The Digital Networked Self and its Demons

Social media has hit India by storm. In 2002 there were 45 million phones for a billion Indians. Ten years later there were 900 million, (Jeffrey, 2013) making India the second largest digital market after China. In the 16-64 age cohort, 90% have smart phones. In this paper I want to demonstrate how this is enabling a new, networked identity different from both the traditional oral, communal self and the modern literate self. This new digital self is both a network of digital personae and itself a node in an array of external networks in which it is embedded. The ability to communicate on social media interactively across any distance in real time, and to do so through a profile or avatar created by oneself is enabling young Indians in particular to liberate themselves from a traditionally ascribed identity based on family, wealth and caste to an individually crafted identity, not autonomous and private as in modernity but social and performative. While social media thus liberates young Indians from past entanglements it also creates new vulnerabilities or "demons" to combat in the pursuit of the good life.

Marshall McLuhan and his most influential student, the Jesuit Walter Ong, distinguished between oral and literate forms of communication, arguing that each enabled a different way of thinking, a different kind of culture, ultimately a different sort of identity and a different form of religiosity. With speech its all about community. We identify with whom we belong to; how we fit in, our place in our community. Our reputation, the stories others tell about us, that is what tells us who we are. Our identity is a communal identity. Literate maturity on the other hand is a process of separation from family and external social expectations. To become myself I must become an individual, I must choose who I am to be. My true self is not what others say about me. That is now seen as a "shallow" superficial, even false self. To discover my true self I must turn within, explore my own interior depths, my feelings, my desires, I must draw from my own

experience. And such exploration is only possible now that I can record them in private journals to read back later in solitude. Honor, that is reputation, is replaced in literate culture by authenticity. My authentic self is the story I author, that story I write to myself for myself. It's a story no one else can ever fully know, it's a story even I cannot know fully, as I am still writing it, I do not yet know what the next chapter might hold, let alone how the book is going to end.

Now its not that people were not different in oral, communal cultures, but what made them different was not what mattered, indeed what made them unique could be a threat to what matters most. For what matters most was how I fit in, where I belong. Fitting in was essential not only for my living a meaningful life, but for my living any life at all. In oral society if you do not think the way everyone else thinks you are an idiot, if you do not act like everyone else acts you are weird, shunned, if not scapegoated.

In stark contrast, literate people define themselves precisely by how they are different from everyone else. Even when we talk about our identity we are usually asking not about what we share in common with everyone else, but what makes us different, even unique. As if its what is different about us is what is most important about us, what defines us. In the language of the Upanishads, the modern self is fully entangled in "the illusion of separateness."

Both Marshall McLuhan and especially Walter Ong explored how Christianity had evolved as a hybrid of both oral and literate religiosity. Jesus was an oral prophet preaching communal values. But he was also steeped in the Hebrew prophets who could and did write down their oracles and visions and who did not fit into Israelite society but were critics of its temple worship. Jesus would also repeatedly draw from the book of Deuteronomy, perhaps the first literate transcription of Jewish sacred lore and tradition.

And so, while Jesus himself likely could not functionally read or write, and certainly did not write down his teachings, he was influenced by axial literate prophecy. He did preach a coming Kingdom of God, but he located that kingdom as much within the individual heart as without in the public world. It is less our public actions than our inner intentions that matter. We do not just belong to a chosen people, we are each chosen individually, called by name. Redemption, salvation, pertains not just to Israel but to me, personally, whether or not I fit into society, in fact especially if I don't fit in, but have been pushed off to margins, or even persecuted as a scapegoat. Jesus himself ended up an executed scapegoat. We Christians are each called in our own unique way, to imitate him.

Now over the past 25 years humanity has witnessed the rise of a third communication revolution, one I believe that will prove just as significant and as disruptive as writing had proven to be for oral culture—digital or virtual communication, that is, computer and especially internet-enabled communication. It too is enabling new ways of relating to one another, new ways of acting, new ways of thinking, ultimately a new way of being in the world. It is also catalyzing a new kind of identity- neither communal nor individual, but networked. To the horror of their literate parents and teachers, the digital native does not live as an autonomous individual. They do not hold their privacy sacred. Rather the millennial is a network of personae and in turn a node in larger networks in which he or she is embedded.

