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SIMULATION AND GOD

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Öz

As simulations become more prevalent in different aspects of human life, philosophical discourse persists regarding the plausibility of our universe serving as a simulation created by posthuman entities. While the creation of such a complex simulated universe may presently appear beyond the scope of contemporary technology, many philosophers and scientists speculate about its potential feasibility. Indeed, proponents led by Nick Bostrom assert that the likelihood of our universe existing within a simulation is profoundly plausible.

The possibility of our universe being a simulation raises the idea that the universe has a creator, but this creator is not God, unlike classical theism. On the other hand, some philosophers equate the creator of the simulation with God. While certain proponents employ the simulation hypothesis to argue for the absence of God, others contend that it offers compelling evidence for God's existence. Hence, it becomes evident that the theological dimensions of this issue warrant careful consideration alongside its philosophical discourse.

This article provides a concise assessment of Matrix-type simulation thought, rooted in mind-body dualism, and Bostrom-type simulation thought, founded on mind-body unity, within the frameworks of polytheism, deism, the theory of emanation, and theism.

Keywords: God, Simulation, Bostrom, Matrix, Polytheism, Emanation, Deism, Theism.

SİMÜLASYON VE TANRI

Abstract

Simülasyonların, insan hayatının hemen her alanında yaygın bir biçimde kullanılmaya başladığı günümüzde, içinde bulunduğumuz evrenin insanüstü varlıklar tarafından simüle edilmiş olabileceğine ilişkin felsefi tartışmalar varlığını sürdürmektedir. Karmaşık bir evren simülasyonu yaratmak günümüz şartları açısından her ne kadar mümkün görünmese de gelecekte böyle bir evren simülasyonunun yaratılabilmesini mümkün gören filozof ve bilim insanlarının sayısı azımsanmayacak kadar çoktur. Nitekim Nick Bostrom ve takipçileri, evrenimizin bir simülasyon olma ihtimalinin son derece akla yatkın olduğunu iddia etmektedirler.

İçinde bulunduğumuz evrenin bir simülasyon olma ihtimali, klasik ateizmden farklı olarak, evrenin bir yaratıcısı olduğu halde bu yaratıcının Tanrı olmadığı tezini gündeme getirmektedir. Öte yandan, simülasyonun yaratıcısını Tanrı ile özdeşleştirmek isteyen filozoflar da bulunmaktadır. Bazı filozoflar, simülasyon hipotezini Tanrı'nın yokluğuna delil olarak kullanmak isterken, bazıları bu hipotezin Tanrı'nın varlığına işaret ettiğini savunmaktadırlar. Bu nedenle konunun felsefi söyleminin yanı sıra teolojik boyutlarının da dikkatle değerlendirilmesi gerektiği açıktır.

Bu makale, zihin-beden ayrımına dayanan Matrix tipi simülasyon düşüncesi ile zihin-beden birliğine dayanan Bostrom tipi simülasyon düşüncesinin politeizm, deizm, sudur teorisi ve teizm açısından kısa bir değerlendirmesini sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tanrı, Simülasyon, Bostrom, Matrix, Politeizm, Sudur, Deizm, Teizm.

1. Introduction

Simulation refers to a system or environment that imitates, models, or otherwise represents the functioning of an existing or proposed system. This is often accomplished using a computer program, software, or hardware. Simulations can be used in various fields

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to understand how behaviors will manifest under specific conditions, to provide training, to conduct tests, or to foresee events that have not happened yet. With the advancement of computer technology, simulations have become increasingly complex and realistic, and are actively used today in numerous areas such as medicine, traffic, ecosystems, finance, and entertainment.

Simulations can facilitate the understanding, learning, or testing of complex systems in the real world. If we had more advanced simulation technology today, we could verify or refute theories that are impossible to test in reality, such as fundamental scientific topics like the Big Bang and evolution, through simulations. By simulating different scenarios of historical events, for example, if Mehmed the Conqueror had conquered Sicily, we could try to understand how history would have unfolded. In this way, we could have the opportunity to evaluate and understand the possible alternative courses of past events.

