

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

Post by "Cassius" of March 23, 2020 at 1:31 PM

Eugenios then as usual we are not so very part after all. You are focusing on the aspect of the machine as bypassing of the natural sense mechanisms by implanting directly in the brain, which removes the natural functioning controls. In that context then I can see more application of "true and false" to pleasures, but if we are talking within the terms of the hypothetical then all bets are off anyway and the discussion is just a pure mind game with all the downside that is inherent in such activity. Here is the machine as stated at Wikipedia:

The thought experiment [\[edit \]](#)

Nozick asks us to imagine a machine that could give us whatever desirable or pleasurable experiences we could want. Psychologists have figured out a way to stimulate a person's brain to induce pleasurable experiences that the subject could not distinguish from those he would have apart from the machine. He then asks, if given the choice, would we prefer the machine to real life?

Nozick also believes that if pleasure were the only intrinsic value, people would have an overriding reason to be hooked up to an "experience machine," which would produce favorable sensations.

So now we are talking issues as to how much of the hypothetical to accept, and how far to go along with its premises. The further we go, the more hazardous it is to switch back and forth between real life and the hypothetical, or to draw real life conclusions from the hypothetical.

The issue that I would want to emphasize is that in real life there is no such thing as "true" or "false" pleasure. Pleasure is pleasure, and the question is much more focused on "Is it sustainable?"

So the danger in allowing the pleasure machine hypothetical to lure us into abstracting out the characteristics of pleasure, so as to consider there being true and false types, and they sliding that distinction back into the real world. So long as we guard against that we are ok, but we are now squarely into the realm of "Stay away from hypotheticals!" that Elayne has emphasized.