2015 Nammour Student Essay Competition: The Experience Machine

The Department of Philosophy and the Center for Practical and Professional Ethics at Sacramento State University is sponsoring a student essay competition in connection with the 2015 Nammour Symposium, which occurs April 8th and 9th. The competition is open to all students currently enrolled at Sacramento State University as well as those attending one of the community colleges in the Los Rios Community College District.

The theme of the 2015 Nammour Symposium is "Happiness" and the topic of the student essay competition is "The Experience Machine." This is the title of an influential passage by Robert Nozick, which you can find here.

Students are invited to write short critical essays focusing on this passage. Submissions should be between 1,500 and 3,000 words and must be capable of being presented in 20 minutes or less.

By engaging deeply with Nozick’s passage, The Experience Machine, Submissions should attempt to answer one of the following questions:

- What matters other than how people's experiences feel "from the inside"?
- What should matter other than how people's experiences feel "from the inside"?
- Is it in your best interests to plug in to Nozick’s, or any other, experience machine?

Students might consider following the format for writing analytical essays (located here), however this is not required. This passage from Nozick has been the subject of much discussion, which will be easy for you to locate. However, below are some muses—angles of approach or sources of inspiration—which may help you to get started with thinking about Nozick's piece.

- Use examples from films, such as The Matrix and Inception
- Discuss ways in which our thinking about what matters can be biased
- Use the distinction between a subjectively and an objectively good life
- Consider would it take for us to want to plug in to the experience machine
- Draw parallels with currently and potentially available drugs

Up to three winning essays will be selected, and each winner will receive $200. Authors of the winning essays are expected to present them during the student panel at the Nammour Symposium.

Submission Requirements

- Essays are due on April 1st. Late essays are not guaranteed consideration.
- Essays should be double-spaced and conform to Department writing and format guidelines. (http://www.csus.edu/phil/Guidance/WritingGuidelines.html)
- Submit your essay as an attachment to an e-mail to sacstatephil@gmail.com.
- Write "Nammour Student Essay Competition Submission" as the subject of the e-mail.
- Identify yourself in the e-mail, but do not write your name on the essay.

Supply both an e-mail (if different from the one you use to submit the essay) and a phone number at which you can be easily reached.