

Simulation Hypothesis and Theism: An Assessment in the Context of Multiverse *

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Abstract

Today, when plots, buildings and items in virtual universes are put up for sale, the question of whether the universes inhabited by real individuals can be produced is being debated. Many philosophers and scientists think that if technology continues to advance at its current rate, we will soon be able to produce universes similar to ours in the virtual environment. This point is the starting point of the famous simulation hypothesis. According to this theory, which many philosophers find reasonable, if we can produce virtual universes, it is highly probable that conscious beings in these universes can create their universes. But this situation also suggests the opposite: How can we be sure that we are not living in a simulation? Based on this argument, Nick Bostrom, an Oxford University philosopher, argues that we are almost certainly in a simulation. Because if most of the existing universes are simulations, it is much more likely that we are living in one of the virtual universes rather than the real one. Well, if the universe we live in is one of infinite universes and was brought into existence and designed by conscious beings in other universes, what would this mean for theism? From the perspective of classical theism, this universe was created and designed by God. For example, proponents of the cosmological argument claim that the universe had a beginning, while advocates of design proof argue that God designed this universe. Some assume that the idea that there are an infinite number of universes other than the one we live in is contrary to theism. Again, in many studies, we come across that the theory of multiverses is handled as an understanding of the universe in opposition to theism. While this study does not aim to defend the truth or falsity of the simulation hypothesis, it suggests that if this theory is assumed to be true, there will be no serious danger to theism. While doing this, the discussions in the context of the theory of multiverses and theism will be mentioned, and it will be argued that simulation universes do not contradict the existence of God.

Keywords

Philosophy; Philosophy of Religion; Theism; Simulation Hypothesis; Multiverse

Highlights

- Even if there seems to be a tension between the simulation hypothesis and theism, there is no contradiction between them.
- To say that we live in a simulation does not mean that our life is meaningless.
- The fact that the universe is a simulation raises questions about divine creation and freedom.
- The existence of an infinite number of simulated universes is not a problem for divine creation.
- The existence of an infinite number of simulated universes is compatible with divine freedom.

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Simülasyon Hipotezi ve Teizm: Çoklu Evrenler Bağlamında Bir Değerlendirme *

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Öz

Sanal evrenlerdeki arsa, bina ve eşyaların satışa çıkarıldığı günümüzde, artık gerçek bireylerin yaşadığı evrenlerin üretilip üretilmeyeceği meseleleri tartışılmaktadır. Hatta pek çok felsefeci ve bilim insanı, teknolojinin bugünkü hızla ilerlemeye devam etmesi durumunda, çok yakın bir zamanda bizimkine benzeyen evrenleri sanal ortamda üretebileceğimiz kanaatinde. Bu nokta, meşhur simülasyon hipotezinin başlangıç noktasıdır. Pek çok felsefecinin makul bulduğu bu teoriye göre, eğer biz sanal evrenler üretebiliyorsak, ürettiğimiz bu evrenlerdeki bilinçli varlıkların da kendi evrenlerini üretebilmesi kuvvetle muhtemeldir. Fakat bu durum, tersinden şunu da düşündürür: Biz bir simülasyon içinde yaşamadığımızdan nasıl emin olabiliriz? Oxford Üniversitesinde görev yapan felsefeci Nick Bostrom, geliştirdiği bu argümana dayanarak, kesine yakın bir ihtimalle bir simülasyonda olduğumuzu öne sürer. Zira mevcut evrenlerin çoğu simülasyon olsa, bizim gerçek olanda değil de sanal evrenlerden birinde yaşıyor olma ihtimalimiz çok daha yüksektir. Pekâlâ, içinde yaşadığımız evren, sonsuz sayıda simülasyon evreninden biriye ve başka evrenlerdeki bilinçli varlıklar tarafından varlığa getirilmiş ve tasarlanmışsa, bunun teizm için anlamı ne olacaktır? Klasik teizm perspektifinden bakıldığında, bu evren Tanrı tarafından yaratılmış ve tasarlanmıştır. Örneğin kozmolojik argümanı savunanlar, âlemin bir başlangıcı olmasından hareketle bir yaratıcısı olduğunu, tasarım kanıtı savunucuları ise bu âlemin Tanrı tarafından tasarlanmış olduğunu öne sürer. Kimileri, içinde yaşadığımız evren dışında sonsuz sayıda evrenin olduğu fikrinin teizme aykırı olduğunu varsayar. Yine pek çok çalışmada çoklu evrenler teorisinin teizme karşıt bir evren anlayışı şeklinde ele alındığına rastlarız. Bu çalışma, simülasyon hipotezinin doğruluğunu veya yanlışlığını savunma amacı gütmemekle birlikte, bu teorisinin doğru varsayılması durumunda teizm için ciddi bir tehlike ortaya çıkmayacağını öne sürmektedir. Bunu yaparken de çoklu evrenler teorisi ve teizm bağlamındaki tartışmalara değinilecek ve simülasyon evrenlerin Tanrı'nın varlığıyla çelişmediği öne sürülecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Felsefe; Din Felsefesi; Teizm; Simülasyon Hipotezi; Çoklu Evrenler

