

The Matrix

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Outline

- 1 Introduction to The Matrix
- 2 What would we be missing out if we were in Matrix?

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- 2 For our purposes, the most important one is **epistemological in nature**: how do we know that what we perceive (see, hear, etc) is **real** or an **illusion**?

Philosophical Issues

- 1 The movie *The Matrix* raises a number of philosophical issues.
- 2 For our purposes, the most important one is **epistemological in nature**: how do we know that what we perceive (see, hear, etc) is **real** or an **illusion**?
- 3 But it also raises an interesting metaphysical question:
What is reality?

What is real?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVro5wxqh4U>

Neo : This isn't real...

What is real?

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Morpheus : What is "real"? How do you define "real"? If you're talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see, then "real" is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain...

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Question *Is reality just what we experience?*

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- 2 **Objective facts** are facts that obtain or do not obtain independently of what anybody believes or knows about them, or has evidence for believing.
- 3 Let us look at a view that denies the **objectivity of facts**.

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- 2 For example, a verificationist about height would say that how tall you are depends on what **evidence** there is about how tall you are—for example, on whether people see you as being tall, etc.
- 3 The verificationist believes that it's impossible for all the evidence to point one way but the facts about your height to be otherwise.

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- 3 If the "real facts" are so well-concealed, says the Verificationist, then they cease being facts at all.

Verificationism's consequences

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- 2 Verificationism has weird consequences.

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- 1 Most of us think that Mt. Everest had its height well before there were any human beings and that it would still have this height even if no human beings or other thinking subjects had ever existed.
- 2 But it's not clear that a Verificationist is entitled to say things like that.

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- 1 If there had never been any thinking subjects, then there wouldn't have been anybody who could have had evidence that Mt. Everest existed.
- 2 So according to the Verificationist, then, there wouldn't have been anybody for whom it was true that Mt. Everest is 8,850 m tall.
- 3 It looks like the Verificationist has to deny that Mt. Everest would still have been 8,850 m tall, even in situations where no thinking subjects had ever existed.

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- 2 Perhaps the Verificationist could respond as follows:
- 3 Granted, in the situation we're envisaging, nobody actually has evidence that Mt. Everest is 8850 m tall. But the evidence is still **available**. (Mt. Everest will cast shadows of certain lengths at certain times of the day, and so on.)
- 4 And if people had existed, they could have gathered and used that evidence. Maybe that's enough to make it true that Mt. Everest is still 8,850 m tall in the situation we're envisaging.

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- 1 But in some cases, it is not obvious the evidence would be even available.
- 2 There may be no way for any finite being to ascertain what is the number of stars in the universe.
- 3 And yet, surely, whatever number it is, it is either even or odd!

Conclusion

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Unknowable facts are impossible.
- 2 Verificationism is an interesting but problematic view.

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 - 1 The **Experience Machine**: like the Matrix, but with promise of only pleasant experiences.
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- 2 Neon chooses the Real World. What would *you* choose?

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- 1 Our experiences could be as rich and pleasant as if there were caused by the real world.
- 2 Is there something over and beyond our experiences that we value or care about?

Steaks

Not everybody agrees on this one...

① Steaks

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRRpCZgDU0s>

The value of truths

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- 1 perhaps we would have false beliefs? And we value **truth**?
- 2 It is tempting to think that for example, we would falsely believe that we are eating steaks when we are not.
- 3 But perhaps it is not true that people in the Matrix could not have true beliefs.

The value of truths

- 1 To see that, we should ask ourselves what the words “eating steaks” would mean as used by people in the Matrix.

The meaning of our words

Pryor proposes to consider the following analogy:

JIRO

Suppose you grew up with a friend you called “Jiro.” You didn’t realize it, but that isn’t really your friend’s name, at least not the name his parents gave him. His name is really “Takeshi.” “Jiro” is his uncle’s name. But you got the names mixed up when you were little, and no one bothered to correct you. So all your life you’ve been saying “Jiro” to talk about Takeshi. Isn’t it plausible then that in your mouth, “Jiro” now means Takeshi?

