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The Desert of the Real: Christianity, Buddhism & Baudrillard in The Matrix Films and Popular Culture

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James F. McGrath

Abstract

The movie *The Matrix* and its sequels draw explicitly on imagery from a number of sources, including in particular Buddhism, Christianity, and the writings of Jean Baudrillard. A perspective is offered on the perennial philosophical question 'What is real?', using language and symbols drawn from three seemingly incompatible world views. In doing so, these movies provide us with an insight into the way popular culture makes eclectic use of various streams of thought to fashion a new reality that is not unrelated to, and yet is nonetheless distinct from, its religious and philosophical undercurrents and underpinnings.

Key Words: *Matrix,* Baudrillard, Buddhism, Christianity, religion, reality, Descartes, philosophy, science fiction, popular culture

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When asked in an online chat how many more hidden meanings and hidden messages there might be in *The Matrix* than those that have already been identified by fans, the Wachowski brothers replied 'More than you'll ever know'. Now that the first sequel in the trilogy (*Matrix Reloaded*), plus a collection of short anime films entitled *Animatrix*, and the video-game *Enter the Matrix* (including roughly an hour of additional footage and lots of storyline tie-ins) have appeared, the number of hidden meanings has presumably increased substantially. The significant undertones and overtones that have been identified, analyzed and discussed in philosophy and religion classes in universities around the world, as well as in numerous fan chatrooms, relate to significant issues at the crossroads of philosophy, religion, cyberpunk and popular culture.[1] Although there are other major sources from which *The Matrix* has drawn (such as the myths and literature of ancient Greece), in the present paper I will examine the role of three major traditions or schools of thought that have particularly influenced this series of films: Buddhism, Christianity, and the writings of the contemporary French sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard. These are by far the most predominant sources of typology and imagery relating to the films' core themes. The parallels and symbolism have been presented and discussed so frequently on the web and in recent books that it will probably be sufficient to review these features only briefly here.[2] And to save time, I will let a few pictures replace a few thousand words: the Christian elements are the best

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known, and are present less in individual images than in aspects of the storyline (the discovery of Neo, a messianic figure who, once he is willing to sacrifice his life for others, will rise from the dead and powerfully transcend the world so as to conquer the forces of evil); and of course Christian symbolism is also prominent in the names of characters like Trinity. From Buddhism, the films derive the concept that what we perceive as reality is really just an illusion, and that we thus need to free our minds. Perhaps the most famous image in this category is spoon boy who explains that the secret to bending spoons is realizing that 'there is no spoon'. *The Animatrix* has added to this some much more explicitly Buddhist imagery. Last, the writings of Baudrillard feature most explicitly (and apparently even more so in an earlier version of the script). Baudrillard's book *Simulacra and Simulation* is the one Neo takes from the shelf, the book proving itself to be a simulacrum, since it is hollow and contains illicit software. Baudrillard also coined the phrase 'the desert of the real itself' which Morpheus quotes in the film. For Baudrillard, our simulations of reality hide the fact that reality is no longer there. To take one example, Baudrillard would say that the war in one very important sense Iraq never happened: the war we know is not the real thing, but the made-for-TV movie version, with selected sound-bites, interpretative commentary, the whole thing edited and packaged for its intended audience. Viewers of CNN and Al-Jazeera saw different wars and understood different messages. Can anyone – an individual soldier, a president, a journalist – tell us what the war was 'really' like? By simulating reality so effectively, we have obscured and lost touch with it – and *The Matrix* and sequels obviously explore future possibilities technology might raise along these lines, if reality can ever be simulated not only on a TV screen but for all our senses.