Öne Çıkanlar

- Simülasyon hipotezi ile teizm arasında ilk bakışta bir gerilim var gibi görünse dahi aslında aralarında çelişkili bir durum bulunmamaktadır.
- Bir simülasyonda yaşadığımızı söylemek, yaşamımızın anlamsız olduğu anlamına gelmez.
- Evrenin bir simülasyon olması, ilahi yaratmaya ve özgürlüğe ilişkin bazı soruları gündeme getirir.
- Sonsuz sayıda simülasyon evrenin var olması, ilahi yaratma açısından bir sorun teşkil etmez.
- Sonsuz sayıda simülasyon evrenin var olması, ilahi özgürlük açısından bir sorun teşkil etmez.

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Introduction¹

The rapid pace of technological development over the last half-century has been dizzying. Within a relatively short period, computers have become ubiquitous in every household and the speed of these computers has increased thousands of times over time. This remarkable growth and speed have even led to new types of transactions in virtual and digital universes where “real estate” and “property” can be sold. If technology continues to advance at even one percent of this rate, it is possible to produce numerous science fiction theories about what will happen in the near future. This is why many philosophers and scientists believe that the post-human age has arrived. Considering all these developments, the question arises whether it is possible for humankind to create their own simulation universes, in short, “sim universes.” An even more intriguing question is whether our existence is a simulation.

In his work, “Are We Living in a Computer Simulation?”, Nick Bostrom puts forward a compelling argument that it is almost certain that we live in a simulation universe.² He suggested three possibilities regarding this claim. Mankind would either become extinct before reaching the post-human age or it would reach that age but lack the will to create its own sim universes (possibly due to ethical reasons). The last possibility is that we already live in a simulation. Given the highly low probability of the first two scenarios, it follows that we are most likely living in a simulation. This argument has sparked a lot of controversy and attracted serious attention from prominent philosophers.

Although the simulation hypothesis may seem like fiction, when taken seriously, it contains philosophical and theological claims. Instead of focusing on the truth or falsity of the hypothesis in question, this paper aims to question the relation of this claim, which has been taken seriously by important thinkers, to theism. In other words, assuming the simulation hypothesis is truth, I will examine some of the concerns that might arise in terms of theism. These concerns related to the simulation hypothesis and theism include the meaningfulness of life within a sim universe and the existence of multiple universes. If we indeed exist in a sim universe, it implies that our universe has been created not by God but by other intelligent beings. But is there any point in discussing the meaning of life or believing in God in such a world? This paper argues that life can be meaningful in sim universes and that the issue of multiple sim universes does not pose a problem for theism. Even if we assume that there are an infinite number of sim universes, it is possible to speak of a God who is their original creator. In addition, some discussions of the simulation hypothesis in relation to the debate on divine creation will be addressed in the paper. Some thinkers have postulated the possibility that there is no real universe that created sim universes; rather, all simulations were created by God who acts as an “unsimulated simulator”. This possibility will also be examined in this study.

