

Future Politics Political Science 300

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Moodle: <https://learn.illinois.edu/course/view.php?id=144>

Blog: <http://future-politics.org>

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General Information

Where/When We meet in 222 David Kinley Hall on Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:00 am to 12:20 pm.

We will use a Moodle system for assignments and some communication. The enrollment key is thefutureisnow!. Please enroll immediately.

Office Hours My office hours are 2–4 PM Mondays in 432 David Kinley Hall. Please make an appointment if you want to come to office hours. I'm also happy to meet outside of office hours. Of course, feel free to drop by my office during office hours (or other times). Yet, I can only guarantee that I'll be there if you make an appointment.

Overview

What can political science learn from science fiction? How can we use what we currently know about politics, society, and economics to more create plausible and compelling visions of the future? How can imagining the future help us understand the present? How does considering the future help us think critically about politics today? In this course we will read social science and political philosophy together with science fiction in an attempt to enhance the political, social and economic imagination of the social sciences.

College seminars offer us the opportunity to read and reflect and discuss (and thereby refine and reconfigure our own reflections). I think of a college seminar as a kind of guided self-study group. The students arrive because they are interested in a topic broadly. My job is to help focus the reading and discussion: I have read more of these writing than you have, and I have given some extra thought to the question about how participants in a self-study group might get the most from their participation in such a group. To this end, this course offers multiple opportunities for reflection and engagement with the material: if you don't get it the first time, you'll have multiple opportunities to work to get it. For example, the reflection part of the course will occur (1) on our own while reading and writing summaries, (2) perhaps with informal groups of others meeting for lunch or coffee before/after class meetings, (3) during class meetings themselves before, during, and after the group work of the class, (4) in synthesizing across the material during the blog writing assignment, (5) writing your own final papers and (6) in helping each other with the drafts of your final papers.

Goals and Expectations

You will read a science fiction novel almost every week (scheduled to occur over a weekend for discussion on Mondays), and also a shorter work of political theory or another politically relevant essay (scheduled for discussion on Wednesdays). Our discussions will be very structured and mostly involve work in class in groups. In order for you and your colleagues to get the most out of this class, I have designed the following requirements:

Attendance Regular attendance is required. I will consider an absence excused if you have an appropriate note from a dean, doctor, or lawyer. See http://admin.illinois.edu/policy/code/article1_part5_1-501.html for the official University policy on absences. You may have two unexcused absences this term. Other absences will count as zeros in your in-class involvement grade.

Daily Work By 9am the day of class, each person will have submitted a discussion question on the class Moodle. The point of this assignment is to (1) ensure that the quality of our in class discussions is high, (2) provide some impetus for you to make time to do the reading, (3) let me know what you are thinking about the material and (4) give chances for shy folks to get credit for quality class participation — by writing thoughtful discussion questions. I will grade them as unsatisfactory(C), satisfactory(B), excellent(A) taking into account *engagement with the material, understanding of the material, and writing skills*. An excellent question shows deep reading *and* creative thinking: it does not have to be long. An unsatisfactory question shows little engagement with the reading, little comprehension of it, and/or poor writing. Poor writing alone is enough for a low grade.

You will not be able to turn in these questions late, since I will be use the time between the deadline and class time to read your questions.

In calculating the grade based on the reading questions, I'll drop your lowest three scores. This means that you can either skip the assignment three times with no penalty or you can turn in ill-considered or poorly-written questions three times with no penalty.

Blog I have created a blog for our class at <http://future-politics.org>. Every Friday, two of you will write a blog post (of about two printed pages in length) in which you (a) summarize the science fiction work of the week from the perspective of the political, social, and economic content of the work, (b) report on the political and social commentary the author makes, (c) report on what our class found notable or questionable or otherwise worthy of focus. This blog is indexed by Google and we are reading very popular science fiction authors. So, this assignment (done once per person per term) will deserve some care and focus.

Paper Although most of the course involves close engagement with reading and topics defined here in the syllabus the course ends with a focus on your own ideas and topics. Most importantly, we will have a final assignment; a paper of speculative and critical futurism on a topic of your own choosing. The paper ought not be very long (no more than 10 pages). It should begin with a datum, a piece of fairly well substantiated information about the current world. For example, the datum could be a policy that has been passed into law by some legislature, or it could be a fact about the social, political, and/or economic world. It could be a chart (for example, the trend in economic inequality in the USA, or the trend in voting turnout, or the trend in cell phone usage). It could be a number (for example, the current estimate of the concentration of income in the USA, or the current best estimate of the voting turnout of people aged 18 to 21). Your job will be to appeal to the works that we have read this term (fiction and non-fiction) to craft your own critical piece of extrapolation. This is not a short story, although it ought to be imaginative. The main questions I will be asking about this paper are (1) Did you engage with the works read in this class?, (2) Do your claims plausibly follow from one another (remember this is critical extrapolation not science fiction) and/or does your own writing make a strong and engaging criticism/defense of the state of the world generating the datum, (3) Does your writing clarify rather than confuse?

