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*“The Matrix” conveys the horror of a false world made of nothing but perceptions. Based on the premise that reality is a dream controlled by malevolent forces, it is one of the most overtly philosophical movies ever to come out of Hollywood. And this article is an attempt of the analysis of the movie “The Matrix” from the philosophical and religious points of view.*

*Key words: matrix, allegory of the cave, skepticism, existentialism, Christianity.*

*Матрица передает ужас ложного мира, сотворённого только из наших ощущений. Основанный на предпосылке, что действительность – мечта, которой управляют злорадные силы, этот фильм является одним из наиболее открыто философских кинокартин когда-либо, вышедших из Голливуда. И потому, данная статья представляет собой попытку анализа «Матрицы» с философской и христианской точек зрения.*

*Ключевые слова: матрица, аллегория пещеры, скептицизм, экзистенциализм, христианство.*

*Матрица передає жах помилкового світу, створеного тільки з наших відчуттів. Заснований на передумові, що дійсність – мрія, якою управляють зловтішні сили, цей фільм є одним з найбільш відкрито філософських кінокартин, що коли-небудь вийшли з Голлівуду. І тому, дана стаття є спробою аналізу «Матриці» з філософської та християнської точок зору.*

*Ключові слова: матриця, алегорія печери, скептицизм, екзистенціалізм, християнство.*

Which tablet would you choose, red or blue? What is more important, blissful ignorance or knowledge of the truth whatever it is? Having watched “Matrix”, we are under impression of action and special effects, and our heads are filled with questions. Whether is it possible that we are captives of the Matrix? Is it a Christian movie? It is worth noting that this theme has been poorly investigated, and it doesn’t represent an interest for philosophers. However, a small group of writers and philosophers who weren’t indifferent to this problem have created the book “Matrix” as philosophy” in which have covered all the thoughts, and theories about this subject and in my article I will refer to this work more than once. Moreover, in my work I have mentioned the philosophical doctrines of Plato, Descartes, Sartre and many others who thought over such questions as “What Can I Know?”, “What Is Real?”, “What Is Freedom and whether Are We Free?”.

What is the matrix? The first meaning which gives us the dictionary is “uterus part of reproductive system of animals [1: 136]”. In technological sense it is a template for casting of letters, the press of gramophone records etc. In the movie both definitions are merged, forming frightening mix: human beings are grown up with the use of high technologies in underground cocoons with the metal umbilical cord directly connected through cervical department of a backbone to a brain. These cable programs are a framework in which the person will perceive the world. The allusion to Plato’s is obvious, so it is necessary to remember his well-known allegory of a cave presented in the seventh book of the “State”.

The prisoners in the cave are chained by the neck, hands, and legs. They have led such life since birth and so, have got no conception of any other way of life. Shadows appear on the wall in front of them, as their jailers pass animal figures before the light of a fire in the manner of a puppet show. The prisoners watch shadows on a wall, shadows not of real animals but of carved figures. These prisoners don’t know that they are prisoners and don’t suspect there is any reality except the one they experience [5]. One day, however, one of the prisoners is set free of his chains and is dragged to the outside world. Rather than selfishly remaining in the outside world, the prisoner returns to tell the others who reward his kindness with mockery and resistance, believing he has gone insane. Indeed, this story parallels the story of Neo who is freed from the Matrix one day.

Like Plato’s prisoner, Neo finds himself in chains or, more precisely, black cable wires that stimulate the illusive shadow show of the Matrix. Neo doesn’t want to accept that what he now sees is real, that previously he had been living in a dream world. “*Most of these people are not ready to be unplugged*”, Morpheus assures him.

Comprehension of truth is a transformation of soul which at the same time is self-knowledge, that is, understanding of existence of the soul having a certain nature, and knowledge of reality. This way is followed by sufferings but allows us to come to happiness. Not surprisingly, as “The Matrix”, and Plato’s allegory shows this assumption to glance in a mirror [5]. The image of a matrix created by Plato brings up the mass of questions, including the main: “*What is real and how can we define it?*” This question is set in “The Matrix”. And now I want to analyze the movie from the point of view of skepticism, and, mainly, René Descartes’.

In philosophy, the hypothesis that the world we see, hear, and feel might be an illusion advanced by defenders of the position known as skepticism [7: 201]. Skeptics argue that we cannot know with certainty that the external world exists. Hence, they

maintain that it's possible to doubt our knowledge of the external world, much as the main characters in "The Matrix" come to doubt the everyday world they seem to live in.