1. Simulation Hypothesis

David Chalmers, a leading philosopher specializing in the philosophy of mind, argues that it is highly probable that we were brought into existence by intelligent beings from

¹ Special thanks to Professor Dean Zimmerman for his constructive feedback and invaluable advise on this paper.

² Nick Bostrom, “Are We Living in a Computer Simulation?”, *The Philosophical Quarterly* 53/211 (2003), 243–255.

another universe, based on Bostrom's simulation argument. If there are countless sim universes, we are much more likely to live in one of them rather than existing in the real world. According to Chalmers and Bostrom, those who bring us into existence can be considered our gods³ as they not only created our universe but also have knowledge, control, and power over it. It is important to note that this act of creation is not a creation out of nothing, and there are limitations in terms of knowledge, control, and power. Chalmers constructs the argument for the possible creation of our universe by beings from another universe as follows:⁴

1. A few higher-order populations will each create multiple simulated populations.
2. If a few higher-order populations each create multiple populations, then most intelligent beings are simulated.
3. If most intelligent beings are simulated, we are probably simulated.
4. Therefore, we are probably simulated.

In this context, the term "higher-order populations" refers to populations that produce sim universes. These higher-order populations can produce sim universes in large numbers. Considering that higher-order populations are also created by other populations higher in order than themselves, it becomes evident how numerous these sim universes are. In other words, those who inhabit sim universes also have their own sim universes. Since sim universes are vastly more than the unsimulated universe in number, it is much more likely that we exist in a sim universe instead of the unsimulated universe. Based on this argument, thinkers such as Chalmers and Bostrom consider the possibility of humankind existing within a simulation highly probable.⁵

At this point, one might think that the simulation argument was accepted too quickly or raise objections regarding the obstacles and feasibility of creating a simulation universe. Even Bostrom, who put forward the simulation hypothesis, mentions some of the obstacles such a claim brings about. Therefore, I will briefly address the challenges associated with creating a simulated universe inhabited by conscious beings.

1.1. Sim-Blockers Against Simulation Hypothesis

Can we know if we live in a sim universe? Certainly, there is no experimental data confirming or refuting the existence of humankind in a sim universe. However, it is possible to raise objections to the idea that our universe is a simulation. Bostrom argues that we are most likely to live in a sim universe but adds that two obstacles make it difficult to reach this conclusion. That is, if at least one of these two possibilities is confirmed, it means that we do not exist in a simulation: (1) the human species is very likely to go extinct before reaching a "posthuman" stage, (2) Posthuman civilizations are not going to be interested in creating simulations. Any posthuman civilization is extremely unlikely to run a significant number of simulations of their evolutionary history (or variations thereof). If at least one of these two is true, we have substantial reason to think that we are not in a simulation. Because these two possibilities are possible reasons why sim universes are not being

³ David J. Chalmers, *Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2022), 137; Bostrom, "Are We Living in a Computer Simulation?", 253–254.

⁴ I incorporated this quotation with a slight modification. Chalmers, *Reality+*, 134.

⁵ Chalmers, *Reality+*, 101.

produced, if one of them is true, it implies that simulations are not being produced. Otherwise, we must face the option that, according to Bostrom, it is quite plausible that we are in a sim universe.⁶

Although Bostrom has listed only two possibilities for humans not habiting a sim universe, there are additional arguments against this, referred to as sim-blockers by Chalmers. Chalmers himself has made some additions to these sim-blockers. When combined with Bostrom's, amount to a total of six. Undoubtedly, more can be found in the literature. Nonetheless, the following are particularly noteworthy:⁷

- 1- Nonsims will all die before creating sims.
- 2- Nonsims will choose not to create sims.
- 3- Intelligent sims are impossible.
- 4- Conscious sims are impossible.
- 5- Sims take too much computer power and, therefore, cannot be created.
- 6- Simulators will avoid creating conscious sims.