Simulations offer the possibility of modeling not only past events but also possible scenarios in the future. For example, we could create life simulations that participants perceive as a long period but only last a few minutes in real life. Through these simulations, we could have the opportunity to select the most reliable and effective employees for our workplace by testing the performance and behavior of individuals under different living conditions. We could investigate answers to scientific questions such as the formation of the universe and the evolution of life, and could understand the validity of our hypotheses in a more in-depth way than is possible on paper. We could even attempt to escape a possible apocalypse by developing a kind of life simulation that lasts a few minutes in the real world but offers millions of years of life within the simulation. This is precisely where one of the most fantastical and striking questions in history arises: Could our universe and we, as conscious beings within it, be living inside a computer program simulated by posthuman civilizations?[1]

The foundations of the simulation concept were laid quite early. The ancient Greek philosopher Plato, in his allegory of the cave, argued that the world perceived by humans is more of a shadow or reflection than reality, suggesting that we are actually living in a kind of simulation.[2] Descartes, in the 17th century, questioned how consciousness perceives reality with his famous statement "I think, therefore I am." Focusing on the nature of consciousness and thought, Descartes expressed his doubts about whether the world we perceive is real through dream experiences and the idea of being deceived by a deceitful God.[3]

The idea of simulation was brought to the forefront by mathematicians and computer scientists Von Neumann and Stanislaw Ulam in their 1948 article on random number generation.[4] In 1977, philosopher Hans Moravec, in his article "Simulation, Consciousness, Existence," argued that simulations created by artificial intelligence in the future could imitate the reality of the human mind.[5] A more modern perspective on simulation theory comes from computer scientist and physicist Edward Fredkin. Fredkin,

[1] Nick Bostrom, "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?," Philosophical Quarterly 53, no. 211 (2003): 243–55.
[2] Platon, *Devlet*, trans. Furkan Akderin (İstanbul: Say Yayınları, 2016), 7, 515 d; See: Ergün Avcı, "Antik Mağaradan Sanal Mağaraya: Metaverse," *Beytulhikme* 12, no. 4 (2022): 981–1006.
[3] René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 127, 195; René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 16–17.
[4] Nicholas Metropolis and Stanislaw Ulam, "The Monte Carlo Method," *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 44, no. 247 (1949): 339–40.
[5] Hans Moravec, "Simulation, Consciousness, Existence," *Intercommunication* 28 (1999): 98–112.

with his "digital physics" concept introduced in the 1980s, proposed that information processing processes lie at the foundation of the universe. According to Fredkin, the universe consists of calculations that work like a digital computer program.[6]

Another significant contribution to the concept of simulation came from the French sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard. In his seminal work "Simulacra and Simulation" (1981), Baudrillard argued that modern society had replaced reality and meaning with symbols and signs, and that human experience had become a simulation of reality. Baudrillard posited that in the postmodern era, we lived in a world dominated by "simulacra," where representations of things became more significant than the things themselves. This led to a state of "hyperreality," where the distinction between reality and simulation blurred, and simulations became more real than reality.[7]

The 1999 film “The Matrix” played a significant role in introducing the idea of simulation to the masses. Based on René Descartes's mind-body dualism, The Matrix presents viewers with a profound story that challenges their perception of reality. It explores a theme reminiscent of the brain-in-a-vat (BIV) thought experiment, which was developed by Hilary Putnam.[8] In the film, the actual bodies of people living connected to a kind of simulation are kept in a closed room within a facility, and their brains are connected to this virtual reality through a kind of interface. This concept makes viewers ponder how blurry the line between reality and simulation can be. People in the Matrix do not realize they are in a simulation, and this simulation imitates a world where their minds and perceptions are controlled. This situation is intertwined with the main character Neo's efforts throughout the film to discover the real world outside the Matrix. Under the guidance of Morpheus, Neo tries to understand his real body and his connection to the real world. This thought experiment is one of the fundamental philosophical themes of the film and encourages the audience to think about topics such as the nature of human consciousness, the perception of reality, and the interaction with technology.[9]

"The Matrix" triggered many philosophers to seriously consider the simulation thought. Nick Bostrom's 2003 article titled "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?" took this thought beyond the realm of science fiction and encouraged its evaluation from a philosophical perspective. In his article, Bostrom presented three main arguments, discussing the possibility of humanity living in a computer simulation and concluding that we are almost certainly living in a simulation. Bostrom's article includes these three main arguments:

1) The probability of human extinction before reaching a posthuman stage is high.
2) Posthuman civilizations will not want to create simulations of their own evolutionary history.
3) If posthuman civilizations chose to create an ancestor simulation, they probably created many ancestor simulations instead of just one, and in this case, the probability of us living in a simulation instead of reality is much higher.[10]

According to Bostrom, if the first two of these three propositions are false, the third possibility is definitely true.[11] If we are not sims living in a simulation, the second possibility will never come true, meaning our descendants will never be able to create an

