

Hypotheticals: Would An Epicurean Hook Himself Up To An "Experience Machine" or a "Pleasure Machine"?

Post by "Don" of March 23, 2020 at 12:08 PM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

Our ability to perceive through our senses is critical to being able to choose pleasure. In making this imaginary choice, a person typically tries to "double" themselves-- but they can't fully double. They can't really let go of the pre-machine condition of knowing that life would be going on without them-- that they wouldn't really be seeing their friends, only imagining it. That they would miss out on the pleasure of knowing they are really there for their friends-- the pleasure of being a friend. That creates a pain in the imagination which can't be removed in the hypothetical. It has nothing to do with valuing something other than pleasure. It is an inability to believe there would not be a feeling of painful loss in the machine. A sort of anticipatory loss. And no matter how many times you reassure a person that they won't know they've lost reality, they can't imagine it. So a normal person will not choose the machine.

Well, this thread started to fill up quickly! 😊

I would agree with this line of reasoning from [Elayne](#) (if I understand where she's coming from). To respond to [Cassius](#) from my original post and to rephrase some of my own terminology, I don't think I'm, in retrospect, advocating for "true" vs "false" pleasures. What I was trying to get at were pleasures received through the senses of taste, touch, smell, etc., as opposed to pleasures implanted directly in the brain, bypassing the senses entirely. If I remember correctly, Epicurus could not conceive of pleasures without these sensory inputs and likewise the pleasurable life cannot be lived "without living wisely and well and justly". The Machine takes away the ability to both sense things and to live "wisely and well and justly." This doesn't make Wisdom superior to Pleasure, it removes the entire possibility of sensing pleasure in any meaningful way. Epicurus says that one sense cannot override or contradict another sense (I believe) so what the Machine is doing is tricking the nose into believing it is smelling, the eyes into believing they are seeing, etc. But the "mind"'s purpose is in comprehending ideas and concepts (mental images). I realize the brain senses everything but the Machine isn't sensing molecules of scent or light rays entering the eyes. That's the distinction I was attempting to get at with "true" vs "false."

Enjoying the discussion!