What is the film doing in combining elements from three seemingly incompatible worldviews and views of reality? And what if anything does it tell us about contemporary spirituality?[3] In drawing on elements from the religious stories of various cultures and traditions, these movies reflect the viewpoint of contemporary religious pluralism.[4] But the films do not represent simply yet another visit to the religious smorgasbord, in the eclectic (and some would say self-contradictory) manner typical of our age.[5] To focus on the philosophical coherence or otherwise of religious pluralism, as some have done, is to miss the genius of the achievement of *The Matrix* and sequels.[6] Unlike *Star Wars* and other modern stories that make use of elements of ancient mythical tales, the Wachowskis find a way to weave ancient myths into a new story which does not involve the same suspension of disbelief that stories of miracles and monsters usually do in our age. They envisage a scientifically plausible world in which the implausible elements of traditional religious and mythic stories can be retold believably. Within the virtual world of the Matrix, everything can be real, precisely because nothing is real. The Wachowski brothers, by setting the stories in a virtual world,

have found a way of enabling contemporary people to experience in a believable manner the ancient stories of Greek mythology, Arthurian legend, and of course Christianity and Buddhism. In a virtual world in which real and unreal not only become indistinguishable but lose all meaning, anything and everything can happen.

But in setting motifs from various traditions in a virtual world, is the aim to combine these faiths, or merely to show their similarity, or ultimately to undermine them? In light of Baudrillard's writings, these older stories can be recognized as being *simulacra*, copies which may point to events that did in fact happen, or hide the fact that they never happened, or both. For when it comes to the past, we must always say, like Morpheus, 'we only have bits and pieces of information'. Yet the fact that the filmmakers consider these stories worth rewriting and worth retelling is in itself instructive – films like *Star Wars* and *The Matrix* show the hunger of our age for myths which explore timeless issues in a timely manner. On the other hand, in retelling the stories, religious interpretations of the world are also deconstructed – particularly in *The Matrix Reloaded*. The Oracle's prophecy appears to have been merely a deception, a way of getting the One to enter the mainframe and meet the Architect, where the process of stabilizing the Matrix can begin again. As Neo says to Morpheus towards the end of *Reloaded*, 'The prophecy was a lie [...] It was just another system of control'. Having set the viewer up in the first film to assume that Morpheus was right, the sequel calls that into question.[7] *The Matrix Reloaded* suggests that religious beliefs and the promises made by religions may be *experienced* as working and thus *perceived* as true by believers, yet for reasons other than their actual truthfulness. And so it seems these that while these films suggest that living one's life as though God or Fate is at work can make one's life more meaningful, yet at the same time we see that this meaningfulness may be simply an experience, an illusion. Thus, while the religious overtones of the films seem to suggest that there is some possibility of knowledge of higher truths, ones that transcend the political and the mundane, it seems one can still never know whether that knowledge is accurate. Put another way, just as once reality has been authentically simulated one can never know for certain one is not in a Matrix, likewise once religion and religious experience can be simulated, one can never know whether one is in touch with a transcendent reality, or simply experiencing interesting events in one's brain chemistry.[8]

Religious traditions normally identify something as ultimately real.[9] Baudrillard, on the other hand, suggests that all we now have are simulacra, and reality has been lost to us, perhaps forever. At the end of *The Matrix Reloaded*, Morpheus acknowledges he had 'dreamed a dream', but now that dream was gone from him; he had sacrificed lives for a goal he believed in, and yet that goal now appears to be no more real than the illusion that Cypher wanted to return to. On the other hand, there are still many questions left

unanswered, and it is unfortunate that I have to speak about these issues only a few months before the release of the final film in the series, *Matrix: Revolutions*. Presumably in the end we shall find that both the Matrix and the alleged real world, including Zion, are part of a larger computer system, and that all our perceptions of these things up until the end of *Reloaded* have been wrong. If the storyline is true to itself in presenting these issues, then at the end of *Revolutions*, as at the end of *Total Recall*, we shall very likely still be wondering what if anything is 'real', indeed whether there is a 'real world' at all beyond the Matrix. And in that case, Baudrillard will have won the day, with Christianity and Buddhism perhaps not even tying for second place.

