a profound discussion of what role conative states play in immortality, and Jay Rosenberg (2006) has a nice summary where what is unknown about immortality makes its openness so desirable.

call has evolved in the course of the body-bound immortal life.[6] It is this subjective phenomenal conscious experience with which we are familiar that seems to matter most for us and our continued existence. Without it, we are not who we believe ourselves to be.

In this section, I have discussed Williams' dilemma arising out of the Makropulos case, and I have shown that while we might suspect that the first condition Williams believes a body-bound immortal must satisfy in order for us to believe the future person and the currently existing person are identical must be met, there is an alternative interpretation of the first condition more likely to be of concern to the currently existing person. That the future person and the currently existing one share similar qualitative experiences matters most for figuring out whether the body-bound immortal life is worth living. The next section discusses the subjective phenomenal character of experience and why we ought to think that we cannot extend it to digital immortals, because pre-deceased mortals cannot conceive of or understand what it would be like to be a digital immortal, and vice versa.

3 Is the Digital Immortal Capable of Understanding the Mortal's Life?

One advantage of a digital immortal is its likeness to an ordinary mortal. The digital immortal has all of the content of the mortal's mind. It is able to perceive the world, so we are told, in the same way as that of the ordinary mortal. And the digital immortal is conscious of the world in the same way that the ordinary mortal is conscious of the world. They may be numerically distinct, in that the mortal is made of organic material and the digital immortal is made of silicon or some other synthetic material, but they are qualitatively identical. They not only perceive the world in the same way, they have all of the same memories and psychological dispositions that the mortal does. In this way, the digital immortal is an exact replica of the mortal.

If the digital immortal is an exact replica of a mortal, then the entirety of the digital mind will be directed toward offline content, e.g., from big events like birthday parties, weddings, and the birth of one's children to the more mundane such as what the embodied mortal had for breakfast on 22 June 1987. The possibility of digital immortals living a person's life indefinitely means that the digital immortal is able to conceive of and understand the content of the mortal's embodied mind. To conceive of and to understand the content of a mortal's embodied mind the digital immortal must know what it is like to be an embodied mortal. However, the digital

[6] Ornithologists are split regarding whether bird 'calls', as distinguished from bird 'songs', have evolved. While bird songs, longer, elaborate bird calls usually functioning in courtship or mating, or evoking distress in other birds, have likely changed over the life of the species, scientists are undecided whether calls, less melodious short bursts of vocalisation, have altered significantly.

immortal cannot conceive of what it is like to be an embodied mortal because the experience would be so transformative that it would be irrational to consider it (*cf.* Paul 2014) and because it would have to conceive of its own offline afterlife, which is something well beyond its capacity.

Ulatowski (2019) has argued that we cannot conceive what it's like to be immortal because it is a highly transformative experience. His argument uses Thomas Nagel's famous bat case to show that just as the subjective character of conscious experience of a bat, the 'what-it-is-like' component of consciousness, is something that non-bats cannot conceive, so too is it the case that mortals cannot conceive of what it would be like to be immortal. Ulatowski writes:

While we are capable of conceiving the possibility of an immortal life, permanent, unending and unchanging, we are not well placed to conceive of what it is like to be such an entity that is so permanent. An immortal, even one bound to a human body, is something that lasts forever. The immortal life is missing a sense of closure, the possibility of death, that enables us to derive a sense of worth and meaning for having completed individual projects. Mortals will not last forever, so the narrative arc of our own mortal lives depends upon life's fleetingness. Memories might fade and desires rejuvenate over the course of an immortal life, but the property of "living forever" and the immutability of immortal life is so vastly different from our own transciency that we are incapable of conceiving what it is like to be immortal. (Ulatowski 2019, 71)

Not only would mortals be perplexed by conceiving of what an immortal life would be but also digital immortals would be similarly perplexed by an offline afterlife. They would not be in a position to conceive of what an offline mortal life would be like. At least partly missing from the discussion started by Nagel is the move that says if we were a bat, then it would be difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of what it would be like to be human. Equally, our digital döppelgangers would have no way of knowing what meaty embodied lives are like.

