

Title	Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind
Director	Michel Gondry
Date	2004
Area	Moral philosophy
Theme	Utilitarianism – experience machine
Plot Summary	<p>When Clementine (Kate Winslett) goes to Lacuna inc. to have her memories of ex-boyfriend Joel (Jim Carrey) erased, he retaliates by signing up for the same process to rid himself of his memories of her. But half way through the procedure he decides that he wants to hold on to those memories. Raises the question – are there any moral problems with memory erasure to rid oneself of painful memories? On utilitarian grounds it would be entirely legitimate, since all that is relevant is how much overall happiness an action produces. But is such a procedure morally questionable for other reasons? That is, is happiness, or lack of misery, the only moral consideration? And hence is there a problem with the utilitarian approach itself? The memory erasure process is like a reverse ‘experience machine’, one that erases painful memories rather than giving you wonderful experiences. (The ‘experience machine’ feeds signals into your brain so you have all sorts of wonderful experiences, but these things aren't really happening. So if you had the chance of being plugged in for life, with the prospect of endless pleasure, would you take it? Arguably, many would refuse; they would want to have real experiences, even though these are sometimes going to be unpleasant. This poses a problem because utilitarianism says that what we're aiming at is to be happy. If people value things other than happiness, there are difficulties with seeing how this can be built into utilitarianism.) Like the experience machine, it raises the question – is happiness the only thing important for us; and is there a problem with the utilitarian approach itself, which says that happiness is what we are aiming for above all?</p>
Key Scenes	
Relevant Text	<p>Christopher Grau, ‘Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind and the Morality of Memory’ Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 64 (1), available at: http://clemsun.academia.edu/grau/Papers/135061/Eternal_Sunshine_of_the_Spotless_Mind_and_the_Morality_of_Memory Robert Nozick. Anarchy, State, and Utopia. Basic Books, New York, 1974, pp. 42–45</p>