A notable difference here is that the question of whether consciousness and reason are possible to be simulated can lead to a crucial debate. It is possible that consciousness or reason is not something that can be created in a simulation, however, the ability to create conscious and intelligent beings within a simulation remains highly contested for now. For instance, Tim Crane, one of the leading philosophers of mind, indicates in his article "Taking Simulation Seriously" that "while AI machines have succeeded in exhibiting specific intelligence in well-defined tasks (e.g. chess, GO), there is currently no understanding of how to create the type of intelligence possessed by humans – general intelligence, also known as common sense."⁸ Eric J. Larson makes a similar claim in his book *The Myth of Artificial Intelligence: Why Computers Can't Think the Way We Do*.⁹ Therefore, the simulation hypothesis will bring with it controversial issues concerning the nature of consciousness and reason. However, as stated at the outset, since the purpose of this paper is not to refute or defend the simulation hypothesis, such debates will not be addressed, and the focus will be on the consequences for theism of living in a simulated universe.

2. Sim Universes and Theism

According to classical theism, there is a God who created the universe and is concerned with the moral actions of intelligent beings within it. From this perspective, the proposition that the universe which we inhabit is a simulation created by other intelligent beings may give rise to some questions. Does it pose a problem for theism that the universe is not brought into existence by a divine God but by other beings who themselves may be simulations? Do life and moral choices have any meaning in a simulated universe? Although this study addresses the issue of the existence of multiple universes on the assumption of

⁶ Bostrom, "Are We Living in a Computer Simulation?", 255.

⁷ Chalmers, *Reality+*, 81–100.

⁸ Tim Crane, "Taking Simulation Seriously. Review of Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy by David Chalmers", *The Philosopher* (2022).

⁹ Eric J. Larson, *The Myth of Artificial Intelligence: Why Computers Can't Think the Way We Do* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021). For the Turkish version of the book see Larson, Eric J. *Yapay Zekâ Miti: Bilgisayarlar Neden Bizim Gibi Düşünemez*. trs. Kadir Yiğit Us. (Ankara: Fol Press), 2022.

theism, it will first focus on the question whether life in simulated universes has meaning. This is crucial, as it seems as though it would be difficult to reconcile theistic principles with a meaningless life.¹⁰

2.1. The Meaning of Life in the Sim Universe

The idea of living within a sim universe raises several questions, and the first of them is related to the meaningfulness of life in such an environment. If living in a sim universe renders life meaningless, then has God condemned humans to an illusionary existence by creating a sim universe instead of the real world? This question is especially crucial for theism. The short answer to this question is that living in a sim universe does not make life meaningless. The question of whether we can truly know the external world has been a topic of extensive philosophical debate spanning millennia. For instance, Plato's well-known allegory of the cave illustrates how humans only perceive the shadows of objects and remain ignorant of the real nature of the objects. When someone tries to inform them about the real world, they accuse that person of being a liar. Similarly, Descartes questioned whether there is anything we can be sure of, given the possibility that we are constantly being deceived by an evil genie. Similar themes have been the subject of science fiction movies and works such as *The Matrix* (1999) in which people living in a program called The Matrix are unaware that their physical bodies in tubes are being used to generate energy. Even though such scenarios are pieces of fiction, they still seem philosophically possible.

The concept of sim universes makes us question the authenticity of life within it. Does a sim universe mean a false life in a false universe? Descartes argued that an evil genie could not deceive us with perpetual false perceptions; God would prevent such deception. However, living in a sim universe might be meaningless because we would be deceived and subject to illusion. Chalmers answers this worry in an interview as follows: "I want to say, 'No, even if we're in a perfect simulation, this is not an illusion; I'm still in a perfectly real world; the conversation I'm having with you right now is a perfectly real conversation. Everything is just as meaningful as it was before.'"¹¹ Tim Crane, philosopher of mind, comments on Chalmers' answer as follows: "The tables you encounter in VR are real tables – but they are made of 'bits and bytes' rather than wood and metal. This is the idea he calls 'simulation realism'."¹² Therefore, the fact that the universe we live in is a simulation does not necessarily make it a meaningless place. Even though the objects in the sim universe are formed by software, rather than by real subatomic particles, life in such a world can be just as meaningful.¹³

The idea that the universe we live in does not reflect reality is not a new claim that came with the simulation hypothesis. The distinction between appearance and reality, one of the first debates in the history of philosophy, raises a similar issue. Even philosophers who

¹⁰ David J. Chalmers, "The Matrix as Metaphysics", *Philosophers Explore the Matrix*, ed. Christopher Grau (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 132–170.

