

# Reality Doesn't Really Matter

Dan Weijers

Victoria University of Wellington

Draft 28/02/2011

## The Post-Screening Debrief—What Happened?

So you're leaving the cinema—you've just been blown away by *Inception*—and your mind is buzzing. There is a buzz around you too. Everyone's asking each other: 'Does Cobb's spinning top fall?' Throughout *Inception*, Cobb has been struggling to achieve two things: to get back home so he can see his kids again and to keep a grip on reality in the process. What ends up happening to Cobb's totem bears on both of these struggles. So, most people who watch *Inception* think that the whole point of the movie hinges on whether or not Cobb's top keeps spinning. Unfortunately for most people, they missed the point! The correct answer to 'Does Cobb's spinning top fall?' is: 'Who cares!' The truth, and in my opinion the main point of *Inception*, is that reality doesn't really matter.

What is reality and what isn't is going to be spun around like a tumble dryer in this chapter. So, to reduce your chances of getting a headache, I'll just make a couple of things clear. The terms *the real world* and *reality* are going to refer to the world in *Inception* where Cobb, Arthur, and Eames plan out the inception on the young energy magnate Robert Fischer and recruit Ariadne and Yusuf. Similarly when I mention *real* things, I am referring to things from the same world—the world that Cobb and co. spend most of the first half of *Inception* in. When the word *reality* is used without italics, then I am referring to the concept reality as we normally use it.

Even if, like me, you've watched *Inception* seventeen times on DVD, the movie retains many mysteries, especially about what happens to Cobb in the end. All we can

confidently say about where Cobb ends up is that he is both happy and having the experience of being home with his kids. He might have ended up in Limbo or in *Reality*—we can't be sure either way. My point is that it doesn't actually matter. Perhaps Cobb's spinning top falls and he gets to see his kids again in *the real world* and perhaps it doesn't and Cobb ends up living in Limbo. Either way, Cobb should be happy. If Cobb reunites with his kids in *the real world*, he should be happy because he gets what he wants. More surprisingly, though, Cobb should also be happy (I'll argue even happier!) if he ends up in Limbo. As I'll explain, this is because it's just our experiences that really matter, not whether we are living in reality.

### **Limbo is Great, the Real World Ain't**

If the closing scenes of *Inception* are showing Cobb enjoying a dream about reuniting with his kids, then Saito is probably behind it. Saito agreed to enable Cobb to see his kids again if Cobb could successfully pull off inception on Robert Fischer. And, Cobb did manage to implant Fischer's subconscious with the idea to break up his father's nearly monopolistic power conglomerate. So, it makes sense that Saito would uphold his end of the bargain. It was established early in *Inception* that it was impossible for Cobb to go back to the United States. So Saito either had to pull some serious real-world strings to make Cobb's troubles with the US authorities go away or to create an elaborate dream world in Limbo to give Cobb the experience of those strings having been pulled.

If Saito did choose to reunite Cobb with his kids in a dream, instead of reality, he would probably create a new world for Cobb in Limbo instead of a shallower dream. The depth of Limbo combined with a Yusuf-esque super sedative would help ensure that Cobb couldn't be kicked out of his dream. So, what would Cobb's Limbo world be like? Limbo is unstructured dream space. And, as such, any people sharing the dream can create the world as they please, with their unconscious minds filling in the blanks. Cobb, Saito, and anyone Saito

wanted to employ could have created the Limbo in which Cobb now resides. The same set of people could also affect the course of events in that world and populate it with projections.

