following conclusion: capitalists make profit, or surplus value, by paying workers less than they have earned. It is oftentimes assumed that profit is a careful play of the rhythms of supply and demand: a capitalist sells a product when the price he can make exceeds the cost of its production. Marx realized that this happens too infrequently to be the basis of profit. He also realized that the cost of the raw materials that go in to production are essentially fixed. The only dimension that capitalists can systematically exploit is a laborer's pay. According to Marx, capitalists try to pay workers just enough to live, pocketing the rest. If a laborer works an eight-hour shift, he is basically paid the equivalent of five or six hours; the remaining two or three hours is from where the capitalist's profit is derived.

The Matrix is an unforgettable film, but it falls short of convincing its viewers to "wake up" in order to fight the exploitative powers that make the majority of us into coppertops in the real world. It falls short, in part, because it does not show us what the human race is missing while they are plugged in to the Matrix. Arguably, the two species—the humans and the machines—live a symbiotic relationship, and the dream world that Cypher wants to return is not really that bad. It looks relatively hip and urban, with "really good noodles," steady work, and a cool club scene. Humanity has to work to generate BTUs, but the Matrix has unlimited bandwidth and full color! In other words, humanity works, and they are paid exactly what they are worth.

If *The Matrix* really wanted to make a "Marxist" statement from which to wake up, the dream world of the Matrix would have been shot in black and white, symbolizing the extent to which the machines exploited the value of the coppertop's labor power. If the Matrix had been shot in black and white, and the "real" world in the *Nebuchadnezzar* had been in color, perhaps then the revolutionary future for which the humans were fighting would have looked as bright and colorful as did Oz when the real Dorothy said "bye-bye" to Kansas.

From William Irwin, ed. The Matrix and Philosophy (Carus 2002)

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The Matrix Simulation and the Postmodern Age

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Consider the following hypothesis: Some time during the years between 1966 and 1974, the world changed. Which is to say, *our* world changed. In a big way. Though not uncontroversial, many historians and scholars believe just this: that during these years we entered a new era, leaving behind the modern age, we now find ourselves in very different circumstances. We are now in what is referred to as the postmodern age or the condition of postmodernity.

What happened? Many things. Deindustrialization, suburbanization, and a dramatic increase in the flexibility of capital accumulation leading to what we now know as globalization.[1] In the arts and in architecture, ideals of purity and depth have given way to irony and the play of surfaces while the distinction between high and low or popular art has come to seem quaint and indefensible. Think of Andy Warhol or Madonna. In philosophy, many have been led to abandon their faith in an episte-

[1] The idea of "flexible accumulation" as well as the expression "the condition of postmodernity" come form one of the best books on the subject, David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990). Harvey's book also supplies a more precise date for the beginning of postmodernity. On p. 39, Harvey quotes Paul Jencks as saying that modernism ended and the postmodern age began at 3:32 p.m. CST on July 15th, 1972 in St. Louis, Missouri with the dynamiting if the modernist Pruitt-Igoe housing development.

mological or ethical foundationalism—a rock-solid, axiomatic basis to support our knowledge and values. And, obviously, technology is a large part of the story. The first generation of children "nurtured" on a steady diet of television came of age during this time. And after television there followed the widespread proliferation of cable, video, fax machines, pharmaceutical mood enhancers, computers, cell phones, and the Internet.

Finally, all of this has had an effect on our thoughts, wishes, and feelings. How could it not? The nature of human experience has undergone and continues to undergo a transformation. The idea is that in a world without a real sense of place we have become spiritual nomads. In a world without seriousness, we are cynics and disbelievers. In a world with designer drugs, our personalities have plasticity, leaving authenticity behind as a nothing more than a hoax. And in a thoroughly mediatized world, we are . . . well, we are what? This brings us to *The Matrix* and to the Matrix, that is, to the film by the Wachowskis and to the network of refracted images itself in which, undeniably, we are all entangled to a degree never before known and for as far as we can see. Call it truth, call it the real, call it a rabbit hole. If the film is about all of this, then it's really about looking back at ourselves as we are now and soon to become even more so.