¹¹ David J. Chalmers - Dan Falk, "The Simulated World According to David Chalmers", *Nautilus* (2022). <https://nautilus.us/the-simulated-world-according-to-david-chalmers-238417/>

¹² Crane, "Taking Simulation Seriously. Review of Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy by David Chalmers" (2022).

¹³ David J. Chalmers, "The Virtual and the Real", *Disputatio* 9/46 (2017), 309–352.

thought the universe we live in was not real did not assert that life lacks meaning. If we recall Plato's allegory of the cave, he argued that humans do not live in a world of reality, but rather in a world of shadows. Furthermore, we all remember the failure of the one who escaped from the cave, and when he returned and tried to explain to the inmates that the shadows they were perceiving were not real. For many people, this philosophical idea is not so destructive as to render life meaningless. One might therefore think that the sim hypothesis does not entail a loss of meaning in this sense.

It is crucial to bear in mind that the purpose of all these explanations is not to suggest that we live in a sim universe. As stated earlier, this paper does not aim to make any claim regarding our existence in a simulation or its likelihood. Its sole purpose is to limitedly address the specific concern of whether living in a sim universe would pose a problem for theism. The problem in question concerns the multiplicity of sim universes. If our universe were indeed a simulation, this would imply the existence of multiple other simulated universes. It is plausible that intelligent beings in other universes, who simulate our universe, are also simulating many other universes. It is even possible that these intelligent beings themselves are simulated by beings in another universe. This provides us with an idea of a potential number of sim universes. Moreover, Chalmers states that there can be an infinite number of these sim universes.¹⁴ Naturally, as he puts it, this would require an infinitely vast simulator universe or universes. However, according to him, this is not impossible.¹⁵

We can now proceed to examine why the issue of the multiplicity of universes appears to conflict with theism.

2.2. Multiverse Theory and Theism

The assumption that we inhabit one of the sim universes indicates that there are multiple sim universes. But does the existence of multiple universes mean that there are an infinite number of them? It seems that it is possible to hypothesize both an infinite and a finite number of sim universes. Nevertheless, the answer to this question depends, in a sense, on the question of the possibility of infinity. Some thinkers argue that an actual infinite cannot exist, which would imply that simulated universes must have a beginning since they cannot be infinite in number. This argument also raises the question of whether the actual universe has a cause or not. Therefore, the simulation hypothesis does not lead us to the claim that the universe is eternal or that there are an infinite number of universes. On the other hand, if it is accepted that the actual infinite is possible, then it becomes possible to argue that there are an infinite number of sim universes. This would open up to the discussion of multiple universes.

Proponents of the multiverse hypothesis argue that our universe is just one of an infinite number of universes. However, since multiverses are often presented as an opposing view to theism, it can come across as an idea that is incompatible with theism. For example, Victor J. Stenger, in his book *God and the Multiverse: Humanity's Expanding View of the Cosmos*, emphasizes the difficulty of reconciling multiverse theory with theism and presents it as an

¹⁴ Without delving into debates regarding the plausibility of the actuality of infinity, within the scope of this study, we will assume its feasibility.

