Massey Albany Job Talk Hand-Out: Would You Plug into the Experience Machine?
Dan Weijers
danweijers@gmail.com, www.danweijers.com

Nozick's – Nozick, R., 1974. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.
Suppose that there were an experience machine that would give you any experience 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? If you are worried about missing out on desirable experiences, we can suppose that business enterprises have researched thoroughly the lives of many others. You can pick and choose from their large library or smorgasbord of such experiences, selecting your life's experiences for, say, the next two years. After two years have passed, you will have ten minutes or ten hours out of the tank, to select the experiences of your *next* two years. Of course, while in the tank you won't know that you're there; you'll think it's all actually happening. Others 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.) Would you plug in? *What else can matter to us, other than how our lives feel from the inside?* Nor should you refrain because of the few moments of distress between the moment you've decided and the moment you're plugged. What's a few moments of distress compared to a lifetime of bliss (if that's what you choose), and why feel any distress at all if your decision *is* the best one?

My Self
It's 2062 and you are riding a hovertube to town. You have been offered a permanent spot in an Experience Machine and are now trying to decide if you should accept.[/]You have had a go in an Experience Machine before and know that they provide an unpredictable roller-coaster ride of remarkable experiences. When in the machine, you still made autonomous decisions and faced tough situations, such as striving for your goals and feeling grief, but your experiences were vastly more enjoyable and varied. You also recall that, while you were in the Experience Machine, you had no idea that you had gotten into a machine or that your experiences were generated by a machine.[/]If you accept the spot, then you would stay in an Experience Machine permanently. If you reject the spot, then you would never be offered a spot again. Your life would be the same length in an Experience Machine as it would otherwise have been.[/]1) Ignoring how your family, friends, any other dependents, and society in general might be affected, and assuming that Experience Machines always work perfectly, what is the best thing for you to do *for yourself* in this situation?[/]Tick only one of these options: [/]You should accept the spot in an Experience Machine[/]You should *not* accept the spot in an Experience Machine[/]2) Briefly explain your choice:

My Stranger
It's 2062 and you are riding a hovertube to town. A stranger sits down next to you, introduces himself as Boris, and tells you that he has been offered a permanent spot in an Experience Machine. Although you would never actually tell Boris your opinion, you are trying to decide if you think he should accept.[/]You have had a go in an Experience Machine before and know that they provide an unpredictable roller-coaster ride of remarkable experiences. When in the machine, you still made autonomous decisions and faced tough situations, such as striving for your goals and feeling grief, but your experiences were vastly more enjoyable and varied. You also recall that, while you were in the

Experience Machine, you had no idea that you had gotten into a machine or that your experiences were generated by a machine.[/]If Boris accepts the spot, then he would stay in an Experience Machine permanently. If he rejects the spot, then he would never be offered a spot again. Boris' life would be the same length in an Experience Machine as it would otherwise have been.[/]1) Ignoring how Boris' family, friends, any other dependents, and society in general might be affected, and assuming that Experience Machines always work perfectly, what is the best thing for Boris to do *for himself* in this situation?[/]Tick only one of these options:[/]Boris should accept the spot in an Experience Machine[/]Boris should *not* accept the spot in an Experience Machine[/]2) Briefly explain your choice:

My Friend and Cousin
The Friend scenario makes Boris the participants' (unnamed) friend, instead of a stranger, and the cousin scenario makes Boris the participants' cousin (named Boris). Otherwise the scenarios remain the same as the Self and Stranger scenarios.

My Stranger No Status Quo
A stranger, named Boris, has just found out that he has been regularly switched between a real life and a life of machine-generated experiences (without ever being aware of the switches); 50% of his life has been spent in an Experience Machine and 50% in reality. Nearly all of Boris' most enjoyable experiences occurred while he was in an Experience Machine and nearly all of his least enjoyable experiences occurred while he was in reality. Boris now has to decide between living the rest of his life in an Experience Machine or in reality (no more switching).[/]You have had a go in an Experience Machine before and know that they provide an unpredictable roller-coaster ride of remarkable experiences. When in the machine, you still made autonomous decisions and faced tough situations, such as striving for your goals and feeling grief, but your experiences were vastly more enjoyable and varied. You also recall that, while you were in the Experience Machine, you had no idea that you had gotten into a machine or that your experiences were generated by a machine.[/]Boris' life will be the same length in an Experience Machine as it would in reality. No matter which option Boris chooses, you can be sure of two things. First, Boris' life will be very different from *your* current life. And second, Boris will have no memory of this choice and he will think that he is in reality.[/]1) Ignoring how Boris' family, friends, any other dependents, and society in general might be affected, and assuming that Experience Machines always work perfectly, what is the best thing for Boris to do *for himself* in this situation?[/]Tick only one of these options:[/]Boris should choose the Experience Machine life[/]Boris should choose the real life[/]2) Briefly explain your choice: