

DePauw University

## Scholarly and Creative Work from DePauw University

---

Student Research

Student Work

---

11-2023

### Are We Living in a Simulation?

Michell-Lee Graham

DePauw University, mgraham3202@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.depauw.edu/studentresearchother>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Graham, Michell-Lee, "Are We Living in a Simulation?" (2023). *Student Research*. 60, Scholarly and Creative Work from DePauw University.

<https://scholarship.depauw.edu/studentresearchother/60>

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at Scholarly and Creative Work from DePauw University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Research by an authorized administrator of Scholarly and Creative Work from DePauw University.

# Are We Living in a Simulation?

Michell-Lee Graham

## INTRODUCTION

If we are living inside of a simulation, what's wrong with that? Nick Bostrom, a Swedish philosopher has proposed the question of whether we are living in a simulation. Philosophers in the past have grappled with this concept, from Plato to George Berkeley. In this thesis, I intend to argue or prove that we may be living inside of a simulation or to my best ability find some approximation to the truth of the matter.

## METHODS

For this paper, I will start with summarizing Nick Bostrom's argument. Then, I'll explore some of the implications which he mentions, such as questions of reality, the afterlife and God and the problem of evil. Lastly, we will explore the ethical implications of the simulation. Our hypothesis is that we are not living in a simulation, but that we could, in the future, create one.

