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«Suppose there were an experience machine that would give you any experience that you desired. Superduper neuropsychologists could stimulate your brain so that you would think and feel you were writing a great novel, or making a friend, or reading an interesting book. All the time you would be floating in a tank, with electrodes attached to your brain. Should you plug into this machine for life, preprogramming your life's experiences?»

Robert Nozick (1974). Anarchy, State and Utopia. New York: Basic books 2013, p. 42.

Introduction

This quote questions what the true will of humans is. What do we value more, feelings or reality? Ultimately, the quote aims at this question: Is feelings the meaning of life? To try to answer this question I have split this paper into three parts, which hopefully will support my thesis that one ought not to plug oneself into an "experience machine".

Section 1: The conjunction of feelings and reality.

Section 2: Why not simply seek one's wants?

Section 3: Ultimate happiness versus horrible reality.

Section 1: The conjunction of feelings and reality

Feelings dominate life, they throw you around, they mess with your head, and they lie to you. However, it is my view that this phenomena of existence with emotions are what makes life so beautiful. Just imagine the feeling of being in love, smelling a flower on a beautifully sunny day and greeting your dog as he happily jumps around wagging his tail. If life has any meaning at all, it surely lies in emotions, right? For example, what else can be as meaningful as truly loving someone? But is it feelings alone that beautifies life?

Firstly, I would like to clarify my conceptualization of the idea of reality, as it is vital for my reasoning. I see reality not as that which is physically true, the physicality is irrelevant. Reality, in my view, is the playground upon which real individual subjects play. The realm which allows for the communication between individual subjects. This could be said to be many things, but as our understanding is, the most fitting description would probably be the totality of human communication. And whatever deters from this description, undermines both reality and meaning, as this understanding of reality and meaning is interconnected.

Feelings do not rely on reality, for example one can experience plenty of joy and turmoil in a dream. But when one wakes up from that dream, he realizes that it was a dream and

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quickly forgets about it. A dream is simply not as valuable as reality, because it is not real. The experience one has in a dream is simply an illusion. But why is it that feelings in a dream does not matter as much as feelings in physical reality does? My reasoning for this is simply because that which is real, is more valuable. For example, imagine dreaming that you are trying to save a child from walking on the road, but you were just too late, and he/she dies. Now imagine that same situation, however now, only in real life. Which one is worse? In my view, it is obvious that the child dying in real life is much worse than that of the dream. Even though the feelings of the child dying in a dream and in real life was the same, the child only actually dies in one of them. Experience and existence are only truly valuable so long as it is in reality.

There is a mental syndrome which I think is called “main character syndrome”. As the name implies, the person thinks he/she is the center of the world, kind of like the main character of a movie. He/she thinks they are the only subject in existence, and everyone else are NPCs (non-player characters). If one were to imagine that this truly was the case, does life not lose its meaning? In my opinion, it does, for I see little meaning without the real interactions of the authentic human subjects. I would live in an illusion so long as I have my fellow subjects (humans) by my side, because it is the togetherness of mankind that is what allows us to face the great uncertainty of existence. The greatness of the mysterious phenomena of existence is, that we share it together. We are not alone, we have each other, and we are in this together. Thus, the experience of reality outweighs the experience in for example a dream or an “experience machine”, because then, we are not alone.

In conclusion of this section, meaning, in my opinion, lays in the conjunction of feelings and reality. Feelings alone is not something to strive for it is not necessarily within the realm of reality. It is in the togetherness of the human subjects that true meaning exists. Feelings beautify life, but if it does not stem from the interactions of human individual communication, I question the meaning of that beauty.

Section 2: Why not simply seek one's wants?

What we do, is quite simply only controlled by our wants, we cannot truly be free to choose what we do, as what we do must align with what we want. This being the nature of our wants, makes it easy to understand why we do as we do. Generally, it is the case that we seek happiness because we want it, and we shy away from sadness because we do not want it. For example, a man sits in a chair alone in a room and gets the option to either feel happy for the rest of the day or to feel sad for the rest of the day. I think it is obvious that the man would choose to be happy, as happiness (generally) align more with our wants than sadness does. Thus, one could ask oneself, why not just seek what we want in life?

If I know my wants would be completely satisfied in an “experience machine”, why not plug myself into this machine, after all, it does align with my wants? To this point I raise the

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argument of the necessity of elevating oneself above the fulfillment of one's wants. In other words, creating wants that seek not only the fulfillment of wants. Even though all your wants would be fulfilled in this "experience machine", that does not mean it was the right and meaningful choice. Even though you are controlled by your wants, that does not mean you are obliged to satisfy them. All wants are not good. Should the sadist seek to fulfill his wants, even though it might involve harm? And what about pedophiles, psychopaths, etc. One must elevate one's wants such that the actions caused by said wants aligns with the morality of the actions and consequences of your wants.

For the sake of argument, imagine that you plugging yourself into an "experience machine" would cause thousands of babies to be tortured and eventually be killed, however, when plugged in you would completely forget this and continue to live in fulfillment of your wants, would you do it then? I at least hope not, and if so, does that not prove that it is not the fulfillment of your wants that is the only decider? Does it not imply that there is something more to life other than yourself? We choose not to do it because we humans (generally, in my opinion) are good, and we are caring. Seeking mere happiness for oneself, is a great way to rot your soul.

In summary of this section, it is hopefully clear that your meaning in life is not only the fulfillment of your wants. Humans are caring beings; our troubles are not only about ourselves. We seek to help others; we seek to be kind, and we seek for a better tomorrow. In fact, this altruistic inner truth of humans is so strong that we might even voluntarily sacrifice ourselves (in some way) for the greater good. For these reasons, one ought to at least evaluate the morality of the action of plugging oneself into an "experience machine" for life.

Section 3: Ultimate happiness versus horrible reality

Feelings, as aforementioned, is what beautifies life. In fact, not only does it beautify it, but it also enriches it. When it comes to the question of meaning in life, if there is any, one surely must look to emotions. However, in my opinion, emotions are only meaningful so long as they exist within reality. But this begs the question: Would one rather choose to live in ultimate happiness or horrible reality? One could imagine a scenario where you got two options, two pills let's say, the one pill (black) makes you live in a hellish reality where everything is awful, but you at least do live amongst other subjects. The other pill (white) makes you live in a state of ultimate happiness; however, all your interactions is not with other subjects, rather just the illusion. Which pill would you swallow?

It is my opinion that the black pill is the righteous pill to swallow. This is because the depth of existence is reached in the communicative interactions of subjects, not in mere happiness. Happiness is not what ought to be chased, rather is it the unexplainable ineffable element of life: the play of human communicative interaction. For example, does one celebrate

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Christmas for its gifts, or is it for the gathering of the ones you love? The play of the interconnectedness of your existences is the real reason why we ought to celebrate our gatherings for.

To conclude this section, one ought to choose reality, however dark it is, over illusion, however bright it is. Because superior to emotions, is the togetherness of the subjects (humans).

Conclusion

In conclusion, should one plug oneself into an “experience machine” for the rest of one’s life, if given the opportunity to? My answer is no, firstly and mainly because I believe communicative interactions of subjects to be the meaning of life, and since an “experience machine” would presumably remove that, I see no meaning in such a machine. Secondly, I raise the argument that plugging into an “experience machine”, even if it fulfilled our wants for the rest of our life’s, is not what we necessarily want and ought to do. Humans, through our goodness, must first weigh the morality of such a decision, before choosing. Thirdly and lastly, I reinforce my view that the communicative interactions of subjects ought to be chosen over emotions by testing if it holds up at the extreme: even at the sacrifice of ultimate happiness, ought one choose reality.