



how to talk about the 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*
-.184	.011*
-.060	.025*
-.055	.790
.089	.710
.267	.744
	.104
	.580
	.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

○ ● ● definitions

● sci-fi:

1. futural in tone
2. technological difference
3. plausible connection to our present

● methodology, not method

● ● ● 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”

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● ● ● 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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