





**SHORT COMMUNICATION**

## The Metaverse and Human Identity: Philosophical and Social Reflections on Virtual Existence

### El metaverso y la identidad humana: reflexiones filosóficas y sociales sobre la existencia virtual

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#### ABSTRACT

The emergence of the metaverse as a space for digital immersion and simulation invites profound reflection on human identity and social behavior. This article addresses the philosophical and social implications of inhabiting virtual realities, questioning the nature of presence, authenticity, and relationality in these environments. Drawing on indexed literature, we analyze how digital avatars mediate self-perception, how virtual interactions reshape community structures, and how immersion challenges the boundaries between the real and the simulated. We argue that the metaverse is not merely a technological innovation but a cultural and existential transformation that demands new ethical frameworks. This exploration raises critical questions about power dynamics, inclusion, and identity fluidity, proposing that the metaverse is both a reflection and a projection of contemporary humanity. The study contributes to the current academic debate by providing a multidisciplinary perspective, combining philosophical reasoning with sociological observation.

**Keywords:** Metaverse; Identity; Virtuality; Ethics; Digital Culture; Society.

#### RESUMEN

El surgimiento del metaverso como espacio de inmersión digital y simulación plantea una profunda reflexión sobre la identidad humana y el comportamiento social. Este artículo aborda las implicancias filosóficas y sociales de habitar realidades virtuales, cuestionando la naturaleza de la presencia, la autenticidad y las relaciones en estos entornos. A partir de literatura académica indexada, se analiza cómo los avatares digitales median la percepción del yo, cómo las interacciones virtuales transforman las estructuras comunitarias y cómo la inmersión difumina los límites entre lo real y lo simulado. Se argumenta que el metaverso no es solo una innovación tecnológica, sino una transformación cultural y existencial que exige nuevos marcos éticos. Esta exploración plantea preguntas críticas sobre dinámicas de poder, inclusión y fluidez identitaria, proponiendo que el metaverso es tanto un reflejo como una proyección de la humanidad contemporánea. El estudio contribuye al debate académico actual desde una perspectiva multidisciplinaria, combinando el análisis filosófico con la observación sociológica.

**Palabras clave:** Metaverso; Identidad; Virtualidad; Ética; Cultura Digital; Sociedad.

## INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, humanity has witnessed an unprecedented change in how reality is experienced. The emergence of the metaverse – understood as an immersive and interconnected digital environment – raises fundamental philosophical questions about the nature of being, identity, freedom, and human relationships. Far from being a simple technological innovation, the metaverse represents a new ontological frontier, where the boundaries between the real and the virtual are blurred, and the “I” acquires multiple forms of representation and presence.

This virtualization of experience brings with it profound cultural and social transformations. In these digital spaces, people communicate and build worlds, bond effectively, and negotiate new forms of existence. As pointed out, we face an “infosphere” where the real is reconfigured based on data, algorithms, and avatars.<sup>(1)</sup> Thus, the metaverse becomes an expanded mirror of the human condition, manifesting our collective aspirations and most complex ethical tensions.

### 1. Philosophical foundations: reality, identity and avatar

Philosophical reflection on the metaverse requires questioning traditional notions of reality, body, and identity. In immersive digital environments, the individual not only accesses a graphic representation of themselves –the avatar– but also lives through experiences that can have the same emotional, social, or ethical weight as experiences in the physical world.

Simulacra theory proposes that we live in a hyperreality where the simulated replaces the real as a referent of meaning.<sup>(1)</sup> In the metaverse, this hyperreality is not only materialized but institutionalized: users create and inhabit worlds that do not depend on the material to be meaningful, and they experience affective bonds, conflicts, and forms of cultural belonging.