What is real?

There seems to be an analogy between that scenario and the following:

Eating steak

Similarly, Jeremy has grown up inside the Matrix program, and on various occasions he's interacted in certain ways with other parts of the Matrix program, ways he described as "eating steak." Now perhaps all he means by "eating steak" is just **interacting in those certain way with the Matrix**. He's done that many times. So perhaps he really has managed to eat steak on many occasions. At least, he's managed to do what he calls "eating steak." It's not clear that there's anything more that Jeremy would like to be doing, but isn't. Is there?

What is real?

Distinguish two cases:

- 1 The first generation of Matrix's inductees.

What is real?

Distinguish two cases:

- 1 The first generation of Matrix's inductees.
- 2 The last generation of Matrix's inhabitants.

What is real?

First Generation

People who grew up outside the Matrix, and have just been freshly plugged in. Presumably what they mean by “eating steak” has to do with cow flesh, not with patterns in the Matrix simulation. Presumably what they mean by “air” is made up of nitrogen and oxygen, not 1s and 0s.

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- 1 But what about people that only ever lived inside the Matrix?

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- 2 So it is plausible that “steaks” in their mouths refer to **those patterns of activation**, not to cow flesh.
- 3 But if so, then, the sentence “I am eating steak” could be true in the mouth of a last generation Matrix inhabitant when it seems to her that she is eating steaks.

The meaning of our words

Pryor says:

Last Generation

We can suppose we're talking about people who have spent all their lives so far inside the Matrix. I want to try to find something we value that goes beyond what experiences we're having, and where we can agree that the people inside the Matrix really would value that same thing. They wouldn't just value having some Matrix substitute. And yet this will be something that people inside the Matrix don't have. They only seem to have it.

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- 1 If “steak” behaves like our “Jiro” example (as well as what in one’s mind refers to), then there are many truths uttered and believed by the people in the Matrix.
- 2 So we would not be missing out on truths by living within the Matrix.
- 3 That is pretty a surprising conclusion!!!

Objective truths in the Matrix

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- 2 They are objective truths about the functioning of the Matrix—i.e., the pattern of activations that make the Matrix the program that it is.

What else could we be missing out in the Matrix?

What are those people in the Matrix missing out that we instead have?

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What are those people in the Matrix missing out that we instead have?

- 1 They miss out in scientific truths? The scientists in the Matrix must have some false beliefs about how things work in the world of the Matrix.
- 2 But would not what we said in the case of ordinary truths also apply here too?

The value of freedom?

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- 1 According to Pryor, what is worse about the Matrix is that the machines have so much control on us. We are really slaves.
- 2 So what is bad is not much that it is not real, because in several senses it **is** real.
- 3 Rather, the **human condition** in the Matrix is terrible. We are slaves.

What is real?

Pryor's Conclusion

If the Matrix weren't a kind of enslavement—and it still involved interacting with other real people—then maybe it wouldn't be so bad after all.

Do you agree with Pryor on this?

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- 2 I think that the people in the Matrix are **epistemically worse off** than we are, and not merely **politically worse off**.

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- 2 People in the Matrix have justification, reasons for what they believe. Just as much as we do.
- 3 So they cannot be worse off as far as the amount of justification that they have goes.

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- 3 In many good cases, our experience is **transparent** of what it represents.
- 4 The kind of phenomenology that people in the Matrix does have does not track the truth in the same way—it is not transparent in the same way.
- 5 If it looks as if there are objects arranged table-wise in front of them, there may not be actually any object arranged table-wise in front of them.

The Value of Knowledge

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The Value of Knowledge

- 1 Matrix people may have justification all right. But do they know what they believe?
- 2 Well, it depends on what it takes for one to know that p .
- 3 If one has a view of knowledge that has as a conclusion that Matrix people do not know, that we can say that we are much better off than Matrix people, because they do not know nearly as much as we do.