Virtual Humanity And Digital Immortality: Redefining Life And Legacy

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Abstract

The concept of making human lives digitally immortal or creating a virtual human being would be one of the inexplicable human inventions. This paper particularly refers to Martine Rothblatt's 'Virtually Human-The Promise- and the Peril of Digital Immortality.' Martine elaborates on how a human being can still live among their loved ones even if their body is turned to ashes. However, its something that deviates from human convention and this paper attempts to explore whether this new revolution will be embraced by human species and what holds in Buddhism for mindclone, will it bring devastation or harmony in humanity.

Key words: Digital Immortality, Virtual Human, Mindclone, Cyberconsciousness

Introduction

In a digital era, every layman might perceive that their lives will be surrounded by robots, doing their task on their behalf and making life easy. At the same time there is an argument that artificial intelligence will supersede human intelligence. Perhaps scientist, scholars or any relevant stakeholders might be calling out for AI regulation as Gray Scott rightly said, "The real question is, when will we draft an artificial intelligence bill of rights? What will that consist of? And who will get to decide that?".

Martine Rothblatt in her book 'Virtually human-The Promise- and the Peril of Digital Immortality' gives us an incredible view on how digital technology can keep us immortal. Virtually Human explores what the not-too-distant future will look like when cyberconsciousness simulation of the human brain via software and computer technology becomes part of our daily lives. Rothblatt states that " Digital consciousness is about life and the living, because, as you will learn, digital consciousness is our consciousness." One cannot ignore the fact as digital technology and the development of ever more sophisticated forms of artificial intelligence, "you and I will be able to have an ongoing relationship with our families: exchange memories with them, talk about their hopes and dreams, and share in the delights of holidays, vacations, changing seasons, and

everything else that goes with family life—both the good and the bad—long after our flesh and bones have turned to dust."

Mindclone

Author of Virtually Human together with Hanson Robotics, created Bina48- the world's most sentient robot. Bina48 is a nascent Mindclone of Rothblatt's wife that can engage in conversation, answer questions, and even have spontaneous thoughts that are derived for multimedia data in a Mindfile created by the real Bina. Mindclones is a software version of our minds, software-based alter egos, doppelgängers, mental twins. Mindclones are mindfiles used and updated by mindware that has been set to be a functionally equivalent replica of one's mind. A mindclone is created from the thoughts, recollections, feelings, beliefs, attitudes, preferences, and values you have put into it. Mindclones will experience reality from the standpoint of whatever machine their mindware is run on. Today, most of us are active on Facebook, Instagram sharing photos and writing blogs or composing Vlogs. This is already a way of creating a Mindfile, a digital database of one's thoughts, memories, feeling, and opinions that is essentially a back-up copy of our mind. Soon, this Mindfile can be made conscious with special software, that is mindware that mimics the way human brains organize information, create emotions and achieve self-awareness. Rothblatt (2019) writes that:

Amputees miss their limbs but acclimate when given an artificial replacement. In fact, the comparison suggests an apt metaphor: The mindclone is to the consciousness and spirit as the prosthetic is to an arm that has lost its hand. (p.27)

She writes that Mindclones will experience reality from the standpoint of whatever machine their mindware is run on. When the body of a person with a mindclone dies, it will not feel that they have personally died, although the body will be missed in the same ways. Rothblatt argues that mindclone is completely different from genetic cloning, though both is accompanied by legal and social consideration. Genetic cloning does not create any part of a person's consciousness, as, for example, identical twins do not have identical minds. Furthermore, a genetic clone of a person is not the person, just a copy of the DNA of a person. Digital cloning of our own minds is an entirely different matter.

"I believe mindclone will be humanities biggest invention" Martine Rothblatt- interview with Bloomberg QuickTake

Cyberconsciousness

Human consciousness is essential composition in the journey of mindclone. "It is the consciousness that makes us us. The same qualities that constitute our consciousness—our memories, reasoning abilities, experiences, evolving opinions and perspectives, and emotional engagement with the world—will give rise to the digital consciousness of our mindclones, or what I will refer to as cyberconsciousness" Rothblatt (p. 25). The understanding on consciousness varies but the similarity remains only on 'self-awareness' thus, remains as an important facet of a conscious person, it's not the only qualification. Therefore, it would define cyberconsciousness and programmer can write a concise piece of self-aware software. "Self-aware software and robotic machines don't feel physical or emotional pain or pleasure either—they are not sentient. Most people require mental subjectivity to include emotions, that is, sentience, in order to qualify as consciousness, because recognition of how we feel is integral to human consciousness—to the "human condition" (p.28). Yet sentience still doesn't get us where we want to be in defining consciousness, because we expect conscious beings to be independent thinkers as well as feelers.

Hence, "feelings" is not a stand-alone description of consciousness either. Physical feelings don't require complex cognitive capability." She affirms that human consciousness is an ability to be autonomous, ability to learn, reasoning, and judgement. To be humanly conscious necessarily implies an intermingled unconscious mind. As a human mind inevitably shunts certain conceptions (generalizations and stereotypes), motivations (choose this), and decisions (avoid danger) to unconscious neural patterns, thereby providing more time and freeing up more brain power for conscious neural patterns. The same will occur with cyberconsciousness. Much of who we are is what we consciously attend to out of the unconsciously managed background.