Social media offers the most graphic illustration of this new kind of identity. Consider all the different personae a digital native might enact on an array of media platforms all accessible anywhere at anytime on their smartphone and other digital devices.

Let's begin with Facebook. In 2020 there were 2.6 billion active Facebook users across the globe—just over one third of the planet, and 60% of all internet users. And two thirds of these

use it daily. Among the 18-19 demographic the percentage of Americans using Facebook rises to 80%, even half of those 65 and over have accounts. India has 350 million Facebook users.

Now what is the relationship between how someone presents themselves in person, face to face, versus over Facebook? Since many of my friends on Facebook do also know me in person or on other sites, there cannot be too wide a discrepancy. On the other hand, recognition over Facebook is skewed. I only post what's worth posting, typically fun and interesting experiences that present me in a positive light and/or items that will score more likes from other users in my network. In that sense recognition is more positive than in the messier world of face to face interaction. On the other hand the same holds true for all my Facebook friends leading to the common paradox that all my Facebook friends seem to have more fun, lead more interesting lives than I do. Thus the overall effect of Facebook use can sometimes be to lower one's self esteem, particularly among heavy users.

Feelings around Facebook use are thus often ambivalent. Over a recent 12 month period, (5) 42% of users reported having taken a break from the site for several weeks or more and (6) 26% claimed to have deleted the app altogether from their phone, though again they can only stand such social deprivation so long before they restore it.

WhatsApp is not far behind, with 2 billion users worldwide. Over the past five years it has grown by a quarter billion of users each year. A staggering 65 billion messages are sent over WhatsApp daily. In India it has already surpassed Facebook with 400 million users as of July 2019. Since it is banned in China, India is Whatsapp's biggest market. Facebook paid Whatsapp the ultimate recognition. Rather than trying to compete, Facebook just bought it out.

Whatsapp enables its user to choose their own profile and craft their own persona. They need not include any information on class or caste. They can connect not just with friends but with like minded others from anywhere in India and indeed across the world. in this way whatsapp is also enabling young Indians to also transcend ethnic and even national identities creating citizens of what McLuhan had hailed as the "global village". They can also promote aspects of their personality they are too shy to reveal face to face. They can disclose hidden talents and skills, surprising interests, passions and sexual orientations and preferences that might shock their family.

Instagram, while a more image oriented app, plays a similar role in the United States. It is the most popular peer to peer site for digital natives. Facebook on the other hand is a more "official" public site. Parents, relatives, old acquaintances as well as current friends are often included within one's Facebook network. Employers will often access the Facebook accounts of job applicants. Instagram content tends to be more experimental and more edgy, less documenting experiences and more expressive of one's personality. Selfies are edited and photoshopped to create the right effect. One's Instagram's persona can be said to be a performative identity. Indeed it is not uncommon for people to have multiple Instagram accounts for different audiences. Pictures tend to be even more heavily edited and likes more carefully tracked, as after all, my followers include my friends; my having a large following, can impresses them. I can even make a living at it, becoming an "influencer" subtly placing products in my photos for which I am paid by sellers, or more often it seems, actively promoting them to my followers as products I use myself. Such "viral" marketting is a goldmine for advertizers.

Snapchat is another popular social media site in the United States, especially among teens, with 69% being active users. (1) Snapchat posts are automatically removed after 24 hours.This

can lead to greater spontanaeity, less curation …or circumspection in what one posts. Snapchat also tends to be more text based. Such differences between Instagram and Snapchat: spontaneous vs curated, visual vs textual, suit different thoughts and experiences, different feelings and desires, different personality traits, to some degree then, different persona.

