**What is an Experience Machine?**

An experience machine is a hypothetical machine which would interface with a human brain and stimulate it such that the user has every sensation that would suggest they are experiencing a reality, but their physical body remains still in the machine and the user is none the wiser.

**Sure, most would plug in temporarily to give it a try, but would you plug in for life?**

**Here is some food for thought: If you were somehow made aware that you are in an experience machine right now, would you unplug from it? Do you actually value connection to reality enough to unplug from something you have known for so long or do you only value what you perceive as real? We have a status quo bias that makes us reluctant to change which makes most peoples’ answer to these questions a resounding "no".**

**Here is some food for thought: Is it moral to plug into the machine for life leaving behind your friends and family? Will your choice make them feel as though they too should plug in? Do you welcome the thought of being made happy by means of self-illusion? Sure, you will have no memory of leaving your friends and family behind and you won’t know that your new reality is an illusion once in the machine, but can you justify making this choice from your current standpoint?**

**Proposition: It is feasible that someone values reality but would be willing to trade it for something they consider more valuable to them (living out their days blissfully in an EM). This is not to suggest that everyone should though because it is entirely possible and even expected that humans value reality to the point that they wouldn’t give it up for anything.**

1. The Experience Machine, Ben Bramble, Lund University

<https://philpapers.org/archive/BRATEM-3.pdf>

* Nozick says hedonism is not true because if it were then the experience machine would constitute the best life, but intuitively (according to Nozick) the experience machine does not constitute the best life and hedonism is false.
* Nozick says we intrinsically desire connection to actuality. The EM does not give us connection to actuality and so it does not constitute the best life.
* Some say that the intuitive reason they wouldn’t plug in is fear of the experience machine malfunctioning, but for this thought experiment we should take it for fact that the machine will not malfunction.
* Common argument: it is not moral to plug into the machine because your friends and loved ones would have to carry on without your company. Nozick wants us to discard this from the thought experiment because everyone else has the option to plug in too and we can assume that they would in time if you did. I think that this needs more picking apart.
  + “can also plug in to have the experiences they want, so there’s no need to stay unplugged to serve them. (Ignore problems such as who will service the machines if everyone plugs in.).”
* We should discard any justification for not plugging in that are reasons like it is scary or repulsive because here our emotional response is getting in the way of reasoning about *well-being.*
* Being especially connected to reality as an evolutionary trait: early humans that were this way likely outlived ones not especially connected to reality. AKA we are not descended from hedonists.

1. Choosing the Experience Machine, chapter from Happiness and Goodness: Philosophical Reflections on Living Well

<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.lehigh.edu/stable/10.7312/cahn17240.18?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=experience&searchText=machine&searchText=nozick&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dexperience%2Bmachine%2Bnozick%26amp%3Bfc%3Doff%26amp%3Bacc%3Don%26amp%3Bwc%3Don%26amp%3Bgroup%3Dnone&refreqid=search%3A39d5e99a03530136633ed21ce7b978ca&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents>

* Does the value of happiness depend on how it is achieved?
* Would people welcome the possibility of being made happy by means of an illusion?
  + Could simulate all the things that make people happy: achievement, friendship, learning, pleasure, etc.
* Nozick thinks people would not plug in because:
  + We want to do things not just have the experience of doing them.
    - Cole: But what if the machine left us no way to distinguish whether it is an illusion?
  + We want to *be* a certain way.
    - Cole: Again, what is the difference if the user isn’t aware of the illusion?
  + Plugging in limits us to a man-made reality.
    - Cole: Could be a ma-made reality with even more possibility than our natural one.
* Consider things people wouldn’t want to *do but* would want to *experience.*
  + Dangerous things that would be exciting and valuable, but nobody would risk their safety to do them like going to battle, trying an extreme sport, etc.
  + This is why people love movies, amusement parks, video games, bungee jumping, etc.
  + Psychedelics and alcohol as ‘local experience machines’ as they distort reality for the user.
* Consider achievements that are only attained from a life of devotion (expert golfer, musician) wouldn’t normal people want to experience what this is like?
  + Cole: I think replicating these is possible only if the user plugs in for life and adopts the experience machine’s reality as their own. Otherwise when the unplug the illusion is up.
    - Are people willing to trade their lives for these experiences?
* Foregoing your life to live one modelled after champions of history (Alexander the Great, Cleopatra).
  + Could also filter out any hardship and make it so the user only experiences the triumphs.
* Another option is to just be yourself with modified traits like confidence, intelligence, etc.
* Plug in to a reality where deceased loved ones are reincarnated and appear perfectly real.
* What if someone’s life on earth is objectively dreadful and they want to escape it? What if they are severely handicapped and want to experience a reality where this is not the case?
  + Cole: Consider how many people suffer and live genuinely unhappy lives. Consider how many more people feel this way and just don’t openly admit it. Wouldn’t an experience machine offer a better reality for them?
* Does knowing the truth rather than experiencing bliss through an illusion entail “a better life”?