

GRAPPLING WITH THE FUTURES

Insights from
Philosophy,
History, and
Science, Technology
and Society

Sunday April 29 - Monday April 30, 2018

A Symposium hosted in Boston by

Harvard University (Department of the History of Science)

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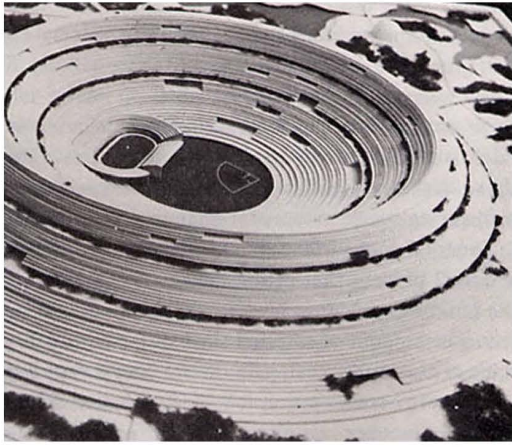
Boston University (Department of Philosophy)

Co-Sponsored by The Millennium Project: Global Futures Studies and Research

CALL FOR PAPERS

Futures studies, which emerged as a new field after WWII, offer a variety of methods for predicting, forecasting, anticipating, controlling, imagining, and shaping multiple futures. Those methods include trend extrapolation, predictive modeling, scenario-planning, Delphi, and Wild Cards, to name a few. The goal of this symposium is to bring together philosophers, historians, and science, technology and society (STS) scholars who are deeply engaged with the exploration of the futures. We will begin an interdisciplinary dialogue that interrogates the goals, concepts, and methods of futures studies and probes informal futures-oriented thinking that is ubiquitous in social thought and practice.

Organizers: Yashar Saghai (Johns Hopkins University and The Millennium Project),
Roberto Poli (University of Trento), Peter Galison (Harvard University),
Russell Powell (Boston University)



From the 1950s on, American and European philosophers took part in the creation of futures studies. In the US, they relied on their background in logic, philosophy of science, and epistemology; in Europe, they mainly mobilized political and social philosophy, philosophy of action, ontology, and axiology. However, from the '80s to the end of the '90s, philosophers were less involved with the field. What are new philosophical issues, theories, concepts, and forms of engagement with futures studies? How are anticipation, forecast, and foresight related? What is the meaning and the value of the distinction between possible, probable, plausible, and desirable/undesirable futures? How can political and social philosophy, as well as ethics, fairly evaluate the normative dimensions of futures studies and contribute to making futures studies normatively more compelling in collaboration with practitioners? At a time when non-ideal theories of justice have gained momentum, what role should aspirational ideals, social hopes, and utopias play in normative conceptions of desirable futures? What role should risk, uncertainty, worst-case scenarios, and dystopias play in our anticipatory attitudes towards undesirable futures and our policy decisions? What theoretical frameworks can philosophers mobilize to investigate informal futures-oriented thinking?

Historians have engaged with futures studies in several manners. Early on, Reinhart Koselleck elaborated the study of “futures past.” How do contemporary historians reconstruct perceived future options from the perspective of past agents in specific contexts (e.g., Cold War; medicine), and embed their inquiry into broader historiographic, methodological, and social concerns? What have historians gleaned from the investigation of national and transnational trajectories of futures studies? What is the epistemic value and academic status of counterfactuals in historical research as compared to futures studies? How do questions about regimes of historicity and the futures mesh with new approaches to historical explanations and theories of history?

Finally, STS studies have for decades investigated the futures and stressed the performative dimension of assertions about the future in public policy and R&D contexts. How does STS construe the imaginaries at work in futures studies, popular culture, politics, and social movements? What is the potential contribution of the growing field of visual STS to understanding the exploration of the futures as a material, social, and institutional practice? What are new issues and theories in the sociology of expectations? Why is professionalization sometimes embraced and sometimes resisted within futures studies? How do technologies of futures studies change the governmentality of the futures in different contexts, such as energy policy, healthcare, food systems, science and technology, predictive policing, and environmental regulations?

These are some of the questions that will be discussed at the symposium through discipline-specific and interdisciplinary sessions. Speakers will have 20 minutes to present their original research.

Abstracts from all relevant fields are encouraged.

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Deadlines:

- Friday November 3: Submission of abstracts
- Friday November 24: Notice of acceptance
- Friday December 8: Final symposium schedule
- Monday December 11: Registration begins
- Friday March 30, 2018: Full draft of papers to be shared with respondents

Guidelines:

Submissions should be prepared in Word format and contain the following information:

- Title
- Name
- Affiliation
- Abstract (250 words)

Upon reception, abstracts will be anonymized for blind review and selection.

Registration to the symposium is required and free of charge.

Please email abstracts and queries to Yashar Saghai at grapplingwiththefutures@gmail.com

Updates on the symposium will be available on our Website: grapplingwiththefutures.com