Assignment 3
Due: Wednesday, February 16 at 1:30pm
Length: 1800-2200 words

For students enrolled in the Writing in the Major version of the class, you will receive extensive comments on this paper, and there will be a required revision.

The papers will be graded without knowledge of your identity. Please submit the paper with YOUR STANFORD ID number on a cover page along with the WORD COUNT (not including footnotes/bibliography).

Your section leader will give you additional information regarding how to submit the assignment.

Do not plagiarize. Plagiarism frequently happens unintentionally, so if you are in doubt about your use of external sources, ask your instructor. Stanford’s plagiarism policy and further links: http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/communitystandards/integrity/plagiarism

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS
Choose one of the following paper topics. Your essay should state and defend a thesis. You must use and cite specific examples from our readings to illustrate and support your argument. Although we encourage you to draw on lectures and section discussions to elucidate your argument, you must foreground your own analysis of multiple readings, and demonstrate your use of them beyond merely revisiting quotes or arguments that were discussed in lectures and sections. The different questions also invite further research. You are encouraged to consult supplemental readings listed on the syllabus or through your own research.

Some Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper.
For any student who has never written a philosophy paper before, we strongly encourage you to read the paper writing guides on the course website.

Many students believe that writing a paper in philosophy is unlike any other kind of writing. This is an exaggeration. Writing a good philosophy paper is very much like writing a good paper in history, economics, literature, or biology. A good paper requires a particularly careful use of language and a particularly close examination of ideas and arguments. Because a good paper is a good paper, the guidelines sketched here apply with equal force in other courses as well.

It’s important, however, to stress just how central good writing is when doing philosophy. As a general matter, your writing is a good measure of your ability to communicate ideas. But in philosophy, the quality of your writing is not just a measure of your ability to communicate; it is also a measure of your ability to think. If you cannot express your thoughts in writing in a clear, concise, and cohesive manner, then your thoughts themselves are not clear, concise, or cohesive. Philosophical writing exercises your thinking; learning to write better is inseparable from learning to think better. In philosophy, becoming a good writer is the same thing as become a good thinker.

In addition, there are many excellent online resources for doing further research in philosophy. We especially recommend the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy ("the most interesting website on the internet"), and these entries in particular may be helpful:
Artificial Intelligence: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/artificial-intelligence/
Ethics of AI: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-ai/
Informed Consent: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/informed-consent/
Personal Autonomy: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/personal-autonomy/
Philosophy and Technology: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/technology/
History of Utilitarianism: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/utilitarianism-history/
Utilitarianism/Consequentialism: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/
Happiness: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/happiness/
Well-Being: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/well-being/
Rawls’s Theory of Justice: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rawls/
Isaiah Berlin and Value Pluralism: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/berlin/
Value Pluralism: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/value-pluralism
Philosophy of Digital Art: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/digital-art/
1. AI, VR, and the Metaverse

VR and virtual worlds (such as Second Life) are already here. And the metaverse is coming, or so we are told. One assumption is that in the near future human beings will spend more time in virtual worlds rather than the actual world. How should we think about the experiences we have in virtual spaces? Is it possible to have a good and meaningful life in the metaverse?

The philosopher David J. Chalmers says yes. “In principle, life in virtual reality can have the same sort of value as life in nonvirtual reality. To be sure, life in virtual reality can be good or bad, just as life in physical reality can. But if it’s bad, it won’t be bad simply because it’s virtual.” (Chalmers, Reality +, 2022, p. 312).

Write an essay that responds to Chalmers’s claim and that defends your own view about whether “virtual reality can have the same sort of value as life in nonvirtual reality.”

2. An AI Democracy?

It is 2028, and the country is coming together to vote on a highly contested presidential primary election. For the first time, in the state of California voters have a choice not only on who to vote for, but on how to vote for them.

Model 1. The traditional way. Cast a vote for your preferred candidate.

Model 2. The basic algorithmic model. The model knows the policy preferences of every candidate standing for office. Each citizen answers a survey asking them to state and weigh your policy preferences across a number of issues. With these inputs, an algorithmic model optimizes your choice of candidate, and automatically records your vote.

Model 3. The fully developed AI model. Citizens give an advanced app (highly secure, owned by the government or a trusted nonprofit) access to an ocean of data about them (race, gender, age, ethnicity, income, location, job, credit score, education, what you buy online, which websites you visit, your preferred level of taxation, your views about contested social issues, what you do on social media, friends on Facebook, etc.); the app then determines which candidate is best for you. The candidate that is better for most people wins the election. The algorithm improves over time by gathering information about how satisfied people were at the end of the term of the elected official.

A combination of technologists and democratic theorists argue that we should adopt model 3. Imagine, they say, a democracy without election campaigns. No negative advertising, no electoral misinformation and disinformation. No citizens who vote on the basis of irrelevant factors or irrational responses to candidates (such as the well known finding the voters reliably prefer taller to shorter candidates).

Write an essay that assesses what would be gained and lost in model 3. Be sure to include in your answer a clear argument about whether, all things considered, we should or should not adopt the model.
3. AI and Art

“Art is what you can get away with.” Andy Warhol

Of the potential uses of AI and autonomous systems, one of the most seemingly innocuous and even hopeful might be the use of AI by artists and technologists to create new kinds of art experiences and exhibitions. Some of these integrations of AI into Art have been focused on collaboration and participatory artwork. We have seen increases for instance in Immersive Art experiences, especially in the Bay Area. Companies like TeamLabs produce interactive art exhibits projected on museum walls where visitors can change the artwork with the movement of their bodies. Other art exhibits involving AI remove the human element all together. In 2019, HG Contemporary Gallery in New York, had an exhibition of prints created entirely by AI which was the first solo gallery devoted to an AI artist.

Write an essay that explains how we ought to think about a future of AI artistic expression.

Your essay can explore many different considerations, but it must address the following questions:

- What level of physical materiality is required for something to be art?
- What level of human contribution is required for something to be art?
- Is AI capable of artistic creativity?
- If an algorithm can generate a portrait in the style of some other artist, who is the rightful owner of that work?