**The Experience Machine**

In his 1971 book Anarchy, State, and Utopia, Robert Nozick introduced a “thought experiment” that has become known as **“The Experience Machine”**

Suppose there were an experience machine that would give you any experience you desired. 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. Would you plug into this machine for life, preprogramming your life’s desires? 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?”

Questions for discussion:

1. Should you hook up to the experience machine for life, pre-programming all of your

life’s desires? Why or why not?

1. Would it make any difference to you if you were actually doing these things?  
   If in every respect it seems to you that you’re in a good situation, isn’t it true, at least for you, that you are in a good situation?
2. Do you care about certain things independent of the experiences they create for us? For example, is being in reality important even if the experience isn’t pleasant? Is it better to live happily in a delusion than miserably in reality? Why or why not?
3. How do we know that we are not in an experience machine? Can we prove we are not? How do we know that what we perceive is real?