

Meanings in and outside the Matrix

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Outline

The question

First view

Second view

Outline

The question

First view

Second view

Remember the question

What does “steak” mean in the mouth of people who have always lived and still live in the Matrix? Why does it matter for whether those people can have true beliefs about the world?

Outline

The question

First view

Second view

Introducing the first view

1. Many students in the quiz endorsed the following view:

Introducing the first view

1. Many students in the quiz endorsed the following view:
2. In the mouth of people living in the Matrix, “steaks” means the experiences one has when it looks to one that one is eating steakes.

Introducing the first view

1. We want to assess this view, to see what are its costs.

Introducing the first view

1. We want to assess this view, to see what are its costs.
2. In order to assess this view, let us consider some objections to that view, and what, if anything, motivates it.

Outline

First view

First objection

Second objection

Motivations?

First objection: the possibility of hallucinating in the Matrix

1. Even in the Matrix, what people in the Matrix calls “steaks” must exist independently of the experience we have when we eat them.

First objection: the possibility of hallucinating in the Matrix

1. Even in the Matrix, what people in the Matrix calls “steaks” must exist independently of the experience we have when we eat them.
2. Otherwise, suppose in the Matrix, “steaks” referred to just experiences.

First objection: the possibility of hallucinating in the Matrix

1. Even in the Matrix, what people in the Matrix calls “steaks” must exist independently of the experience we have when we eat them.
2. Otherwise, suppose in the Matrix, “steaks” referred to just experiences.
3. It is certainly possible to hallucinate, even in the Matrix.

First objection: the possibility of hallucinating in the Matrix

1. (In the case of the Matrix, we can suppose hallucinations are some kind of interferences that the program might run into.)

First objection: the possibility of hallucinating in the Matrix

1. If in the Matrix one were hallucinating a steak, and if 'steak' in their mouth meant experiences one has when it looks to one as if one is having a steak, in that person's mouth the sentence "I am having a steak" could be true.

First objection: the possibility of hallucinating in the Matrix

1. If in the Matrix one were hallucinating a steak, and if 'steak' in their mouth meant experiences one has when it looks to one as if one is having a steak, in that person's mouth the sentence "I am having a steak" could be true.
2. Because while hallucinating, it is true that he is having the experiences that he has when it looks to him that he is having what he calls "steak".

First objection: the possibility of hallucinating in the Matrix

1. If in the Matrix one were hallucinating a steak, and if 'steak' in their mouth meant experiences one has when it looks to one as if one is having a steak, in that person's mouth the sentence "I am having a steak" could be true.
2. Because while hallucinating, it is true that he is having the experiences that he has when it looks to him that he is having what he calls "steak".
3. But even in that Matrix, that sentence cannot be true, if one person is hallucinating.

First objection: the possibility of hallucinating in the Matrix

1. Even in the Matrix, we want to distinguish between what happens to one when one hallucinates what one calls “steaks” and what happens to one when one is really having what one calls, in the Matrix, “steaks” .

Outline

First view

First objection

Second objection

Motivations?

Second Objection: the possibility to communicate

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1. My experience of eating steaks is different from yours. It is highly subjective.
2. Similarly, a Matrix person's experience of eating what he calls "steaks" in the Matrix is different from the experience that his fellow Matrix-mate has when the latter is undergoing the experience of having what people call "steaks" in the Matrix.

Second Objection: the possibility to communicate

1. My experience of eating steaks is different from yours. It is highly subjective.
2. Similarly, a Matrix person's experience of eating what he calls "steaks" in the Matrix is different from the experience that his fellow Matrix-mate has when the latter is undergoing the experience of having what people call "steaks" in the Matrix.
3. So the hypothesis that "steaks" meant the experiences one is having when one seems to be eating "steaks" would make the meaning of our words highly subjective and person-dependent.

Second Objection

1. It is worth asking how people in the Matrix can even understand each other, if the words they use have such subjective meanings!

Outline

First view

First objection

Second objection

Motivations?

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1. What motivates the view that in the Matrix, “steaks” means the experiences one has when it looks to one that one is eating steaks?

