

For thirty years, every day, Francis Johnson rolled a ball of twine. When he died it weighed nine tons and was twelve feet wide. Was his life meaningful?

Some thinkers insist that just because one wants or chooses something is insufficient for a meaningful life. Others suppose that, if we are lucky enough to spend our lives engaged in things we care most about, why isn't that sufficient?

'It is better to be a human being unsatisfied than a pig satisfied'.

John Stuart Mill thinks this is right because he thinks that pleasures are not equal. While humans have the capacity for both higher and lower pleasures, pigs do not. The Cynics, by contrast, disdain human culture and praise pure animal existence.

Imagine that you could plug into a happiness machine for the rest of your life. This machine would give you experiences of whatever kind made you happy. Would this be a good idea?

If, as Sidgwick thinks, 'people ultimately desire nothing else but happiness and pleasure', then this would be a good idea. Alternatively, you might think this would be a bad idea because it seems to matter both that our lives go well and that our state of mind is appropriately related to how things actually are. Finally, Orwell imagines a future world absent of deep pain and grief. He suggests that if we could not feel deep unhappiness and tragedy, we could not feel happiness.

What do You think?