So, this paper will be an exercise in synthetic and analytic future-oriented political, social, and economic thinking as well as an opportunity to practice writing a medium length essay.

We will be devoting class time toward the end of the course to reading exemplars of this kind of writing, and will also have a few days devoted to discussing drafts of each others' work.

Commentary Commenting on colleagues' work is an exercise in sensitivity and honesty and critical thinking. Just as we'll hone our reading skills, critical thinking skills, and imaginations in other parts of the class, we'll work on how to provide constructive criticism to others during our draft workshops. These workshops will also help those who are circulating drafts fine-tune and deepen their own analyses as the class as a whole reflects along with the paper writers on the topics of interest. I will require that you turn in written commentary (maximum 1 page) for each draft we read (except on your own drafts). I will grade this commentary as C, B or A (a meager effort, satisfactory, excellent) according to your *engagement with*

the writer, understanding of the material, writing skills, synthetic and analytic thinking, and helpfulness and honesty.

Draft comments may not be turned in late because your colleagues will need them to improve their papers.

Involvement Quality class participation does not mean “talking a lot.” It includes turning in assignments on time; attending classes; arriving on time; thinking and caring about the material and expressing your thoughts respectfully and succinctly in class.

The best in-class participation that I have seen has come from people who have done the reading carefully and then listen closely to their classmates and respond thoughtfully (if possibly critically or supportively). This class is not a place to make speeches. Nor is it a place to sit in silence. You get credit for daring to guess or giving unexpected answers. Although I will call for volunteers to answer the questions I pose, I will probably call on you if you consistently don’t raise your hand or if you keep avoiding my gaze.

Texts **BRING TEXTS TO CLASS EVERY TIME.** We will be working closely with them in class. Most of the readings assigned here will be made available on the Moodle or are downloadable from the web. The science fiction books are mostly purchasable in electronic format.

Grades I’ll calculate your grade for the course this way: 20% blog posting quality, 30% final paper quality, 20% discussion question quality, 20% in-class involvement quality, 10% draft commentary quality.

I do not curve. If all of you perform excellently, then I will say so to the computer system of the University. That said, I am a hard grader with very high standards: I have never given all As, or even mostly As. I hope I can assign all A’s this term.

All written work in this class will assume familiarity with the principles of good writing in [Becker \(1986\)](#). If you do not know why one should avoid the passive voice, ask me in class or in office hours and I will post relevant chapters from Becker on the topic.

Conduct I expect you to observe the University of Illinois Campus Code of Conduct when writing your papers (and in general) (http://admin.illinois.edu/policy/code/article1_part4_1-402.html). So, for example, do not use the words of others without proper attribution.

List of Assigned Readings

Some of these readings will be assigned only in part — i.e. only chapters or sections. Other readings will be available for free online. Most articles will be provided by me. See the Schedule of classes for this information before buying a given reading.

Bacigalupi, P. (2010). Calorie man. In *Pump Six and Other Stories*. Nightshade Book.

Banks, I. M. (2008). *The Player of Games*. Orbit.

Becker, H. S. (1986). *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. University of Chicago Press.

Callenbach, E. (1990). *Ecotopia*. Bantam Books.

Cascio, J. and Brin, D. (2007). Politics: Participatory panopticon. Whitepaper.

Constant, B. (1988). The liberty of the ancients compared with that of the moderns. In *Political Writings*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Diamond, J. (2005). *Collapse : How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. Penguin (Non-Classics).

Doctorow, C. (2008). *Little Brother*. Tor Teen.

Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline & Punish : The Birth of the Prison (Vintage)*. Vintage, reprint edition.

- Hearne, V. and McCaig, D. (2007). *Adam's task: Calling animals by name*. Skyhorse Pub Co Inc.
- Marcuse, H. (1964). *One-dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*.
- Niccol, A. (1997). *Gattaca [Motion picture]*. Columbia TriStar Pictures.
- Niven, L. (1973). Flash crowd. In *The flight of the horse*. Ballantine Books.
- Ollman, B. (1977). Marx's vision of communism a reconstruction. *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, 8(1):4-41.
- Pohl, F. and Kornbluth, C. (1953). *The space merchants*.
- Rousseau, J. (1985). *The Government of Poland*. Hackett Pub Co Inc.
- Stephenson, N. (2000). *The Diamond Age*. Bantam Books.
- Sterling, B. (1996). *Holy Fire*. Bantam Books.
- Stross, C. (2006). *Accelerando*. Orbit.

