

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

Post by "Don" of March 27, 2020 at 7:36 AM

Quote

[Cassius](#) says: Is it inherent in the scenario that the issue with the pleasure machine is lack of variety? (IE, that there are pleasures we would want that the pleasure machine would not provide?)

No, not from my perspective. My issue with the pleasure machine is that it puts itself between the person hooked up to it and Nature. The pleasure machine serves as the mediator. Whoever built the machine is putting themselves between the user and Nature. There is no way for the senses to sense \*real\* sensations coming \*from\* Nature. Therefore, there's no way for the person to apply the Canon. Therefore, there's no way to lead an Epicurean life which, at its most basic definition, is the best life to lead (PD 21) since it calls us to sustained pleasure. Ah, but "sustained pleasure" is what is provided by the Machine one might say! Okay, maybe "sustainable" is a better word. That question is harder to answer since we're dealing with a unicorn of a machine. What if the machine breaks down?

I think what we're trying to decide is if it is "right" or "just" to hook oneself up to the pleasure machine. Probably in the grand scheme, we can't make this determination FOR anyone. I would assert that we cannot hook people up without their consent. That seems to me to go against the precept of not wanting to be harmed or to be harmed. Can we stop people from hooking themselves up? No, I don't think that's just either. Do I think someone trying to live a life in accordance with Epicurus' teachings SHOULD hook themselves up. No, because it removes the ability to apply the Canon, to apply wisdom in making choices and rejections, and to allow each of the senses to do what they do without trying to have one sense override the sensations of the others.

My personal "prolepsis", if you will, of the pleasure machine is the Matrix (for those who have seen the movie): Shut off from reality, having sensations fed to you, floating in a vat of goo. And the one who wanted to be re-hooked up to the Matrix after being freed was the villain in that movie... So that may be coloring my opinion.

Additionally, I still think PD 10 is talking about applying the Canon to our pleasures so they are sustainable - not sustained or unlimited - as I tried to lay out over on that thread. It's not a matter of superior or inferior pleasures, but a matter of whether they are sustainable. The life of

the profligate is not sustainable. It leads to pain. I don't think the candle-starer is leading an inferior life. Are they meeting their necessary desires? Are they experiencing both ataraxia and aponia? Are they applying the Canon? Are they living wisely, justly, and virtuously? It's sounds like it.

To bring this back to this thread: Given a choice, I would take the life of the candle-starer over the pleasure machine hands-down.