Self-presentation on Tinder is different yet. As a dating app, users are trying to sell themselves to strangers who may only look at your picture or if you manage to catch their attention, your profile, for a few seconds as they browse dozens if not hundreds of others. Hence there is a premium on being able to sell yourself in a quick catchy, maybe quirky way. Its hardly your true self, but you do want to sell yourself to the kind of people you would be interested in going out on a date. So your Tinder persona does relate back to your broader identity at some level.

Also people who select you will usually check out your other social media sites to learn more about you, and particularly to assess the coherence of your persona across platforms before ever arranging to meet you in person. Thus, once more, there is the dialectic between highlighting your strengths without the other feeling duped and the date a waste of time and money. Recognition received over Tinder is correspondingly ambivalent and potentially ephemeral. Given the vast number of other choices literally at your fingertips, once difficulties arise in a relationship, as they inevitably will if it goes anywhere, it may be easier to simply cut ties, or "ghost" the other rather than working through them towards a richer, more meaningful relationship on the other side of conflict.

In India, dating apps such as Tinder are revolutionizing India's traditional marriage practices. Arranged marriages is one of the most potent manifestations of an ascribed over a self-crafted identity. Whatsapp already enables social mixing between the genders independent of

adult supervision. One can think of a dating app as an automated digital matchmaker generating a limitless array of possibilities. Now it is true that dating app users are overwhelmingly male, Tinder being the most stark with a 9 to 1 ratio. App developers are working on righting the balance though. And, given the gender segregation in India, girls are more apt to use dating apps to broaden their pool of potential suitors.

Twitter is yet another genre of social media where the content of tweets are sharply restricted but their frequency is correspondingly higher to the extent that they can create an "ambient sociality" in which followers can feel like they know the tweeter personally, without ever having met or even exchanged more than random sentence fragments. For through such random tweets one learns the kind of random facts characteristic of more personal relationships.

In the United States, Trump has become the poster child for this platform. He was the first politician to use twitter effectively to circumvent mass media outlets and connect directly with the voters. Followers would often feel an "authentic" connection to Trump as his tweets seemed so spontaneous and unfiltered. Everyone knows that today virtually all politicians hire media consultants to manage their social media accounts and even script their content. But no one doubts that Trump writes many of his own tweets. The very time stamp on many of them, early in the morning or late at night, confer a sense of raw authenticity and so a feeling of easy familiarity. Its like gossip at a sleep over. And so the king of lies among his critics is regarded by his followers as the ultimate truth teller, someone who says what he thinks and tells it like it is.

The Indian equivalent to Twitter, at least for digital natives may well be TikTok. This is a site where one posts not texts but video clips of up to 15 seconds. It provides youth the opportunity to express themselves creatively and energetically. However it has also proven to be

a virulent spreader of hate speech and fake news. So much so that the Indian government banned it at the end of June 2020.

And then, beyond social media one has email accounts, both work and school accounts for more official business, and private, free accounts for more personal use. The persona one adopts on work email accounts needs to be professional. Such accounts are closest to the bureaucratic roles inhabited by participants in literate bureaucracies. Yet even here there remains more room for individuality and personality than in older letters and memos, perhaps typewritten by a third party such as a secretary, and often destined to be filed away for later access. Of course increasingly emails are also archived, even passively monitored whereas letters can be thrown away, even burnt to protect oneself from incriminating content.

And of course there is also Youtube for longer video productions, including videos in which I can develop and express my own digital aesthetic and artistry. I can create my own youtube channel devoted to topics I research and hobbies I enjoy. I can become a media critic myself, providing political commentary over newsclips, or reviewing films and music bands. In short I can express any aspect of myself I choose, with hundreds if not thousands of like minded browsers and followers.

Further yet, there are also my avatars in videogames into which I invest myself and from which mood and attitude can bleed out into other aspects of my life., vlogs and blogs on which to process my experience. And let's not forget my institutional roles offline, and my face to face relationships among family and friends.