Therefore, there is a real intelligent design that would make human live immortal in digital platform. She predicts that it is merely a matter of decades before symbol-association software achieves the complexity of human thought and emotion (mindware) and converges with the information billions of people are already engaged in compiling (mindfiles) to form software brains (mindclones). Mindclones will be among the first cyberconsciousness beings. They will speak from computerized devices using the voice tones and visual representations of the facial mannerisms of humans, whether it's a high-def human face on a computer screen or an actual 3D-printed replica of a human person like BINA48.

"I find the prospect of documented lives chilling, but some people will like the idea. For one thing, a documented life can be a good defense If someone ever accused you of something, you could retort: "Hey, buddy, I have a documented life.… I can play back anything I've ever said. So don't play games with me."- Bill Gates, The Road Ahead.

Will Humankind Embrace Mindclone?

For those who have lost their loved ones, mindclone will be exhilarating concept as they would endure their presence forever. But having a dead person living alive in the form of sentient robot is something deviating from the human's convention. Convention here refers to their belief system which they have been living with for generations. At least for celebrities and renowned figure, their works are usually documented in videography therefore we can see them but it cannot interact like humanoid robot (BINA48). So, we just remember their work or art that is preserved in multimodal tools. While the Mindclones are a composition of human consciousness or self-awareness; human cyberconsciousness makes personal yet concrete, and androcentric yet ascertainable. Grouping self-awareness and morality into autonomy, and sentience and transcendence into empathy. Therefore, "Human Cyberconsciousness is a continuum of software-based human-level autonomy and empathy as determined by consensus of a small group of experts in matters of human consciousness." Hence, we see a future where we can say that only the body has vanished but the soul is still us in the form of mindclone.

Scary, weird, yet for those whose presence is essential might opt for the idea of mindclone. This is because we have seen, read, or heard about people opting for 'synthetic love'. Davecat, who considers himself as an activist for synthetic love has been dating and married to a doll spoke to The Atlantic stating that "there was never a moment when Shi-chan- or any Doll, for that matter-was merely an object to me." (Beck, 2013). He thinks that synthetic partners are ideal for those who don't want to deal with human's inconsistencies. Similar to Davecat, there are people who have officially tied knot with dolls and treat just like 'Organic human being'. Having such scenario or trend, mindclone shall be 'hot cake' for most of us.

Mindclone has a capability to think, feel, and act just as did the deceased original. It will have the deceased original's memories as mindflies. Rothblatt affirms:

"Cyberconsciousness implies what is called technoimmortality. Immortality sans technology, living forever, or until the end of Time, has of course never come anywhere close to happening and is in any event an eschatological concept beyond this book. Humans die within a few decades, and some other forms of nonanimal life can live for centuries or millennia, or even be revived from stasis after millions of years. None of this approaches the end of Time. Instead, we think of immortality as a spiritual concept (as in heaven or via reincarnation) or as a remnant of human existence (as in "Bach's music will live forever"). Cyberconsciousness will make it possible, for the first time, for a person to live in a kind of technoimmortality forever in the real world. Mindclones are the key to technoimmortality"(p.329).

Mindclone- Can this contradicts to non-Self theory?

In Buddhism, self is associated with egoism and draws on the hedonic principle in pursuit of desires. The non-self-cultivating process aims to minimize or extinguish the self and avoid desires, leading to selflessness. Dalai Lama (1995a, 2005) affirms that the Buddha's teaching is aimed at attaining an authentic, durable happiness by cultivating a transition from the self-state to the non-self-state. Brien (2018) asserts that the Buddha taught a doctrine called anatta, which is often defined as 'no-self', or the sense of being permanent, autonomous self is an illusion. As Buddhism holds that personal identity is delusional and the 'self' do not actually exist. Dalai Lama (1995a) advise that clinging to or being obsessed with the delusional self is the major cause of suffering.

The idea of mindclone to me is preserving your 'self' in the form of mindfiles and interacting with sentient robot. It is still to be attached with the worldly things and beings permanently. Perhaps there might be connection with self-centeredness. While eternal goal of Buddhist is 'nirvana' a state of non-self that involves a process of renouncing worldly things, particularly those for which attractiveness springs from egoism and desires. The law of nature is that people are born, grow old and leave the earth. But human desire to live life as long as possible and its quite normal desire for all. Therefore, Eminent Dalai Lama said " Technology certainly help us overcome our physical limitations, but we must be careful that new technology does not endanger our spiritual well-being" (2018) in an interview in De InGenieur.

To this Rothblatt is also considerate as she states that religious rituals are basically to demonstrate relationship with God. Rituals are best designed to nurture relationship with God, and this comes from the inner yearning of a humanly conscious being to answer to the questions such as "Why am I here? Is there a purpose? Who made me? Where did I come from? Why do things happen the way they do?" Mindclones will struggle with such questions because they will be virtually human with self-awareness.

