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IMAGE: [LAURENCE SIMON/FLICKR](#)

FYI.

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I hear a lot of philosophical complaints suggesting that being alive in a computer as an uploaded version of oneself is quite different than being alive in the physical world. While that is open for debate, one aspect of the issue people often forget about is that the so-called spirit world of Abrahamic faiths—which approximately four billion people follow—is based on something at least as odd as the bits in software code that will make up any virtual existence.

When you think about it, trying to wrap your brain around how digital technology and all its wonders are even possible is simply bizarre. Only a tiny fraction of the world's population understand such things in any depth. And an even smaller amount of people actually know how to design and create the microchips, circuit boards, and software that constitutes this stuff in the real world. Human beings are a species dependent on a tech-imbued lifestyle that none of us really understand, but accept

view, change, manipulate, and most importantly, improve upon their creations. They can apply the scientific method and be assured that the worlds they built of bits and code exist—as surely as we know the Earth is spinning, even if we can't feel it.

People of the planet's major religions can't do this with their spirit worlds. They can only make leaps of faith, and elaborately describe it to you. One either agrees or disagrees with them. Amazingly, proof is not necessary to them.

Being able to upload our entire minds into a computer is probably just 25-35 years off given Moore's Law and the current trajectory of technology growth and innovation. If we can harness the power of artificial intelligence in the next 15 years, then we might get there quicker, as AI will likely make the research and progress happen far more rapidly. But mind uploading is generally considered possible by experts. After all, humans are just material machines, striving to create other machines that mirror ourselves and desires.

in India and France, is the communication medium of the future. We're just in the infancy of all this, but progress is accelerating. I'm looking forward to having an exact copy of myself online one day, both as a companion and as a form of personal immortality in case my biological self dies.

Atheists may not believe in God, but as Sam Harris' recent bestseller, *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion* points out, we are still deeply spiritual creatures, searching for answers, trying to do good upon the world, and pondering the mysteries of the universe. All this is very healthy, and not that different than some core hopes of the religious-minded. In fact, the only real difference between religious people and atheists is the fact that religious people insist an all-knowing deity is outside of themselves and controlling the shape of the world. Atheists see no God and believe unconscious universal forces and human will are responsible for the shape of the world.

It's that shape of the world that I care about. It's that shape that affects our lives and gives form to our society, nations, and deeds. For millennia, society has been controlled, guided, and manipulated by religion—often for the worse. As a rule, the more fundamental a particular religion was, the better it steered its populace in the direction the leaders of the religion wanted. I

obfuscation instead of the better metric system.

So what can we do to eliminate our baggage culture? I'm afraid that little will happen as long as we are exclusively biological. Our instincts for vice, petty behavior, and superstition are too strong. There has certainly been a shift towards moral fortitude, reason, and irreligiosity in many developed countries, but it is slow, very slow. The sad truth is we'll be uploading ourselves into machines long before rationality and agnosticism become truly dominant on Earth. The good news, though, is as people begin uploading themselves, they'll also be hacking and writing improved code for their new digital selves—resulting in "real time evolution" for individuals and the species. It's likely this influx of better code will eliminate lots of things that, historically speaking, religion has attempted to protect people from—namely stupidity and social evil.

Take Andreas Lubitz, the co-pilot who likely intentionally crashed Germanwings [Flight 9525](#) in the Swiss Alps, tragically killing all the people aboard. Lubitz is suspected to have been suffering from depression. In the future, we may all have avatars—perfectly uploaded versions of ourselves existing in the cloud or in chip implants in our brains—and these avatars will help guide us and not allow us to do dumb or terrible things. In the

This may serve what Abraham Lincoln called the better angels of our nature, which we all have but often don't use. Now, with digital clones participating in our every move, someone trustworthy will always be in our head, advising us of the best path to take. Think of it in terms of a spiritual trainer—or even guru—leading us to be the best we can be.

A good metaphor or comparison of this type of digital assistance will already be happening in the next few years when driverless cars hit the road. In the same way driverless cars will help lessen drunk driving, perfected uploaded avatars will also lead us to be more judicious, moral, and reasonable in our lives.

This is why the future will be far better than it is now. In the coming digital world, we may be perfect, or very close to it. Expect a much more utopian society for whatever social structures end up existing in virtual reality and cyberspace. But also expect the real world to radically improve. Expect the drug user to have their addictions corrected or overcome. Expect the domestic abuser to have their violence and drive for power diminished. Expect the mentally depressed to become happy. And finally, expect the need for religion to disappear as a real-life god—our near perfect moral