Computing and Writing

The discussion questions on the Moodle will mostly just be typed directly into the Moodle text editor.

The blog postings can use other tools, although I'll encourage you to use the Wordpress blog posting editor.

We will write comments on drafts using a forum on the Moodle.

If you turn in a paper in electronic form it must be in pdf format otherwise you'll need to turn them in as hard-copy.¹ I will not count papers in other forms as turned in. If you turn in a Microsoft Word/OpenOffice Writer/Apple Pages document, I will not count it as having been turned in.

Schedule

Note: This schedule is preliminary and subject to change. If you miss a class make sure you contact me or one of your colleagues to find out about changes in the lesson plans or assignments.

PART I WHAT IS THE POLITICAL IMAGINATION? HOW CAN SCIENCE FICTION BE POLITICAL?

Wednesday, January 18—Course Overview, Motivation, Expectations

Today we will discuss why science fiction might be usefully paired with political philosophy and social science in general as a way to deepen and broaden our thinking about politics, society and the economy. Here is one answer to this question provided by Paul Krugman:

So, the obvious question: what am I [Paul Krugman, Nobel Prize Winner in Economics], of all people, doing as host of this symposium [on the work of science fiction writer, Charles Stross]? Shouldn't I be writing about financial catastrophe or something?

The long answer is that what drew me to science fiction, more than four decades ago — before I got into economics, and in fact part of the reason I went into economics — was a certain kind of possibility: the creation of fictional worlds, different from our own but not too different, as a way to play with ideas about who we are and where we're going. And I do mean "play" — not being too serious, mixing ideas about society, economics, politics, and so on with derring-do and romance is crucial to keeping things light enough to tolerate.²

¹ Actually, I'll accept documents in postscript or html as well.

² <http://firedoglake.com/2010/03/21/fdl-book-salon-welcomes-charlie-stross-the-trade-of-queens-book-six-of-the>

Monday, January 23—Does technology help the *demos* or hurt the people by helping the mob?

Discuss Niven, L. (1973). Flash crowd. In *The flight of the horse*. Ballantine Books [Download from Moodle]

PART II THE DISCIPLINARY SOCIETY AND THE HACKER

Wednesday, January 25—How can technology shape and control the individual?

Discuss Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline & Punish : The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage). Vintage, reprint edition Chapter on “Panopticism” from <http://cartome.org/foucault.htm>

Friday, January 27—Blog

Due: A 1–2 paragraph summary of Niven’s piece and a 1–2 paragraph description of Niven’s piece as social/political criticism and/or critical extrapolation. The total printed length of the post should be 2–4 pages. Feel free to include images or links.

Monday, January 30—What is the meaning of the surveilled life?

Discuss Sterling, B. (1996). *Holy Fire*. Bantam Books [buy in Amazon Kindle store. Free Kindle reader available for almost all platforms]

Wednesday, February 1—What does privacy have to do with politics?

Discuss Cascio, J. and Brin, D. (2007). Politics: Participatory panopticon. Whitepaper

Friday, February 3—Blog

Due: Blog posting.

Monday, February 6—How can technology enhance freedom?

Discuss Doctorow, C. (2008). *Little Brother*. Tor Teen (download for free from <http://craphound.com/littlebrother/>)

Wednesday, February 8—Isn’t education merely another form of discipline?

Discuss: Hearne, V. and McCaig, D. (2007). *Adam’s task: Calling animals by name*. Skyhorse Pub Co Inc [“How to Say Fetch!”]

Friday, February 10—Blog

Due: Blog posting.

Monday, February 13—How much subversion is important in socialization?

Discuss: Stephenson, N. (2000). *The Diamond Age*. Bantam Books

Wednesday, February 15—What is the state’s interest in education?

Discuss Rousseau, J. (1985). *The Government of Poland*. Hackett Pub Co Inc (see online <http://www.constitution.org/jjr/poland.htm>) [Chapters 2,3,4,13]

Friday, February 17—Blog

Due: Blog posting.

Monday, February 20—Is control over reproduction itself a good or bad thing?

