

## Future Politics Political Science 300

Jake Bowers

jwbowers@illinois.edu

Moodle: <http://cho.pol.uiuc.edu/moodle/course/view.php?id=10>

Fall 2010

### General Information

*Where/When* We meet in 313 Gregory Hall Mondays and Wednesdays from 2:30 to 3:50 PM.

We will use a Moodle system for the class. The enrollment key is `thefutureisnow!`. Please enroll immediately.

*Office Hours* My office hours are 12–1 PM Mondays and Wednesdays in 231 Computing Applications Building (CAB). I will have three 20 minute meetings available for each office hour: You can choose 12:00–12:20, 12:20–12:40, or 12:40–1:00. Please make an appointment if you want to come to office hours. I'm also happy to meet outside of office hours. Let me know and I'll try to fit you in. 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 does considering the future help us think critically about politics today? In this course we will read works of political theory together with science fiction in an attempt to enhance the currently impoverished social scientific imagination and to help guide reflections on current theories of politics, economics, and society.

This year, the first part of the course, "Things", will be oriented around Herbert Marcuse's criticisms of capitalist democracy. The second part, "Persons", will respond to Martha Nussbaum's creation of a political theory meant to guide United Nations policy on the basis of a conception of "the human." And the third, "Food", will involve engagement with questions about the natural world.

We choose to take seminars so that we may have the opportunity to read and reflect. In particular, we take seminars to engage with complex or difficult ideas. 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 short writing assignments and (5) in helping each other with the drafts of your reflection papers.

### Goals and Expectations

You will read a science fiction novel 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](http://admin.illinois.edu/policy/code/article1_part5_1-501.html) for the official University policy on absences. You may have one unexcused absence this term. Other absences will count as zeros in your in-class involvement grade.

*Summaries* By 11am the day of class, each person will have submitted a two paragraph writing assignment on the class Moodle: one paragraph summarizing the plot of the reading (what the author *says*) and the other paragraph summarizing the issues engaged by the author (what the reading was *about*). The total writing for this assignment should not exceed 1 page.

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 reading summaries. 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 summary 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 summaries late, since I will be use the time between the deadline and class time to grade your summaries.

In calculating the grade based on the reading summaries, 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 summaries three times with no penalty.

*Reflections* What do these various thinkers and works have to say to each other? The in-class exercises and the reading summaries will help us develop our reading and analysis skills regarding particular works. The short-reflection papers (roughly 5–10 pages) will require synthesis across the readings of a part of the course.

Each person will write two such reflection papers this term—choosing one class part for synthesis and analysis for each paper (the parts are “Things”, “Persons”, “Food”). Outside reading will be encouraged (following, for example, some of the resources listed at the end of this syllabus), but will not be required. I will grade them using the standard letter scale taking into account *engagement with the material, understanding of the material, writing skills, and synthetic and analytic thinking*.

Drafts of each of these short pieces of writing will be read by the whole class and commented on in a workshop devoted to them a week before they are due. I will grade the drafts.

If the paper you turn in is graded higher than your draft grade, your paper grade will reflect only the turned-in paper grade.

If your turned-in paper grade is lower than your draft grade, your paper grade will be the average of the two grades.

You may not turn in Reflections papers drafts late. You may turn in Reflection papers final versions late, but you will lose  $\frac{1}{3}$  letter grade for each day that you are late.

*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 three 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 previous segment of the class. 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 really 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.

*Grades* I’ll calculate your grade for the course this way: 40% short paper quality, 30% reading summary 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 more than 3 A’s to a 20 person undergraduate class. 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.

*Finally.* 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](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.

Brooks, M. (2007). *World War Z: an oral history of the zombie war*. Three Rivers Press.

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

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

Connolly, W. (2010). Materialities of experience. *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, page 178.

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

Deneulin, S. and Shahani, L. (2009). *An Introduction to the Human Development and Capability Approach: Freedom and Agency*. Earthscan/James & James.

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

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

Doctorow, C. (2009). *Makers*.

Duff, B. (2011). *The Parent as Citizen: A Democratic Dilemma*. University Of Minnesota Press.

James, P. (2005). *The children of men*. Vintage Canada, 2005.

Marcuse, H. (1964). *One-dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*.

- Niccol, A. (1997). *Gattaca* [Motion picture]. Columbia TriStar Pictures.
- Pohl, F. and Kornbluth, C. (1953). *The space merchants*.
- Pollan, M. (2006). *The omnivore's dilemma: a natural history of four meals*. Univ California Press.
- Riley, D. (2005). *Impersonal passion: language as affect*. Duke University Press.
- Rose, N. (2001). *Politics of life itself*.
- Sandel, M. J. (2009). *JUSTICE: What's the Right Thing to Do?* Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Stephenson, N. (2000). *Snow crash*. Spectra.
- Stross, C. (2006). *Accelerando*. Orbit.
- Stross, C. (2007). *Halting state*. Ace Books.
- Whyte, W. and Blasi, J. (1982). Worker ownership, participation and control: toward a theoretical model. *Policy Sciences*, 14(2):137–163.

## Computing and Writing

Most of our work will just be plain text writing online using the Moodle.

If you turn in a paper in electronic form (via the class Moodle) it must be in pdf format otherwise you'll need to turn them in as hard-copy.<sup>1</sup> I will not count papers in other forms as turned in. If you turn in a Microsoft Word/OpenOffice Writer/Apple Pages/Google Docs document, it will not be counted 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.

### Mon 23<sup>rd</sup> Aug, 2010—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 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.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Actually, I'll accept documents in postscript or html as well.