The film *The Matrix* was released in 1999, not 1969. Because of this it easily finds resonance among its viewers. We understand it; we recognize its power—not only as a futuristic science fiction, but as a commentary on who we are. It is not the first film or artwork to test these waters. But it is perhaps the most sustained (implicitly) philosophical film to address one of the central features of postmodern experience: the blurred or vanishing line between reality and simulation.

That *The Matrix* is about this vanishing line is clear. References to it are strewn throughout the dialogue. And the film makers give us a wink early on. In the scene in which Neo is visited at his apartment by hackers in need of digitized information, Neo reaches for the goods in a hollowed-out book which the camera reveals to be Jean Baudrillard's *Simulations and Simulacra*[2]—a postmodern work on the erosion of the real

[2] Originally, *Simulacres et simulation* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1981). Available in English as *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983). Morpheus's words later in the film, "This is the world as it exists today. Welcome to the desert of the real," may also have been inspired by Baudrillard, for whom, postmodern America is one big desert where "you are delivered from all depth . . . a brilliant, mobile, superficial neutrality, a challenge to meaning and profundity, a challenge to nature and culture, an outer hyperspace, with no origin, no reference-points." See his *America* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 124 and pp. 1–13, 66–71, 123-126 as well as Baudrillard's *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

and its displacement by simulated images. Yet while the film concerns this vanishing line, it is not immediately clear what it is saying, or rather showing, about it. Neither is it clear what exactly is postmodern or new about the film's story as an allegory for our age. This essay attempts to look at that line, to cast our gaze around the rabbit hole, to see what we've become.

My method is to consider four theses or propositions which are possible interpretations of what the film is saying, suggesting, or showing about the distinction between reality and simulation in our age of advanced technology. They are as follows:

I. It is ultimately impossible to tell the difference between the real and the unreal.

II. Reality can be simulated and improved on.

III. Simulated or virtual reality can (and probably will) be preferable to normal reality.

IV. Simulated reality is as metaphysically real as unsimulated reality, if not more so.

We should not simply assume from the start that each or any of these propositions is true. The point here is to reflect on the film's acceptance of or flirtation with these propositions and the ways in which they characterize our postmodern age in opposition to previous history. The hope is that, in the end, our rabbit hole might be better understood.

It Is Ultimately Impossible to Tell the Difference between the Real and the Unreal

After Neo first meets Morpheus, he learns that he's been right all along, that "there's something wrong with the world" and it has

something to do with the Matrix. He chooses the red pill to see "how deep the rabbit hole goes" and, as we know, soon learns that the only world he has ever known, seen, and tasted is an illusion, having no reality outside cyberspace. Just before his voyage into the real begins, Morpheus sensing Neo's puzzled disbelief asks him: "How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?" The message is clear. Neo has no way of knowing for sure what's real and what isn't.

Now, this, of course, is a *philosophical* problem, more specifically, an epistemological one. It is also an old one. Is it possible that we know nothing because all of our beliefs are false? Is there any way to show that we are not totally deluded about *everything*? Plato's *Republic,* 2,400 years old, tells of cave dwellers who take the mere shadows on the wall to be the real things themselves. They do not know what is real, having never encountered it, and are oblivious of their ignorance. For Plato this is an allegory for the condition of human beings who know only the material world and not the ideas or Forms which, Plato holds, stand behind them and make them possible. Much later, in the seventeenth century, Descartes entertains the possibility that all our beliefs might be false. In his *Meditations*, he aims to find a secure foundation for knowledge and, wanting to start from scratch, undertakes, in the first meditation, to show that all of our beliefs are susceptible to doubt. He begins with the unreliability of our senses but decides that this doesn't quite do the job. He then considers the possibility that we may be dreaming everything up. In fact, there is no surefire way to show that we are not dreaming. But Descartes reasons that we could not *always* have been dreaming since the contents of our dreams could not be generated from dreams alone and so must come from some other source. Descartes then considers the possibility that a malicious demon is systematically deceiving us such that every one of our beliefs is false. And with this possibility, and the attendant impossibility of proving this false, comes radical or global skepticism (which Descartes thought he could overcome by the means explained in his later meditations).