The hypotheses of skepticism are especially popular with two groups of people. The first are young people whose teenage revolt against the simple truth imposed by parents sometimes takes the metaphysical form, pushing them on statements like "Nothing is what it seems!" or "Only I know what reality actually is!" The second and more important group is philosophers. It includes those who like Descartes, and consider scenarios, similar to "The Matrix" to be the useful tool for research of fundamental problems of knowledge and reality [4: 96]. In his classic *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes presents an influential skeptical argument designed not to prove that skepticism is true but to establish a solid foundation for science. To accomplish this task, Descartes opens the *Meditations* by declaring his intention to suspend every one of his beliefs that he can find the slightest reason to doubt. Only those beliefs that are absolutely certain, in the strongest sense of the term, will survive Descartes' test, and only such beliefs, he holds, can serve as truly reliable foundations for science [3: 12].

First to go in this belief-suspension process, are the beliefs that Descartes had formed on the basis of sensation. We justify many of our opinions with information collected through our senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. Continuing this exercise, Descartes then suggests that even such relatively uncontroversial beliefs as that you are sitting in a chair and reading this book could be subject to doubt. Of course, such beliefs seem to be more trustworthy than your beliefs about John and about whatever he is doing on the porch. However, Descartes points out that we often make mistakes about precisely these kinds of things when we dream. When you are dreaming, it may seem to you that you are sitting in your chair, reading this book, when in fact you are fast asleep in your bed. We are unable to distinguish waking experiences from experiences of the sort we appear to have in dreams until after we awake, a notion that Morpheus affirms as he asks: "Have you ever had a dream, Neo, that you were so sure was real? What if you were unable to wake from that dream? How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?" On the basis of the "sleepy" argument Descartes draws a conclusion that sensual experience isn't the most reliable mechanism of check therefore he rejects all beliefs created on the basis of sensual experience. Descartes concludes his first Meditation by considering the following still more radical thought experiment. Suppose, he says, that a "malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me" [3: 15]. Such a creature could easily lead us to mistaken conclusions about the sum of two and three or the number of sides to a square.

This malicious demon could even more easily mislead us into thinking that there is a physical world external to ourselves when in fact "The sky, the air, the earth, colors, shapes, sounds, and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams which he has devised to ensnare [our] judgment". Thus, Descartes concludes "I shall consider myself as not having hands or eyes, or flesh, or blood or senses, but as falsely believing that I have all these things". Having read Descartes's first Meditation, then it is difficult to imagine how we could show that our lives are not just grand deceptions created by a malicious demon. How could we ever refute the skeptical arguments advanced by Descartes?

After watching "The Matrix", I had another question: can we exclude the possibility that our lives seem filled with meaning, in fact, are only an illusion created by our brains intelligent computers? In "The Matrix", the main character Neo is faced with an existential choice. This choice is between a red and a blue pill. Neo is given the pills by the character,

Morpheus, immediately after Morpheus tells Neo that what he believes to be the world is instead a fabrication “that has been pulled over [his] eyes to blind [him] from the truth”. Morpheus informs Neo that if he takes the red pill the true nature of things will be revealed, whereas if he takes the blue pill his perception of things will remain unchanged. Given their opposite effects, the pills represent the means through which Neo can either elect to wake from his slumber or sustain his dream. Thus, Neo’s choice between the red and blue pills symbolizes the existential choice between living honestly, and living in ignorance. Neo swallows the red pill and the plot unfolds.

Virtually all existential philosophers speak at length of the sort of choice Neo makes between honesty and ignorance, or truth and illusion. Though some use different terminology, they tend to describe it as a choice between authenticity and inauthenticity. Existentialists define authenticity as a state in which the individual is aware of the true nature of the human condition. In contrast, inauthenticity is defined as a state in which the individual is either ignorant of the true nature of reality or in denial with respect to it. The existentialist view is that existence is without any inherent purpose or underlying design. Existentialists assert that humans invest the world with order and meaning. Common themes that existential philosophers discuss include absurdity, alienation, anguish, and authenticity. While Neo’s choice involves a number of these items, it is most clearly a choice between authenticity and inauthenticity [4: 159].