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

## PART I THINGS

**Wed 25<sup>th</sup> Aug, 2010—Is technology bad for people and politics?**

**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>)

**Mon 30<sup>th</sup> Aug, 2010—Is technology good for people and politics?**

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

**Wed 1<sup>st</sup> Sept, 2010—No Class — APSA****Mon 6<sup>th</sup> Sept, 2010—No Class — Labor Day****Wed 8<sup>th</sup> Sept, 2010—What might be the political consequences of making things?**

The ownership of the means of production and the division of labor have long been thought to be politically consequential. What kinds of new organizations of economic life might lead to what new political outcomes?

**Discuss** Doctorow, C. (2009). *Makers*[Part 1] (download for free from <http://craphound.com/makers/>)

**Mon 13<sup>th</sup> Sept, 2010—What might be the political consequences of pervasive technology?**

**Discuss** Stross, C. (2007). *Halting state*. Ace Books

**DUE** Indication of intent to write the first reflection paper.

**Wed 15<sup>th</sup> Sept, 2010—What does privacy have to do with politics?**

**Discuss** Connolly, W. (2010). Materialities of experience. *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, page 178  
Cascio, J. and Brin, D. (2007). Politics: Participatory panopticon. Whitepaper

**Mon 20<sup>th</sup> Sept, 2010—What does buying stuff have to do with politics?**

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

**Wed 22<sup>nd</sup> Sept, 2010—In defense of capitalism: Hernando de Soto's concern for 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](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/commandingheights/shared/minitext/int_hernandodesoto.html) [about 7 mins]

**DUE Fri 24 Sept, 2010 by 5pm—Part 1 Reflections Drafts**

Upload drafts to the Moodle forum for Part 1 Reflections Drafts.

**Mon 27<sup>th</sup> Sept, 2010—Part 1 Reflections Draft Workshop**

**Discuss** The drafts of the first set of reflection papers.

## PART II PERSONS

**Wed 29<sup>th</sup> Sept, 2010—How might politics depend on a definition of a person?**

Deneulin, S. and Shahani, L. (2009). *An Introduction to the Human Development and Capability Approach: Freedom and Agency*. Earthscan/James & James, Chapters 2 and 3

**DUE Fri 1 Oct, 2010 by 5pm—Part 1 Reflections Papers**

Upload drafts to the Moodle forum for Part 1 Reflections papers.

**Mon 4<sup>th</sup> Oct, 2010—How might the definition of a person change and change politics?**

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>)

**Wed 6<sup>th</sup> Oct, 2010—What is the point of politics?**

Rose, N. (2001). Politics of life itself (download pdf from class website)

**Mon 11<sup>th</sup> Oct, 2010—Who does the polity serve?**

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

**DUE** Indication of intent to write the second reflection paper.

**Wed 13<sup>th</sup> Oct, 2010—TBA**

**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)

**Mon 18<sup>th</sup> Oct, 2010— Why be “political”?**

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

**Wed 20<sup>th</sup> Oct, 2010—How can language be political?**

**Discuss** Riley, D. (2005). *Impersonal passion: language as affect*. Duke University Press, Chapter 1

**Mon 25<sup>th</sup> Oct, 2010—How might the political use of language depend on technology?**

**Discuss** Stephenson, N. (2000). *Snow crash*. Spectra

**PART III FOOD**

...and how people organize to get it/keep it/make it.

**Wed 27<sup>th</sup> Oct, 2010—Can we organize ourselves for a good life?**

**Discuss** Whyte, W. and Blasi, J. (1982). Worker ownership, participation and control: toward a theoretical model. *Policy Sciences*, 14(2):137–163

**DUE Fri, 29 Oct, 2010 by 5pm —Part 2 Reflections Drafts**

**Mon 1<sup>st</sup> Nov, 2010—Part 2 Reflections Draft Workshop**

**Discuss** The drafts.

**Wed 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov, 2010—When society and politics ignores ecology what may happen?**

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

**DUE Fri 5 Nov, 2010 by 5pm —Part 2 Reflections Papers**

**Mon 8<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2010— A vision of political systems in harmony with natural systems?**

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

**Wed 10<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2010—How can food be political?**

**Discuss** Pollan, M. (2006). *The omnivore's dilemma: a natural history of four meals*. Univ California Press (intro and chapters 1, 2 and 5 of part 1.)

**Mon 15<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2010—Children, Reproduction, and Politics**

**Discuss** James, P. (2005). *The children of men*. Vintage Canada, 2005

**DUE** Indication of intent to write the third reflection paper.

**Wed 17<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2010—TBA**

**Discuss** Duff, B. (2011). *The Parent as Citizen: A Democratic Dilemma*. University Of Minnesota Press (Introduction)

**Thanksgiving Break**

**Mon 29<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2010—What is politics when the world is ending? (How can politics save the world?)**

**Discuss** Brooks, M. (2007). *World War Z: an oral history of the zombie war*. Three Rivers Press

**Wed 1<sup>st</sup> Dec, 2010—Consequentialist and Deontologist Ethics**

**Discuss** Sandel, M. J. (2009). *JUSTICE: What's the Right Thing to Do?* Farrar, Straus & Giroux [Chap 1 and 2 and 5]

**DUE Fri, 3 Dec, 2010 by 5pm—Part 3 Reflections Drafts**

**Mon 6<sup>th</sup> Dec, 2010—Part 3 Reflections Draft Workshop**

**Discuss** The drafts of the third set of reflection papers.

**Wed 8<sup>th</sup> Dec, 2010—Open Discussion: Loose Ends**

**Discuss** Questions brought by the class.

**DUE Fri, 10 Dec, 2010 by 5pm —Part 3 Reflections Papers**