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3. In our mouth, “steaks” does not mean the experiences that we have when it seems to us that we are having steaks

Motivations?

1. What motivates the view that in the Matrix, “steaks” means the experiences one has when it looks to one that one is eating steaks?
2. Compare it to what “steaks” means in our mouth!
3. In our mouth, “steaks” does not mean the experiences that we have when it seems to us that we are having steaks
4. In our mouth “steaks” means steaks! And steaks are not experiences!

Unitary view

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Unitary view

1. It would be nice to have a unitary view of what makes a certain word refer to certain things rather than others, whether those words are used in the Matrix or outside the Matrix.
2. It is plausible that words refer to whatever it is that stands in a certain **causal role to use** (to whatever it is that causes in us certain experiences, and so on).

Unitary view

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1. In our cases, it is cow flesh that provokes in us the experiences that we associate with the word 'steak'.
2. So it is plausible that in our mouth, 'steaks' means steaks—cow flesh.
3. In the mouth of people that always used their language within the Matrix, what causes them to have the experiences that they associate with the word "steaks" are bits of the Matrix programs.

Outline

The question

First view

Second view

Introducing the second view

1. So it is very plausible that in the mouth of people in the Matrix, “steak” means the bits in the computer programs that generate into them certain kinds of experiences.

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Introducing the second view

1. So it is very plausible that in the mouth of people in the Matrix, “steak” means the bits in the computer programs that generate into them certain kinds of experiences.
2. This is a very different view from the first.
3. According to it, the referent of “steak” causes experiences into us, but it is not the same as those experiences.

Introducing the second view

1. On this view, what people in the Matrix call “steaks” exists independently of their experiences of it!

Introducing the second view

1. On this view, what people in the Matrix call “steaks” exists independently of their experiences of it!
2. So the people in the Matrix’s realist beliefs would be vindicated—they would be true.

More objectivity

1. The meanings would be more objective and also more inter-subjective.

Uniformity

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2. That is because we assume that the meaning of our words must be something that exists independently of us and that causes our experiences.

Uniformity

1. In our case, we take “steaks” to refer not to our experiences, but to stuff that exists independently of it—like cow flesh.
2. That is because we assume that the meaning of our words must be something that exists independently of us and that causes our experiences.
3. Why suppose that in the Matrix, facts about meanings of our words are so radically different from the way they are in our case (i.e., that in the Matrix words refer to experiences and not what causes them?)

Outline

Second view

Consequences

Distinguish “steaks” in English versus “steaks” in Matrix English

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Second view

Consequences

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Consider the following three sentences:

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1. ‘Steaks’ in English means steaks.
2. ‘Steaks’ in Matrix English means steaks.

Consider the following three sentences:

1. ‘Steaks’ in English means steaks.
2. ‘Steaks’ in Matrix English means steaks.
3. “ ‘Steaks’ in Matrix English means steaks” is true in Matrix English.

True or false?

Are these sentences true or false?

The first sentence

- ▶ The first sentence is true:

The first sentence

- ▶ The first sentence is true:
- ▶ It is true that steaks in English means steaks.

The second sentence

- ▶ The second sentence, instead, is false:

The second sentence

- ▶ The second sentence, instead, is false:
- ▶ It is false that ‘Steaks’ in Matrix English means steaks (cow flesh).

The second sentence

- ▶ The second sentence, instead, is false:
- ▶ It is false that ‘Steaks’ in Matrix English means steaks (cow flesh).
- ▶ Rather, ‘steaks’ in Matrix English means some bits of the Matrix program.

The third sentence

1. The third sentence is again true:

The third sentence

1. The third sentence is again true:
2. It is true that the sentence “ ‘Steaks’ in Matrix English means **steaks**” is true in Matrix English.

The third sentence

1. The third sentence is again true:
2. It is true that the sentence “ ‘Steaks’ in Matrix English means **steaks**” is true in Matrix English.
3. That is so because in Matrix English the red word in that sentence refers to bits of programs and the word ‘steaks’ in Matrix English does mean bits of programs.