We should also take seriously the possibility that, although these movies make use of religious imagery and ideas on multiple levels, the point of the films may nonetheless not ultimately be religious in character.[10] In other words, it is worth considering whether the films ought not to be viewed, not as a parable of a religious view of ultimate reality, but simply as a symbolic depiction of the way society and its norms domesticate creativity and originality, and define reality for us so that we gradually lose our freedoms, and even surrender them willingly. The powers that be have realized, as did the Architect of the Matrix, that human beings crave choice, and so we will accept a prison for our minds 'provided we are given a choice, even if we are only aware of the choice on a near-subconscious level'. Like Neo's relationship to the Oracle and the Architect, or Fox Mulder's dependence on figures like Deep Throat and X in *The X-Files*, even rogue elements would be blind to the cover-up unless they had help from within the system. Worse still, we are never entirely sure that Mulder is not simply being used as a pawn, to focus attention on aliens when the 'real' cover up is something else. Likewise Neo has to choose whether or not to trust the Oracle, once he discovers that she is part of 'the system'. The Architect seems to suggest that 'the One' is not really a rogue element in actual fact, so much as a way the system stabilizes itself in relation to the inevitable anomalous elements that can result in system failure. Many forms of apparent rebellion against the system are to be evaluated, in light of both Baudrillard and *The Matrix Reloaded*, as simply pawns in the system's game.

The Matrix and sequels can thus be understood to be offering something like a Marxist critique of religion – although in this case religion is not so much the opiate of the masses, as an outlet for a disgruntled minority, allowing them to engage in simulated rebellion while still being part of the system, and thereby being prevented from engaging in activities that would bring about genuine change. This is in fact the Baudrillardian assessment of contemporary terrorism and protest in the essay 'On Nihilism' that is seen in Neo's copy of the book in the movie. That *The Matrix* is not only asking about future possibilities involving A.I. and virtual reality, but is also an allegory of the present, can be seen in the fact that 'the Matrix', while

in fact everything Neo has ever experienced up until that point, is said by Morpheus to be focused around *television, work, church, and taxes*. And so while in the film the Matrix is 'everything', there are hints that it symbolizes the post-modern understanding of ideology: the language and beliefs which accompany our experience of the world, shaping and interpreting it.[11] And yet, if the main point of *The Matrix* and sequels is not to communicate a religious message at all, it nonetheless does say something about these in relation to their function in society. The films give both positive and negative assessments of traditional religious belief systems, acknowledging that religion can provide transcendent, life-changing enlightenment, or serve the interests of the system. Nonetheless, the choice to use religious imagery in a positive way suggests that the films are asking some of the same questions posed by traditional religions, even if doing so in a rather post-modern or even secular manner. The film's meaning is thus probably not exhausted even once its character as a parable of the post-modern assessment of ideology has been explored. The rabbit hole appears to go deeper still.

James L. Ford has described the movie *The Matrix* as 'a provocative example of modern-day myth-making'.[12] Societies construct stories and myths as part of worldview construction, as outlined by people like Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in the field of sociology of knowledge. Myths analyse and examine fundamental and existential questions about human nature and about the way the world is. That *The Matrix* addresses such basic questions is easily seen. As the Wachowski brothers put it in an interview, myth is a 'mirror that is an archetype of our own time and our own life […] It's how we understand where we are and where we came from.'[13] But if we follow Ford in regarding *The Matrix* and its sequels as an example of 'myth-*making*', then the choices made by the storytellers, regarding what to keep and what to omit from earlier religious stories like those of Christianity, can be highly suggestive.[14] But at any rate, myths 'are the by-product of a dialectical process that often yields internally conflictive elements.'[15] This means that one possible explanation for the apparently contradictory emphases in *The Matrix* and its sequels is precisely the process of mythmaking. To contextualize religious stories and seek to retell them for a new era involves not only the preservation of tradition, but its enculturation in new contexts which may add elements or suggest interpretations that are in tension with aspects of the traditional story. For example, a version of *The Matrix* which ignored Buddhism would be ignoring a religious tradition whose popularity in the West in our time is ever-increasing. A version of *The Matrix* which included no violence would not be a late 20th-century Hollywood movie. A version that did not address some of the specific questions raised by contemporary technology and by post-modern philosophy would be preserving the traditional at the expense of the contemporary and contextual. Thus many of the elements that are felt to be in tension are

