



## The Fantasy of Forever: The Danger Behind Biological Immortality

By Zachary G. Botkin

### HEALTH

September 10, 2025

*Does living forever lead to wisdom? Without grace, it distorts identity, erodes desire, and hollows the soul.*

*This thing all things devours:  
Birds, beasts, trees, flowers;  
Gnaws iron, bites steel;  
Grinds hard stones to meal;  
Slays king, ruins town,  
And beats high mountains down.*

Bryan Johnson wants to **live forever**. He's not alone. From Silicon Valley biohackers to Saudi-funded **biotech firms**, the world's wealthiest men are trying to outrun the grave.

Their weapons are cold plunges, gene edits, transfusions, calorie counting, and near-religious adherence to lab results. Longevity clinics have sprung up from L.A. to Dubai. The language has shifted. People now talk about “biological age,” “epigenetic clocks,” and “lifespan escape velocity.” Death, once a certainty, is being rebranded as a failure of maintenance. They dream of endless decades. Of forever.

But forever is not a blank slate. It has a shape. And that shape is not beautiful.

J.R.R. Tolkien understood this long before the blood boys and cold plunges. He gave us characters who lived too long, not as an ideal, but as a warning. His most haunting case wasn't an emperor or a god. Small, shriveled, and half-mad, this creature endured far beyond his natural years. Not because he deserved to, but because he was chained to something unnatural. The result wasn't wisdom. It was ruin.

This is the unspoken danger of the longevity movement. When we talk about reversing age, we rarely ask what we're becoming in the process. We treat time as neutral, as if more of it must be good. But there is a kind of life that corrodes as it stretches. And there is a kind of man who stops living long before he stops breathing.

We've met him before. His name was Gollum.

## Gollum the Preserved

*He hated it and loved it, as he hated and loved himself.*

~Gandalf, about Gollum and the Ring

Gollum didn't thrive. He lingered. That's all.

He had no greatness in him. No ambition. No strength. He was a frightened, petty creature who stumbled onto something too powerful, and it refused to let him go. The Ring extended his life, but not to elevate it. Only to use it. And so he remained, not as a man, but as a husk. Not aging, not dying, not changing. Preserved.

Preservation is not life, it's suspension. Gollum wasn't alive in any meaningful sense. His body withered. His voice broke into fragments. His mind splintered into quarrels.

He was meat kept too long, sealed off from time, no longer rotting, but no longer whole. In the darkness, he stopped becoming. He just ... persisted.

This is where the dream of forever leads if you strip away grace. You don't get a golden age. You get maintenance. You get fragility stretched thin. And you see this already in the obsession with hormone panels, in tech moguls who track their every heartbeat but can't keep a family together. In men who fear death more than dishonor, who cling to youth but have no use for wisdom.

Yet mortality is not the end of the story. It's the form that gives the story meaning.

Gollum's tragedy wasn't that he died. It's that he didn't. He became smaller with every passing year, not because he was weak, but because he was no longer allowed to break. Yet mortality is not the end of the story. It's the form that gives the story meaning.

He should have died. Instead, he lingered. And that was his curse.

## The Object Becomes the Soul

*We swears to serve the master of the Precious. We swears ... on the Precious!*

~Gollum, to Frodo and Sam

Gollum didn't hold the Ring; the Ring held him. Over time, it stopped being a tool and became the axis of his identity. He no longer had desires of his own—he bent around the thing that sustained him until he was indistinguishable from it.

This is not an ancient problem but a modern one. Men who build their lives around supplements, routines, and trackers are no longer pursuing health. They're outsourcing the self. The aura ring becomes a confession booth. The lab report becomes scripture. Their souls are managed through metrics until nothing left inside isn't optimized.

Gollum once had a name: Sméagol—a person with history, guilt, and possibility. But the Ring erased all that and replaced relationships with fixation. He no longer lived to build, to love, to know. He lived to possess, and all possession inverts.

We see the same pattern in addiction. In obsession. In the man who lives for his fortune but no longer knows what to do with it. In the influencer who curates every image but can't form a thought without applause. In the striver whose health is perfect but whose life is barren.

When life depends on an object, the soul eventually conforms to it. Gollum's will, language, posture, and even his voice all twisted around the Ring. His desires didn't serve his identity. They replaced it.

This is the true cost of dependency-based immortality. The longer you survive through something external, the less you exist apart from it.

## **The Mad Math of Eternal Time**

*Deep down here by the dark water lived old Gollum, a small, slimy creature. I don't know where he came from, nor who or what he was. He was Gollum.*

Time without end doesn't liberate. It erodes.

