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Is Ignorance Bliss?

Eliana R. Mandelberg
Gettysburg College, mandel01@gettysburg.edu

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Is Ignorance Bliss?

Abstract

This project explores the ethics of telling someone factual information, even if it could hurt them. Specifically, the main question is: If a person were to learn that our world was just The Matrix, would they be obligated to tell people to be truthful or keep it to themselves to spare the feelings of others?

Keywords

Ethics, lying, philosophy, ignorance, matrix

Disciplines

Applied Ethics | Philosophy of Mind

Comments

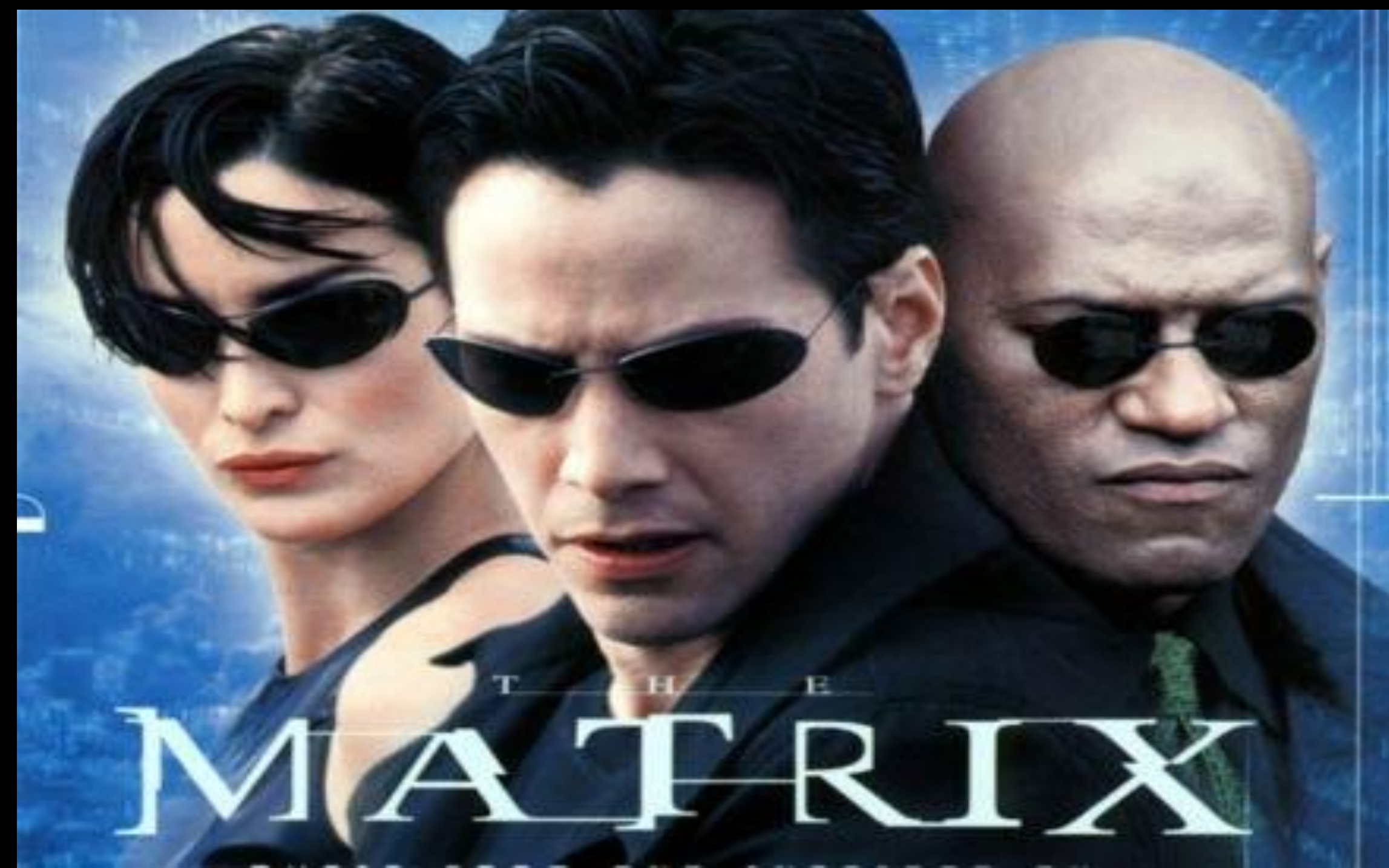
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Is Ignorance Bliss?