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perhaps part of the very nature of the enterprise. Yet the divergent elements also pinpoint a potential problem within popular spirituality, which emphasizes the individual's freedom to choose and to mix and match from various religious traditions. Does such 'mixing and matching' produces a meaningful, much less a coherent lifestyle choice that can provide genuine inspiration and guidance to people today in anything other than a superficial manner? The questions about the relationship between Buddhist, Christian, and post-modern in *The Matrix* and sequels are thus questions that pop spirituality has always needed to ask itself. To the extent that the apparent contradictions do not appear to invalidate these movies or their message, it may be suggested that *The Matrix* films do not just raise the question, but also answer it and affirm this contemporary approach to spirituality. And certainly it cannot be denied that a very high percentage of people in Western Europe and North America stand under the influence of the very same three traditions we have highlighted in this paper: Christianity, Buddhism, and postmodernism. Indeed, not only is the combination *not* incoherent, as Gregory Bassham claims, but it is practically *inevitable* in any person exploring popular spirituality in our time anywhere in the Western world.

Let us return now to our main question: What is the perspective of the film vis-à-vis reality? Is it Baudrillardian, Christian, Buddhist, or somehow all of the above simultaneously? This is not an easy question to answer without the final instalment in the trilogy, and attempting to read the story in light of any one of these traditions can provide you with a different understanding of the films' message. From both Christian and Buddhist perspectives, Neo is the hero of the films. Yet if Baudrillard represents the primary viewpoint of the Wachowski brothers and of the film, then Cypher would most likely be the one who represents the authorial perspective, in at least one important respect: there is no longer a 'real world' to which one can return from the illusion of the Matrix.[16] The Matrix is a copy of a world that no longer exists. The question the character of Cypher raises is this: Why should one choose to live in a post-apocalyptic nightmare rather than a simulation of an earlier, better age? The question is raised by the movie but without yet being answered, unless one has an innate preference for 'reality'. Several articles have been written asking what is so bad about the Matrix, and whether Cypher was not in fact right. If Cypher (among others) represents the film's implied authorial viewpoint, then the movie could perhaps be renamed *Neo Superstar*, since it is being told from the point of view of 'Judas'.

Neo in his hyperreal world is himself a simulacrum of Jesus, of Socrates, of Christians, of Buddhists, of Gnostics, of other originals that no longer exist except in the simulacra form in which they are to be found in today's society or in our piecemeal knowledge of the past – copies of originals that either no longer exist or are no longer accessible, and which may never have existed in a form resembling the simulacra that take their

place today. And yet, interestingly enough, while we cannot know what Jesus or the Buddha would make of *The Matrix*, the same limitation is not in place with respect to Jean Baudrillard. In a 2002 NY Times interview, Baudrillard suggested that any 'borrowings' from his book in *The Matrix* stemmed from misunderstandings. And yet, the only Baudrillard most people in our time will ever know is mediated through the movie *The Matrix*. Somehow it seems fundamentally appropriate, albeit also rather disturbing, that the philosopher who warned us of the dangers of technological simulacra should find himself and his thoughts obscured in precisely the fashion he predicted. 'Fate, it seems, is not without a sense of irony.' [17]