So we see that Morpheus's suggestion that we cannot really know for sure whether the world we experience is real or not

is a respectable philosophical assertion (though there may be some good arguments against it). Is there anything new in what Morpheus says here? Only this. The thought of the malicious demon in the seventeenth century and until recently was an outlandish thought. Very few people were able to imagine how an all-powerful, mean-spirited entity could possibly implant beliefs into our minds. Nowadays, with the advent of computer simulation and the knowledge that the brain operates by means of electrical impulses, all of this seems possible, even if only remotely so. So *The Matrix* and other sci-fi films and books have made the job of philosophy teachers easier. Global skepticism is not so ridiculously far-fetched. With rapid advances in computer and brain science, maybe we'll one day arrive at the point where lifelike simulated images and experiences can be masterfully fed into our brains or central nervous systems. Maybe we're already there and maybe you're lying somewhere in a tub of goo thinking otherwise. "*How could you know the difference . . . ?*"

Still, the point here is that the claim that we cannot be sure that we can recognize the difference between reality and illusion is not philosophically new. But there's more to *The Matrix* than that.

Reality Can Be Simulated and Improved On

Start with the idea that there is only one real world and that it is exactly what it is and nothing else besides. Where then does the unreal, the illusory come from? And why are we sometimes fooled by it? The unreal may arise spontaneously in dreams and seems to fool us while we are dreaming. The unreal may also result from sensory or cognitive error, again spontaneously, and such as to lead to deception. In either case, the world co-exists with something else thanks to the powers and frailties of the mind. There is another way in which the real world comes to co-exist with something else. Human beings can *represent* the world in signs, language, and images. Consequently, we live in a world of things *and* of representations of things. Representations have been around since cave drawings and the beginnings of sign language. But theorists of postmodernity

argue that we now live in a world thoroughly saturated with representations, both linguistic and pictorial. Words, signs, and especially images are ubiquitous and have usurped the immediacy of the material world, so much so that the world we experience is better described as a *spectacle* than as a space-time continuum filled with physical objects. Thus, Guy Debord, in his highly original *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), writes:

> In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into representation. The images detached from every aspect of life fuse in a common stream in which the unity of this life can no longer be re-established. Reality considered partially unfolds, in its own general unity as a pseudo-world apart, an object of mere contemplation . . . The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.[3]

According to Debord, there are now not only a lot more representations and images than before, but they form a network (matrix?) constituting a spectacle which is so much closer to us than the non-representational that the non-representational has become an unreconstructible abstraction. To illustrate this, look at your immediate surroundings and the extent to which their reality has been shaped by human fabrication and production with an eye to their eventual consumption. Or think of the place of the television or monitor screen in contemporary life or in an airport lounge.

The next step comes with computer simulation. Not only can we and do we produce and consume human-made representations of the world, we can now *simulate* the world. Simulation is a means of representing, in a life-like manner, objective processes and subjective experiences that may or may not have existed before, typically with the aid of computers. Thus we can simulate a car crash or the aroma of fried onions or the experience of weightlessness. And people are doing just this right now in labs in Texas and New Jersey and in IMAX theaters at your

[3] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), p. 5. Originally *La société du spectacle* (Paris: Éditions Buchet-Chastel, 1967).

local museum. As a result we live in a simulated world, filled with the products of such simulation, called simulacra.