[6] Edward Fredkin, “Digital Mechanics: An Informational Process Based on Reversible Universal CA,” in *Cellular Automata: Theory and Experiment*, ed. H. Gutowitz (North Holland, The Netherlands, 1990), 254–70.
[7] Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulations, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (USA: The University of Michigan Press, 1994).
[8] Hilary Putnam, Reason, Truth and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
[9] David J. Chalmers, “The Matrix as Metaphysics,” in *Philosophers Explore the Matrix*, ed. Christopher Grau (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 132–70.
[10] Bostrom, “Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?,” 243, 254.
[11] Nick Bostrom, “A Patch for the Simulation Argument,” *Analysis* 71, no. 1 (2011): 54.

ancestor simulation. If our descendants succeed in creating an ancestor simulation, it means the probability of us living in a simulation is very high. However, the viability of Bostrom's third proposition hinges on the satisfaction of many prerequisites. These include the non-destructive advancement of technology, the comprehensive simulatability of all acpects of the universe—from the conscious human mind to the macro and micro levels—by machines, and the fulfillment of the considerable software, hardware, and energy requirements essential for crafting such a simulation. Since we do not yet know the true nature of consciousness, we are not sure if the concept of "strong artificial intelligence" is applicable, meaning whether consciousness can be simulated by machines.[12] This seems to be the biggest obstacle in front of Bostrom's hypothesis. Additionally, considering that there are roughly 10^80 subatomic particles in our universe, simulating such a large number of particles and their relationships with each other would require an immense processing/memory power.[13] Moreover, the number of these relationships at the micro level would increase exponentially when reaching the macro level. Working with such a large number of elements in software would bring enormous hardware and energy needs, as well as potential programming errors.[14] However, thousands of years of human experience show that we have not encountered any unusual situations that could be called software errors or "bugs" in our universe.[15] Phenomena like the uncertainties and the wave-particle duality that defy common sense in quantum physics are regarded by some as clues that the universe is simulated. However, the realm of quantum mechanics remains incompletely elucidated.[16] Therefore, Bostrom's ancestor simulation is not a scientifically testable hypothesis but rather a thought experiment and a philosophical speculation.

2. Simulation and Polytheism

Despite all the obstacles it faces, the idea of simulation is still a matter that needs to be taken seriously. Less than a century has passed since the invention of computers, and we already have thousands of realistic simulations. It is quite difficult to predict what our descendants who will replace us a million years from now will be able to do in this regard. Bostrom's hypothesis is noteworthy in this respect. If today we had the knowledge and technology to create strong artificial intelligence, we might have the chance to observe the experiences of conscious sims placed in a realistic simulation. Who knows, maybe a malevolent programmer could take on the role of Descartes's evil demon, showing miracles to his sims, choosing so-called prophets from among them, and introducing himself as God in the books he sends them, demanding worship. Or would the real God never allow such things to happen?[17] If Bostrom's hypothesis is true, our descendants will want to simulate their real history by creating a realistic ancestor simulation. In other words, if we stick to

[12] John Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs," *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 3 (1980): 417–57; See also: B. Weatherson, "Are You a Sim?," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 53 (2003): 425–31.

[13] Seth Lloyd, "Computational Capacity of the Universe," *Physical Review Letters* 88, no. 23 (2002): 237901–4; Norman Margolus, "Looking at Nature as a Computer," *International Journal of Theoretical Physics* 42, no. 2 (2003): 309–27.

[14] John D. Barrow, "Living in a Simulated Universe," in *Universe or Multiverse?*, ed. Bernard Carr (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 481–86.

[15] Bostrom asserts that simulating the entire universe down to the quantum level is definitely not feasible unless an entirely new physics is discovered. This situation would necessitate resorting to some software tricks, such as temporarily suspending events at the macro and micro levels that would require additional information processing in the simulation. In case of glitches in these software tricks, software errors, known as "bugs," would occur. According to Bostrom, rather than simulating the universe to the lowest level, it suffices to take necessary precautions to ensure that sims do not encounter such errors. See: Bostrom, "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?," 246–47.

[16] Barrow, "Living in a Simulated Universe," 483–85.

[17] Descartes, based on the premise that God cannot deceive, maintains that He would never permit such a global deception event. See: Descartes, *CSM*, 1985, I:213.

the hypothesis, the primary purpose of our descendants will not be to deceive us. However, who can guarantee that posthuman beings with such technology will not create deceitful simulations? In this case, the need for a theological examination of the simulation thought becomes evident.