Which one of all of these persona is my true self and which are simply roles that I play, masks that I wear, performances that I enact? I am the author of them all to some degree. Or

better I am the designer and content moderator of them all. But I am hardly responsible for whatever appears on my pages. Posts by others can only be removed by me after the fact and all are open to anonymous hacking and malicious viruses. On the other hand, I have more freedom of expression than in literate bureaucratic roles or what family and even some friends would countenance. I can creatively manage of reputation and image more than ever before. I have unprecedented opportunities to express myself, but never autonomously, never with Sartrean radical freedom.

Can all my digital personae be integrated as multiple expressions of an ultimately single, true self? Or would not any such common identity be yet another partial persona, this one abstracted from any concrete connection? Is it not better to call my true self my entire network of more or less public personae, with my private personae, who I am in solitude, simply one of the nodes in that network? In other words, the virtual self is not the private individual enabled by literacy but a new, networked self. Or perhaps better put, the virtual self's individuality is its distinctive network of more or less public personae.

Demons of the Networked Self and Religious Resources for Combatting Them

Such a networked self has a new set of vulnerabilities, different from the threats of earlier oral and literate selves. For the oral self, threats were largely to reputation or shame, leading to ostracism, scapegoating even expulsion or abandonment. For the literate self, additional threats overlay these, in particular neurosis from the repression of sexual and aggressive instincts, guilt for indulging them despite being forbidden, and breakdown from being too relentlessly productive.

Virtual technologies add yet another set of vulnerabilities to oral and literate ones. Clearly, as a network of personae, fragmentation becomes a principle threat to the virtual self. Rather than repressing instinctual desires, I can safely indulge them anonymously on sites that I can then dissociate from the rest of my network. Dissociation replaces repression as the principle threat to a coherent sense of self.

Now, one might object that we have always presented ourselves and acted in different ways to different audiences in different settings.

But in oral culture these different audiences and settings were permeable, they knew one another, indeed they were often made up of the same people. Oral cultures were communal cultures. Encountering someone who you did not already know in some setting and to whom you did not already have some relationship, ie encountering a stranger, was rare, and potentially dangerous. And so one's thoughts, words and deeds needed to match up if you were to have a good reputation, needed to survive, let alone flourish.

In literate culture public and private thoughts words and deed could become more insulated from each other. For in public life in the modern city one lived with strangers, in the factory one worked with strangers. And so public life and private life could be more separate, even contradictory. And so too the rhetoric of public roles as masks hiding your true self, who you were in private, in the home, in the bedroom, ultimately in solitude, even in dreams.

But with the internet and social media, personae can multiply exponentially, audiences and settings may have no interaction with one another except through their link to you. And so how one presents oneself, the persona one adopts and cultivates on these various sites can

become dissociated from each other, leaving one with a fragmented identity, and only confusion over which of this array of persona are "masks" and which constitutes one's true self.

Multitasking and automation threatens to fragment our behavior and divide our attention even at a single moment. Fragmentation endangers not just our identity but our reasoning, our very conscious awareness.

Dissociated self-presentation leads to dissociated recognition. And so while social media may extend the breadth of our relationships, it may do so at the cost of empathetic depth, that is at the cost of recognition of myself as a whole, rather than simply as this persona, saying or doing this particular act at this moment with this fraction of my attention. The dangers here are already playing out in the work place in the shift from lifetime employment even if in alienating factory labor, to "gig" labor by self-styled entrepreneurs who have no long term, broader institutional allegiance to a particular employer, but in return enjoy no longer time broader benefits beyond pay for performance here and now.

Dissociation of what one does for one's employer today from any future expectations or obligations on the part of either party may seem like ever greater freedom but ironically its at the cost of ever less security and effective power, where actions take long term commitment and full attention to execute. Not that long ago, taking on a second job, used was shamed as 'moonlighting," and treated as virtual theft from one's primary employer of one's full time and attention. Today it's the very definition of a gig job. It's the new normal.

