

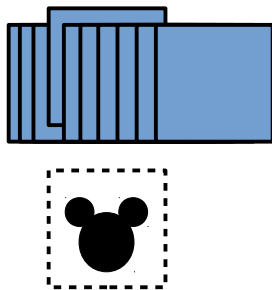
The Movie Hypothesis of Non-Consciousness

by Sven Nilsen, 2019

In this paper I express a metaphysical hypothesis of non-consciousness, called “The Movie Hypothesis”, which states that physical systems constructed in a specific way do not produce intentional high-level self-awareness.

Humans possess some common sense about consciousness and self-awareness which is surprisingly sophisticated given that the basic problems of consciousness have been studied and remained unsolved.

One example of such common sense is that characters in movies are not self-aware.



A movie consists of a sequence of frames that are displayed rapidly in order to produce the illusion of movements and visualize intelligent actions. Common sense tells us that agents represented in movies are not self-aware. Movie technology has improved significantly over time, but has not yet reached the state where it is indistinguishable from reality.

The Movie Hypothesis of Non-Consciousness states that given sufficiently advanced technology, a physical system might be constructed that produces human stimuli and responses indistinguishable from reality. By pre-recording all consequences of choices and selecting the appropriate sequence for each choice, the viewer can even interact with the movie, believing the movie is real.

Despite having no way to tell the difference between a movie and reality, the viewer can be confident in the belief that if reality as it appears is actually produced by a movie, then other agents represented in the movie have no self-awareness and therefore no intentional high-level consciousness similar to the viewer.

The confidence in this hypothesis relies on knowledge about the construction of the physical system. Each frame in the movie has the capability of producing any possible stimuli, independent of the previous frame. Although the content of the frames are determined physically, they are semantically independent. As a result, there should be no self-aware agents inside the movie.