¹⁵ Chalmers, *Reality*, 37.

opposing view to theism.¹⁶ Similarly, Robin Collins, a philosopher of science, states that theism and multiverses are pitted against each other in many studies and that there is a general perception that the two are in conflict.¹⁷ This perception primarily stems from the multiverse theory being constructed as a crucial part of an objection to the argument from design. If there are an infinite number of universes, it is quite possible that one of them possesses the initial conditions necessary for life and appears to be designed. In this case, there is no need for a designer. This argument, which is based on the multiverse theory, is said to be the most used objection to the argument from design.¹⁸ The fact that it is presented as an argument against the argument from design sometimes causes the multiverse theory to be understood as a theory that contradicts theism on its own. On the other hand, some theistic philosophers argue that the existence of these multiverses also necessitates an explanation or suggests the presence of a designer. However, the debate at hand is not about whether the argument from design can be defended despite the existence of multiverses, but whether there is a conflict between theism and the theory of multiverses. Therefore, the issue of the compatibility of design evidence and multiverses will not be addressed here. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that according to some philosophers, the theory of multiple universes also requires a designer.

First of all, it is important to clarify the concept of “multiverse” to avoid any potential confusion. As stated previously, the existence of multiple universes can refer to either a finite number of universes or an infinite number of universes. However, it should be noted that an infinite number of universes does not necessarily imply the existence of all possible universes. So, this is different from the modal realism proposed by David Lewis, which proposes that all possible worlds are real. Although modal realists argue that possible worlds are just as real as our actual world, it is necessary to distinguish between these two perspectives i.e., a multiverse posited as the grounds for modal truths, and a multiverse posited for some other reason. When we speak of something being possible, we mean it can be real but might not be real — and this conflicts with modal realism; we will be assuming modal realism is false. Moreover, if each possible world were to exist, it would entail the existence of worlds where every conscious being solely experiences suffering without any pleasure or happiness. For such worlds also appear to be possible, or at least there is no good reason to assume their impossibility.

On the other hand, if a benevolent God exists, the existence of such evil universes does not seem plausible. Therefore, one could argue that God would not create every possible world.¹⁹ Nevertheless, this does not negate the possibility of an infinite number of universes. In such a case, God can select and create an infinite number of universes from among the possible worlds. In fact, some philosophers assert that it is more reasonable to expect an infinitely powerful and creative God, to create multiple universes rather than just

¹⁶ Victor J. Stenger, *Tanrı ve Çoklu Evren: İnsanlığın Kozmosa Dair Genişleyen Görüşü*, trs. Banu Özgür Mısırlı (İstanbul: Ginko Bilim Press, 2019), 11-12.

¹⁷ Robin Collins, “The Multiverse Hypothesis: a Theistic Perspective”, *Universe or Multiverse?*, ed. Bernard Carr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 459.

¹⁸ Thomas Metcalf, “Fine-Tuning the Multiverse”, *Faith and Philosophy* 35/1 (2018), 4.

¹⁹ Dean Zimmerman, “Evil Triumphs in These Multiverses, and God Is Powerless”, *Nautilus* (2017), <https://nautilus/evil-triumphs-in-these-multiverses-and-god-is-powerless-236478/>

one. “The principle of plenitude” attributed to Plato also suggests that God, being generous, would not refrain from creating all the good things He can. In this context, philosophers such as Klaas J. Kraay and Paul Draper argue that it is more plausible for God to create multiple universes as a requirement of His perfection. On the other hand, there are philosophers of religion who are uncomfortable with such a creation being presented as a necessity for God. They argue that since God possesses free will, God does not have an obligation to create multiple universes. In other words, God could choose to create no universe or only one universe. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to impose the creation of one universe or multiple universes on God as an obligation. Nevertheless, this claim does not imply that God does not or cannot create multiple universes. If God possesses free will in the sense of being able to choose between different options, He could have chosen to create a multitude, even an infinite number of universes. As Katherin Rogers states: “... divine freedom implies that God could create multiple universes if He chose to do so. Classical theists, then, cannot object to the multiplicity of God’s creation and find no justification for His dividing this diversity into separate causal systems - multiple universes.”²⁰ We are not in a position to say that God should not have created more than one universe. A God with free will could have created one universe or more.