Bostrom's ancestor simulation hypothesis evaluates the possibility that humanity, after reaching a posthuman level, created a simulation to observe the real historical adventure of their ancestors. If we are sims within such a simulation, our descendants must have lived a life lives similar to ours and reached a posthuman level. They might even be living in an ancestor simulation created by their own descendants. Whether there is an end to this is unclear.[18] What is clear is that Bostrom's hypothesis does not refer an unsimulated simulator, that is, the idea of a single God. According to the hypothesis, each simulator is considered the pseudo-God of the simulation they created. In this notion, which emerges as a modern version of polytheism, the pseudo-Gods creating the simulations are anthropomorphic and reminiscent of the ancient Greek Gods.

Whether the building blocks of our universe are made of bits, subatomic particles, or anything else, we have to consider this universe as "real".[19] The central quandary pertains to the existence of an alternate reality beyond the confines of our universe, not delimited by spatial constraints. Classical atheism posits the absence of any non-material reality beyond the confines of the material universe, contrasting with theistic viewpoints, which affirm the existence of a transcendent creator for this universe. It is at this juncture where beliefs and disbeliefs crystallize. However, the advent of simulation thought appears to engender a distinctive strain of atheism. Within the framework of simulation theory, even if one were to concede the notion of a creator for the universe, uncertainty shrouds the nature and identity of this creator, thereby challenging conventional conceptions of divinity. Neither the Matrix-type nor the Bostrom-type simulation thought implies that the creator of the simulation is God. It can even be said that they present materialistic perspectives on the universe.[20] However, some philosophers perceive no impediment in labeling the creator of the simulation as God. They even regard the simulation hypothesis as evidence supporting the existence of a divine entity.[21] Philosopher David Chalmers states that the person simulating the universe can be considered God and that the simulation thought is the most influential argument for him to believe in a God, despite being an atheist.[22] After all, unlike materialistic theories, simulation theories, like theistic religions, claim that the universe did not arise by chance but is rather a product of intelligent design. Moreover, the person simulating this universe could create a similar one, for example, another simulation like the realm of the grave, heaven and hell, and reward or punish the sims in other simulations based on their performance in this simulation. The simulator is the creator of the simulation. The person responsible for designing the simulation possesses omniscient knowledge and omnipotent control over all its components.[23] These, according to Chalmers, are divine qualities, so the simulator—although not worthy of worship—deserves the name God.[24]

The similarity of the Matrix-type simulation thought with Abrahamic religions is more evident. The fact that the real bodies of people connected to the simulation through

[18] Bostrom, "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?," 253.
[19] David J. Chalmers, "The Virtual and the Real," *Disputatio* 9, no. 46 (2017): 350.
[20] Klee Irwin, Marcelo Amaral, and David Chester, "The Self-Simulation Hypothesis Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics," *Entropy* 22, no. 2 (2020): 247.
[21] Jeff Grupp, "The Implantation Argument: Simulation Theory Is Proof That God Exists," *Metaphysica* 22, no. 2 (2021): 189–221.
[22] David J. Chalmers, *Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2022), 125.
[23] Bostrom, "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?," 253–54.
[24] Chalmers, *Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy*, 125–26.

an interface in their brains are kept in a closed room/tank, and that some people are aware of being connected to the simulation but feel they belong to the simulation after the connection is established, reminds us of the concepts of "bazm alast"[25] (the primordial covenant) and "al-imtihan" (trial) in Islamic literature. The fact that the time people spend in the simulation is much shorter compared to the time in the real world bears resemblance to certain articulations found within the Quran.[26] The fact that the minds of people disconnected from the simulation are returned to their real bodies kept in a closed room and that people can see their memories from the simulation by looking at the screens there seems to be compatible with the concept of "barzakh" (life in the grave). All these similarities can be perceived as positive developments supporting theism. But when the simulation thought is accepted as it is, is it compatible with the belief in one God? It does not seem so.

