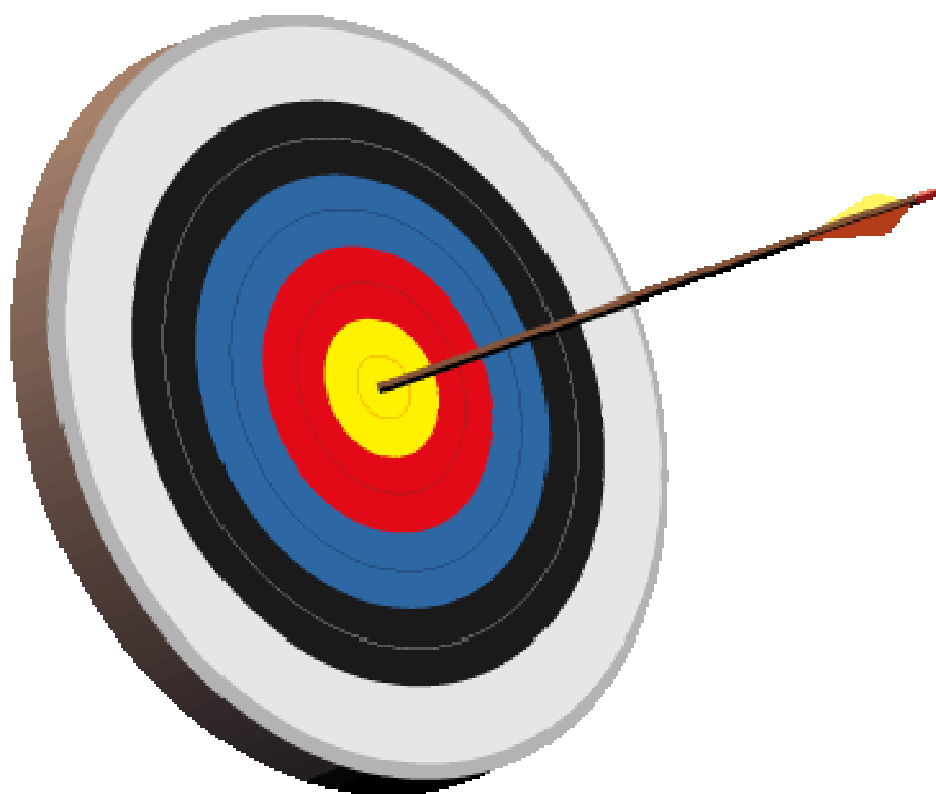


## The Purpose of Futures Studies



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### Editorial

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### What is the goal of FS?

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### Contemporary Futurist Thought

A historical review is conducted on the contemporary futurist thought ...



### FS: As a How-to Knowledge

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20 predictions are offered for next 14 years...



### How to Study the Future?

7 steps of FS are discussed in an easy way...



### Futures Knowledge Base

A well-known article by Richard Slaughter is translated into Farsi...



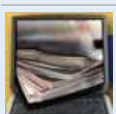
### A Futurist

Richard Slaughter is introduced to our readers as a leading futurist...



### Book Review

New Thinking for a New Millennium is the book that is reviewed in this issue...



### Web Surfing

Useful futures links are given in this section...



It's about a decade since the science and art of Futures Studies introduced to our society as an expert field of activity and practice. Many valuable efforts have been made to recognize and introduce the field to all who are interested in futurist affairs. Regardless of different interpretations usually made at the academies about this field of thought or how-to knowledge, it seems that we need a balanced definition and clear realistic description of the field and its goals. Those who love the Futures Studies as an applied field of study may exaggerate its potential capabilities and some others who have not a reasonable understanding of its principles, basics and techniques may underestimate its practical capacities. In this case, an intelligent intervention is needed to moderate current unbalanced perspectives and offer realistic and logical views of the Futures Studies, the goals and functions of the field.

The students of this new founded field, who have started or completed their studies at graduate levels, find it difficult to offer a clear definition of the field so can be understood easily by everyone. The hardship of the task becomes more tangible when they are faced with people who are going to shape their understanding of Futures Studies based on the same assumptions they usually have from other fields of study. It is obvious that in such conditions, explaining academic issues of the Futures field may not be enough effective because of its different and complex nature compared to other fields. On the other hand, looking at Futures Studies from a very popular perspective is not a logical behavior and leads to making more unreasonable views unintentionally. The leading futurists believe that in such conditions we should tune our futurist discussions with ordinary people according to their levels of understanding and education, keeping the original nature of our professional futurist literature and glossary. In other words, people usually understand professional concepts when they find them near to their own level of comprehension. They simulate received concepts in their minds according to their mental and cognitive patterns.