At this point, one might raise the question of what kind of worlds God created or why He created simulated universes. However, these questions, akin to the inquiry regarding why God created the world, are ancient and controversial, and do not appear to yield certain answers. As Rogers puts it, “This issue probably cannot be resolved by mere mortals.”²¹ For, answering such ancient questions regarding what God created and why may be as impossible as trying to read God’s mind. Furthermore, when we consider that God created a single universe more questions arise, such as why He created only one universe, or why He specifically created this universe and not another, which are problematic to answer. Hence, it would not be wrong to assert that these questions have become considerably more intricate in the context of simulated universes.

The possibility of God creating an infinite number of universes raises a concern about the simulation hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, the universe we live in was not directly or instantaneously created by God, but rather by the inhabitant of other universes (simulators). Consequently, within such a cosmology, God’s intervention in our universe may be called into question. However, the point to keep in mind here is that the entire series of simulated universes ultimately result from the act of creation of God. Therefore, the fact that their emergence is based on other causes does not pose a problem for theism. We observe that many things come into existence through various means. However, considering that God is the ultimate creator, all this can be understood as a part of God’s creation plan. The fact that the direct causes of sim universes appear to be other beings does not change this.

The simulation hypothesis implies the existence of multiple simulated universes as well as a real universe. What is meant by the “real universe” is the universe that is not itself a

²⁰ Klaas J. Kraay, “Theism, Possible Worlds, and the Multiverse”, *Philosophical Studies* 147/3 (2010), 361; Paul Draper, “Cosmic fine-tuning and terrestrial suffering: Parallel problems for naturalism and theism”, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 41/4 (2004), 318–319.

²¹ Rogers, “Classical Theism and the Multiverse”, 28.

simulation but simulates others. Unlike the discussion of multiple universes, this issue also raises the question about the nature of the real universe. Certain scholars argue that this first simulator may in fact be God, not a universe. Let us briefly examine this claim in the context of theism and the simulation hypothesis.

2.3. The Unsimulated Simulator

Aristotle argued that the universe in motion needs a first mover, referred to as “the unmoved mover”. Similarly, sim universes require a simulator, and it is also possible that this simulator has a simulator, however, the chain of simulation cannot extend ad infinitum. Hence, it requires a first simulator, one that is not itself a simulation. This first simulator is called the real universe. According to theists, God is the creator of this real universe and consequently, of simulated universes as well. On the other hand, instead of asserting the existence of a distinct real universe alongside simulated universes, a theist might not extend the chain of simulation to a real universe originating from the others but believe that God is the one who simulates all simulations. In this case, one could also use the term “the unsimulated simulator” when referring to God. Thus, both possibilities remain open to theists: either the real universe exists and its existence is contingent upon God, or the real universe does not exist and God is the first simulator.

Similar ideas have been expressed by philosophers such as Eric Steinhart and Jeff Grupp. They have argued that God can be the ultimate simulator.²² According to Steinhart, this idea supports a kind of neo-Platonic understanding of emanation. As is well known, proponents of the emanationist conception of coming into existence argue that there is a sequential overflow from God. The initial emanation from God is the being closest to Him and for this reason, it is the most valuable emanated thing. This being then actualizes its own act of overflowing, giving existence to a new being, and so on. The precise number of emanations and stages of overflow remains a subject of debate among emanationists. If we consider emanation in terms of Steinhart’s analogy, each overflow of beings would represent the emergence of a new simulated universe from the previous one. These universes that emanate from God constitute their own superficial (i.e., inferior to the one created by God) simulations.²³ In this context, each emanation signifies a new sim universe. Steinhart suggests that it is possible to interpret the simulation hypothesis in the context of an emanationist creation.

Grupp argues that if we exist in a simulation, we cannot certainly know the nature of the real universe. Our simulated universe would be made up of software data (bits and bytes), whereas the real universe must consist of real objects. However, since we would only be familiar with the objects in the sim universe, we would lack direct knowledge of what the objects in the real universe are. Consequently, it is plausible to consider the possibility that the real world may be fundamentally different from our own, or may not exist at all. There is no obstacle, then, to thinking of God as the original creator of the simulation, rather than attributing this role to the universe itself.²⁴ On the other hand, one could argue,

²² Eric Steinhart, “Theological Implications of the Simulation Argument”, *Ars Disputandi* 10/1 (2010), 28.