It would be possible for Saito or his employees to take advantage of Cobb's subconscious when creating the Limbo world. The influence of Cobb's subconscious memories and desires would help to create the world so that it would be both familiar and suitably predictable for Cobb. By combining their talents with Cobb's subconscious in this way, they could make the Limbo world perfectly indistinguishable from *the real world* for Cobb. Since the whole world would be designed by Cobb and Saito's employees, all doubtless skilled architects like Ariadne, it would seem to be impeccably real. Everything would be just as he remembered, so there would be no need to question it. All future events would be partly based on Cobb's desires and expectations, again giving him no reason to question whether they are real. Recall also Cobb's question to Ariadne: "You never remember the beginning of your dreams, do you? You just turn up in the middle of what's going on." So, Cobb's transition to Limbo (whenever it might have occurred) would also have been too smooth for him to notice.

In addition to being indistinguishable from reality, Cobb's Limbo world could even be far superior to the real world. After spending a good few days catching up with his children, Cobb would need to start living a normal life again. He would need to find a job, make new friends, and plan for his children's future. In the real world, Cobb's lack of references and (legal) job experience might mean that he could only find a job as a cleaner or, if he's really unlucky, a bathroom cleaner. In Limbo, though, Saito's employees could concoct a plausible scenario that results in Cobb landing a cushy acting job in an upcoming blockbuster movie—perhaps starring as a plucky rogue who stows away on the Titanic and then falls in love... If Cobb lives in Limbo, instead of reality, he could achieve much better outcomes in all of the important areas of his life. In Limbo, Cobb's friends could be more fun

and generous, his work life could be more stimulating and fulfilling, and when his children grow up they will get into Ivy League colleges instead of bathroom cleaning school.

Given these obvious advantages of a life in Limbo over a life in *reality*, it's a wonder that Cobb didn't just ask Saito for a Limbo life instead of a life in *the real world*, right? Well, not quite. If Cobb had asked to be reunited with his kids in Limbo, rather than in *reality*, then he would probably always be burdened by the thought that he were living in a dream. His experiences would be much less enjoyable, because they would be polluted by the fear that none of his actions had any consequences and that his life were meaningless. Fortunately for Cobb, if he did end up in Limbo, he has no idea. So, at least in terms of what Cobb would experience, we can see that ending up in Limbo is probably better for Cobb than ending up in *reality*.

Hold on, did I just say that living in a dream is better than living in reality? No, just that in this example the total of Cobb's life experiences would probably be better in Limbo, but that raises a very interesting question: Do anything other than experiences matter for how well someone's life goes for them?

### **Why all the Hoopla about Reality?**

I believe that only what we experience matters for our wellbeing; that events which we do not become consciously aware of in any way (directly or indirectly) cannot have any impact on our how well our lives go for us. So, I think that Cobb would be better off living in a more enjoyable Limbo (and believing it to be real) than living in *reality*.

Either you believe that events which we never become directly or indirectly consciously aware of cannot have any impact on our wellbeing or you believe that events can impact our wellbeing without ever affecting our consciousness. If you believe, as I do, that events which do not affect our consciousness cannot have any impact on our wellbeing, then

on pain of contradicting yourself you must agree that Cobb would be better off living in the Limbo described above than in *reality*.

You might not agree with me, though. Perhaps you think that Cobb's life would be better if he lives in *reality*, despite the point that his experiences would be more enjoyable in Limbo. If this is the case, I have some questions for you. How is it possible that something can make your life go worse for you if you never become consciously aware of it in any way (directly or indirectly)? Can you explain the causal process by which Cobb's not living in *reality* will make his life go worse for him, without referring to impacts on his conscious states? If not, can you make some other argument as to how something can affect how well our lives go for us without affecting our consciousness?

These are certainly difficult questions. Fortunately, though, the hard work has been done for you. In fact, thanks to philosophers with an interest in well-being (the good life for the one living it) there is a small mountain range of philosophical musings relevant to these questions. One of the several mountains in this range are made up of arguments for how several things, including reality, can impact our well-being even if our consciousness is never directly or indirectly affected by them.