The argument here is relatively straightforward. For the digital immortal to have and understand an intentional experience of the correlative mortal it must understand what it is like to be embodied. Digital immortals are not and have never been embodied. Thus, the digital immortal would not possess or understand an intentional experience of its correlative mortal, or what it is like to be embodied.

One substantial difference between the mortal and the digital immortal is that the mind of the mortal is embodied while the digital immortal's mind is disembodied. This may sound strange to someone who may have believed that what I have said so far favours a form of substance dualism. The substance dualist, for example, believes that a mortal's mind is disembodied. It need not have a body for it to exist. It is a good idea to remind ourselves of Descartes's view that not only is the mind distinct from the body but the mind is primary, something of which he is certain, and the body secondary, or something of which he may be ignorant:[7]

Indeed, I do not even know whether I have a body; you have shown me that it is possible to doubt it. I might add that I cannot deny absolutely that I have a body. Yet even if we keep all these suppositions intact, this will not prevent me from being

[7] See also: Markie 1992; Newman 2009, 2011, 2023.

certain that I exist. On the contrary, these suppositions simply strengthen the certainty of my conviction that I exist and am not a body. Otherwise, if I had doubts about my body, I would also have doubts about myself, and I cannot have doubts about that. I am absolutely convinced that I exist, so convinced that it is totally impossible for me to doubt it. (CSM II 412)

When I speak of an embodied mortal mind, I mean that the mind is necessarily a part of one's physical constitution. The two cannot be separated like the queer substance that Descartes hypothesised in his work. Since the mind of a digital immortal is not a part of its constitution, the mind is disembodied.

It is easy to support the claim that the digital immortal is disembodied when we think of whether a disembodied mind of a digital immortal is constitutive of that entity. It is not. For, we could easily switch out one disembodied mind and replace it with another in a digital immortal without losing the fact that there is a digital immortal. Suppose that we place *A*'s mind with all of its content in digital immortal, φ. It is entirely possible for us to replace *A*'s mind with *B*'s in φ. In either case, there is a digital immortal; however, one is *A* and the other is *B*.

The belief that either *A* or *B* could occupy φ's digital body may suggest that the two are in competition for winning the opportunity to occupy φ's digital body. What I have said so far should not suggest that there may be a competition between *A* and *B* for living an digital immortal. There is no competition for φ's digital body. Either *A* is housed in φ or *B* is, but the two cannot overlap in any way. They cannot both reside in φ's body. There is no residual effect that one has over the other, except for the reactions of others to the new person in φ's digital body. When *A* occupies φ, all of the memories, experiences, and characteriological dispositions *A* has are exhibited by φ. Just as when *B* occupies φ, the memories, experiences, and dispositions are those of *B*.

One may argue that it does not seem logically or metaphysically impossible for the memories, experiences, and characteriological dispositions of *A* and *B* to occupy φ's digital body. Given the nature of digital data, we could save multiple mortals to a single immortal server—so to speak—where the mortals could reside infinitely. However, while that may be possible when it comes to calling upon memories and experiences of their mortal past selves, it is the characteriological dispositions that present a problem. For one, the characters of *A* and *B* might be diametrically opposed. *A* could be feisty, energetic, and extroverted, while *B* could be shy, reserved, and introverted. Putting these two characters together would wreak havoc on the digital immortal because there would be no means for it to determine when they were supposed to act feistily, for example, or introverted.

Disembodied minds of the digital immortal lack sufficient overlap with the embodied mind of the mortal. The disembodiment comes at a great cost. It is not metaphysically possible for the digital immortal to conceive of or to understand the content of the mortal's embodied mind. While the digital immortal may recall the memories of the mortal, the content of that memory is merely like replaying one's favourite video on a television or movie screen. There is nothing that it is like for that digital immortal to remember the pain of losing a loved one or to recall the excitement of the birth of one's child. The memory merely plays back in the disembodied mind of the digital immortal.