²³ Steinhart, “Theological Implications of the Simulation Argument”, 36–37.

²⁴ From this, Grupp builds an argument in favor of God’s existence. Because of word limits, I will not address this argument here. For the argument, see Jeff Grupp, “The Implantation Argument: Simulation Theory is Proof that God Exists”, *Metaphysica* 22/2 (2021), 189–221.

contrary to Grupp, that simulations should bear a resemblance to their simulators. If this is the case, it would be implausible for the first simulator to be God. Therefore, the plausibility of this assertion raises the question of whether the simulation resembles the simulator.

Regardless of the veracity of any ideas mentioned in this paper, there can be various interpretations of the simulation hypothesis from a theistic perspective. Therefore, theism is consistent with either a first real universe or a first simulator and no real universe. A theist who finds the simulation hypothesis plausible may opt for a creationist conception of God or continue to defend other hypotheses such as emanation in this context.

Conclusion

The simulation hypothesis, despite lacking empirical data and being highly speculative, has influenced a significant number of thinkers. At least for the time being, there seems to be no significant reason to assume our existence within a sim universe. Even if we accept the validity of the simulation argument, we still need to address the sim blocker arguments that would, if they were true, prevent us from simulating a universe like ours, in which conscious beings exist. It is surely possible to overlook all these arguments and question the nature of life in a sim universe which is what this study aims to do.

It should be noted that the simulation hypothesis raises many more controversial issues for theism than those discussed here. For instance, the simulatability of consciousness or intelligent beings would bring about many controversial issues related to theism on the topics of human nature and transhumanism. In addition, the existence of sim universes created by intelligent beings other than God raises other problems such as the possibility of divine intervention and miracles. It can be argued that these issues raise more controversial issues for theism other than the issue of the multiverse, which is the focus of this paper. However, this study is limited to the simulation hypothesis and the issue of multiple universes. If this hypothesis presents itself as a more serious scenario, it will require more discussion of many other issues regarding theism.

The first problem that arises from accepting that we live in a simulation is that our universe is not unique since it is posited that God created our universe through other universes and conscious beings. At first glance, this may seem like a conception of the universe that renders life meaningless and disconnects God from us. However, the validity of this thought is open to discussion. This can be likened to the paradigm shift that occurred when the Ptolemaic conception of the earth as the center of the universe was abandoned. Under the Ptolemaic conception, the Earth was considered to be at the center of the universe, positioning both the Earth and humanity in a special place within the creation of God. Challenging this assumption appeared to be an affront to human worth and theism. Just as the fact that the universe is larger than it was thought to be at first appeared to contradict theism, in time it was realized that this was only related to the limitations of human conceptions of God. Similarly, contemporary theories that lead to the expansion of our understanding of the universe may first seem perplexing and questionable. However, this does not imply that these contemporary theories are in ultimate conflict with theism. There is a possibility that theories that are regarded as utopian now may be substantiated as scientific truths in the future. Although some of these claims may initially seem contradictory to the theistic perspective that we have shaped based on our current

understanding of the world, this so-called contradiction may not be indicative of a real contradiction. In this context, even if the sim universe hypothesis is assumed to be true, it does not pose a problem for theism, at least in the context of the issue discussed here.

When considering the scope of the structure of the universe and multiple sim universes, it has been argued in this paper that theism and the assumption of a simulated universe are not contradictory. Given the fact that we do not possess any knowledge of the purpose and nature of divine creation, it is difficult to dismiss the possibility that our universe is a sim universe. Anyone who says “we can’t know what God’s purposes are in creation” can’t very well object to the idea that God created us by means of creating others who simulated us. If these arguments are accepted to be true, the existence of a simulated universe does not pose an insurmountable challenge for theism. In case we eventually conclude that we live in a sim universe, it will only result in a shift in our understanding of the fabric of the universe, and its constituent elements. It will not lead to the conclusion that life is meaningless, or that our beliefs that have so far made our lives meaningful are entirely erroneous.

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