The highest of these mountains is made up of work based on Robert Nozick's pioneering and powerful argument that more than just our experiences matter to us.<sup>1</sup> Nozick maintained that living a life in reality is far more important than living a more enjoyable but unreal life. His argument is very popular among philosophers and is almost always referred to when philosophers want to argue that reality does matter. So, let's use Nozick's argument to see if Cobb should care if his spinning top falls and also why there is all this hoopla about reality.

Imagine that Cobb is on the plane with Saito and the others after pulling off inception on Fischer. Saito leans over and whispers two options in Cobb's ear. Saito is giving Cobb the

choice between either reuniting with his kids in *reality* or in Limbo. Saito makes it clear that all of Cobb's experiences will be much more enjoyable in Limbo. Saito also mentions that if Cobb chooses Limbo, he will slip Cobb a pill that removes his memory of this offer, so Cobb will never realise that he chose Limbo. Saito also guarantees that the Limbo world has been so carefully crafted that Cobb will never realise it is not real. Considering only what is best for Cobb, what do you think he should choose, *reality* or Limbo?

When I ask people about this, nearly all of them think that Cobb should reunite with his kids in *the real world*. They acknowledge that the Limbo life might be more enjoyable in some ways, but they also think that choosing it just doesn't feel right. Some of them say they feel hollow about choosing the Limbo life, but aren't sure why. Many comment that Cobb never getting to see his *real* kids again seems like a bum deal. Of course, if Cobb did choose the life in Limbo, he would never realise that he was lovingly raising projections instead of his *real* children. But most people argue that Cobb not knowing his kids aren't *real* doesn't really matter. They say that Cobb doesn't want to reunite with projections that seem real; he wants to see his *actual* children again. If you think Cobb should choose *reality* over the life in Limbo, perhaps your decision was heavily impacted by the idea that his kids wouldn't be *real* in Limbo. Regardless of the reason, though, nearly everyone thinks Cobb should choose *the real world* over the more enjoyable Limbo life in this scenario. Perhaps the hoopla about reality is not unfounded.

The idea of living the rest of our lives in Limbo might seem both exciting and depressing. Many of the differences would be fun, but one difference would ruin it all for most of us. Since Limbo is not real, our actions would have no significant impact on any real person and our lives would be, in some ways, meaningless. We have plans that are important to us and we want them to come to fruition. The vast majority of these plans include having an impact on real people, such as lovingly raising our real children. In Limbo, we couldn't

succeed in these plans. So, the hoopla about reality seems to be that, without it, we can't achieve the majority of our important and meaning-giving goals and our lives are much less valuable for us as a result. This seems like a good reason to think that reality matters (even if it never affects our consciousness) and to choose *reality* over Limbo (even if we won't realise we're in Limbo). This also seems like a good reason to care if Cobb's totem will keep spinning; his life will be more meaningful, and therefore better, if it drops.

Actually, it's not a good reason to think or choose any of these things. The hoopla about reality is as bogus as one of Eames' impersonations. Although the line of argument above might seem convincing, it takes advantage of a widespread bias in our reasoning and two false assumptions. I'll discuss the bias and then the assumptions.

### **Turning the Tables**

So, what is this widespread bias in our reasoning that Nozick's argument takes advantage of? Recall from the scenario above, that most people think that Cobb should choose *reality* over a life in Limbo. I gave a couple of reasons why this might be, both based on the importance of reality. But note that these reasons were only guesses. They might sound right to us, but the fact that most people choose *reality* over Limbo in this scenario does not (by itself) prove anything about the actual value of living in *reality* or Limbo. However, the fact that so many people also agree that there probably is something important about reality (even when it never affects our consciousness) means that it's only fair to give them the benefit of the doubt. But I'm going to try to take that benefit of the doubt right back off them. I'm going to show that there is a defect in the reasoning process that they all used and then argue that they should have doubts (period), not the benefit of the doubt. Here's a new version of the previous scenario, which should help highlight the bias in reasoning that causes most people to choose *reality* over Limbo.