Eliana Mandelberg

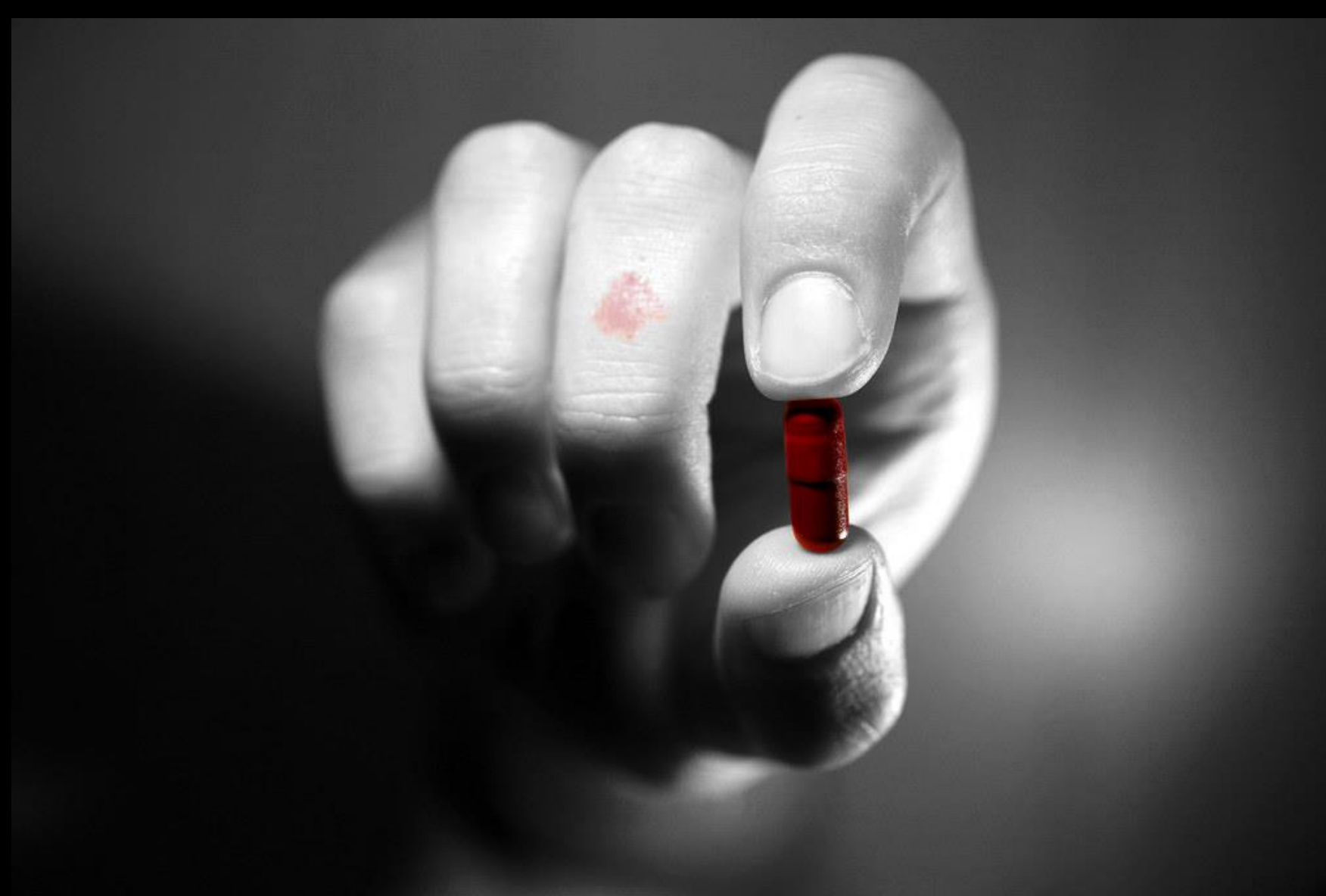
Overview

How much do we really want to know? If there is information that could hurt someone else, is it better to share it to broaden their knowledge or keep it to spare their feelings? If you found out the reality in which we were living was a lie, would it be right to tell people? Would people want to know? Does it matter if they do?



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In The Matrix, the reality perceived by society is similar to our world today, but none of it is real. The truth is everyone is stuck within a pod to power robots, and they “dream” of a different life: The Matrix. So, if a person today were to discover that this was true, how could it be right to tell? Once a person learns that everything they believed was not real, they can’t unlearn it.



"Why, oh why, didn't I take the blue pill?" by ThomasThomas is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

reveals information about his friends in exchange for his memory of The Matrix being wiped.

“After nine years, you know what I realize? Ignorance is bliss” (The Matrix 01:04:07-01:04:13)

Cypher

Cypher knew about The Matrix, and he went as far as betraying his friends to go back to not knowing. His life with this terrible knowledge was too much, and he resented learning. He



"Immanuel Kant als Quantenphysiker I" by Rhetos is marked with CC0 1.0.

you knew, you would have to tell that person even if you knew that your friend would be murdered. He would think that you have to tell people about The Matrix

Immanuel Kant, a philosopher in the 18th century, thought that, in every situation, a person “ought not to lie even though lying were to bring [them] not the slightest discredit.” According to him, every lie is wrong, whether or not it spares someone. He even goes as far as to say that if a murderer broke into your house asking where your friend was, if



"Tunisia-3462 - Great People and Smiles" by archer10 (Dennis) is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

Another view is utilitarianism. In this view, any action is considered to follow the utilitarian view if the action’s power to “augment the happiness of the community is greater than any it has to diminish it.” So, what would these philosophers say about telling people about The Matrix? Well, since informing others of The Matrix would bring people pain, utilitarians would say that it is one’s moral obligation to not tell anyone. Why tell the truth when it does not bring happiness to anyone? Telling people about The Matrix would not follow their moral code.

