

DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

THE SCHOOL FOR NEW LEARNING



Advanced Elective Seminar: Utopia, Millennium, and Apocalypse: Visions of Human Destiny from the Bible to Hollywood

Fall Quarter, 2003

Syllabus

Campus: South

Dates: Mondays 6:30-9:30; 9/15 - 11/17

Credit Hours: 4

BA 99 Competencies: E1, E2, A1X, H1X, S3X, FX.

Pre 99 Competencies: AL 9, 10; HC 9, 10; PW 9, 10; WW 9, 10.

Prerequisite: Students taking the course for E1, E2, or any Pre-99 capstone must have completed Research Seminar.

Faculty: David Simpson received his PhD in English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University and has served on the faculty in English and humanities at Columbia and Northwestern. His academic interests include classical and Renaissance literature, media studies, American culture, professional communication, and intellectual history. A former member of the Chicago Board Options Exchange, he has served as a consultant in business writing and technical stock-market analysis and has written articles and reviews on topics ranging from jazz and cinema to slang and cyber-culture. He has served on the visiting faculty at SNL since 1990.

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Course Description: Though usually associated with a sub-culture of palm readers, ouija boards, tarot cards, and crystal balls, predicting the future is a lot more than just a parlor trick or confidence game. In fact it is a serious imaginative and intellectual activity that has engaged the talents of many of the world's greatest writers, thinkers, and filmmakers. In this course students will review and analyze a selection of representative works of "futurology" and visionary imagination both old and new – from the apocalyptic prophecies of the Bible to the end-of-the-world scenarios typical of Hollywood sci-fi. While viewing or reading these works, students will also compare and evaluate various

theories of world history as they seek to answer the question: Is it actually possible – by combining imagination, reason, and established methods and principles of scientific history – to predict the future course of civilization?

Competence Statements: Competence statements for E1, E2, and all pre-99 capstone competencies will be written by the student with the cooperation and approval of the instructor.

Note: the following are sample statements. You may use them as guides or templates for your own customized statements.

A1X. Can analyze and interpret futuristic themes and genres in film and literature.

H1X. Can compare and evaluate different theoretical models of ideal societies or political organizations.

S3X. Can analyze the likely future development and impact of science and technology.

FX: Can analyze long-term business, financial, or economic trends.

Criteria for demonstrating competence:

E1-2, AL9-10, HC 9-10, PW 9-10, WW 9-10: A 10-15 page research project on a topic or question selected by the student plus a 10-15 minute in-class presentation reviewing the main highlights and findings. (Note: projects should include an annotated bibliography with at least 8 resources.)

A1X. A 6-8 page essay analyzing apocalyptic or futuristic themes in a work of film or literature.

H1X: A 6-8 page essay analyzing or comparing likely future political scenarios or historical developments.

S3X: A 6-8 page essay analyzing the likely impact of a new technological development or scientific breakthrough.

FX: A 6-8 page essay analyzing the likely long-term effects of a current business, economic, or consumer trend.

Note: In addition to their essays, students enrolled for A1X, H1X, S3X, or FX are required to give a 10-minute in-class presentation on a course-related topic or theme appropriate to their competence area.

Assessment: Students are expected to attend regularly and be prepared to participate fully in class discussions. Written projects will be evaluated on the basis of interest and accuracy of content, depth of understanding, quality of research, force of argument, and overall organization, readability, and style.

DePaul Policy on Academic Integrity: All students enrolled in this course are responsible for knowing and upholding the university's policy on academic integrity as outlined in the [DePaul Student Handbook](#).

Format: Informal seminar with student-led discussions and occasional lecture presentations by the instructor.

Required Texts:

The Bible (King James Version). Available in electronic format at:

<http://www.cforc.com/kjv/>

Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*.
Wilson, Edward O. *The Future of Life*.

Recommended Texts:

Bacon, Sir Francis. *The New Atlantis*.
Bellamy, Edward. *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*.
Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*.
More, Sir Thomas. *Utopia*.
Plato, *The Republic*.

Web Resources

Utopia on the Internet:

<http://users.erols.com/jonwill/utopialist.htm>

Society for Utopian Studies:

<http://www.utoronto.ca/utopia/links.html>

Films

Metropolis (1926)
Things to Come (1936)
The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951)
Dr. Strangelove (1964)
2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)
Planet of the Apes (1968)
Colossus: The Forbin Project (1970)
The Omega Man (1971)
The Andromeda Strain (1971)
Soylent Green (1973)
The Terminal Man (1974)
The Demon Seed (1977)
Blade Runner (1982)
1984 (1984)

Terminator 2: Judgment Day (1991)
Demolition Man (1993)
Twelve Monkeys (1995)
Armageddon (1998)
Deep Impact (1998)
AI: Artificial Intelligence (2001).

Schedule of Class Meetings and Discussion Topics

Week One. Sept 15.

Introduction. Ancient and classical theories of history: Hesiod to Augustine. Lifting the curtain: Myths and visions of the future.

Discussion Topic: "The Revelation of St. John the Divine."

Week Two. Sept 22.

Modern secular theories of history: Kant to Fukuyama.

Reading: Fukuyama, chapters 5 –11. (pp. 55-139).

Discussion topics: Is there a pattern to history? What is its cause or driving force?

Week Three. Sept 29.

Envisioning Doomsday: Ancient and classical scenarios of world destruction.

The Last Humans: Genes and Memes.

Week Four. Oct 6.

Envisioning Utopia: Plato to Bellamy.

Student presentations: H-area.

Discussion questions: Will governments be more repressive or less so in the future? Will citizens have more freedom or less?

Week Five. Oct 13.

Visions of the end of the world in modern literature and film.

Whitman, Bellamy, Huxley, Orwell.

Student presentations: A-area.

Discussion questions: According to the scenarios presented in recent films and fiction, what does the future have in store? Which scenarios strike you as the most plausible? The most disturbing or controversial? The most desirable or attractive?

Week Six. Oct 20.

Predicting the future: Science and Technology. Cybernetics. Bioengineering.

Neuroscience. Artificial Intelligence.

Reading. Wilson, *The Future of Life*.

Student Presentations: S-area.

Discussion topics: What developments in science and technology are likely to have the greatest impact on the future course of civilization? What new inventions or scientific breakthroughs do you foresee?

Week Seven. Oct 27.

Predicting the Future: Commerce and Consumerism.

Student Presentations: F-area.

Discussion topics: Will future generations witness the continued rise of global capitalism and international corporations? Will the impulse to amass consumer goods and individual possessions continue unchecked or will we see a new era of limits and relative austerity?

Week Eight. Nov 3.

Advanced Elective and capstone presentations.

All assignments due.

Week Nine. Nov 10.

Apocalypse and Beyond: Visions of the last human.

Advanced Elective and capstone presentations.

Week Ten. Nov 17.

Summary and Review.