Finally fragmentation also extends to the senses. Sight and sound can now be transmitted instantaneously across space and time, but touch, haptic technology, remains in its infancy, and while we can simulate smell and taste chemically, we have yet to invent a technology for

transmitting them virtually. Virtual Reality devices or VR has become visually and aurally immersive but it is still split off from the other senses. It remains but a fragment of actual embodied experience. However stimulating, VR is still a simulation, and a dissociation from RL, "real life."

What can religion offer to digital natives to cope with all these varieties of fragmentation and dissociation?

First religion can do what religion already does best: offer a refuge from everyday life-- today, life online-- by providing face to face, embodied rituals that can enhance attentiveness and inspire immersive reverence and heightened belonging. Religion can offer opportunities for both solitary reflection and communal face to face support. In short, it can offer those harried and harassed by multitasking, exposed and exhausted by being always available, always "on", an opportunity to get off the grid for a while, and critically reflect over how one's life is proceeding. Silent retreats, solitary meditation, prayerful reflection over Sacred Scripture can give the digital native time and space to slow up, quiet down, empty out, let go. Religion can aid the digital native in the cultivation of an interior life, characteristic of literate axial spirituality.

However, religion cannot just be a refuge from virtual life. Christians must also be able to find the sacred online. For if the internet and social media is dismissed as godless, then the digital natives who spend more and more of their time and attention online risk becoming godless as well. But how focus attention through a medium that incentivizes multitasking? How invite reflection in a medium built for speed? Meaningful practices in a medium built for optimizing outcomes? Qualitative communion in a medium built for quantitative connectivity?

Religious symbolism can also be enlisted in the service of a meaningful appropriation of the virtual self. A networked self is not an integrated self. Its logic is not to be one thing, as Kierkegaard called for. (1) But if it cannot model monotheism, it can be understood as an image of a trinitarian God.

Or better put, the Trinity can be seen as a sacred paradigm for the networked self, where the three persons do not undermine but rather catalyze a dynamic unity. Contributions can be distinguished but all three ever cooperate towards the execution of the same creative activity. Their interrelationship is modeled not on negotiation, or even dialogue, but on dance, in Greek a *perichoresis*, in Latin a *circumcessio*. A dynamic creative sacred for a dynamic, creative identity.

A second demon stalking the virtual self is paranoia: anxieties over being both monitored and manipulated. How does this play out and what does religion have to offer to combat and abate if not fully exorcize this demon? First with regards to monitoring. Digital natives live in a world without privacy. They live knowing that they are under continuous surveillance by governmental agencies, such as the NSA and FBI to prevent terrorism, pedophilia, hate speech; as well as corporations in the service of personalized marketing, political groups in order to incite, sway or even dampen voting, and hackers, phishing and spearing, infecting and hijacking your virtual network of digital devices.

Privacy has been replaced by anonymity. Those monitoring do not claim to know you, or often even have any interest in knowing you as a person, merely as an IP address, a data point in their algorithms. But anonymity is no substitute for privacy. Give someone a reason and those monitoring can track down the owner of that IP address, the person behind the posting of a bomb

threat, underage pornography or in too many countries, political dissent. And pressure is mounting to regulate social media more not less, precisely to weed out the most vicious effects of dissociated anonymous hate and violence.

Virtual religion may not be able to protect us from such nefarious actors, but it can be a resource in combatting anxieties over monitoring that is here to stay, by appeal to mystical forms of self-understanding, in which the other appears less as a threat than as an ally, in Aristotle's terms, even an "other self" that can enhances and extend what is otherwise constricted to the "I, Me Mine."

Concerns over manipulation are likewise rife among digital natives. Everyone is worried at the degree to which their behavior is dictated by real time records of likes, views, retweets, downloads our online postings receive.

Digital natives may express guilt, even shame but that does not lead to stopping the behavior, except perhaps for a time. And too often the criticism often amounts to a scapegoating of others. Its their generation as a whole, all those others, who are addicted to social media, whose self esteem is too vulnerable to online recognition. They themselves have transcended the trappings of social media, but they are worried that too many others don't bother to resist, or give up thinking resistance is futile.