In both Bostrom-type and Matrix-type simulation thoughts, the creators of simulations rely on pre-existing materials for their construction, suggesting that the simulated universe is not generated ex nihilo. Furthermore, it is conceivable that the universe in which the simulator operates may itself be a simulation created by other entities, potentially perpetuating an infinite regress.[27] Chalmers argues that the prospect of simulations entering an infinite loop poses no inherent issue.[28] He appears inclined to ascribe the title of a Greek deity to each simulator. Nevertheless, such a scenario presents a theological challenge for Abrahamic religions, particularly Islam. According to Islamic doctrine, there exists only one God, Allah, who is omniscient, omnipotent, and the creator of all existence.[29] Even if it is conjectured that there might be a being created by or emanating from God that possesses omniscience, such a being is deemed imperfect as it relies on God for its existence, thereby failing to meet the criteria of divinity. To qualify as God, a being endowed with divine attributes must be singular, existing independently of any external factors. Furthermore, the creator of the simulation proposed by Chalmers does not truly embody omniscience or omnipotence. The simulator's omnipotence and omniscience are constrained solely to the simulation they have created, with no dominion or knowledge extending beyond its confines. Consequently, such a simulator may lack power or knowledge over other simulations, undermining its claim to divinity within the framework of Islamic theology.

The idea that each of the nested infinite simulations is created by a different God is unacceptable for monotheistic religions. Hence, accepting either the Bostrom-type simulation hypothesis or the Matrix-type simulation thoughts as they stand seems implausible to reconcile with the concept of the Islamic deity within such frameworks.

3. Simulation and Emanation

The "theory of emanation," initially postulated by Plotinus within the annals of philosophical discourse as an alternative to the concept of "creation ex nihilo," underwent further development by Muslim philosophers, notably Farabi and Ibn Sina. This theory posits that existence emanates from God in a hierarchical progression from the perfect to the imperfect. According to Plotinus' principle of "one from one," the emergence of multiplicity from God simultaneously is deemed implausible; rather, the sole entity emanating from God is the one bearing the utmost resemblance to Him in perfection,

[25] Covenant made between humans and Allah during their creation. See: Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, "Bezm-i Elest," in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, n.d., 106.
[26] Hac, 22/47
[27] Bostrom, "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?," 253.
[28] Chalmers, *Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy*, 38–40.
[29] According to the Quran, if there were multiple gods, the system would be disrupted. See: Enbiya, 21/22.

denoted as the "first intellect" (nous). Following the Plotinian schema of emanation, this entity is succeeded by the hypostasis soul.[30] Subsequently, al-Farabi expanded upon this triadic hierarchy to encompass ten levels, correlating with the number of celestial bodies. According to Ibn Sina, it is not possible for us to know the exact number of beings in this hierarchy, but it is also inconceivable for this chain to go back infinitely.[31] At the top of the hierarchy is the "necessary being", "One", or "God", whose existence does not depend on any other being and whose non-existence cannot be conceived. The other beings in the hierarchy are beings whose existence and non-existence are "possible" (al-mumkin). According to Ibn Sina, the beings at the top of the hierarchy are the closest to God in terms of perfection. These beings are the proximate cause of the beings that emanate from them. Nonetheless, none among them, except the necessary being, warrants the designation of "God," as each is contingent upon the necessary being for their existence.[32]

Steinhart, who attempts to reconcile Bostrom's simulation hypothesis with the theory of emanation, argues that the only valid connection between the simulation thought and theism can be established in this way. Steinhart uses the theory of multiple universes,[33] which is generally used to support atheist arguments and is seen as the biggest rival of the "fine-tuning" argument, in favor of his own thought.[34] According to philosophers such as Graay and Rogers who argue that multiple universe models are compatible with the idea of God, it is conceivable that God, due to his free will, could create nothing, create only one universe, or create multiple universes. It can even be said that creating multiple universes is a necessity due to God's perfection.[35] Steinhart applies Aristotle's idea of the "unmoved mover" to the theory of multiple universes and places God at the top of the universes that emanate from each other and form a hierarchical structure, just like in the theory of emanation. Then, he combines this theory with the simulation thought and states that each universe is simulated by a higher universe, but these simulations cannot go back infinitely; there must be God as the "unsimulated simulator" at the top of the simulation hierarchy.[36] This structure designed by Steinhart, in contrast to Chalmers's polytheistic simulation understanding that allows for an infinite chain of simulations and depicts each simulator as a separate Greek God, allows for multiple simulations but includes God as the "necessary being" or "first simulator" at the top, can be construed as a form of simulation hypothesis. However, it should not be overlooked that this structure goes beyond the limits of the hypothesis put forward by Bostrom. Because in Bostrom's hypothesis, the beings who create the simulations are the beings within the simulation who have reached a posthuman level. On the contrary, Steinhart accepts that the first simulation emanated from God, and the others emanated from each other. This does not solve the theological problem raised by neither Bostrom nor the Matrix-type simulation thought; it simply gives the theory of emanation a modern appearance.