    The Matrix, like the *X-Files*, is at once quintessentially post-modern science fiction, and yet it expresses the hunger of the post-modern spirit for modernity's certainties. Everything is true, everything is possible in these worlds: werewolves and vampires and haunted houses are real, because they are either (a) part of the government conspiracy to hide the truth that is out there in the *X-Files*, or (b) older renegade programs inhabiting our virtual computer world in *The Matrix* series of films. In assenting to postmodernism's acceptance of pre-modern truths, both these works of science fiction nonetheless continue to feel the need to provide an implicit overarching 'matrix', a scientific metanarrative, which can make sense of humanity's multiple and contradictory experiences of life. Perhaps this is why *The Matrix* takes us back to Descartes, to the 'brain in a vat' scenario, in which an evil scientist or demon deceives all our senses.[18] It brings the viewer back, in order to retrace the steps which lead from modernity to postmodernism, from foundationalism to postfoundationalism, not necessarily in order to point the way forward, but like all those who retrace their steps, *The Matrix* also seeks to discover whether the foundation whose absence we so noticeably feel in our time is not recoverable somewhere along the way – a baby discarded with the bathwater, an image perhaps captured well by the picture from *The Matrix* of Neo being 'discarded' as his pod and its contents are emptied down a chute. But in returning to re-examine Descartes' discarded foundation, 'I think therefore I am', will *The Matrix*, through the questions it raises, recover that foundation's significance, or will it rather cause even our own existence to fall into uncertainty?[19] Also noteworthy is that, by focusing on Descartes' question, *The Matrix* expresses popular culture's ongoing commitment to the modern, Western belief in and emphasis on the reality of the individual self. In spite of Buddhism's popularity in the West in our time, the idea of 'no-self' has yet to find many who are willing to adopt it and leave behind our cultural heritage of radical individualism. The notion may be entertained that 'there is no spoon'; the idea that 'there is no permanent distinct self' is a harder pill to swallow. In addition, the fact that in *The Matrix* artificially intelligent machines can demonstrate simulated selfhood leaves even the self itself subject to the

Baudrillardian analysis that, once something can be perfectly simulated, the reality of the original over against the copy is called into question and eventually lost forever. We thus find that the films have, at this stage, raised an old question, but have not decided which of at least three possible answers it prefers: the conclusion of Descartes in the Christian tradition, 'I think therefore I am'; the Buddhist answer, 'I think and yet ultimately I am not';[20] and Baudrillard's analysis, which probably suggests that if my thoughts can be simulated by a machine or in a virtual world, then even my own existence as the real me rather than a copy can never be certain. In fact films like *The 6th Day*, *Impostor*, and *Dark City* ask precisely the question of what identity means if memories can be copied and/or replaced. At any rate, the films seem more interested in raising these questions for today's audience, than attempting to provide final and definitive answers to them.

And yet, in conclusion, it is important to note that the scenario envisaged by Descartes and by the Wachowski brothers is an inherently improbable one, in which all the senses of every one of us are actively deceived. The question this scenario poses is an interesting and important one from a philosophical perspective. However, 'in the real world', we may be deceived about some things and just plain wrong about others, but those points on which we agree across cultural and other boundaries of perception are likely to bear some semblance to the 'real'. In this case, those things that different religious traditions agree on become important – those very commonalities that underpin the storyline of *The Matrix*. The problem of the reference of our religious symbols remains, but at they very least they reflect deep-seated human instincts and sentiments which cross many cultural divides. And to paraphrase Mouse, to deny our deepest religious instincts is to deny one of the things that makes us truly human. By drawing on Baudrillard, Buddhism, and Christianity, the Wachowski brothers have managed to focus popular attention on questions that are at the heart of our post-modern cultures and our religious heritage, and also to highlight the very human diversity that may, perhaps, at times, enable us to 'free our minds' and catch a glimpse of what is 'really real'.

Notes

[1] The fact that this is probably the first major film to have a philosophy section on its official website, and to require one to play the video game in order to understand certain details of the plot, suggests that we are dealing with a unique and striking phenomenon in contemporary cinema and culture, although one imagines it will probably not be unique in this respect for long.

