

# **Meaning and Subjectivity in Virtual Worlds**

Drawing on the philosophical traditions of existentialism, this paper articulates the idea that — by means of our technical equipment and coordinated practices — human beings disclose contexts or worlds in which they can perceive, feel, act, and think. The theoretical framework for the paper as a whole is derived from our recently published book *Virtual Existentialism: Meaning and Subjectivity in Virtual Worlds* (2020 - <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9783030384777>).

Our presentation is divided into two sections.

- The first introduces the question of what it means to exist in (and towards) virtual worlds. In this section, we concentrate our attention on the idea of the projectual structure of human being and on the concept, developed in our book, of ‘virtual subjectivity’.
- The second homes in on the work of the Norwegian philosopher Peter W. Zapffe, and its relevance to our understanding of virtual world experience and its significance. Zapffe identified four ways in which human beings typically protect themselves from existential panic: isolation, anchoring, distraction, and sublimation. In this section of our paper, we consider the ways in which our engagement with virtual worlds can be seen to embody each of these four mechanisms, leading to an understanding of virtual environments as technologies for repressing existential panic.

In sum, the paper aims to demonstrate how the encounter between philosophical existentialism and virtual worlds research can prove fruitful in both directions – that is, using existential philosophy as a lens through which to reach an understanding of our being in virtual worlds, and analysing experiences in virtual worlds to shed new light on existential questions.