Now, at the beginning of our twenty-first century, computer simulation is clearly in its infancy. But it is rapidly progressing. The hardest part of it may not be replicating and modifying the ways things and people look, smell, sound, and behave but feeding all of this into the brain in a way that bypasses any awareness of the surrounding non-simulated world. But imagine that science and technology have come this far. Or rather let *The Matrix* imagine it for you. That's what the film does. Simulation begins with the staccato peck-peck-pecking at the keyboard (the certain sign in recent Hollywood films telling us that something interesting is about to happen) by means of which virtual reality is created. In *The Matrix*, cyberspace is beautifully depicted by white space without walls, floor, or ceiling as in the scene when Morpheus first shows Neo the "inside" of a computer program adorned with two red leather armchairs and a TV set (of prepostmodern 1950s vintage, appealing to our stubborn nostalgia for the days before the line had blurred) or in the scene when Neo and Trinity generously stock up on weapons to save Morpheus. Next, fill up the white space with whatever you'd like from guns and skyscrapers and swarms of business people to the woman in the red dress. Pipe all of this in through a steel rod inserted into the brain and wired into the appropriate receptors and, *voilà*, we get the fully simulated world of 1999 and it's the only world we know. *Formidable!*, as the French say.

Once all of this is granted, it seems rather easy, in principle, to see how a simulated world could be created and how our judgment of the real might yield to it. There is one aspect of it, however, that is confusing and maybe even poorly thought out by the film's writers: the self and its mental powers. Morpheus tells Neo that when a person is placed into a computer program such as the Matrix, he or she retains a "residual self image" and becomes "a mental projection of your digital self." What does this mean? It's not clear that it means anything, but we can give it a try. Neo, once unplugged and then loaded up into cyberspace, is very much a residuum of whatever he was in the real world, that is, on the *Nebuchadnezzar*. He has the same personality (that same Keanu Reeves *il-ne-sait-quoi*), the same

memories (which incidentally were formed, strangely enough, not in the real world, but in the virtual one), the same will to be free, the same knowledge of ju jitsu (this, by contrast, was uploaded), and so forth. On the other hand, his person and powers in cyberspace are also a function of his capacity for mental projection. Thus, on the ju jitsu mats with Morpheus, he is told that if he is to win the fight, his mind will do it, not his body. His mind is strong enough (if not always his will or self-confidence) to defy gravity and bend spoons. It is not altogether clear where this power comes from. It could easily be punched in at a keyboard, of course, but that's not what happens. Neo himself lying inert in a chair is doing the work of manipulating his body and the physical world in cyberspace. What allows for this?

It would seem, at first, that simulation gives unlimited power to the keyboard operator and no power at all to the one (lying in the chair) to whom the world is being simulated. Or is this right? What if simulation could be more than this? A world is piped into your brain and, furthermore, your brain has the power not only to receive information from that world but to act on it (as in a video game) and because it is the cyberworld, not the real one, your powers are not limited by the familiar scientific laws. Maybe *The Matrix* is right about this, after all: very, very sophisticated simulation would in fact allow for a cyberself that both projects much of its real attributes and is able to surpass them as well by means of a strong and disciplined will. According to *The Matrix*, more powerful than the computer is the mind that engages with it. We'll have to wait to find out about this one, but it's hard not to be curious. Wake me up in a couple hundred years, or better yet, load me up there right now.[2]

So, not only can reality be simulated, it can be improved on. Why simulate it otherwise? This means that simulating reality is not only a matter of replicating its basic structure but making

[2] For experts on the film, this quiz-show question: According to *The Matrix*, what is most powerful of all? Incorrect answer: the mind or its will-power. Correct answer: Love. Recall that, toward the end of the film, in his struggle against the agents, Neo's mental powers are not sufficient for the task. As he lies dying or dead, what saves him and gives him the strength to prevail is Trinity's kiss.

whatever tweaks are necessary to bring it into line with our wishes. Virtual reality in *The Matrix* replicates not the bleak, gray wasteland of 2199 but the world as it was in 1999. Compared to the world of 2199, it is replete with bright colors, blue skies, and tasty food. Even compared to the "real" world of 1999, it's improved in certain ways, for example with the addition of the woman in the red dress or perhaps the elimination of poverty (for we see mainly business types and we mustn't forget that the machines want a docile human population and would be unwise to permit hunger and deprivation).

