

Dear Professor Nozick,

It was an utterly thought-provoking journey to read your world-renowned work: *The Experience Machine*. While I am amazed at the tremendous technological advancement of humanity in the two millennia after my death, which has made your thought experiment possible, I would like to offer my views in response to some of your arguments. In general, I share your opinion that there is a conclusive reason not to plug into an experience machine. I would like to add on to your reasoning against the experience machine by extending it to humans' pursuit of the chief good. This leads to my second point that the reason why we would not want to plug into an experience machine is its conflict with our pursuit of a well-lived life.

In Paragraph 2, you suggested several reasons why we would avoid plugging into an experience machine. The first reason was that "we want to *do* certain things, and not just have the experience of doing them". However, I believe that every action done by humans aims at some good (1094a). The motivation behind an action does not simply stop at one wanting to *do* it. Instead, one wants to do a particular action because it is perceived as a means to some end, and this end may in turn be for the sake of something else. Then, there must exist some good which we want only for the sake of itself, otherwise we would be trapped in an endless and meaningless quest for some unattainable good (1094b). This final good, at which all our actions aim, will clearly be the chief good that all human beings desire to achieve when they do something. Therefore, your claim that we undertake some actions just because we want to do them seems incomplete, as there must be some motivation behind each action.

We may consider this highest good to be *happiness*, as agreed by most people (1095a). However, this certainly does not mean that people would want to plug into an experience machine for the sake of happiness. In fact, plugging into such machines is in direct conflict with our pursuit of happiness. Following my arguments in the previous paragraph, let us suppose an individual who wants to enter such a machine. Then, he must have done so as a means to some end, and ultimately to attain the chief good—happiness. However, is it really possible for him to attain happiness? Let us first explore what constitutes happiness in humans. I believe that a happy life is a virtuous life. But what is virtue to humans? We need to look at the characteristic activity<sup>1</sup> of a human being. In contrast with other animals and plants, humans have a unique capacity for reason. Our characteristic activity is thus activity of the soul and actions in accordance with reason (1098a). When this activity is accomplished well, it is accomplished in accordance with virtue. Inside the experience machine, this individual has no capacity for reason, neither is he engaged in any activity of the soul. This is because all his brain activities are programmed

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase "characteristic activity" is also translated as "function" in some English versions of Nicomachean Ethics.

artificially by the machine, not by his own reason. Thus, he is in no position to pursue virtue, and consequently happiness is unattainable to him. Therefore, due to this conflict with a happy, well-lived life in accordance with virtue, plugging into an experience machine would be anathema to any reasonable person.

To conclude, the loss of the capacity for reason, and consequently the ability to pursue virtue, prevents one from attaining true happiness inside an experience machine. I look forward to your reply regarding my response to your work.

Yours sincerely,  
Aristotle

Written by Liu Zechu (Group 2)  
Word count: 598

## References

1. Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Crisp, R. (2000). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Nozick, R. "*The Experience Machine*". *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. (1974). Basic Books, Inc.