



talking aboutthe future

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● ● ● thefuture

- of obvious relevance to everyone
- often cited as the Holy Grail of (social) science
- hard to get a handle on:
 - speculative character of knowledge
 - variety of potentially relevant factors

○ ● ● nonfactual

- facts—orderings of experience in terms of a theoretical interest
- factual claims must refer to the world of experience
- claims about the future are *nonfactual claims*

● ● ● explanation

● difficult to know which factors
matter to an outcome

● when explaining, we use
information about the outcome

● can't do this for the future

| <i>r</i> | <i>Significance (p)</i> |
|----------|-------------------------|
| .841 | .000** |
| .369 | .042* |
| .369 | .025* |
| -.184 | .790 |
| -.060 | .710 |
| -.055 | .744 |
| .258 | .104 |
| .089 | .580 |
| .267 | .091 |

successful negotiated settlement and 0 for decisive victory. All the independent variables have a positive relationship conforms to the hypothesis.

○ ● ● prediction

- at best, an educated guess
- best human experts only guess right about 20% of the time
- best *statistical models* only guess right about 47% of the time

source: Philip E. Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment* (Princeton UP, 2005)

● ● ● futuretalk

- massive endogeneity problem:
 - it's *our* future
 - discussing the future might change it
 - "open system"
- and we talk about the future *all the time...especially* in sci-fi

● ● ● typology

- two criteria:

1. likelihood of “surprises” — unexpected events
2. plasticity of present-day assumptions — “human nature”

ways of envisioning

| | no surprises | surprises |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| present as parametric | SSDD | scenarios |
| present as plastic | speculative worlds | WTF? |

○ ● ● scenarios

- more or less “realistic” forecasts
- how we would deal with some situation or event
- Arthur C. Clarke
- Robert Heinlein
- *Star Trek*

○ ● ● speculative worlds

- alter basic assumptions about human beings and human society
- ontological displacement
- Iain M. Banks
- Ursula LeGuin
- *Battlestar Galactica*

● ● ● alien encounters


● scenario:

- H. G. Wells, *War of the Worlds*
- Mary Doria Russell, *The Sparrow* and *Children of God*
- *Avatar*; *Starship Troopers*

● speculative worlds:

- Orson Scott Card, *Speaker for the Dead* and *Xenocide*
- Stephen R. Donaldson's *Gap* series
- *Solaris*; *Contact*

○ ● ● culturalwork

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- SSDD: quotidian life is largely stable...
 - WTF: ...except when it isn't

● ● ● culturalwork

- scenarios:
 - make us ready for a future
 - “contingency plan”
- speculative worlds:
 - show us the power of our assumptions
 - explore new assumptions
 - “stock of commonplaces”

● ● ● IRtheory

- we think it's supposed to be predictive
- maybe it's supposed to be like science fiction instead
- talking about the future is an *intervention in the present*

photo**sources**

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