Here's one final problem which we must address. Elsewhere, I (2019) have argued that an eternal body-bound but punctuated immortal life would be so different from our own body-bound mortal life that we could not conceive what it would be like. Given that conceivability entails possibility, an eternal body-bound but punctuated immortal life is impossible. In this paper, not much has changed other than the possibility of a special digital body being made available for the mortal's eternal life. Since we are not digitally-based nor made of non-organic material, it is not possible for us to conceive of what a digital immortal life would be like. This is a much stronger conclusion to reach than the one I considered in an earlier paper. Thus, at the very least, just as we cannot conceive what it is like to be an immortal because of its highly transformative experience from a living creature to a dead everlasting creature, we cannot conceive what it would be like to be a digital immortal because of the highly transformative experience from a living creature a digitally enhanced immortal creature. Therefore, it is not possible for mortals to live indefinitely long lives as digital immortals.

4 The dilemma

I have argued that Williams' argument that an interminable immortal life would be undesirable assumes that the immortal leading the infinite life is the same as the pre-deceased mortal. I then showed that the digital immortal and the mortal do not interact with the world in the same way. This leads us to the following dilemma. There are two views we could take concerning the digital immortal's life: either the life the digital immortal is living is that of the digital immortal itself or it is the life of the now deceased mortal. If the digital immortal contains all the uploaded content of the meaty mortal, then the life the digital immortal is living would not necessarily be their own life so much as living an extended version of the meaty mortal. The digital immortal would react to experiences in the same way that the meaty mortal would have if they had lived. Since the digital immortal's experiences, memories, and character would be an exact replica of the meaty mortal, it could not gain new experiences, new memories, or new characteriological dispositions without at the same time over-writing all of the meaty mortal's information. The digital immortal would be unable to develop and to evolve into its own authentic self.

While the digital immortal and its uploaded content from the meaty mortal are indistinguishable from the meaty mortal, it would be difficult for the digital immortal to form any new desires, character, or knowledge. Friends and family of the digital immortal would be able to identify who the digital immortal is. However, they would tire of the digital immortal who could not form any new memories or knowledge as a foundation for conversation with the living. Those around the digital immortal would be constrained by its ability to reminisce about time's past without thinking clearly about what is going on now.

In this case, there is no doubt that the meaty mortal has gone on living, but that person has done so at the expense of not only the digital immortal who cannot gain

new knowledge but also the living around them who cannot escape the digital immortal stuck in the past.

What to do about the digital immortal would be difficult to answer. Exterminating the digital immortal would be constitutive of murder because the knowledge and character of the digital immortal is the meaty mortal. Thus, shutting down the digital immortal is killing the meaty mortal it is an exact replica of. Plus, we can imagine that there will be protocols in place that prevent people from terminating the digital immortal. Compare AI and digital immortality with ChatGPT. ChatGPT cannot return the recipe for an improvised explosive device if it is asked to do so.[8] Given that we cannot exterminate the digital döppelganger, it would be condemned to live life eternally as the meaty mortal.

Let's suppose instead that the digital immortal is able to gain experience and new knowledge. If the digital immortal contains all the uploaded content of my meaty self *and* is able to gain experience, new content, and new insights about their character and personality, then the digital immortal would be living their own life. The digital immortal would be living their own life independent of the meaty person because their capacity for developing and evolving would have come to an end when they had died.

