

**Research Article**

## ONTOLOGY OF FUTURES STUDIES

**\*Majid Divsalar and Seyd Mohammade Mohammadi**

*Department of Political Sciences, Ayatollah Amoli Branch, Islamic Azad University, Amol, Iran*

*\*Author for Correspondence*

### ABSTRACT

In this paper, I make an attempt to clarify the nature of futures studies with the distinction approach That is called ontology of futures studies .Futures studies (also called futurology and futurism) are the study of postulating possible, probable, and preferable futures and the worldviews and myths that underlie them. There is a debate as to whether this discipline is an art or science. In general, it can be considered as a branch of the social sciences and parallel to the field of history. History studies the past, futures studies consider the future. Futures studies (colloquially called "futures" by many of the field's practitioners) seeks to understand what is likely to continue and what could plausibly change. Part of the discipline thus seeks a systematic and pattern-based understanding of past and present, and to determine the likelihood of future events and trends futurism (Wikipedia, 2014).

**Keywords:** *Future, Futures Studies, History Studies, Futurism*

### INTRODUCTION

Futures-thinking in various ways may or may not be expanding. But it is clearly an ever-changing activity, and appears to be ever more fragmented by culture, subject matter, style, and ideology. 'Futures Studies (FS)' as a subset of this larger activity is highly problematic as a viable entity, due to seven disabling myths: that FS is a field, that futurists are generalists, that futurists are primarily 'futurists', that FS does what no one else does, that FS is generally understood and appreciated, that FS is static, and that FS is a community. Many futurists contend that future studies don't attempt to predict the future, but rather it presents alternative or possible futures. 103 Peter Bishop argues that it is better to think of the future as multiple possibilities rather than one clearly predictable eventuality. 104 Cornish, in *The 1990's and Beyond* and *Suturing*, contends that futurists don't try to predict the future.105 Rather, futurists present different possibilities in order to lay out before us our choices for tomorrow. For Cornish, if the future could be predicted it would be determined (or predetermined) and, consequently, there would be no choices to make and no practical reason to think about the future. What would be the point, since our future actions would be determined as well? If the future is possibilities, including our own personal lives, then we have some options to consider, evaluate, and act upon. Hence, a very predictable future seems to preclude the possibility of choice—there is an apparent incompatibility between determinism and freedom of choice. But we have also seen that Cornish does support the idea that futurists.

Engage in cautionary and probabilistic prediction, and in fact, many of the futurist methods he lists are of this type. Furthermore, it is only because we can thoughtfully anticipate the probable consequences of present trends and conditions that we can make informed choices about the future (Wells, 2005).

### ***The History of Future Studies***

The following highly simplified reconstruction of the origins of futures studies starts after the Second World War. After the beginning of WWII, the first efforts to establish the discipline are possibly those of Ossip Flechtheim, a German philosopher who already in 1943 sought to establish *Futurologie* (Flechtheim, 1943) as an applied research field aimed at eliminating wars and fostering peace, stabilizing population growth, eliminating hunger, poverty, and exploitation, democratizing states and communities, halting the exploitation of nature, and creating a new homo humans. Furthermore, Flechtheim proposed to teach the future by establishing suitable courses.

A second figure to cite is Gaston Berger, the founding father of the prospective, the French version of futures studies. Berger began by noting that the constant acceleration of technological and social changes thwarts all efforts to extrapolate forecasts from analysis of present and past situations. The most relevant question to be asked is not how to forecast the future, but how to prepare ourselves better for a constantly

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changing world, and how to choose the courses of actions that may achieve our preferred objectives. Changing the focus from forecasting to being ready for future challenges implies that the capacity to deal with new situations and realize accepted values is more important than producing correct forecasts. Forecasting as extrapolation from the past is replaced by the capacity to orient and reorient oneself in real time, to choose values, and especially to decide proactively, that is to say, in a manner such to bring about the changes desired. According to Berger, the future is already embedded in the present and it can be discerned provided we focus on "future-bearing facts" (Poli, 2011).

### **Purposes of Futures Studies**

The major purpose of futurists is to maintain or improve the welfare of humankind and the life sustaining capacities of the Earth itself. Futurists carry out this purpose by systematically exploring alternative futures. They engage in prospective thinking. They try to create 'new, alternative images of the future! Visionary explorations of the possible, systematic investigation of the probable, and moral evaluation of the preferable'.<sup>65</sup> The possible, the probable and the preferable! These are what futurists seek to know. Moreover, futurists' distinctive obligation to the future invites them to speak for the freedom and wellbeing of future generations! The as-yet-unborn people of the future who have no voice of their own in the present. To meet these goals, futurists also seek to know what causes change, i.e. the nature of the dynamic processes that underlie technological developments on the one hand, and changes in the political, economic, social, and cultural realms, on the other. Futurists seek to determine what anticipated economic, social, and cultural realms, on the other. Futurists seek to determine what anticipated developments may have to be accepted because they are beyond human control, and what can be brought under human control. Also, they seek to discover the unanticipated, unintended, and unrecognized consequences of social action. <sup>67</sup> Thus, futurists attempt to clarify goals and values, describe trends, explain conditions, formulate alternative images of the future, and invent, evaluate, and select policy alternatives. <sup>68</sup> They also study images of the future held by various groups such as national leaders or slum dwellers. <sup>69</sup> Finally, they analyze the dominant societal images of the future and their implications for the rise and fall of entire civilizations. Of course, there is a division of labor among futurists, just as in any other profession. Some futurists are primarily analysts, focusing their efforts on methods, theories, and other scholarly issues. Other futurists are primarily activists, dedicating their efforts to shaping the future itself. An example of the latter is the late Robert Jungk who was often actively involved at the grassroots level, working to increase the participation of ordinary people in the decisions affecting their lives. Other activists work to disseminate alternative images of the future or even to advocate an image of some particular future. A successful example of disseminating such images (underpinned by the desire to increase popular participation in shaping them) took place in Honolulu in 1982. Professors J Dator and T Becker of the University of Hawaii organized the first Honolulu Electronic Town Meeting (ETM). It was composed of several different parts. There was a scientific information-ga the ring part through the Hawaii Televisive in which seven hundred persons (selected by random digit dialing) were invited to be interviewed about economic and social policies affecting the future of Hawaii. There was also a dissemination and discussion part. Two daily newspapers, three commercial radio stations, public radio, a commercial and public television station, and the island's largest cable television station all participated. Most of this activity was in the form of phone-in programs, so that the public was both informed about the issues and able to participate in the discussion. Finally, there was the judgment part.