Yes, simulation is, for almost all intents and purposes, fundamentally an enhancement of reality. This brings us back to ourselves and our society. Haven't we reached a point where virtual reality is simply better than the real thing? Isn't it possible that the artificial flavor of banana is or could be made more pleasing than the banana itself? Or can't we imagine the day when the super-duper IMAX experience of the Grand Canyon far surpasses the experience of the big hole itself? Walker Percy, the philosophically-inspired novelist, once pointed out that it would be far better to encounter the Grand Canyon unexpectedly than to arrive there on a tourist bus. Imagine that the IMAX experience hooked you up to electrical impulses that temporarily eradicated any knowledge of the Grand Canyon's existence so that you could ride up to it on a horse and be completely taken by surprise. Given such a scenario, people might understandably say: "If you've only got three hours, take a pass on the Canyon and head straight for the IMAX. It's awesome. If you have more time, visit the real thing, it's not bad, though be prepared for a bit of a disappointment." And who can blame them? Which takes us to the next step.

Simulated or Virtual Reality Can (and Probably Will) Be Preferable to Normal Reality

Which is preferable, the real world or the enhanced virtual world? Which pill would you take—the blue one or the red? As we have just seen, given the appropriate technological advances as well as a competent and benevolent programmer, the virtual world will typically seem more attractive than the real one. Much more so. This is nicely illustrated in the scene in which

Cypher defects and goes to work for the inimitable Agent Smith. Cypher enjoying a succulent cut of beef and a fine glass of red wine says: "I know this steak doesn't exist. I know that when I put it in my mouth, the Matrix is telling my brain that it is juicy and delicious. After nine years, do you know what I realize? Ignorance is bliss."

The Matrix has juicy steaks; the real human world has bland gruel. The Matrix has great nightclubs; the real world has none. The Matrix has the woman in the red dress; the real world has . . . Trinity (oh well, there's always an exception). But the point is that the Matrix is a paradise of sensual pleasures compared to the real world. And Cypher is a hedonist through and through—a pleasure-seeker unwilling to put up with forever-deferred dreams and other idealist crap. He wants to return to cyber-reality and is willing to do what it takes to get out of another nine years of gruel. Not so the other *Nebuchadnezzar* team-mates. There's something more important to them than pleasure, namely, truth and freedom. Especially to Neo who reveals early on his distaste for and disbelief in fate because "I don't like the idea that I'm not in control of my life."

So, on the face of it, it looks as if the virtual world is only preferable to the shallow hedonist who's indifferent to the sin of self-deception, while the real world is preferable to anyone who cares about more important things such as truth, freedom, autonomy, and authenticity. In putting forth this message, we get an old-fashioned Hollywood morality tale. Very unpostmodern. And of course the whole plot of the film is driven by the noble battle for liberation from the tyranny of the machines and their evil Matrix. But the film, despite itself, presents us with two worlds in a way that shows us that Cypher is the one who is right. I believe that the only sensible path is to choose the simulated world over the real one.