From the identity perspective, digital environments allow for a fluid exploration of the self.<sup>(2)</sup> The avatar is not just a mask but a symbolic extension of the subject, which makes it possible to experiment with roles, genders, and forms of interaction. This performative identity is linked to theories that consider gender and subjectivity as constructions situated and repeated in social contexts.<sup>(3,4,5,6)</sup>

Likewise, all human interaction is mediated by a “staging” of the self, which is intensified in the metaverse. Each avatar is a carefully designed representation that responds to cultural codes, personal aspirations, and norms of the digital environment.<sup>(4)</sup> Thus, the self becomes an interface between the physical body and the virtual community, blurring the boundaries between what one is and what one projects to be.

In this context, the concept of the “infosphere” describes an ecosystem where online and offline life are integrated on the same plane of existence and where digital presence is not an accessory but a constituent part of the subject.<sup>(7,8,9,10,11)</sup> The avatar ceases to be a means of representation and becomes a dimension of being, questioning the dichotomy between the real and the virtual.

### 2. Social and relational impact of the metaverse

The emergence of the metaverse as an experiential environment raises profound transformations in the modes of human interaction and traditional socialization structures. It is no longer just a question of technological expansion but of a shift in the way of inhabiting the world with others. In this new symbolic space, the relational is reconfigured, giving rise to bonds not mediated by physical corporeality but by the digital construction of the self.

Far from replicating the relational models of the physical world, social dynamics in the metaverse demand new grammars: cultural codes, shared aesthetics, and symbolic forms of affiliation that go beyond geographical and temporal boundaries. The emotional ties established in these contexts are not superficial but, in many cases, generate more intense forms of belonging than face-to-face relationships. The sense of community is built here from the cohabitation of virtual spaces, where shared narrative and everyday aesthetics replace physical proximity as the basis of the bond.<sup>(12,13,14)</sup>

This phenomenon transforms how we relate to each other and how the collective is configured. The common is no longer articulated around territoriality but rather around symbolic convergence. However, this apparent openness also shows its limits: the metaverse, like other technologies, is not neutral. Underlying its architecture are logics of exclusion derived from differential access to devices, connectivity, and digital literacy. Thus, while for some, it represents a scenario of expansion of the self, for others, it perpetuates inequalities and marginalizes them from the new relational sphere.<sup>(15,16,17)</sup>

From a philosophical perspective, this reality forces us to rethink the notion of intersubjectivity. In the metaverse, the other appears as a construction of himself, designed in his avatar, in his digitized gestures, in his way of inhabiting the simulated environment. This raises new questions about the authenticity of the encounter, about whether ethics of recognition is possible in contexts where the body – historically the mediator of the human bond – has been displaced by a visual interface.<sup>(18,19,20,21,22)</sup>

On the other hand, affectivity in these environments is not illusory. Although they emerge from a simulated

interaction, emotions are registered in the actual body. Empathy, rejection, attachment, or grief experienced in the metaverse have the same emotional charge as their equivalents in the physical world. This duplication of the affective experience requires a new pedagogy of digital coexistence, an ethics of care that contemplates the vulnerability of the other, even when that “other” is represented by an avatar.<sup>(23)</sup>

### 3. Ethical challenges: privacy, representation and freedom

The metaverse, as an emerging socio-technological construct, not only reconfigures human interaction and the construction of identity, but also poses ethical challenges that are as unprecedented as they are urgent. Far from being a simple space for digital entertainment, this new virtual environment presents itself as an extension of the real, where corporate interests, subjective experiences and new forms of power converge. In this context, three key dimensions become inescapable: privacy, the representation of the self and freedom.

#### *Privacy and digital intimacy*

The first problematic axis revolves around privacy. Unlike other digital environments, the metaverse requires the exposure of deep dimensions of the self: not only biographical data but also movement patterns, facial reactions, tone of voice, and even emotional responses. This hypervisibility of the subject configures a new form of vulnerability, where intimacy becomes raw material for algorithms. We no longer talk about data as technical inputs but about fragments of life itself collected, processed, and commercialized without users fully understanding its implications.<sup>(24)</sup>