Again, imagine that Cobb is on the plane after successfully completing Saito's job. Saito leans over and tells Cobb that he has actually been in Limbo all along, that Cobb's whole life up to that point has all been a dream. Saito gives Cobb the choice of either reuniting with his kids in the world that he have been experiencing as real all this time or changing to his *real* life. Again, Saito gives Cobb a pill to erase his memory of the conversation if he chooses to stay in the dream. Saito also guarantees that if Cobb remains in the dream, he will never become aware that it is a dream. Cobb asks what his *real* life is like and Saito replies that it is both very different to this life and considerably less enjoyable. Only considering what is best for Cobb, do you think that Cobb should choose to spend the rest of his life in the realistic dream or in the *reality* that he knows nothing about except that things don't tend to go his way there?

This time, most people think Cobb should take the pill and stay in Limbo. This time, some say that the thought of Cobb living in *reality* and abandoning his dream-world kids leaves them feeling slightly hollow. What might guide this choice? Perhaps curiosity leads you to think that *reality* might be better for Cobb, but the notion that life would be so much more enjoyable in the dream might lead your thoughts back towards the life in Limbo. Some even say that Cobb would feel a sense of duty towards his dream kids and want to stay in Limbo because of that relationship.

A few of you might think that Cobb should choose *reality* over Limbo in both scenarios. If this is the case, I have a couple more questions for you later on – I'll try to convince you that you are wrong, that it's better for Cobb not to choose *reality*.

You will have noticed how this new scenario is a reversal of the original one. In the first scenario, you were asked if Cobb should choose the *reality* he knew over a more enjoyable dream. In this second scenario, you were asked if Cobb should choose the dream he knows over a less enjoyable *reality*. Most of you will have thought that Cobb should

choose to remain in *reality* in the first scenario and to remain in Limbo in the second scenario. Now, if reality is so important, why didn't most of you think Cobb should choose *reality* in the second scenario like you did in the first? The only thing that changed between the scenarios is whether *reality* or Limbo was framed as what is familiar or known to Cobb.

Could it be that sticking with what we are familiar with matters more to us than what is real? And, is it the case that we are irrationally biased towards the familiar? And, is this bias the main reason that we choose *reality* over Limbo in the first Nozickian scenario? The answers to these questions are 'yes,' 'yes,' and 'yes' (respectively).

### **Familiarity Breeds Approval**

Psychologists have long been aware of the human tendencies to prefer things to remain the same and to favour what they are familiar with over unfamiliar things of equal or even greater value. These tendencies are often collectively referred to as status quo bias and are considered irrational because they can make us miss out on beneficial changes of circumstance.

You may not realise it, but mere exposure to a person can make you think that they are more attractive. If you happened to live in the same town as Ellen Page (Ariadne) and had subconsciously caught a glimpse of her here and there, then you would prefer to look at a picture of her than that of an equally attractive person. Psychologists recently demonstrated this by planting equally attractive models in a class, different numbers of times, making the students become familiar with them to different degrees. The students were then asked to rate pictures of the models, which they did, scoring the models that they were more familiar with more highly.<sup>ii</sup>

In another experiment, three classes of students were rewarded for completing a task. In the first class, all of the students were given a mug and then (a short while later) asked if

they wanted to swap their mug for a chocolate bar. In the second class, all of the students were given a chocolate bar and then (a short while later) asked if they wanted to swap their chocolate bar for a mug. In the third class, all of the students were given a choice between a chocolate bar and a mug. Despite only having to raise a piece of coloured paper to accept the offer to switch gifts, only 10% of students from the first two classes chose to do so. This is an unusual result because about half of the students from the third class chose the mug and the other half the chocolate bar—indicating that the bar and the mug had similar value. It can't be that 40% of the students in classes one and two were just too lazy or shy to swap their reward. Psychologists think that the students didn't want to swap their rewards because they had created irrational attachments to them—they overvalued them because they had become familiar with them.<sup>iii</sup>

Even more recently, the philosopher Philippe de Brigard demonstrated how status quo bias can affect our decisions about which kinds of lives we would choose for ourselves. Using scenarios similar to those I have been discussing, de Brigard revealed that the less we know about a life, the less likely we are to choose it.<sup>iv</sup> The point of all this is to show that we all tend to overvalue what we are familiar with, including types of lives.