Here's why. The Matrix does not just offer sensual pleasures. It really encompasses much more, in fact, it gives us just about everything we could want from the shallowest to the deepest of gratifications. Assuming the machines haven't made things unnecessarily impoverished, the virtual world gives us the opportunity to visit museums and concerts, read Shakespeare and Stephen King, fall in love, make love, raise

children, form deep friendships, and so on. The whole world lies at our feet except that it's probably better than our world since the machines have every motivation to create and sustain a world without human misery, accidents, disease, and war so as to increase the available energy supply. The real world, on the other hand, is a wasteland. The libraries and theaters have been destroyed and the skies are always gray. In fact, you'd have to be out of your mind or at least seriously out to lunch to choose the real world (is that why Keanu Reeves seems so well cast in the role?). We're not talking base hedonism now, we're talking about, to use John Stuart Mill's words, "the higher faculties" and the deep and diverse types of gratification derived from them. Such gratification is to be found far more easily in The Matrix than in "the desert of the real."[3]

What about truth and freedom, autonomy, and authenticity? The machines probably don't mind what you do in the virtual world as long as it stays there. You can paint, you can make music, you can support the government or fight against it. You're free in every way that you're free now, you just can't do one thing: unplug or try to get others to unplug or kill Agents who are trying to stop people from unplugging. As for truth, there's really only one single important truth that eludes you: that none of this real. It's all only virtual. But it feels real as real can get. And there's no reason to suspect that it's unreal unless Morpheus or his team visits you. So should you care? Does it matter? Is it in the end really unreal? What makes it unreal? On to our last proposition.

[3] So while Neo chooses the red pill, I, along with Cypher, would choose the blue pill, albeit not simply for creaturely comforts and pleasures. There is, however, a third position. In "You Won't Know the Difference So You Can't Make the Choice," *Philosophy Now* (December 2000/January 2001), pp. 35–36, Robin Beck argues that "there are no rational grounds for making the decision" because "[e]pistemologically, the worlds are the same" given that either world seems "equally real" once either pill has been swallowed. Beck is right to say that either way we take our world to be the real one and so there's no difference on that score. But the world so taken is very different depending on which pill's been chosen, and the blue pill gives us by far the better world.

Simulated Reality Is as Metaphysically Real as Unsimulated Reality, if not More So

First, some lines from the theorist of postmodernity, Jean Baudrillard:

> The very definition of the real becomes: *that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction* . . . At the limit of this process of reproducibility, the real is not only what can be reproduced, but *that which is always already reproduced*. The hyperreal . . . transcends representation . . .only because it is entirely in simulation . . .[A]rtifice is at the very heart of reality.[4]

When Morpheus takes Neo on his first tour of computer programmed cyberspace, Neo grasps at a leather armchair against the background of a bright white void and asks Morpheus: "Are you telling me this isn't real?" Morpheus responds: "What is real? How do you define 'real'?" This is not just a throw-away line or a mere rhetorical question. In the weird context of this film and our ever-weirder technological world, it is a legitimate question. Morpheus's next statement only confirms this. He says that the real is what we can "feel, smell, taste and see" and that this consists in "electrical signals interpreted by your brain." But if one's experience of a virtual reality is also a matter of electrical signals interpreted by the brain, then it would seem to follow that virtual reality is as real as reality.

In another scene Neo is being driven by car to the Oracle. Gazing out the window, he suddenly recognizes something and exclaims, "God, I used to eat there . . . really good noodles," only to fall back into his seat disappointed when it occurs to him that "I have these memories from life . . . none of them happened." But didn't they? He remembers them.[5] Unlike false memories (say, the kind that questionable psychotherapeutic practices are said to create), Neo's memories were experienced at one time as occurring in the present. His experience of the restaurant led to further visits to the restaurant. In other words,

[4] Baudrillard, *Simulations*, pp. 146, 147, 151.

[5] Which calls to mind the line from the 1960s song "Both Sides Now": "It's life's illusions I recall / I really don't know life at all."

his experience of the restaurant stands in a coherent relation to his other experiences and behavior. It even stands in a coherent relation to the experiences and behavior of other human beings, whom Neo brought to the restaurant in a virtual intersubjectively shared world.[6] In a way, then, those memories do in fact correspond to something that happened. One could, in principle, find traces of it in the brains of other human beings lying in pods plugged in to the Matrix.