This situation demands an ethical reformulation of digital consent. The traditional paradigm – based on free and informed consent – is insufficient in an environment where technologies operate with algorithmic opacity. How can authentic consent be given if the totality of what is being shown is not understood? What does it mean, in this context, to have control over one’s digital identity? Therefore, the ethics of privacy in the metaverse requires a more profound conception of the subject: not as a user, but as a person in their dignity, with the right to decide on the exposure of their most intimate self.<sup>(25)</sup>

#### *Representation and authenticity of the self*

Secondly, the metaverse stretches the limits of personal representation. The avatar is not just an aesthetic image but an extension of the self, an interface that conveys emotions, values, beliefs, and ways of inhabiting the world. In this sense, a fertile field for exploring identity is opened, where the subject can construct, rehearse, and live alternative versions of themselves. This fluidity, however, is not without ambivalence.

On the one hand, it allows the visibility of subjectivities that have been historically marginalized for reasons of gender, race, or corporeality. On the other hand, it risks trivializing or aestheticizing profound identity experiences, reducing them to interchangeable “skins.” Representation thus becomes a field of ethical dispute: can any identity be freely appropriated in the virtual environment? Where is the line between exploration and exoticization? The metaverse demands a rethinking of authenticity not as fixation but as a commitment to recognizing the other, even when that other appears mediated by digital aesthetics.<sup>(26)</sup>

#### *Freedom, agency and the architecture of power*

Finally, the notion of freedom in the metaverse must be questioned from its foundations. The promise of autonomy and unlimited creativity contrasts with a reality where the rules of the game are determined by technological corporations that design algorithms, moderation policies, and internal economies. This structural asymmetry calls into question the idea that users are free agents within the virtual environment.

Digital freedom, in this sense, cannot be reduced to the possibility of movement or avatar customization. It must be thought of as genuine self-determination, which includes the right to participate in the governance of virtual space, to understand and modify the systems that structure it, and to defend oneself against abuses of power. Without transparency, participation, and justice, the metaverse risks becoming a playful dystopia: a free but deeply controlled space.<sup>(27)</sup>

Moreover, this control is not manifested in a coercive way but through subtle mechanisms of gamification, behavioral rewards, and invisible norms that shape the behavior of users. This “digital normalization” implies a form of voluntary docility, where the subject accepts the conditions of the environment because they have been presented as natural or desirable. At this point, critical thinking must intervene to unmask what is presented as technological neutrality and reveal the power dynamics that underlie the design of the platforms.

#### *Towards a situated and relational ethics*

Faced with these challenges, there is a need to construct an ethics of the metaverse that is not merely normative but situated, dialogical, and relational. Ethics start from the recognition of the vulnerability of the digital subject, the diversity of identity experiences, and the need to rethink freedom beyond individualistic paradigms. This ethics cannot arise exclusively from the legal or technical sphere but requires the intervention

of philosophy, education, and the social sciences.

Moreover, it must be an ethic of care: care for others, oneself, and our environments – even if they are virtual. Ultimately, the way we design and regulate the metaverse speaks not only to our relationship with technology but to the vision of humanity that we choose to uphold in this new frontier of being.

## CONCLUSIONS

- The metaverse is not just a technical innovation but a profound transformation in the ontology of human existence. It brings together questions about authenticity, identity, freedom, community, and justice. This new digital dimension forces us to revise traditional philosophical categories, redefine social bonds, and face unprecedented ethical challenges.
- Virtual worlds offer significant creative, expressive, and community possibilities, but they can also reproduce forms of exclusion, control, and alienation if not designed according to robust ethical criteria. Our hyperreality demands critical thinking, digital literacy, and public policies that guarantee rights in virtual environments.
- This article has shown that the avatar is not a mere mask but an extension of the subject, that the digital community is not a copy of the physical one but a new relational ecology, and that freedom in the metaverse cannot be understood without participation and informational sovereignty.
- Faced with the speed of technological change, it is becoming urgent to adapt to the metaverse and humanize it. Making these environments spaces of encounter, dignity, recognition, and equity will be one of the most transcendental philosophical-social challenges of the 21st century.

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