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[30] Ahmet Arslan, *İlkçağ Felsefe Tarihi 5* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2010), 56–58; A. H. Armstrong, *Plotinus* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 68–69.

[31] Ali Durusoy, *İbn Sinâ Felsefesinde İnsan ve Alemdeki Yeri*, 3rd ed. (İstanbul: M.Ü. İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2012), 103.

[32] İbn Sina, *Eş-Şifâ: El-İlâhiyyât*, ed. İbrahim Medkûr (Kahire, 1961), 37–48, 405–12; İbn Sina, *En-Necât*, ed. Macit Fahri (Beyrut, 1985), 261–63; İbn Sina, *Et-Ta'lîkât*, ed. Abdurrahman Bedevî (Beyrut: Daru'l-İslâmiyye, 1973), 101–2, 130–31; İbn Sina, *İşaretler ve Tembihler*, trans. Muhittin Macit, Ali Durusoy, and Ekrem Demirli (İstanbul: Litera Yayıncılık, 2021), 129.

[33] See: Richard Swinburne, "Bayes, God, and the Multiverse," in *Probability in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Jake Chandler and Victoria S. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 103–23.

[34] Eric Steinheart, "Theological Implications of the Simulation Argument," *Ars Disputandi* 10, no. 1 (2010): 23–37.

[35] Aykut Alper Yılmaz, "Simulation Hypothesis and Theism: An Assessment in the Context of Multiverse," *Eskiyeni* 55 (2023): 1002.

[36] Steinheart, "Theological Implications of the Simulation Argument," 28.

4. Simulation and Deism

Let us hypothetically consider a scenario where posthuman entities, as posited in Bostrom's hypothesis, have been attained, and a flawless simulation is meticulously crafted by a formidable software company. In this simulated realm, the inhabitants, unaware of their simulated existence due to the absence of discernible software anomalies, are continuously broadcast as part of a television program. The software company, aiming to bolster viewership ratings, elects to designate a prophet among the simulated individuals and furnish them with a sacred scripture. Reflecting on this contrived world, wherein both adherents and skeptics of the bestowed holy text reside, one is compelled to confront the profound implications of existence within an elaborate facade.

René Descartes, often hailed as the progenitor of modern philosophy, posits in his seminal work, "Meditations," the imperative for individuals to subject all aspects of existence to skepticism at least once in their lives. Employing doubt as a methodological tool to attain genuine knowledge, Descartes extends his skepticism to his own corporeal being, the external world, and even the existence of God, entertaining the notion that all may be artfully contrived by a malevolent demon to deceive him. Yet, upon realizing the indubitable existence of his own self as a "thinking thing", Descartes revisits the question of the external world's reality. It is at this juncture that he discerns the presence of an innate "God" idea within his consciousness, one for which he finds no corresponding external referent. Descartes contends that this idea, conspicuously absent in the empirical realm, is instilled in his mind by a perfect God, rendering it inconceivable for such a deity to deceive humanity. Consequently, Descartes swiftly dispels his doubts regarding the external world, deeming the malevolent demon argument untenable.[37]

Descartes's proposition that the mind and body are fundamentally separate entities suggests that machines are unlikely to replicate the mind, as the mind, according to Descartes, is not composed of material substances and cannot be created from them. Therefore, the Bostromian simulation hypothesis, which is based on the premise that machines can simulate the mind, stands in stark opposition to Cartesian dualism. However, the concept of a Matrix-type simulation presents a different scenario: while bodies within the Matrix are programmed by computers, minds remain externally connected to the simulation. This establishes a genuine mind-body dichotomy akin to Descartes's framework. In this context, the simulator responsible for creating the Matrix assumes the role of Descartes's malevolent demon, orchestrating a grand deception.

Regarding the innate "God" idea within our minds, Descartes offers a singular explanation: this idea must have been imparted by the real God, who serves as the creator of both the sims and the simulator’s mind. Since the notion of a perfect being resides within our consciousness, the simulator must be a creation of God, devoid of access to the concept of a perfect being within its own simulated reality. However, the implications of this theological conjecture remain inconsequential. Ultimately, the presence of a prophet and a holy book within the simulation necessitates a definitive determination of their divine origins—whether they emanate from God or from the simulator. If one entertains the notion that our malevolent simulator engineers such phenomena to deceive us, while concurrently acknowledging the divine creator's non-intervention in our simulator's universe, we arrive at the conception of a deistic God.

[37] Descartes, *CSM*, 1985, I:197–98, 206–8, 213; Descartes, *CSM*, 1984, II:34–36, 40–42; René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes (The Correspondence)*, trans. John Cottingham et al., vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 25.