Digital natives know only too well because they have experienced only too often how easily personalized marketing can nudge purchases one later regrets; how newsfeeds can reinforce in-group biases and trigger out-group outrage, by feeding you what you like to hear,

your own personalized clickbait, and protecting you from anything that would turn you off, particularly, off their site.

Even worse, concerns over unknowing manipulation is recursive, able to serve as its own accelerant through conspiracy theories over such malicious manipulation outside of view. For the proffering of such conspiracy theories can themselves be tools for manipulating others, fueled by those same social media newsfeed algorithms. Respond to one conspiracy theory and you are apt to find a dozen more appearing on your Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, perhaps even Amazon book and movie suggestion algorithms.

These conspiracy theories can be compelling not only by confirming fears of unknowing manipulation but also be identifying scapegoats already suspected of such nefarious behavior, and justifying mimetic responses to manipulate one's enemies in turn to defeat the enemy. Thus fearing being a victim of malicious scapegoating, one scapegoats the suspected perpetrator in turn, leaving a trail of aggrieved victims vulnerable to yet further manipulation.

How can we break out of such a vicious cycle of manipulation and conspiracy theories? Here too, mysticism offers forms of religious language belief and practice that can help digital natives come to terms with this existential fact of life in the digital age. (1) For the networked self, our agency, even our reason is not autonomous but distributed across a network of resources and allies.

But our interdependence need not be feared as a threat but can be embraced as a gift, a fertile field for grace to supply what one cannot do or learn by oneself. Religion is not about getting what you deserve but coping with suffering one doesn't. Religion provides rituals to console us

in our afflictions, to exorcize us from our curses, but also to express praise and thanksgiving for all the good that is too easy to overlook and simply take for granted because we can, because through no merit of our own but by the grace of God we are able to take such goods, these loved ones for granted. A second video explores such virtual mysticism and its potential to redeem the evils our interdependence renders us vulnerable to and to attend to the graces our synergies can germinate and come to bloom.

Finally, a third demon is our dependency on those very technologies that enable us to live our new virtual lives. Such dependency on our technologies is hardly new. Paraphrasing Latour, we have never been modern, autonomous agents. Humans have co-evolved with their technology even before their beginning from their hominid ancestors. Nor has such autonomous freedom ever been a religious ideal. In Christianity such an aspiration is the original sin of Lucifer. In Buddhism it lies at the heart of illusion of separateness and the wheel of suffering that revolves in its wake.

Freud had observed in the industrial age that the advance of civilization correlates tragically with ever greater psychological fragility not in spite of technological progress but because of it. In gaining greater material control over our world, we are becoming more dependent upon maintaining such control and so more vulnerable to frictions, slippages, and failures.

Digital natives become only too aware of their dependence on technology when a device is lost, stolen, hacked, or broken. The technology that is designed and purchased to enhance our power and control makes us vulnerable to feeling even more powerless and out of control when

they cannot be relied upon. A hundred years ago, let alone a thousand years ago, no one could even imagine the affordabilities of a smartphone to connect with anyone, anywhere, at any time, to buy anything, to access any fact, and yet (2) now without it, the digital native can feel lost, powerless and abandoned.

Virtual religion can help us to better appreciate, positively as well as critically, our utter dependence not only on God but on our technologies as well.

A virtual examen, for example, can track (1) when, where, why, how and with whom we devote ourselves to activities that are (2) meaningful and valuable in themselves, that call upon our full attention, whose delight lies in their very performance. (3) Then to identify and track other activities whose value lies in their outcomes, along metrics of ease, cost and efficiency. (4) Then, to do the same for still other activities that we do while multitasking and finally (5) to identify those we choose to fully outsource through smart automation and the internet of things. The aim of such an examen would not be just to diagnose problematic behavior online but also to identify and assess engagement than enriches, sanctifies even and resources and allies to enlist in one's own life going forward.

By Way of Conclusion

In closing, when evaluating the costs and benefits of our emerging networked virtual selves, I would like to issue some cautions and caveats.

