

Future Politics Political Science 300

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Moodle: <https://learn.illinois.edu/course/view.php?id=4465>

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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 Wed 2–4pm 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). Of course, I can only guarantee that I'll be there if you make an appointment.

Overview

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. The future hopes and imaginings of past political thinkers do not include either enough detail or enough information about our rapidly changing technological, social, political, and economic landscape to provide us with enough practice to confidently confront the future as citizens as it happens to us. Science fiction allows us a much more detailed view of life in alternative futures, and the writers that we choose to read here tend to think seriously and logically about how current cutting edge technology might have social and political ramifications — however, science fiction authors are also mostly working on a narrative and thus may skim over core concepts that ought to organize our thinking about politics and society. Thus, we read both together in order to practice a kind of theoretically informed futurism (which is not the same as prediction or forecasting, but is more like the practice of confronting the unexpected).

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 pieces 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 as you write the assigned papers, and (5) in helping each other with the drafts of your 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).

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 morning before each 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-73), satisfactory(B-83), excellent(A-93) 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 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.

Papers Although most of the course involves close engagement with reading and topics defined here in the syllabus, it is important you have a chance to engage with the material on your own — choosing your own books, movies, etc. . . to discuss. You will have a chance to write 2 short papers on a book, movie, or other work of science fiction or political theory. The paper ought not be very long (no more than 15 pages).

One idea for a paper involves your own critical extrapolation (i.e. futurism following the Cascio readings assigned below). Another idea would involve the use of some piece of science fiction in discussion with some of the ideas from political theory that we will engage. You are free to propose your own ideas for these papers.

I do not imagine that you will write short stories, although I suspect that imagination should play an important role in your work. 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, these papers 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 have a session to read each others work in draft form before the final versions of the papers are turned in.

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 1/2 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. If you attend class but never speak, you will get a C+ (77), if you engage in minimal discussion or discussion that does not appear to pertain to the reading or the flow of the class discussion, you will get a B (83). Energetic and thoughtful discussion on topic receives an A (93).

Forum discussions In order to help you all synthesize and process the in-class discussions, we will have Forum on the Moodle where you can continue the discussions after class. No one is required to participate in the forum. However, participation in the forum can help improve your in-class participation grades. For example, if you attend class but do not speak you will receive a C+ for in-class discussion. If you later post a thoughtful comment on the Forum, I could increase your in-class discussion grade to an A: my current proposed formula is $\max((1/4) \cdot \text{in-class grade} + (3/4) \cdot \text{forum grade}, \text{in-class grade})$. So, if you attended class but did not participate but posted a great and thoughtful comment in the forum, the formula would apply like so: $(1/4)77 + (3/4)100 = 94$. No more than twice in the term you may post in the discussion forum if you missed class. In case of a missed class, the same formula will apply, such that a superb forum comment would yield $(1/4)0 + (3/4)100 = 75$ (a C).

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% for the first paper you write, 30% for the second paper you write, 20% discussion question quality, 20% in-class involvement quality (including attendance) , 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.

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.

Blomkamp, N. (2013). *Elysium [Motion picture]*. Columbia TriStar Pictures.

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

- 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.
- Heinlein, R. A. (1961). *Stranger in a strange land*. Penguin.
- Huxley, A. (1998). *Brave New World [1932]*. London: Vintage.
- Jonze, S. (2013). *Her [Motion picture]*. Annapurna Pictures.
- Le Guin, U. (2003). *The Dispossessed*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics.
- Marcuse, H. (1964). *One-dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*.
- Niccol, A. (1997). *Gattaca [Motion picture]*. Columbia TriStar Pictures.
- 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.

Computing and Writing

The discussion questions on the Moodle will mostly just be typed directly into the Moodle text 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 MODES OF THE POLITICAL IMAGINATION: HOW CAN SCIENCE FICTION BE POLITICAL?

Wednesday, January 22—Course Overview, Motivation, Expectations

Today we will discuss why science fiction might be usefully paired with political philosophy and social science 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

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

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

Monday, January 27—How might we write about the future?