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² At the time of writing a rather exhaustive list of possible ways of reading *The Matrix* as a Christian parable can be found at http://awesomehouse.com/matrix/The_Matrix.PDF. See also G Bassham, 'The Religion of *The Matrix* and the Problems of Pluralism', *The Matrix and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago, 2002, pp. 111-113; It is perhaps noteworthy that Cypher betrays *Morpheus* rather than Neo, and Morpheus is presented as suffering in a manner reminiscent of the depictions of Jesus' sufferings in art. On Buddhism and *The Matrix* see M Brannigan, 'There Is No Spoon: A Buddhist Mirror', *The Matrix and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago, 2002, p. 103; JL Ford, 'Buddhism, Christianity and *The Matrix*', *Journal of Religion & Film* Vol.4, No.2 (October 2000) http://www.unomaha.edu/~wwwjrf/thematrix.htm. –Note not only the emphasis on the illusory nature of what most people accept as 'real', but also the need to perceive beyond it, and the emphasis on waking up, which also feature prominently in the movie. It should be noted as well that, in *Animatrix*, the major world religions also get a negative portrayal in 'The Second Renaissance', since they give their sanction to the attempt to destroy the newly-formed A.I. civilization.Evangelical Protestants, Muslims, and Buddhists are depicted as making common cause against the machines. Baudrillard features as author of the book Neo uses to hide his illegal software, and is the creator of the phrase Morpheus uses, 'the desert of the real'. Baudrillard was explicitly mentioned in the movie dialogue in an earlier version of the script.

³ One suggestion, which may be quickly dismissed, is that these movies are 'really' a Christian movie, whether a parable of the Christian faith or an updating of the 'old old story'. There are a number of difficulties with this interpretation of the film, in spite of its initial plausibility (the original movie was, after all, released Easter weekend), and in spite of the many web-sites and sermons that utilize the film as a Christian allegory. While these movies are rich in imagery and symbols drawn from Christianity, the elements drawn from other traditions are not tangential to the film's plot and message. In short, it is precisely the prominent elements incorporated from Buddhism and other traditions that make it impossible to regard *The Matrix* and its sequel(s) as simply a retelling of the Christian story. For example, the fact that Neo is not the first 'One' but there have been previous '(re)incarnations', and that the key thing that binds people to the illusion of the world is not sin, but ignorance. (*Animatrix* in fact uses the word 'sin' in reference to the actions and attitudes that got humanity into this mess in the first place; it also shows the world's religions united in seeking to wipe out the machines by scorching the sky.) Further, the film hints at a cyclical rather than a linear view of history, although the possibility of the genuinely new has not been excluded, and seems to be affirmed at the end of *Reloaded* by Neo's choice. In addition, the fact that the world that transcends the present illusory world is neither

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Nirvana nor a perfect 'heaven', but a world where a small remnant of
humanity is at war, fighting for their very existence, does not fit either the
Buddhist or Christian viewpoints. The movie can only with great difficulty be
regarded as essentially a retelling of a single earlier story. It is rather a new
story based on many older stories, and it is only in taking this fact seriously
that we can get at the heart of the meaning and message of *The Matrix* and
sequels.

[4] Bassham, 111-125.

[5] Bassham, ibid. To the extent that the film may be regarded as drawing on
elements of *Gnostic* Christianity and Buddhism, the two traditions have
somewhat closer affinities, since both regard the main problem of human
beings as ignorance. See F Flannery-Dailey & R Wagner, 'Wake Up!
Gnosticism and Buddhism in *The Matrix*' http://www.unomaha.edu/~www
jrf/gnostic.htm.