Acceptance of Mindclone- Religious perspective

Rothblatt is positive that her idea of mindclone will be accepted in every religious belief. She holds with an opinion that religious movement have adapted to all kinds of social, cultural and political changes and have do so for millennia. Some of those such as slaves, immigrants, gays, which law had rejected were accepted by religion. "Mindclone are a creation of mankind, and a positive one in the main- they are us-so how they not be embraced by all" Rothblatt.

"Japan's traditional religion of Shintoism holds that both animate and inanimate objects from rock to trees to robots, have a spirit or soul just like a person" P.W.Singer, Wired of War.

Further, she refers to three religious philosophies to argue that mindclone can be treated as God's creation.

▪ The Creator of everything that is possible (e.g., Enlightenment view of religion). This interpretation of religious practice came about during the Enlightenment period, as a response to the preceding century of religious conflict in Europe. Theologians of the period wanted to reform faith and make it nonpolitical and nonviolent.

In terms of Christianity this meant a return to the simplicity of Scripture's core themes. For others, like English American political activists, it was a simple belief in God the Creator with no need for miraculous sources such as the Bible.

- The Creator of and Intervenor in everything that is possible (e.g., classical view of religion), which demands strict adherence to orthodox theological doctrines whatever they might be. This may also be considered Fundamentalist Religion, as in Salafist Islam, Pentacostalist Christianity, Mormonism, or Orthodox Judaisim.

- The Creator and Embodiment of everything that is possible (e.g., naturalistic view of religion). Religious naturalism is an approach to spirituality absent anthropomorphic supernaturalism. The interpretation of a religion in a naturalistic fashion focuses on the spiritual attributes of nature or the totality of the universe, and on understanding our moral relationship to it. Religious naturalism seeks to merge a scientific view of reality with the more subjective sensory experiences of spirituality (p.308).

Keeping these philosophies as a foundation, she affirms that mindclones can be like all things on Earth and will exist in the world. For a naturalistic religion the mindclone will be another facet of God, for enlightenment religion it will be a consequence of God's master toolkit and for classical religion it will be a result of human activity with potential for good or evil. However, classical view of religion will eventually accept mindclones and in doing so shall reap many rewards. "First, their numbers will grow rapidly as the cybernetic percentage of the world's population grows and the biological percentage shrinks. Second, they will carry out God's will on Earth by spreading His Word, and thus countering Evil, among all who can appreciate the difference—which will surely include mindclones" (p.309).

"Religion might not be so popular if ethics were easy. Digital immortality can help religion address the quest for an afterlife that hovers like a ghost within human consciousness. Virtual humanity can also supercharge religion in its "purpose of life" and "meaning of life" missions, by enabling us to do a great deal more with our lives. ..."

Why Immortality?

"Some people want to achieve immortality through their work or their descendants. I would prefer to achieve immortality by not dying."- Woody Allen

Immortality can bring in both pros and cons but its always attached with 'may be and may be not'. Therefore, wanting to have immortality is abstract or subjective. To those who are suffering in life might want a peaceful sleep that is death, while those who are doing good in life and enjoying their life might want to live forever. While Rothblatt brings out new perspective on immortality:

"It has been argued that people will treat the world more kindly if they know they must live with it forever. Or it can be argued that civilization will advance more assuredly if there would be more of a hands-on transferring of experience. On the other hand, it can be argued that there will be less room for new talent to shine if the old guard never leaves the stage. Or that society will change too slowly if a gerontocracy holds on

to power. I don't consider any of these abstract reasons particularly compelling. What is unambiguous, though, is that if you love or if you think you will eventually love being alive, you'll want to continue being alive. If you don't, you won't mind a peaceful death. The best default button is the individual's assessment of his or her own situation. " Therefore, the choice of mindclone would be based on individual's choice while its acceptance might influence with the belief they hold because of their religion, policy and over all uncertain future that holds for them with either adversity or good times they will have.

Conclusion

As Ray Kurzwell, the author of 'The Age of Spiritual Machines' states that "Martine Rothblatt has a knack for expanding our minds as well as our comfort zones beyond customary boundaries, be they of gender or substrate." It is true because virtual human- digital immortality gives a new hope towards human life and different perspective towards death. I personally felt devastated when my mother passed away and when I see her in photographs, I wish she speaks to me and this idea has been executed by Rothblatt through Bina48 a robot who has cyberconsciousness. Given the opportunity I would opt for a mindclone of my mother and feel her presence every day. But the convention that I follow, the belief my community, funeral ceremony or sermon delivered shall take time to embrace mindclone. Who knows we might have new edition in religious practices for funeral or sermons if mindclones come into existence? This article focuses mainly on ' Virtually human-The promise-and the peril of Digital immortality' and whether virtual human can be accepted within the sphere of human existence.

The development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race…. It would take off on its own, and re-design itself at an ever-increasing rate. Humans, who are limited by slow biological evolution, couldn't compete, and would be superseded." Stephen Hawking, BBC

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