Let us consider a morbid thought experiment: if we were to subject individuals, completely severed from any connection to the external world, to a virtual reality environment of remarkable verisimilitude, wherein they are presented with purported prophets and holy texts for assessment, would the intervention of the real God be forthcoming to halt such a simulation? If such divine intervention is absent, are these individuals then held religiously accountable? Initially, one might hastily conclude otherwise. However, arriving at the same verdict becomes markedly more challenging when extending this premise to encompass all inhabitants of the universe undergoing analogous deception. It becomes evident that a global deception event transcends mere theological inquiries concerning the problem of evil. Religious responsibility hinges upon the premise of individual agency,[38] a facet notably absent within a fabricated universe where our perceptions are manipulated by external simulators and divine intervention is lacking, thus obfuscating our capacity to discern truth. Consequently, in a cosmos shaped by a God who created the universe housing the initial simulator yet remains disengaged from subsequent simulated universes, and indifferent to our ensnarement in deception, our accountability towards such a deity is rendered null. For a God indifferent to our deception is likely indifferent to our devotion and worship.

At this juncture, we encounter another perplexing question: what if genuine free will truly exists, and we are tasked with utilizing it to distinguish the real God among myriad simulations, disavowing the deceitful simulator in the process? Our cognitive abilities might lead us to consider the possibility that the universe containing the initial simulator could itself be a simulation, leading to an endless chain of simulators, each dependent on another for existence. Consequently, all simulators within nested simulations would inherently be imperfect and unfit for the designation of "God." However, it is possible that our simulator, with full access to our simulation, could manipulate events and produce apparent miracles through software manipulation, or insert compelling narratives into the holy texts circulated among us.[39] Nevertheless, we may speculate that our simulator, akin to us, is mortal and imperfect, having not engendered the simulation ex nihilo but rather being a creation of God. If we are indeed in a Matrix-type simulation, our minds must have come from God, even though our bodies are created by the simulator. Thus, the mind assumes a divine nature, empowered to differentiate between the simulator and the real God. If one of these two hypotheses proves true, it requires us to reject the deceitful simulator, the prophets purportedly sent by it, and the holy texts, in favor of belief in the real God.

5. Simulation and Theism

A theistic simulation hypothesis entails the existence of a simulation directly created by God Himself, subject to His ongoing intervention. In this context, the dichotomy between the "simulation" and the "real world" becomes blurred, as the authenticity of our universe hinges not on its mode of creation, be it through computer codes or alternative means. Given the premise that the Creator God exists independent of any external dependencies, conceptualizing our universe as a Matrix-type simulation appears conceivable. Aligned with Descartes's doctrine of mind-body dualism, while our physical bodies are integral components of the simulation, our true essence, embodied by our souls, may remain tethered to the simulation from an external realm. Conversely, our souls, akin to our bodies, could be constituent elements within the simulation itself. It is plausible that God has orchestrated a multiplicity of simulations/universes concurrently, each existing in

[38] Michael Tooley, "Alvin Plantinga and the Argument from Evil," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 58, no. 4 (1980): 360–76; William Hasker, "Human Freedom and the Problem of Evil," *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 53, no. 1 (2012): 167–81; Adam M. Willows, "Augustine, the Origin of Evil and the Mystery of Free Will," *Religious Studies* 50, no. 2 (2014): 260–61.

[39] Chalmers, *Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy*, 124–28.

variegated forms beyond human comprehension, a manifestation of His omnipotent free will.

Determining with certainty whether the universe we inhabit was fashioned by a divine entity remains a formidable challenge. The occurrence of software errors or anomalies within our simulation, akin to what might be deemed "bugs," could suggest the handiwork of an imperfect creator rather than an omnipotent God. However, discerning the creator's identity within a flawlessly executed simulation is inherently subjective. Thus far, human-made software has yet to attain perfection; in contrast, our universe exhibits flawless design at every scale, from the microscopic to the cosmic, functioning impeccably. Furthermore, uncertainties persist regarding the feasibility of meeting the immense energy and hardware requisites necessary for simulating such a universe, along with the creation of artificial consciousness via computer systems. These factors undermine the plausibility of the universe being a product of post-human civilization craftsmanship.