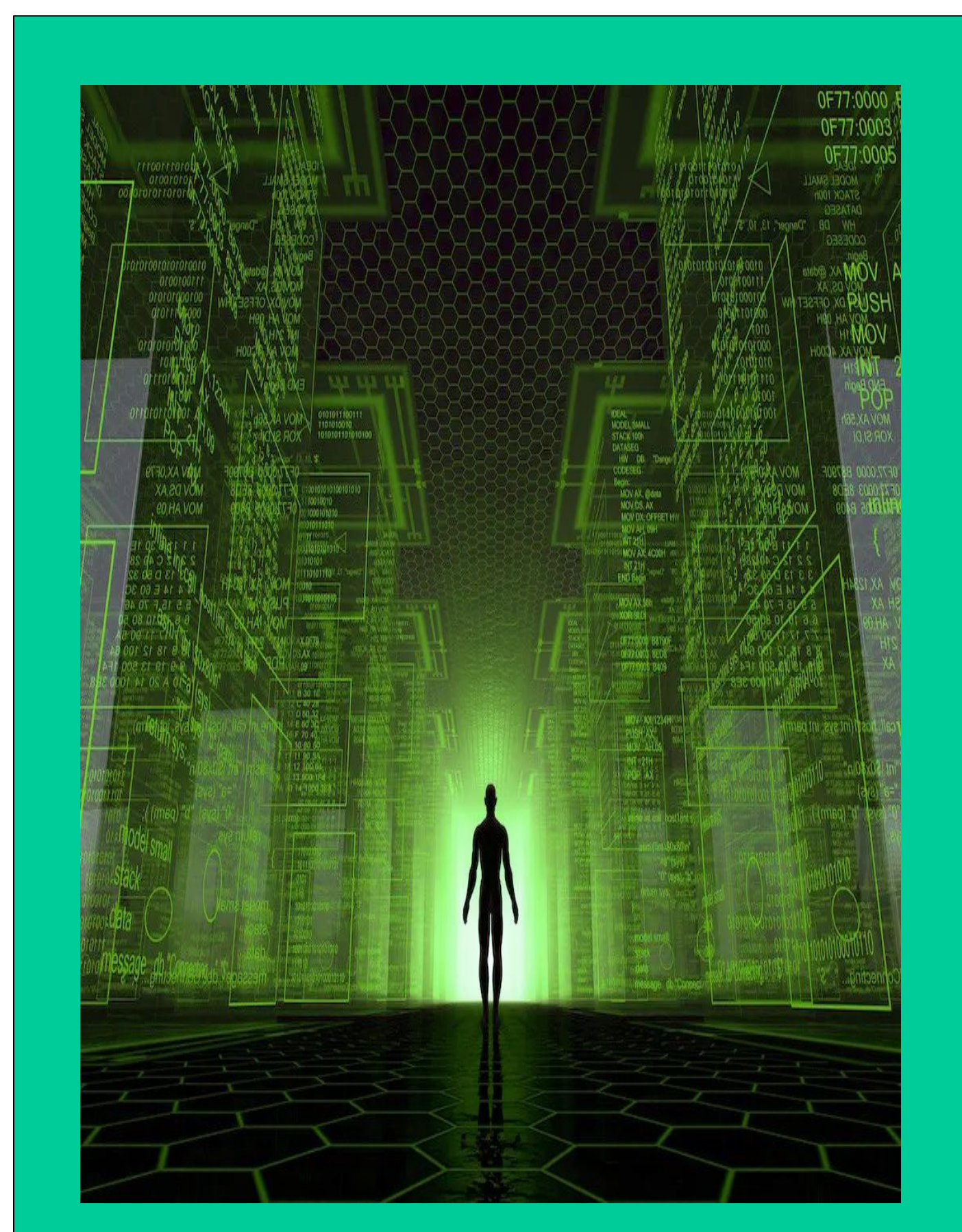


Figure 1 is a representation of the simulation

## The Simulation Theory

Nick Bostrom provides three suppositions, "(1) the human species is very likely to go extinct before reaching a "posthuman" stage; (2) any posthuman civilization is extremely unlikely to run a significant number of simulations of their evolutionary history (or variations thereof); (3) we are almost certainly living in a computer simulation." Bostrom's arguments are quite alluring and if true, may shake our foundations to their core. Due to our fast advancement in technology with products such as A.I, the possibility of being in a simulation is greater. And so, our hypothesis is that we are not living in a simulation. However, in the future we may be capable of producing one.

## Big Questions

1. Are we living in a simulation?
2. Who created the Simulation?
3. How does society function in a simulation?
4. If we're in a simulation, what is wrong with that?

## Why Does this Matter?

Currently, our society has made significant progress in science and technology. With these advances, we may very well create a simulation, and become transhumans, leaving behind our "humanity."

## What are some Objections to the Simulation Argument?

Hilary Putnam's Brain in a Vat scenario supposes that our brains are connected to a super computer, which then sends signals to our brains which stimulates an external world. Putnam's example suggests that if we were in a simulated world, we would not be able to know that we were inside of one. However, Bostrom's argument is that we are living inside of a simulation, so we are aware of being inside of the simulated world.

Micah Summers argues that Bostrom's argument that we could be living in a simulation is false because our consciousness cannot be digitized.

## Implications

### Question: What are the implications of the simulation, if it exists?

Free-will will be restricted. Inside of a simulation our actions are programmed by our creators. There is no full body autonomy.

If we're in a simulation, then our morals must be something constructed by our creators. And so, if they created us to be this way, then are there any true evils that exist? Can we trust that they are capable of judging morality?

Is it ethical for our creators to have deceived us? With the probability of a simulation being higher because of A.I, should we begin to halt their productions?

## Which is Reality?

### Question: How do we determine what is reality?

Plato's Allegory of the Cave argues that what we perceive through our senses is our reality. Meaning things outside of our senses are not our present reality. However, this just means that there is a true "reality" that is not known to us.

Similarly, Hume argues that we cannot know anything outside of our sense perceptions. So, if we were living inside of a simulation, it would be impossible for us to know.

George Berkeley claims that there are no material substances and that all objects are just collections of ideas which are dependent on our minds. To Berkeley, these ideas are objects of knowledge, and for an idea to be perceived it has to be known. So, to have an idea that has a real existence separate from what is perceived would be impossible. Therefore, if there was a simulation, we would not be aware of being in one. As the ideas we perceive would be our only idea of "reality."



## SUMMARY

Our research so far has shown that a simulated universe could very well be created in the near future. However, there are still concerns for whether or not our consciousness and rationality would be able to be transferred to this simulated universe. As of right now, our research so far stands that if we are in a simulation, it would be impossible for us to be aware of being inside of one because our present reality is the only one we are aware of. Nonetheless, with our recent technological advances, it is highly possible that we'll be able to create a simulation.

## Cited Literature

1. Plato, *The Republic*. Diamond Pocket Books Pvt Ltd
2. Berkeley, George, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*
3. Putnam, H. (1992), "Brains in a Vat", in K. DeRose and T.A. Warfield (eds.), *Skepticism: a Contemporary Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
4. Bostrom, Nick ' Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 53 (2003), pp.243-55.
5. Hume, D. (2000). *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (T.L Beauchamp ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

## Acknowledgements

I thank the Honor Scholar program for their support of the project and my thesis committee for their guidance and time.