

Why Neo was too confident that he had escaped the Matrix

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According to a typical *skeptical hypothesis*, the evidence of your senses has been massively deceptive. Venerable skeptical hypotheses include the hypotheses that you have been deceived by a powerful evil demon, that you are now having an incredibly detailed dream, and that you are a brain in a vat.

It is obviously reasonable for you now to be confident that neither of the above hypotheses is true. Epistemologists have proposed many stories to explain why that is reasonable. One theory is that those hypotheses are inherently much less plausible than the hypothesis that your senses are basically reliable. Another theory is that you currently don't believe any of those hypotheses, and that you need no justification to continue in that disbelief, given that your current beliefs cohere properly. A third theory is that—given that your senses are working properly—your sensory experiences themselves justify you in believing propositions such as the proposition that you have hands.

Neo is given very good evidence that some skeptical hypothesis is true. He rightly becomes doubtful that his senses are or have been trustworthy. In fact, he becomes confident of a particular hypothesis: that AI's created the Matrix, etc. But this is just one of many types of hypotheses that might account for his experiences. These types include:

1. Neo's computer nerd life has been in a simulation, from which escapes in order to live as a rebel on the hovercraft.
2. Neo's computer nerd life was as it seemed. But by taking Morpheus's red pill, he enters an elaborate simulation involving the experiences of being a rebel on a hovercraft.
3. Neo's computer nerd life was as it seemed. But by taking the red pill, he is transported to a very different place—a place where rebels incorrectly think that they have escaped a simulation. As he jumps back and forth between these two places, we discover that in one of the places, he has special super-powers.
4. Neo is involved in a large simulation during the course of the whole movie. Perhaps he starts out in a simulation-within-a-simulation, and pops out one level. Or perhaps he is just involved in a single simulation that allows its subject the experiences of having an exciting life as an action hero.

Neo is right to realize that something fishy has happened to him—that he is embedded in a scenario of the general sort illustrated above. But he is wrong to be so confident that he is in a type (1) scenario. (You shouldn't always believe what attractive, charismatic people tell you!) And scenarios of types (2), and (4), (and perhaps even (4)) account for Neo's experiences just as well as any scenario of type (1). (Question to think about: how do the anti-skeptical moves described above bear on which sort of scenario Neo is justified in thinking he is a part of?)

Furthermore, Neo has some evidence that counts in favor of (2) and (4) over (1): that he is **The One**. That is evidence against (1), because (antecedently), Neo should have counted it as very unlikely that he is **The One**, conditional on his being in a scenario of type (1). In contrast, he should have counted it as much more likely on the hypothesis that he is in a scenario of type (2) or (4), because it is reasonable to think that those scenarios involve him in simulations in which he plays a special role.