### **Landslide on Mount Nozick**

Given all of the evidence for status quo bias in situations like the scenarios I have been discussing, it is reasonable to believe that our judgements about what kind of life Cobb should choose in these scenarios is heavily tainted by status quo bias. In both cases most of us thought that Cobb should choose the familiar life over the enjoyable life in one case and, most importantly, the *real* life in the other case. Most of us thought Cobb should choose the kids he knew over the kids he didn't, regardless of whether they are more real or more likely to bring him happiness. This shows that the judgement that Cobb should choose a *real* life

over a dream life in the first scenario isn't as heavily impacted by our concern about reality as we first imagined. It's not reality that matters to us in this scenario, it's familiarity.

The status quo bias can even help explain why many people think that the choice of *reality* over Limbo in first scenario is because of the value of reality, despite the evidence that familiarity seems to be the main reason—we have mislabelled what we are familiar with as 'reality.' From as soon as we could understand, we were told that what appears to be our waking existence is real. Since we had no good reason to doubt the reality of this waking existence, we always assumed it to be real. For the same reason that people don't want to swap chocolate bars for mugs or vice versa, we all become more and more attached to this 'reality'—familiarity. So, for those who had a negative feeling about Cobb choosing Limbo in the first scenario, it's natural to think that the feeling stems from the realisation that your trusted friend 'reality' would not be going with Cobb to Limbo. The truth is that what we have been referring to as reality is simply what we are familiar with. So, in the first scenario, we choose the familiar option, but claim that we are choosing reality.

Importantly, since the widespread agreement that Cobb should choose reality over Limbo in the first scenario is based on an irrelevant bias, Nozick's argument fails.

Where does the failure of Nozick's argument leave us? First, the main reason given to argue that events which don't affect our consciousness can still affect our well-being is wrong. Therefore, we have more reason to think that events which we don't consciously experience cannot affect our well-being. Philosophers have provided several other reasons for arguing that events can affect our well-being without affecting our consciousness, but the best of these are also based on our judgements about scenarios and might also elicit biased judgements. Without discussing all of these arguments, no firm conclusion can be reached as to whether our conscious experiences are all that matter for our well-being.

Second, and regardless of the first point, with Nozick's argument defeated, it becomes much less clear why reality matters. We are returned to the problem of how living in Limbo could make Cobb's life go worse for him, considering he never becomes aware that he is not in *reality* and will never experience any negative consequences from not living in *reality*. You might worry that his real desires are not being satisfied in Limbo, but there is still no good explanation for how this actually affects him. If Cobb ends up in Limbo then, as far as he is concerned, his desires *do* get satisfied and his life *is* meaningful. In fact, the advantages of Limbo, such as allowing Cobb to get more fulfilling work and better friends, would mean that from Cobb's perspective his life would be more enjoyable and more meaningful than if he had ended up in *reality*. Since we are interested in what is best for Cobb, why should any other perspective be more important?

But what about the people who think that Cobb should choose *reality* in both scenarios? Let's call these people diehard fans of reality (not because they attend all the reality conventions in their reality-branded T-shirts, but because they still think living in reality is better for us). They can plausibly claim to be relatively unaffected by the status quo bias, since they didn't choose what they were familiar with in both scenarios. These people presumably chose *reality* over Limbo both times precisely because they think there is something valuable about reality even if it never, directly or indirectly, affects our consciousness. I think that these diehard fans of reality are in the grip of two pernicious assumptions.

