

Alexa in the Garden of Epicurus

Post by “Don” of August 22, 2025 at 1:30 PM

This discussion (*and it's a good one!! Thanks to whomever it was that got this rolling!!*) reminds me of the discussions we've had over the experience machine (which I believe was mentioned earlier?).

My primary reason for saying that one should not hook themselves up to the experience machine is the source of pleasures change from experienced to induced.

My understanding is that Epicurus said "[All sensations are true](#)" in that their *source* is natural and coming from some existing thing in the universe. There is a reality beyond our minds and bodies. We experience sensations because we are alive in a material world which has an effect on us.

The experience machine renders us a passive inert participant in someone else's idea of what pleasure is. We are at the mercy of the manufacturer and repairman of Experience Machine LLC.

Yes, our "experiences" would be "real" to us but only in the sense that a dream or hallucination is real. There would be no external stimuli coming from a real external universe. We would be cut off from the universe, encased in the shell (or wires or hoses, pick your mechanism) of the experience machine. I don't believe, from my understanding of Epicurean philosophy, that Epicurus would endorse a life of living in a dream or an hallucination. All our friends would be figments of our imagination. All our pleasures would be fake. Our life would be a pale reflection of what it could be.

Epicurean philosophy is not pleasure at any cost; it is taking responsible for moving one's life - navigating one's little boat - using pleasure as your North Star, weathering the storms through which the Star can be seen through the clouds and lightning, and steering one's own course. It does not mean abdicating one's pleasure to someone or something (eg, AI) else.