The idea, mentioned a moment ago, that reality, and our knowledge of it, is rooted in the sensory impressions (seeing, touching, etc.) we have is a fundamental principle of philosophical empiricism—a philosophy that is no less influential today than when it was first developed in its modern form in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to David Hume, there can be no other justification for our knowledge, for our belief in what is real, than what we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. Now one might object to this by saying that Neo and other human beings in the Matrix don't really see or hear anything at all. However, they have the same type of sensory impressions as we do. And since there is nothing that distinguishes their sensory impressions from ours, no external evidence accessible to them (as there is none for us) that would show them that their sensory impressions are mere imaginings, then it follows that for them the Matrix is as real as our world is for us since both are underwritten by the same type of sensory impressions.*

We also saw that Neo's earlier experiences were experiences of reality because they cohere with other experiences and other behavior, not only Neo's own but that of other human beings as well. This relies on something like a coherence notion of truth, according to which a belief such as "I used to eat in that restaurant with my buddies" is true if it coheres with most of our other

[6] Why intersubjective? In *The Matrix* it's not as if each individual has his or her own private Matrix, rather the entire human population is experiencing the same Matrix. What one person does there is witnessed and experienced by others.

* This point depends on accepting a certain principle of verification—according to which a claim is meaningful and true if and only if there is a possible method for verifying it. This principle is itself not without philosophical controversy

beliefs. That his experience coheres with and is a reliable basis for our behavior (also true of Neo's earlier experiences) is a central principle of pragmatism.

Still, a skeptic of all this, a cyberskeptic, will say that no matter how many sensory impressions one has of the virtual world and no matter how much they cohere within and between individuals, the cyberworld is not real because it does not exist in space. It is nowhere except in people's heads in the same way that other fictitious things (imaginary lovers or Santa Claus) might be in people's heads. But the cyberbeliever will respond: but the cyberworld does *exist* in space, in cyberspace. The skeptic will say that cyberspace is not *real* space. And the believer will then say *HELLO-O?*, of course it isn't "real" space, that's what makes it cyberspace. But the skeptic will respond that any space that isn't real space just doesn't count as space at all. According to this view, "cyberspace" is a mere metaphor; strictly speaking, "cyberspace" is an oxymoron.

Even granting that "cyberspace" is only a metaphor, we should note here that the cyberskeptic is assuming that spatiality is an essential feature of what can count as real. The assumption is that there is one and only one spatial-temporal continuum and that some of our beliefs and experiences correspond to what is in that continuum and some do not. If beliefs (or experiences) do not correspond, they are false (or nonveridical). Similarly, if something cannot be found in that continuum, it is not real. This assumption of the spatiality (and materiality insofar as materiality is defined in terms of spatiality) of the real is an assumption that some philosophers would reject. In fact, Plato rejected it. He held that numbers and, more generally, all Forms or ideas are real yet not spatial. (And Kant held that space is not a thing-in-itself, but belongs to the way subjects intuit the world.) So we see that the cyberbeliever shares some philosophical ground not only with empiricists, coherentists, and pragmatists but with Platonists (and perhaps Kantians) too. As does the postmodernist (at least, in many cases).

Plato held that the Forms or ideas were *more real* than material objects locatable in space. His reasons are complex but we might say, in a nutshell, that for Plato the Forms or ideas are more real because they are eternal and immutable and make possible the material world and our knowledge of it. Now, virtual reality is not eternal or immutable nor does it enable the unsimulated world we know (at least, not yet). Can any sense be given to the claim that simulated worlds are more real than nonsimulated worlds? Perhaps only this sense. If our future experience turns out to be such that simulated reality has a greater causal impact on our lived experience and actual behavior than nonsimulated reality, then, in one sense, a pragmatic sense, it will be more real. Whether this will turn out to be the case is not something that we can easily foresee at this point in time. Let's wait, oh, about two hundred years.