### **The Problem with Reality Spotting**

Diehard fans of reality probably assume both that they can really know when they are in reality and that they are in reality right now. Most people have probably never given either of these assumptions much thought. Fair enough too, most of us haven't had much reason to

question them in the past. Seeing *Inception*, though, generally makes people want to dig a little deeper into these issues.

How do you know when you are dreaming and when you are awake? It might seem obvious just after you have woken up... until you wake up again at any rate. Just like Saito, when Cobb is performing extraction on him, you could be in a dream, within a dream, within a dream. There are common tell-tale signs that help us to know when we are dreaming. Some of you will realise it's a dream when you start flying or when you can't read the newspaper because the text won't sit still. For sure, most of us have developed our own method of working out if it's a dream after we wake up and wipe the drool away. But how do you know that your method of dream detection actually works? If you really are in a dream, within a dream, within a dream, then your method of detecting if you are dreaming is just an artifice of the third-layer dream.

Consider Cobb's totem—his spinning top. Throughout *Inception*, Cobb spins his top to test if he is still dreaming or not. The totems can perform this test because only their owner knows their precise characteristics. Arthur explains to Ariadne that when entering someone else's dream your totem will act differently because the dreamer does not know the specific features that make it unique. Of course, if all the talk about, and making of, totems occurs within a dream (if, say, the entire movie is actually Cobb's dream), then totems cannot be trusted; If totems are made in the dream, then their precise characteristics are not secret. Similarly, if Cobb ends up in Limbo and his subconscious is partly responsible for populating the world with objects, then he can't trust his totem because one of the dreamers (himself!) knows how it works. This is a good reason not to care if Cobb's spinning top falls or not, but it also helps make a very important point. Just as Cobb can never be sure that he is not in a dream, neither can we. We think that we have little tricks and tests to ensure that we know when we are in reality and when we are not, but all of this could be part of a deeper dream.

So, diehard fans of reality, who are adamant that actual reality (not just the experience of it) is important for wellbeing, should be feeling a little uneasy now. They thought they knew how to tell when they were dreaming, but now should realise that they can't be sure. This leads to an even more pressing question for them: are you in reality right now?

The truth is that they, you, I, or anyone could be in a dream. Another truth is that none of us can prove we are not. On balance we might have good reason to believe that we are not in a dream. But if reality is so important to diehard fans of reality, then their inability to really know if they are in reality should lead them to worry about whether they are missing out on something very important.

When diehard fans of reality choose *reality* over Limbo in both of the scenarios because reality matters so much to them, I think they are making two big mistakes. First, they have assigned reality special value for Cobb—they value reality over the additional enjoyment and experience of a more meaningful life in Limbo. They have even assigned this special value to reality in scenarios when it is impossible for reality to directly or indirectly affect Cobb's consciousness.

Second, and even more importantly, diehard fans of reality are making the mistake of putting great value in something that they can never be sure of. Even if reality (that never affects our consciousness) is more valuable than extra enjoyment and sense of meaning in life, actively valuing it and pursuing it is a choice that would seem to lead to a much worse life. Someone who has seen *Inception* should realise that they can't be sure of whether the life they are familiar with is actually a real one. And anyone who remains a diehard fan of reality after seeing *Inception* is likely to be made worse off by worrying about whether they are in fact living in reality. Plus, since there will never be a way for diehard fans of reality to really know if they are dreaming or not, this worry could plague them for the rest of their days.

When we take the uncertainty that *the real world* is actually real into account, it is clearly a mistake to think that Cobb should choose *reality* over a more enjoyable and subjectively meaningful life in Limbo in either scenario. By choosing *reality*, Cobb would be taking a bad bet. He would be gambling on *reality* actually being reality. This is a bad bet because the stakes are very high (more enjoyment and a greater sense of meaning in life) and the payoff is uncertain (both in terms of value and chance of occurring). It's not clear that actual reality can actually impact on our well-being over and above what seems like reality in every way but actually isn't. And, even if reality could have this impact on our well-being, there is no way to ever know if it actually is because we can never be sure that we're not dreaming.