Gollum didn't live in time; he sank in it. Years passed without structure, without company, without change. His mind folded in on itself, repeating old phrases, replaying old injuries, splitting into fragments that argued in circles. His long life didn't bring wisdom. It brought decay without death.

This is already visible in our world. The man who lives online, untethered from place, family, or ritual. The man who hasn't grown in twenty years, because he's insulated himself from hardship, consequence, and finality. Life becomes an endless scroll. No climax. No resolution. No shape. Only more.

We assume more time means more clarity. But time, without limits, becomes background noise. Without endings, we lose urgency. Without death, there is no reason to forgive or to act. There is only delay. Gollum didn't plan or aspire. He reacted. He returned, always, to the moment he lost the Ring. That moment swallowed the future. All meaning collapsed into retrieval.

Tolkien gave Gollum a long life not to glorify him but to show what happens when time is unmoored from mortality. There is no arc, only repetition. No growth, only fixation. He was frozen in compulsion because there was no reason not to be.

The problem wasn't that Gollum lived too long. The problem was that nothing meaningful could occur. His wound never healed because it was never allowed to close. And when the music of life has no final note, even the most beautiful themes lose their shape. Time, unchecked, becomes noise. And the soul, unstretched by struggle, folds in on itself.

Time, without limits, becomes background noise. Without endings, we lose urgency. Without death, there is no reason to forgive or to act.

## The Death of Desire

*We soon forgot the taste of bread, the sound of wind in the trees ... We even forgot our name.*

Gollum didn't want the good, the true, or the beautiful. He wanted the Ring. And once that want took root, all other desires withered. Food meant nothing. Light hurt. Friendship confused him. He was not tempted by joy. He was terrified of anything that might threaten his obsession. The Ring promised life. In return, it consumed every other reason to live.

This is the cost of unnatural immortality. It doesn't simply extend the body. It distorts the soul. When your life depends on a single object, everything else becomes noise. Desire shrinks to fit the terms of survival. Pleasure becomes a threat. Love becomes a risk. Even mercy feels like a trick.

You can already see the pattern emerging. Men who track every biomarker but feel nothing. Men who sacrifice relationships for regimes of control. Men who fear aging more than they fear irrelevance. They live to preserve their bodies. Yet their souls lose their salt. Passion is replaced with protocol. Risk is replaced with ritual. And desire is strangled by its own guardrails.

Gollum didn't protect the Ring. The Ring consumed his capacity to want anything else. He wasn't loyal. He was trapped. He wasn't focused. He was hollow.

To be human is to dream and to desire beyond your means. To risk heartbreak. To hunger for something greater than safety. Immortality doesn't allow for that. It demands narrowing, shielding, hoarding. But a life spent hoarding cannot hope. And without hope, desire dies.

That is the final degradation. And it wears Gollum's face.

## Mercy Is Better Than Immortality

*Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment. For even the very wise cannot see all ends.*

~Gandalf, to Frodo about Gollum

In the end, Gollum didn't find peace. He fell into fire, clutching the very thing that ruined him. But his death mattered. It closed a chapter. It made the story whole. And it only happened because someone showed him mercy.

Frodo spared him. Again and again. Not because Gollum deserved it, but because Gandalf had said something true: even the wise cannot see all ends. Mercy creates space for grace to act. It opens a future you can't predict or control. And that virtue, in the end, is what destroyed the Ring. Not power. Not cunning. Mercy.

Immortality has no place for this. It sees no virtue in endings. It sees no glory in surrender. It replaces love with calculation and hope with protocol. But the soul is not a system. It needs more than time. It needs transcendence. That comes not from extending life, but from offering it to something higher.

Gollum could not be healed. He had passed that threshold. But even he could play a part in something greater. And that part was only made possible because someone had chosen to be merciful.

The soul is not a system. It needs more than time.

Gollum's final act was not heroic. It was selfish, compulsive, pathetic. But it mattered because someone else had chosen love over fear. That choice gave the story meaning. Immortality cannot offer that. It does not bend. It does not resolve. It only continues.

The moguls of Silicon Valley would do well to understand this: Life cannot be engineered. It must be lived, and to be lived, it must be allowed to end.

It needs transcendence. That comes not from extending life, but from offering it to something higher.

About the author

## Zachary G. Botkin

Zachary G. Botkin is a cybersecurity analyst working for NASA. He studies novel technologies and their transformative effects on people and communities.