

The Experience Machine

-Robert Nozick

Matthew McDonald

Utilitarianism

- Moral theory associated with John Stuart Mill.
- Based on Greatest Happiness Principle (GHP) which states the right act is the act which produces the greatest happiness for the greatest number.
- “Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness (Mill 141).”

Three Clauses

Utilitarianism can be broken down into three main clauses

1. Consequentialism: Acts are judged by their consequences
2. Hedonism: Consequences are evaluated by the amount of total happiness they bring
3. Egalitarianism: Each person counts as one.

Hedonism

- “The ultimate end... is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality (Mill 144).”
- “Happiness is the sole end of human action, and the promotion of it the test by which to judge of all human conduct (Mill 145).”

Nozick's Rejection

- “If pleasure were the only intrinsic value, we would have an overriding reason to be hooked up to a machine which would produce favorable sensations (Nozick 124).”

The Experience Machine

- Nozick proposes a machine created by “super-duper” neuropsychologists.
- This machine would allow you to think, and feel you were living your normal life, but you would actually be floating in a tank attached to electrodes.

What Matters

- When deciding to plug into this machine you must determine if there is something beyond happiness.
- “What else can matter to us, other than how our lives feel from the inside? (Nozick 124)”

First Reason

- We want to do things, not just have the experience of doing them.
- “It is only because first we want to do the actions that we want the experience of doing them of thinking we’ve done them (Nozick 124).”

Second Reason

- We want to be a certain person, not a “indeterminate blob.” Plugging into the machine could be considered suicide.
- “There is no question to what a person is like who has long been in the tank...It’s not merely that it’s difficult to tell; there’s no way he is (Nozick 124).”

Third Reason

- The Machine limits us to man made reality, the world is only as good as we can make it.
- Many people wish to leave themselves open to the possibility of contact with a deeper reality.

Conclusion

- The biggest problem is that the machines are living our lives for us.
- “Perhaps what we desire is to live ourselves, in contact with reality (Nozick 125).”

Examples

- Pianist loses ability to use her hands, but happiness is insured by a 'happy pill'.
- Athlete who is injured and unable to play while their team wins the championship.

Questions

- Would you plug into the machine?
- Is there something else beyond happiness?
- What is this something else? Is Nozick correct about what they are?