Discuss Niccol, A. (1997). *Gattaca* [Motion picture]. Columbia TriStar Pictures(movie)

PART III WORK AND MONEY: THE MEANINGFUL LIFE AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

Wednesday, February 22—What was Marx’s vision of the future good life?

Discuss: Ollman, B. (1977). Marx’s vision of communism a reconstruction. *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, 8(1):4-41

Friday, February 24—Blog

Due: Blog posting.

Monday, February 27—How might “capitalism” and “communism” depend on technology and definitions of “person”?

Discuss: Stross, C. (2006). *Accelerando*. Orbit (download for free from <http://manybooks.net/titles/strosscother05accelerando-txt.html> and or <http://www.antipope.org/charlie/blog-static/fiction/accelerando/accelerando-intro.html>)

Wednesday, February 29—How might technology and capitalism be worse than totalitarianism?

Discuss Marcuse, H. (1964). *One-dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* [Introduction, Chapters 1 & 10] (download for free from <http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/64onedim/odmcontents.html>)

Friday, March 2—Blog

Due: Blog posting.

Monday, March 5—What does buying stuff have to do with politics?

Discuss Pohl, F. and Kornbluth, C. (1953). *The space merchants*

Wednesday, March 7—How might a free market help the poor?

Discuss Watch the ILD documentary “The Mystery of Capital among the Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon” at <http://www.ild.org.pe/indigenous-peoples-amazon/video> [about 20 mins] and http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/commandingheights/shared/minitext/int_hernandodesoto.html [about 7 mins]

Friday, March 9—Blog

Due: Blog posting.

Monday, March 12—Another conception of freedom: Ecotopia.

Discuss: Callenbach, E. (1990). *Ecotopia*. Bantam Books

Wednesday, March 14—Should our technology free us from politics?

Discuss Constant, B. (1988). The liberty of the ancients compared with that of the moderns. In *Political Writings*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (download pdf from the moodle)

Friday, March 16—Blog

Due: Blog posting.

Monday, March 19—Spring Break.

Wednesday, March 21—Spring Break.

Monday, March 26—No Class.

Wednesday, March 28—Why be “political” after the singularity?

Discuss Banks, I. M. (2008). *The Player of Games*. Orbit[first part] Also TBA “A Few Notes on the Culture” by Banks.

Friday, March 30—Blog

Due: Blog posting.

Monday, April 2—What happens to politics post-collapse?

Discuss Bacigalupi, P. (2010). Calorie man. In *Pump Six and Other Stories*. Nightshade Book

Wednesday, April 4—How can politics work against sustainable civilization?

Discuss Diamond, J. (2005). *Collapse : How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. Penguin (Non-Classics) [Chap 6 and 14] and
Jared Diamond talk on why societies collapse: http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/jared_diamond_on_why_societies_collapse.html

Friday, April 6—Blog

Due: Blog posting.

PART IV FOCUS ON PAPERS

Monday, April 9—How might we write about the future (Part 1)?

Discuss

- <http://www.fastcompany.com/blog/jamais-cascio/open-future/three-possible-economic-models-part-1>
- <http://www.fastcompany.com/blog/jamais-cascio/open-future/three-possible-economic-models-part-ii>
- <http://www.fastcompany.com/blog/jamais-cascio/open-future/futures-thinking-basics>

Wednesday, April 11—No Class

Friday, April 13—Blog

Due: Blog posting.

Monday, April 16—How might we write about the future (Part 2)?

Discuss

- <http://www.fastcompany.com/blog/jamais-cascio/open-future/futures-thinking-asking-question>
- <http://www.fastcompany.com/blog/jamais-cascio/open-future/futures-thinking-scanning-world>
- <http://www.fastcompany.com/blog/jamais-cascio/open-future/futures-thinking-mapping-possibilities-part-1>
- <http://www.fastcompany.com/1547923/futures-thinking-mapping-the-possibilities-part-2>

- <http://www.fastcompany.com/1560416/futures-thinking-writing-scenarios>
- <http://www.fastcompany.com/1617780/futures-thinking-a-bibliography>

Wednesday, April 18— How should we write scholarly papers?

Discuss Becker, H. S. (1986). *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. University of Chicago Press [Chapter 2 and 4]

Monday, April 23—Draft Workshop 1

Discuss Selected Drafts

Wednesday, April 25—Draft Workshop 2

Discuss Selected Drafts

Monday, April 30—Draft Workshop 3

Discuss Selected Drafts

Wednesday, May 2—Draft Workshop 4

Discuss Topics Chosen by Class and/or Selected Drafts

PAPERS DUE Fri, May 4 by 5pm