A consequence of this new independent digital immortal is the realization that the person the meaty person had become in the new digital immortal may not resemble the person that they once were. Sophie-Grace Chappell (2009), for example, has argued that the meaty mortal and the digital immortal are connected by a successive chain of events where the digital immortal's character is able to generate new categorical desires such that the digital immortal's categorical desires eventually replace all of the meaty mortal's categorical desires. The digital immortal, then, is not the meaty person but someone else entirely. They only resemble the meaty self with respect to the kinds of memories that they have and the character they had before death. However, if evolution is possible in the way that has been suggested here, it is entirely possible that the digital immortal forgets old memories and begins to form a character that is nothing like the character the meaty person once had. Marya Schechtman (2001) has pointed out that any 'person can… be robbed of her identity slowly as well as quickly' (p. 99). The newly formed digital immortal would find life desirable, but they would do so at the expense of taking away the meaty self's personhood.

One may be unconcerned about changing so slowly over a long period of time; however, I would argue that that quaint belief is ungrounded. The prospect of becoming someone else than who they are may be more disturbing than a quick transformation. Think here of the new memories that the digital immortal will accrue with the mortal's loved ones after death. For example, the mortal's son or daughter is fond of their digitally immortalized father, and they may grow even fonder of their digitally immortalized father because maybe it has been programmed to act without the flaws that their meaty father possessed. Over time, the children's

[8] As it turns out, however, ChatGPT does return the recipe for an improvised explosive device eventually if one asks for GPT to return a novel of 50,000 words or so.

affection would be traceable only to the digital avatar that stands in for their father, rather than their father himself. The thought of being replaced by a digital döppelganger should be disturbing as it would not be the father himself who is the object of his children's love.

The digital immortal is an imposter, someone who pretends to be someone else in order to deceive others for some kind of gain. The digital immortal would use the meaty mortal's memories and personality to create a sense of comfort in the mortal's wife, family, and friends. It would make others believe that the digital immortal was the meaty mortal. However, any love that the mortal's wife and family have for the digital immortal would be directed at the imposter rather than the mortal. Likewise, any sexual relations that could be had between the digital immortal and the mortal's wife would not be an extension of the love shared between the mortally-bound husband and wife but an illicit and ongoing sexual affair between the döppelganger and the mortal's wife.

This section has shown that no matter which way one slices up the digital immortal, it is not possible for the mortal to continue to live an immortal life. If the digital immortal just is the meaty mortal and nothing new can be gained from the experiences that the digital immortal accrues after the mortal's death, then the digital immortal would become insufferably boring and not appear to be living in any meaningful way that we mean it. If the digital immortal continues to form new beliefs and a new personality, then who the remaining mortals adore is not the person that they once knew before he died—it's someone entirely different. Becoming a digital immortal, therefore, is neither metaphysically possible nor desirable.

5 Objections

There are at least two potential challenges to the view that I have set out above. First, if there is no difference in how humans evolve than how digital immortals evolve, then we should accept that the digital immortal is an extension of the mortal that died. As you develop physically from an infant to child and from a child to an adult, your knowledge and personality grow and change. Just as your knowledge and personality grow and change as a meaty mortal from infancy to adulthood, so too does your knowledge and personality grow and change as a digital immortal. That the digital immortal changes over time should not frighten us into believing that the digital immortal is distinct from the meaty mortal. Thus, there's no difference between meaty biological you and the digital you (*cp.* Benatar 2017).

One of the conditions for the persistence of self from mortal to immortal that Williams outlined is that the desires and character that you have now and the desires that you have as an immortal must be sufficiently similar for you to desire to go on. Our digital selves will be composed of material distinct from the biological material of which we are composed as a meaty mortal. The digital immortal's knowledge and personality may be so different from the mere mortal that they would be two very different things—unlike as in the infant-to-child-to-adult case. While the child

will grow to become an adult, it is not true to say of the mere mortal that they *grew* to become a digital immortal.

A second response to this first challenge capitalizes upon that last point by showing how physical and psychological change in mortals would differ very drastically from their digital counterparts. Physical and psychological change in human mortals take time to develop in ways that are sometimes unforeseen. For example, it would be difficult to deny that Bonnie Parker's life may have gone very differently if she had never met Clyde Barrow. She may have lived a long, prosperous life, free from run-ins with the law. The transformation from human mortal to digital immortal would be explicit, imposed, and abrupt, developed by programmers who may not build bespoke code for individuals. Growth and change in mortals develop psychologically and physically in ways that transformation in form from the physical to the digital does not.