[6] A Wachowski in an interview in the Chicago Tribune mentions Jungian
archetypes (cited by Lloyd in his online article 'Glitches Reloaded'), and
Larry says 'Mythology lets you talk to old cultures and future ones' <quoted
at http://www.matrixfans.net/thematrix/rev-time.html>. The fact that the film
draws not only on religious terminology, but on symbols and motifs that are
found in multiple religions, suggests that they see importance not in one
particular religious tradition, but more so in the things they have in common,
an idea to which we shall return later in this study.

[7] It is interesting to see how the plot of the trilogy parallels the development
in the original *Star Wars* trilogy. The first movie seems complete in itself, a
hero flick. The second film complicates matters and ends on a darker note.
Will the parallels continue in *Revolutions*?

[8] A famous example is W James, who was convinced that he was having a
deep religious experience as an effect of anesthesia.

[9] Even if what is ultimately real is *sunyata* (emptiness), as is the case in
Buddhism.

[10] God in a Western monotheistic sense is generally agreed to be absent from
the films. P Fontana disputes this, however, arguing quite plausibly that while
humanity is in 'exile' and thus experiences a sense of God-forsakenness,
nevertheless God can be discerned to be providentially active behind the
scenes, much as in the Book of Esther in the Bible.

[11] Ford, op. cit., 143.

[12] Ford, loc. cit.

[13] A Culpepper, 'Myth meets Internet in 'Matrix'', March 31, 1999. http:
www.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Movies/9903/31/matrix.

[14] The fact that thus far there is no transcendent deity in *The Matrix*, while
typical of Hollywood, might be said to be more Buddhist or Baudrillardian
than Christian, although even within Christianity there is the idea of God as

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deus absconditus – a God who is hidden from view, and yet nonetheless there and active. The closest one gets to any kind of mention of a 'higher power' is in the frequent references to 'fate'. But is fate in *The Matrix* 'real', or simply another example of manipulation by 'higher powers' that are really intelligent programs running the whole known world? The closest one comes to God in *The Matrix* films is The Architect, but as in ancient Gnosticism, this creator is not the ultimate reality, the God of mainstream Judeo-Christian monotheism.

[15] Ford, loc. cit. JF McGrath, 'Change in Christology: New Testament Models and the Contemporary Task,' *Irish Theological Quarterly* 63/1, 1998, pp. 39-50.

[16] In an earlier (1996) draft of the screenplay for *The Matrix* (available on the internet), Cypher expresses the view that the war has already been lost, and that Zion is just part of the ongoing madness – ideas that perhaps gave too much away too soon, and thus were dropped from the movie.

[17] Accessible via http://www.ee.bilkent.edu.tr/ge301/matrixfilm.txt. On the question of the film's lack of faithfulness to Baudrillard's ideas, see A Gordon, '*The Matrix*: Paradigm of Postmodernism or Intellectual Poseur? Part II', *Taking The Red Pill: Science, Philosophy and Religion in* The Matrix, BenBella, Dallas, 2003, pp. 99-101. If the film's assessment of reality and religious truth is ultimately that of Baudrillard, it is striking that Baudrillard himself does not feel the film gives accurate expression to his thought.

[18] Cf. TS Hibbs, 'Notes from Underground: Nihilism and *The Matrix*', *The Matrix and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago, 2002, p. 155.

[19] The latter would be a nice 'Buddhist' result from the film's inquiry. But the question goes further still. If memories can be implanted, as in *Total Recall* and *Dark City*, and perhaps implicitly also in *The Matrix*, then the question is raised whether in knowing the mere fact *that* we exist (because we doubt, think, etc.) allows us to know anything else about *who* we are! We may have memories of love, of murder, of joy, of sorrow, which shape who we are today, and yet these may be recently implanted. Again, it is an emphasis of certain Buddhist traditions that who we *were* (and hence our memories) do not tell us who we *are*. At any rate, as one character in 'Matriculated' states, our dreams do not define what is real – they only show that our minds are real, that 'I dream therefore I am'. Even if I may not be sure what is real and what is a dream, I exist.

[20] At least, am not a permanent distinct entity.

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