When describing authenticity and inauthenticity, existentialist philosophers tend to privilege authenticity over inauthenticity. For example, prominent existentialists such as Albert Camus, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre clearly elevate authenticity and scorn inauthenticity. In their philosophic works, these individuals describe inauthenticity in uniformly negative terms. Sartre refers to inauthenticity as bad faith [6: 249]. Camus describes it as intellectual suicide. Heidegger asserts that living inauthentically not only leads to “the levelling down of all possibilities [8: 119] but also to “the phasing out of the possible as such” [3:181]. In contrast, these existentialist philosophers describe an authentic lifestyle positively as one that is courageous and “free of illusions” [8: 245]. Despite the positive terms that existentialists use to describe authenticity, their literary portraits of characters that approximate or achieve it are discouraging, if not downright depressing. Whereas inauthentic characters are described as existing in tranquil ignorance, characters approaching authenticity are depicted as anxious, alienated, and bordering on insanity. Because of the preponderance of such depictions, existential literature seems to suggest that the movement toward authenticity entails anguish, social dislocation, and sometimes madness. These consequences compel one to ask whether authenticity is indeed preferable to inauthenticity. Perhaps it is better to choose the blue pill. However, I believe that the advantages of stronger authentication of its shortcomings and that in this state can be achieved by a unique form of serenity. I choose the red pill.

Indeed, it was no accident that “The Matrix” was released on an Easter weekend. There are numerous Christian motifs in the film, some obvious and others quite subtle. Most clear is the theme of the promised deliverer. In the Gospels, Jesus is the promised Messiah, the one “who is to come” (Luke 7:19). In the film, Neo is “the One”, the messianic deliverer whose coming was foretold by the Oracle. “Neo” is an anagram for “one”. Moreover, in Greek neo means “new”, signifying the new life into which the risen Neo enters and which, presumably, he will make possible for others.

Neo’s path has many elements of the Jesus story, including virgin’s birth. In the scene in which he is rescued from the Matrix, Neo awakens to find himself in a womb-like vat, is

unplugged from umbilical-cord-like cables, and slides down a tube that may symbolize the birth canal. Further, since humans are “grown, not born” in the machine-dominated actual world, Neo’s awakening and emergence into that world is almost literally a “virgin birth.” Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan by John the Baptist. Similarly, Neo is “baptized” in the human battery refuse tank by Morpheus and the crew of the Nebuchadnezzar. Just as Jesus was tempted by the devil for forty days in the desert (Luke 4:1–13), Neo is tempted by the Agents to betray Morpheus. In the Gospels, Jesus gave his life as “a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). In the film, Neo knowingly sacrifices his life to save Morpheus [2].

In an epiphany prior to his death and resurrection, Jesus was transfigured before three of his disciples, his face and garments glowing a dazzling white (Matthew 17:2). Similarly, Neo physically glows after his destruction of Agent Smith. And just as Jesus (on a literal reading of the relevant texts) ascended bodily into heaven at the conclusion of his earthly ministry, Neo flies through the sky in the final scene of the movie [2: 117].

Names in “The Matrix” are also important Christian connections. There are obvious parallels between Cypher, the Mephistophelian character who betrays the rebels, and Judas, the disciple who betrayed Christ. There are clear linkages, too, to Lucifer: Cypher looks like traditional depictions of Lucifer, Cypher sounds a bit like Lucifer. In the film, Zion is the last human city, the final hope of humankind. In the Old Testament, Zion is a poetic and religiously charged name for Jerusalem, and in Christian literature it is often used as a designation for heaven as the spiritual home of the faithful.

Speaking about “The Matrix”, it is necessary to say that this movie contains a set of philosophical allusions, and they are free enough to give life to philosophical interpretations and reflections. These allusions are intended for creation of tension, concern, alarm and even horror, but also and a philosophical reflection. At the same time, the main tools of “The Matrix”, a fight, a riddle, and a tension, don’t allow the viewer to concentrate on subjects and ideas, interesting from the philosophical point of view. From this it is possible to conclude that “The Matrix” as the model multigenre movie can hardly count on attracting interest of the audience with philosophical questions, and of course it isn’t capable to propose solutions of these questions. However, “The Matrix” is ingenious because it embodies all the passions, phobias, fears and aspirations of a modern man. This movie has collected many subjects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, a computer remake of an aphorism “*all life is a game*”, both hobby for religions, and fear of revolt of cars, and vague expectation of the Messiah – in one point and has put this end over “I”.

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