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"File:Plato Cave Wikipedia.gif" by Wikimedia, Veldkamp, Gabriele and Maurer, Markus. Own work is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

Allegory of the Cave. A group of people in a cave are chained and forced to look in front of them at shadows on a wall. They believe that this is real. If one person is forcibly freed and shown how the shadows are made, his perception of reality would change. If he were forced outside, the sun would at first be too bright, but eventually, his eyes would adjust. He would realize that real life is much better than life in the cave. If this man were to go back into the cave and try to tell the others what he saw, however, he would be ridiculed. In fact, since his eyes wouldn’t readjust to the dark right away, the others would say that the outside world had literally blinded him and he became crazy.



"Polaroid 190" by mooninsean is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

we are introduced to Teddy. On Teddy’s Polaroid, Lenny wrote “DON’T BELIEVE HIS LIES.” This causes Lenny to distrust him in every scene. At the end of the movie (which is chronologically the first since the movie is out of order), Teddy tells Lenny that the person who killed his wife was Lenny. He accidentally gave her too much insulin one day. After learning this, Lenny took Teddy’s picture and wrote the words "DON’T BELIEVE HIS LIES." He didn’t want to live in the reality where he killed his wife, so he changed the narrative in his mind.

Conclusion:

People may think that they want to know the truth always, but this is not the case. If the truth goes against a person’s beliefs, they would much rather be kept in the dark. No one likes to be questioned, especially if the questioning comes at the expense of the views they have held their entire life. All in all, if a person were to learn that our perceived reality was simply a computer-generated program meant to seem like everyday life, they would have the moral obligation to keep this information a secret; otherwise, they would just cause harm to themselves and those around them.