

A Letter to Jordan

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Abstract

This piece draws inspiration from the scenario depicted at the Humans 2.0 Conference on the 1st of July 2022, and extends from the article ‘Humans 2.0: Mortal Life, Immortal Consequences’ in this issue that asks how society would regard a posthuman being. The piece is in the form of a letter to Jordan, the protagonist in the scenario, who becomes a posthuman cyber entity to escape death from terminal illness. In the letter, a close friend reflects on his thoughts and feelings about Jordan’s transformation, before conveying his perspectives on how this has impacted the world around him.

Keywords:

AI, artificial intelligence, cyber, ethics, society, posthumanism, transhumanism.

Hey Jordan,

How are you? I hope this email reaches you. It's been several days since your "transcendence" into the cyber realm. We are all worried that no one has gotten news from you. Encephalink has not been able to provide clear answers to public inquiries. Other than wanting to know you are alright, there are some things I need to say to you. I thought I might have alienated you when we last met. Please know that was not my intention.

I was relieved to learn that your operation to implant the Encephalink neuro-matrix chips was successful. I knew you had recovered well from the operation, but only truly relieved and convinced once we met in person. I was amazed at how well the tech suppressed your symptoms and even more so later, when it would become your gateway to the cyber realm. Those couple of hours spent catching up with you are now a much-cherished memory. I now hope we will soon have that sense of relief again when we know that the replication of your consciousness into the digital space has also been successful, and you are okay.

You had sent me an email shortly before your transcendence process, looking for clearer answers to the questions you had put to me when we caught up. I'm sorry I was vague, and I understand it may have come across to you, at the very least, that I was being evasive or worse, made you feel alienated. I'm sorry that I was not straightforward with you. They were questions that were reasonable of you to ask. But I did not know how to answer them at the time.

A question you asked quite candidly was, what I thought of you being part AI. You would recall the awkward silences and the slower conversation flows; it was not as easy as talking about the good times of yesteryears. Other than being happy for you, I couldn't explain my feelings about the new you. I was impressed with the progress you had made; you appeared healthy and alert. A stark contrast from the Jordan who had been unwell. And, coupled with the sight of the small, flat metallic objects adhered to the top and back of your head, I was in awe of you; it was as if meeting a character from a sci-fi novel. When you spoke, your speech was accompanied by your characteristic smile, your eyebrows and hands moved the way they always did – the way Jordan reached out to those around him. This familiarity was comforting. But there seemed to be an enigmatic disconnection amidst our interaction. You had appeared distant at times. I thought to myself that you were still the Jordan I grew up with. It was the nascent Encephalink tech that could not let you express the nuanced emotions that should have accompanied the facial expressions, gestures, and tones in your voice. Writing now, that matters not. I am just glad that you will now have a future. Please know that you remain one of my closest friends.

You had also asked what I thought of your intention for your consciousness to be replicated digitally, so that you may continue to exist as a wholly AI individual. This was not a simple question, as this meant first coming to terms with your death. I have known you for many years. I've witnessed your incredible ability to understand and adapt mentally to the disease, and your intrepid determination to overcome obstacles had further made you into the person I and others value dearly. So, you will forgive me for evading the question. I just wasn't ready to confront the inevitable, and frankly, I hadn't quite accepted a cyber existence as life. But, thinking on that

question now, you are someone who carefully considers and evaluates options, and when necessary, forges new paths. So, I will be with you on whatever you think is best for you. Your mother also eventually came around; she has been confident of your decisions ever since the success of the operation. I was more worried about the stress you and your mother had to endure from public perceptions and opinions when the EncephaLink spokesperson announced your intention to be the first posthuman in the form of a cyber entity. There was criticism from academics and media commentators, and human rights organisations, that EncephaLink was exploiting you for their own ends. Knowing you, I'm sure you didn't see yourself as being anyone's guinea pig. You were using EncephaLink as a means to your survival (what with the transcendence process being offered to you free of charge!). You had nothing to lose.