Discuss

- <http://www.wired.com/gadgetlab/2012/12/ff-robots-will-take-our-jobs/all/>
- <http://www.fastcompany.com/blog/jamais-cascio/open-future/futures-thinking-basics>
- <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>

Extra

- <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/1617780/futures-thinking-a-bibliography>

PART II HACKING THE DISCIPLINARY SOCIETY

Wednesday, January 29—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>

Monday, February 3—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 5— Education and discipline?

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]

Monday, February 10—How can technology enhance freedom?

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

Wednesday, February 12—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!"]

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

Monday, February 17—How much subversion is important in socialization?

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

PART III CHANGING WORK AND CHANGING POLITICS

Wednesday, February 19—What was Marx’s future politics?

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

Monday, February 24—Problems in utopia?

Discuss Blomkamp, N. (2013). *Elysium [Motion picture]*. Columbia TriStar Pictures
Edward Halter’s analysis, <http://www.artforum.com/slant/id=44552>

Wednesday, February 26—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>)

Monday, March 3—Consumerism as control?

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

Wednesday, March 5—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]

Monday, March 10—Another conception of freedom: Ecotopia.

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

Wednesday, March 12—What is the future for?.

Discuss: Kim Stanley Robinson’s speech: <http://www.momaps1.org/expo1/event/kim-stanley-robinson-keynote-address/>
and
Roy Stanton’s editorial <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/10/learning-how-to-die-in-the-anthropocene/>

Friday, March 14—Short Paper 1 Drafts Due

Please upload your draft to the Moodle for the class to read. Unless you have advance permission to use another format please upload the paper in PDF format only.

Monday, March 17—Short Paper 1 Draft Discussion

Discuss Drafts of Short Paper 1.

Wednesday, March 19—TBA.

Friday, March 21—Short Paper 1 Due

Please upload your final version of short paper 1 to the Moodle for me to grade. Unless you have advance permission to use another format please upload the paper in PDF format only.

Monday, March 24—Spring Break.

Wednesday, March 26—Spring Break.

Monday, March 31— No Class

Wednesday, April 2—Another vision of organization: anarchy.

Le Guin, U. (2003). *The Dispossessed*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics

Monday, April 7—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]

Extra Jared Diamond talk on why societies collapse:

http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/jared_diamond_on_why_societies_collapse.html

Wednesday, April 9— Social Control and Discipline

Discuss Huxley, A. (1998). *Brave New World [1932]*. London: Vintage

Monday, April 14—Post singularity politics?

Discuss Banks, I. M. (2008). *The Player of Games*. Orbit[first part]

Wednesday, April 16—Politics in space/post-singularity?

Discuss “A Few Notes on the Culture” (Iain Banks) <http://www.vavatch.co.uk/books/banks/cultnote.htm>

Monday, April 21—Return to questions of authority, discipline, and political morality.

Discuss Heinlein, R. A. (1961). *Stranger in a strange land*. Penguin

Wednesday, April 23—Relationships with Technology

Discuss Jonze, S. (2013). *Her [Motion picture]*. Annapurna Pictures

Monday, April 28—Distribution and Bodies: The Creation of Scarcity

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

Wednesday, April 30—Paper Meetings In Class

Friday, May 2—Short Paper 2 Drafts Due

Please upload your draft to the Moodle for the class to read. Unless you have advance permission to use another format please upload the paper in PDF format only.

Each class member will be assigned to read and comment on approx. 5 papers. Comments will be due by Monday.

Monday, May 5—No Class

Wednesday, May 7—No Class

Maybe also:

One the importance of the freedom to speculate about consequences:

http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2011/01/the_purpose_of_science_fiction_single.html

The need for utopias

<http://www.antipope.org/charlie/blog-static/2010/12/utopia.html>

Short Paper 2 Due between May 9 and May 16

Please upload your final version of short paper 2 to the Moodle for me to grade. Unless you have advance permission to use another format please upload the paper in PDF format only.