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The idea that human and artificial intelligence should merge is in the air these days. The Tesla and SpaceX chief executive Elon Musk, for instance, suggests “having some sort of merger of biological intelligence and machine intelligence”. His company, Neuralink, aims to make implanting chips in the brain as commonplace as laser eye surgery.

Underlying all this talk is a radical vision of the mind’s future. Ray Kurzweil, the futurist and director of engineering at Google, envisions a technotopia where human minds upload to the Cloud, becoming hyperconscious, immortal superintelligences. Mr Musk believes people should merge with AI to avoid losing control of superintelligent machines, and prevent technological unemployment.

But are such ideas really possible? The philosophical obstacles are as pressing as the technological ones. Here is a new challenge, derived from a story by the Australian science fiction writer Greg Egan. Imagine that an AI device called “a jewel” is inserted into your brain at birth. The jewel monitors your brain’s activity in order to learn how to mimic your thoughts and behaviours. By the time you are an adult, it perfectly simulates your biological brain.

At some point, like other members of society, you grow confident that your brain is just redundant meatware. So you become a “jewel head”, having your brain surgically removed. The jewel is now in the driver’s seat.

Unlike in Mr Egan’s story, let us assume the jewel works perfectly. So which is you — your brain or your jewel? It doesn’t seem possible that the jewel could ever truly be you, as your biological brain and consciousness exist alongside it. It is implausible to think that your consciousness could magically transfer to the jewel upon the destruction of your brain. Instead, it’s more likely that at the moment you opted to remove your brain, you inadvertently killed yourself.

This suggests a human merger with AI is ill-conceived — at least, if what is meant by that is the

eventual total replacement of the brain with AI components. Your mind is not its back-up drive,

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