I'm sure you appreciated the roadblocks you had to navigate. Though patient you were with society's procedures, we were worried you were running out of time. If the transcendence process didn't occur well before your further decline, then chances of replicating your healthy state of mind would diminish. Many of these blocks stemmed from humans' collective inertia to drastic changes to the concept of the human condition, and the status quo. There were arguments against your transcendence from the outright uninformed and intellectual among us. Along with the religious views, which were not unexpected, many also thought you and EncephaLink were going against the natural order. However, such arguments lost momentum when comparing attempts to cure cancer and other diseases. The challenge for you was to prove that you were of sound mind, and that you weren't manipulated by EncephaLink. It was a great injustice that you not only had to fight for your survival, but also to convince our legal system that you should have a chance to outlive a terminal illness. I could only imagine the stress you were under. I hope amidst all that, you found comfort knowing you had firm backers!

It was a relief when the judges deliberated that you, and EncephaLink could proceed with the transcendence process. Many had doubted this outcome, as many had thought that it was the EncephaLink software that was doing the talking during the court proceedings. Clearly, EncephaLink had made the improvements to their tech to enable you to be you. And you had made an impression on the judges. I still recall seeing you before the panel, confidently, and passionately presenting your arguments. From my vantage, you had two battles – one, was convincing the judges, and the other was convincing EncephaLink to make their proprietary technologies available to public scrutiny. You had won both! EncephaLink's advanced interface hardware and anthropomorphic-replication algorithms were peer-reviewed and tested by academics and leaders in the industry. The majority was convinced that you were expressing your thoughts to the judges, and that the EncephaLink tech was a slave to your cognition; that you were not a sophisticated puppet. And, also importantly, experts were convinced that EncephaLink's tech could do what it claimed it could do – digitally replicate and preserve your nature, so that you can thrive as an AI after corporeal death. You will grow, adapt cognitively and emotionally like any human, only you will do so as an entity of sorts in the cyber realm.

I'm sure it was not lost on you, that what you achieved in those weeks before you transcended had significant implications for the rest of us. You had left this physical world with waves that are being felt. You had not only shown us the making of the world's first posthuman, but also the

possibility that a posthuman could legally have the same rights currently accorded to any human. You had also made the Encephalink technology accessible to any capable tech companies to further develop and innovate. This would mean transcendence technologies will likely become accessible faster to a wide section of society. And of course, you've gotten academics and armchair philosophers all fired up! You have accelerated a paradigm shift in our notion of human existence. You have also caused trepidation, as many think that you have opened the gate to a posthuman race that will eventually threaten humanity's existence. But I think such a sense of foreboding comes from a very human reaction, that is both visceral and ancient – the fear of the unknown and alien. I don't see why humans and posthumans can't co-exist. You may have certain abilities now being a cyberbeing, but I have no doubt your memories and experiences will still be influential factors in your evolution as a posthuman. And thus, you will still regard your family and friends with care, love, and respect. Given this, there's no reason humanity should fear you. I certainly will not regard you any differently.

When your body ceased to function, you were pronounced dead by clinicians. But Encephalink and independent experts proved that a new entity had emerged in the cloud and that it was "uniquely unique"; no one, however, could prove that it was posthumanly sentient. New fields are emerging to define a posthuman cyberbeing and to develop means to distinguish it from AIs and bots. In your mother's unyielding belief that you are now "out there", she decided to not hold a funeral service for you. And society doesn't know yet how to define your status. You have caused a lot of mixed feelings. Those who consider you a threat to humanity's future also regard you as the harbinger of humanity's immortality. It's hard to describe our state of mind Jordan, but your transformation has evoked simultaneously all the hopes and fears that humanity could ever imagine! What would be good now, is for you to reach out and tell us that you are okay. Many will think of you as "Jordan 2.0", but to your close ones, you will always be Jordan.

I truly hope you are well. And hopefully I've sufficiently answered your questions. Sorry for the long read. But perhaps you had read this in a split second! Time – how might you now perceive this? Perhaps, you will let me know.

Eagerly awaiting your reply.

Your friend,

Brasdir Eldor.