The concept of simulation inherently implies the existence of a pre-existing universe. The resemblance between the simulated universe in both Bostrom-type and Matrix-type simulation theories and the universe inhabited by the simulators is not coincidental. Human capacity for design is bound by familiarity and sensory experience. Human cannot design something entirely novel or devoid of external reference points. Therefore, if our universe is indeed a human-made simulation, the simulator must have constructed it by extrapolating from the materials and phenomena present in their own universe. Otherwise, it would not be classified as design but rather as a form of creation ex nihilo.

In positing the existence of a human-made simulation, one must account for the requisite hardware and energy within the simulator's universe necessary for its creation. Simulations derive their energy from external sources rather than internal mechanisms, as genuine energy is absent within virtual constructs. The perpetuation of nested simulations poses an insurmountable quandary regarding the origin of their energy supply. Consequently, it becomes imperative to posit a point of origin for these simulations, necessitating the existence of an unsimulated universe—the progenitor of all subsequent simulations. Thus, if one accepts the premise that our universe is a simulation, and acknowledges the necessity of a simulator for every simulation, it logically follows that the unsimulated first universe also requires a creator.

The reconciliation between theism and the simulation hypothesis hinges upon the premise that the simulation was orchestrated by God himself. Should it be posited that there exists a God, yet the simulation was crafted by posthuman entities rather than God, this would relegate such a deity, who refrains from intervening in the process, to the realm of deism rather than theism. Conversely, if there exists a God who created the universe, imparted awareness of his existence through prophets and holy scriptures, and actively intervenes in worldly affairs, independent of any external dependencies for his existence, then the classification of the universe we inhabit as either a "simulation" or "real" holds negligible significance within the framework of theism. This is because the act of creation, whether ex nihilo or from pre-existing matter, encompasses various theological interpretations across different strands of theistic thought. Nevertheless, in all theological contexts, God stands as the quintessential and necessary being, upon which all other forms of existence are contingent.

Conclusion

Bostrom's simulation hypothesis presents a materialistic perspective on the origin of the universe. However, this view, unlike classical materialistic views, argues that the

universe did not come into existence on its own but was created by posthuman civilizations. From this perspective, while the simulation hypothesis brings a different perspective to materialism, it raises the possibility that the universe having a creator is technologically possible. The question of whether the creator of the simulation is God is outside the limits of the simulation hypothesis.

The simulation hypothesis cannot be tested using scientific methods. This means that we will never know for sure whether we are in a simulation or not. When we evaluate the issue from a theological perspective, the simulation hypothesis should be considered as a skeptical argument against theism. Because we can ask the same questions about the origin of the universe when we think that our universe is a simulation, as we can when we think that it is not a simulation. If we are in a simulation, whether the simulators who created our simulation and the universe they are in came into existence on their own, were created by another simulator, or were created by God, are all questions that can still be asked. The verification or refutation of the simulation hypothesis does not constitute proof for the existence or non-existence of God. If we are not living in a simulation, we can think that the universe came into existence on its own or was created by God, just as we can think that we are actually in a butterfly's dream. Our right to choose what to believe in is preserved even if we are living in a simulation.

When Bostrom's simulation hypothesis is interpreted religiously without any modification, it can be seen that the simulators resemble polytheistic Gods. These pseudo-Gods, although they have unlimited power and knowledge over the simulation, are imperfect in many ways and depend on other beings for their existence. If a small modification is made to the hypothesis and it is accepted that the infinite simulation chain must stop at some point and that there must be an unsimulated simulator, this leads us to a modern version of the theory of emanation. However, in this case, Bostrom's simulation hypothesis completely transforms into a different hypothesis. If it is accepted that the universe is simulated by posthuman civilizations rather than created by God, and along with this, it is accepted that there is a God who created the simulator and the higher universe where the simulator exists but does not intervene in the process and remains indifferent to the deception of the sims, then this God will be the God of deism. There is no way to reconcile the hypothesis with classical theism. Accepting that the simulator is the necessary being that does not depend on anything other than itself for its existence completely invalidates Bostrom's hypothesis. Because the hypothesis is based on the possibility of humans reaching the level of posthuman civilizations and creating an ancestor simulation. The Matrix-type simulation thought, which owes its philosophical foundations to Plato and Descartes, is a fantastical science fiction and does not depend on probabilistic propositions like Bostrom's hypothesis. Therefore, it allows for more modifications. Even when the Matrix thought is accepted as it is, agreement is reached on many issues such as the mind-body duality, elest bezmi, trial, revelation, miracle, life in the grave, afterlife, reward and punishment in classical Abrahamic religions. The Matrix, while not providing any evidence for the existence or non-existence of God, allows for the re-examination of familiar religious beliefs in a fictional way.

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