Before the end of the ETM, ballots were published in a major newspaper and everyone was invited to vote on the issues discussed. The culmination of the exercise was a final hour-long television program with Dator, Becker, and the Lt governor of Hawaii in which viewers called in to ask questions or make comments. Other purposes of futures studies involve the present. First, the action that takes place in the present is what shapes the future. Thus, present conditions must be studied, because futures thinking is largely about what to do now, i.e. What action to take to create a future that will be as desirable as possible, given present conditions and hopes for the future. Second, futures thinking play an orientation role by informing people where they are in the present. Often, the rapidity of change results in confusion about what is happening in the present, and what has happened in the immediate past. Unless s people

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have some perspective on where they have been, where they are going, and where they want to go, the present itself is largely unintelligible. For example, if you want to know if a glass is half full or half empty, it helps to know that it was full a week ago, two-thirds full yesterday, half empty today, and possibly will be totally empty the day after tomorrow.

Third, the results of futures research help people to balance the demands of the present against those of the future. For example, people can deprive themselves in the present so as to profit from future payoffs that may never come. But the opposite is also possible: people can borrow from the future to the extent that they mortgage it beyond its limits. If they do, then when the future arrives, it may be hell, like a Faustian pact with the devil coming due (Bell, 2003).

**Ontology of futures studies:** Futures studies are a new field of inquiry involving systematic and explicit thinking about alternative futures. It aims to demystify the future, make possibilities for the future more known to us, and increase human control over the future ( Bell, 2009).

A future studies reflects on how today's changes (or the lack thereof) become tomorrow's reality. It includes attempts to analyze the sources, patterns, and causes of change and stability in order to develop foresight and to map alternative futures. The subjects and methods of futures studies include possible, probable and desirable variation or alternative transformations of the present, both social and "natural" (i.e. independent of human impact).

A broad field of enquiry, futures studies explores and represents what the present could become from multiple interdisciplinary perspectives.

A futures study takes as one of its important attributes (epistemological starting points) the on-going effort to analyze images of the future and distinguish possible, probable and preferred (normative) futures. This effort includes collecting quantitative and qualitative data about the possibility, probability and desirability of change toward the emergence of alternative futures.

Like historical studies that try to explain what happened in the past and why, the efforts of futures studies try to understand the latent potential of the present. This requires the development of theories of present conditions and how conditions might change.

For this task, futures studies, as it is generally undertaken, uses a wide range of theoretical models and practical methods, many of which come from other academic disciplines (including economics, sociology, geography, history, engineering, mathematics, psychology], technology, tourism, physics, biology, astronomy, and theology).

Two factors usually distinguish futures studies from the research conducted by these other disciplines (although all disciplines overlap, to differing degrees):

- futures studies often examines not only probable but also possible and preferable futures
- Futures studies typically attempts to gain a holistic or systemic view based on insights from a range of different disciplines.

### **Assumptions of Future Studies**

- Time is continuous, linear, unidirectional, and irreversible.
- The future contains novelty.
- Futures thinking are essential for "conscious or decisional" human action.
- Futures knowledge is the most useful knowledge.
- There are no future facts—there are future possibilities.
- The future is open—there are opportunities and freedom in directing the future.
- Humans make themselves.
- There is holism and interdependence within the world, which implies an interdisciplinary approach in the organization of knowledge for decision making and social action.
- There are better and worse futures.

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- People are purposive and creative project pursuers.
- Society is a system of purposive beings and social results come from such purposive beings.
- There is an independent and objective external world (wells, 2008).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Discussion**

Futures studies are "the forward-looking equivalent of history. If history is concerned with origins, roots, where, in some sense, we have collectively been; futures studies is about goals, purposes, where we are going, how we get there and the problems and opportunities we will encounter en route." "Futures studies... are a field of intellectual and political activity concerning all sectors of the psychological, social, economic, political and cultural life, aiming at discovering and mastering the extensions of the complex chains of casualties, by means of conceptualizations, systematic reflections, experimentations, anticipations and creative thinking. Futures studies therefore constitute a natural basis for sub national, national and international, and both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary activities tending to become a new forum for the basis of political decision making".

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