The irony is that the more diehard a fan of reality someone is, the more reason they have to choose the life in Limbo. This is because if a diehard fan of reality chooses Reality, they might not get the actual reality they are looking for. In fact, the only reality they will get is the truth that they will never know either way. The more diehard of a fan they are, the more the thought of trying to choose on the basis of reality, just to end up without it, should scare them.

Gambling on reality is a mistake because reality doesn't matter. Even if you think reality does matter, gambling on it is still a bad idea because you can never know what the odds are.

### **Why Reality Doesn't Matter**

As we were sitting on the edge of our seats, watching Cobb's totem spin smoothly at the end of Inception, our minds were racing. When Cobb's spinning top jolted, as though kicked out of a relaxing dream, we heard the sharp intake of breath around us and we felt it in our own throats too. But Cobb's totem kept spinning until the screen faded to black and the credits rolled. It's only natural that we wanted to know if Cobb's spinning top was going to fall—we

are naturally curious creatures who often compulsively seek the truth. But now you should realise that it really doesn't matter what happened to that spinning top. Christopher Nolan, who has been notoriously tight-lipped about what really happens in *Inception*, has even said that Cobb doesn't care if his spinning top falls at the end. Nolan says that Cobb is far more interested in the experience of seeing his kids again.<sup>v</sup>

We were caught in the grip of some assumptions that we had good reason to think true. But now we have had the chance to think about *Inception* for a while, we should question those assumptions.

I assert that since things that don't affect our conscious experiences can't affect how our life goes for us, reality doesn't really matter. As long as we experience life as if we are living in reality, it doesn't matter if we are living in *reality* or in Limbo. In fact, living in Limbo would probably allow for us to lead lives that we find more enjoyable and meaningful.

Diehard fans of reality might try to convince you that reality should matter to you, even when it will not affect your conscious awareness in any way. If this happens, you should point out to them that they are probably being blinded by a couple of assumptions. You should encourage them to watch *Inception* (again?) and re-evaluate whether they can ever be sure if they are dreaming or not. Most importantly, get them to question their assumption that they are currently living in reality. They'll realise that they can't ever be sure that they're not dreaming. And, because the cost of more enjoyment and sense of meaning is too high for the evanescent chance of living in reality, they too will understand that it doesn't matter if Cobb's spinning top falls or not. In fact, they'll probably wish that Cobb would just throw his totem away and focus on finding enjoyment and meaning in his life because they will realise that our experiences really do matter. Above all, they too will realise that reality doesn't really matter.

---

<sup>i</sup> Robert Nozick, The experience machine, in his *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Basic Books, 1974, pp. 42-45.

<sup>ii</sup> Richard L. Moreland and Scott R. Beach, Exposure effects in the classroom: The development of affinity among students, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Volume 28, Issue 3 (May 1992), pp. 255-276. See also: Melissa Peskin and Fiona N Newell, Familiarity breeds attraction: Effects of exposure on the attractiveness of typical and distinctive faces, *Perception*, Volume 33 (2004), pp. 147-157.

<sup>iii</sup> Jack L. Knetsch, The endowment effect and evidence of nonreversible indifference curves, *The American Economic Review*, Volume 79, Issue 5 (December 1989), pp. 1277-1284.

<sup>iv</sup> Philippe de Brigard, If you like it, does it matter if it's real?, *Philosophical Psychology*, Volume 23 (2010), Issue 1, pp. 43-57.

<sup>v</sup> Nolan makes these comments in an interview with Jeff Jenson for Entertainment Weekly. The story is called Christopher Nolan on his 'last' Batman movie, an 'Inception' videogame, and that spinning top, Entertainment Weekly, 30 November 2010. Available at <http://insidemovies.ew.com/2010/11/30/christopher-nolan-batman-inception/>.