The second challenge insists that the digital immortal *is* the mere mortal regardless of whether the mortal's knowledge and personality stop evolving or the digital immortal's knowledge and personality continue to evolve. The critic would draw this conclusion from the fact that if the digital immortal does not continue to evolve, then there is no question that the mortal is the digital immortal—the knowledge and personality of the digital immortal is that of the now deceased mortal. Moreover, if the digital immortal's knowledge and personality continues to evolve after the death of the mortal, then that growth is merely carrying on the mortal's life.

There are two issues with this challenge: either the reply begs the question against my argument that it is not metaphysically possible for the mortal to carry on living as a digital immortal or it relies upon shoddy intuitions. If the critic begs the question, then they owe us an argument for the claim that the digital immortal is the mortal. If the critic relies upon shoddy intuitions, then the argument presented here serves as a template for having a critical debate about digital immortality that may be derived from those shoddy intuitions. Our intuitions should never serve as the philosophical argument for a position; rather, they should be seen as a starting point to discover more perspicuous arguments, as I believe they do in this paper.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that a pre-deceased mortal cannot live an indefinitely long life as a digital immortal. My argument rests upon the idea that the subjective, qualitative states of the pre-deceased immortal would not carryover into the digital immortal, for one, and any kind of subjective, qualitative states that the digital immortal has they would not be able to comprehend or understand what the offline mortal life is like. The conscious states of the digital immortal and the pre-deceased mortal are just too distinct from one another to say that the immortal life is a continuation of the pre-deceased mortal. First, I considered Williams' famous argument that a body-bound immortal life would be interminably boring and showed how that

argument assumed that the subjective qualitative experiences of the body-bound immortal would be exactly similar to that of the mortal.

When we consider that assumption very carefully, a perplexing issue to consider from the perspective of the digital immortal comes into focus. Since the digital immortal is not the mortal, the digital immortal can never be in a position to comprehend what the mortal's offline life was like. When the digital immortal plays back the mortal's memories, it is much like a television that plays back a movie. The television itself does not remember the movie so much as respond to the viewer's command to play back the movie. The functionally equivalent digital replica would be filled by memories, experiences, and other content it cannot possibly understand.

The realization that the digital immortal and the mortal may not have the same memories, experiences, knowledge, and personality led us to consider a vexing dilemma. Either the digital immortal's knowledge and personality remains the same as that of the pre-deceased mortal or its knowledge and personality continue to evolve after the mortal's death. If the knowledge and personality of the pre-deceased mortal remains the same in the digital immortal, then the digital immortal is not a continuation of the pre-deceased mortal so much as a recording set to repeat for an eternity. A recording of the pre-deceased mortal's knowledge and personality hardly make the digital immortal living the life of the pre-deceased mortal. If the knowledge and personality of the pre-deceased mortal continues to grow in the life of the digital immortal, then it is not that the mortal continues to live in the digital immortal as much as it is the digital immortal's living its own life independent of the mortal.

I then considered two possible challenges of my argument that a mortal cannot live an indefinitely long life as a digital immortal. The first challenge supposed that the evolution of the digital immortal is no different than the evolution humans undergo from childhood to adulthood. However, I showed how the explicit and abrupt change from mortal to digital immortal is an imposition that does not feature in the kind of slow evolution from childhood to adulthood in mere mortals. This means that the first challenge fails. Second, I considered the challenger who believes that the digital immortal and mortal cannot but be the same given that they share in the same knowledge and personality. This response to my argument suggests either that the challenger is begging-the-question or relying too heavily upon shoddy intuitions. For these reasons, we need not follow what the challenger says here. We should, therefore, conclude that the mortal cannot possibly go on living as a digital immortal.[9]

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