First, we need to resist the temptation to contrast the best of the familiar with the worst of the new. Its not like most literate people read a lot of books. Those that did were as often denigrated as admired. They were bookworms, just as disconnected from "real" life as any video gamer.

And while reading may enable deep learning, video streamed series on Netflix and Amazon offer characters and narratives no less complex and insightful as any novel. Fan fiction may not stack up well against Shakespeare, but I doubt its any shallower than harlequin romances and dime store whodunits. And social media ought not be contrasted with profound face to face conversation but with neighborhood gossip

So too, we should be wary of criticizing the new by the standards of the old. New wine not only needs new wineskins but new wine is not to be judged on the metrics of a well aged vintage. A youtube video is not an art film. We will need new measures to evaluate new rituals.

Thirdly, technology is never neutral, but neither should new technology be condemned or praised wholesale. Different social media may be beneficial or harmful to different personalities. For example, Instagram may help someone suffering from social phobia, but only exacerbate a histrionic personality. The anonymity of chat groups can both enable stigmatized people to connect and affirm one another while the same anonymity enables bullies to troll with impunity. Criticism will need to be nuanced and specific, both as regards to medium and message, sender and recipient to be of any effective use or moral relevance.

Fourthly, we must also never forget that the internet is only 25 years old, social media itself, only around 15. Much of what we find harmful about social media may be more a function of its immaturity and our being newbies in its use, rather than inherent to the technology itself. We have hardly begun to discuss how best to regulate social media, let alone develop best practices. After all the impact of the printing press on Christianity was not fully felt until seventy-five years later with the eruption of the Protestant Reformation. And even then, the Catholic Church forbade private reading of the bible to the ordinary laity for another four centuries. The forced

widespread adoption of social media during the coronavirus pandemic will likely accelerate this maturation.

Finally, the very boundary between the virtual and the real is becoming increasingly porous. Agency and cognition are increasingly distributed across an ever-growing network of digital media and virtual technologies. Virtual life has become part of real life and those living in "real life" are still almost always accessible online. Is it even possible anymore for anyone today to be fully off the grid? Humanity has always been a technological species; today we are all effectively more or less cyborgs.

Ultimately them the real question is not, nor has it ever been, whether to embrace virtual technologies but how. As humanity has evolved with its technologies, the nature of the self has evolved alongside, into a nested series of identities all operative in its own sphere. As we have seen, in addition to all the traditional vulnerabilities of the human condition the networked self is beset by a new array of virtual demons.

I have tried to brainstorm ways in which religion might offer resources to battle these demons. As digital natives reach adulthood, the number of people who do not identify with any religion (the "nones") has exploded in the industrial world. In the United States fully 40% of digital natives when asked their religious allegiance answer "none of the above". Even among those who do still claim to belong to a religious tradition, religious practice has cratered and religious knowledge is thin.

Now that said, its not that digital natives are not interested in spirituality. Less that 10% of the "nones" identify as "atheist" or "agnostic." They just do not find traditional institutional religion relevant to their lives, its opportunities and challenges. Nor is it just religion, but

institutions of all sorts, from politics to industry to civic life. Digital natives do not aspire to fit into existing institutional arrangements. They are not attracted to bureaucracy or management. Rather they see themselves as entrepreneurs drawing upon their network of resources to enable, empower and enact change. In religious terms they are "seekers" who cobble together their own religious beliefs and practices from the array of religious traditions available online.

Jeffrey, Robin and Doron, Assa, The Great Indian Phone Book: How Cheap Mobile Phones Change Business, Politics and Daily Life. Hurst and Co: London, 2013,

Data on social media apps cited in this paper were gleaned from two internet resources in particular: Hootsuite.com and Statista.com. Both are designed to provide ongoing real time market data for advertizers and so are expensive to access. However googling specific requests on a given app's usage and penetration does generate specific answers.

Data on contemporary religious membership and the nones was drawn from the Pew Research Center website.