For example, when we are going to explain the notion of "alternative futures" to someone, raising technical concepts like scenarios, drivers of change or wild cards may not help. So, it is better to attract and stimulate our listener's mind according to his comprehension and academic capacities so that he may be able to imagine other forms of the future regarding a phenomenon or a topic. Receiving the people's participation in foresight process is the key to the promotion of Futures Studies. We should express the ultimate goal of Futures Studies to our listeners as a transforming action and changing their minds from a passive state to an active one. So, they may be able to make better futures for themselves and others by making wise decisions and taking logical actions. Replacing passive with proactive approach is the ultimate goal of Futures Studies. The Futures Studies are going to make the people more hopeful with building their preferred futures and reviving the society with a spirit of hope and self-reliance through injecting values-based culture. Creating such a spirit requires all the citizens to participate actively in the process of futures building. So, remaining just as a listener or a reader will not help the objective of promoting the Futures Studies and making them applicable for every citizen.

When people understand gradually that they can build up better futures by their own decisions and actions, illogical interpretations like "certain futures" will be replaced with thinking about "probable futures". The most important function of the futurists is attracting their audience's conscious participation willingly in a knowledge-based manner.

## **What Is the Goal of Futures Studies?**

We observe the world with our senses and conceptualize and store sensations in symbolic forms, thus obtaining objective factual knowledge and understanding of the present reality. We recall and contextualize reality by mental processes, thus being able to obtain interpretation knowledge and understanding of the past reality. And we perceive and envision reality by our faculty of conceiving, thus attaining at perceptual contingent knowledge and understanding of the future reality. Our central nervous system is well equipped and facilitated with these different faculties of knowing and understanding of the diversified reality. The facilities of the brain for observing, conceptualizing and memory functions are well known, while the physiological facilitation for futures thinking within the frontal lobe of the brain may be less known. Good references on how the brain makes decisions and perceives the future are found in the literature.

When we count on the motto above, futurology is nothing else but refinement of everyday futures thinking. Humans have been interested in refining this thinking since the dawn of cultures in forms of religions, magic, art and sciences. The time from the Renaissance and Enlightenment brought in its train many steps in refining futures thinking and directing it to pursue progress. Condorcet (1795) called that field of knowledge and know-how an art of social rationality. It was historian Ossip K. Flechtheim who first used the term futurology in the 1940s. He also outlined what may be regarded as a humanistic futurological program. In his two-volume book *Foundations of Futures Studies*, Wendell Bell gives a thorough account of the current development of futurology and its epistemological bases until today.

According to de Jouvenel, the future can only be conjectured but not known, because there is not one future but many of them. Making this difference between conjecture and knowledge is to my mind confusing at the scientific philosophic level. According to Plato knowledge is a well-grounded true belief. Any knowledge is basically a belief held by someone. That it is true must be grounded by some supporting and convincing arguments. The legitimate line of arguments for the truth is different in different sciences. It is only obvious that in futurology the legitimate lines of arguments have something in common with other sciences but also something different from them. If we regard the difference of argumentation as a reason for calling futurological knowledge not knowledge but conjecture, then we have to start finding new terms to knowledge of all other sciences as well because of their mutual differences. It would be misleading our understanding, and instead I prefer to specify the proper line of argumentation within futurology and add that to the total field of scientific enquiry.

In standard sciences it is generally held that the scientific interest in knowledge is “to know in order to be able to understand, and to understand in order to be able to predict”. And when we add the technical or pragmatic interest in knowledge, we may state further as “to predict in order to be able to control and make reality”.

From this point of view, denying the possibility of knowing and understanding the future would mean abandoning also possibilities to make an effect on the future or to have any power to choose, to make decisions. To make good decisions is, however, in the realm of human behavior in general and it is a special interest of futures research.

The ontological assumption that future exists as alternatives, futures instead of the future, is commonly accepted among futurists. The roots of this commitment are not of any recent origin but found already in Aristotle’s work. Now, however, we may ask if this premise of multiple futures is indeed sufficient to logically contradict the possibility of knowing and understanding of future.

A claim against knowing of future is based on a fixation to the standard science paradigm of proposition knowledge concerning definite, factual objects with definite truth-values of the knowledge claim. These commitments, while valid in most of the standard sciences, are not, however, self-evident in general but subject to discussion and revision. The fixation would rather seem a harmful restriction without grounds. Futurology calls for enlargement of the domain of scientific objects to contingent, non-factual, potential objects and the domain of knowledge of them to the field of contingent knowledge with indefinite truth-values of the claims. Contingent does not in this generalization refer only to uncertainty of knowledge, which may also be a property of proposition knowledge.

It means generic indeterminacy of the objects to be known and indeterminacy of the truth-value of the claim of the knowledge at the very moment of inquiry. We can regard the generalization as a necessary supplement to the critical realism that has been introduced by Wendell Bell to futures study in his Foundations of Futures Studies, wherein he states the same line of thinking as here. According to Bell “all knowledge is conjectural, i.e. in the critical realist theory of knowledge, we recognize that it is always possible that some belief that we have may turn out to be wrong”.

From Wendell Bell we can also quote: “the purposes of futures studies are to discover or invent, examine and evaluate, and propose possible, probable and preferable futures. Futurists seek to know: what can or could be (the possible), what is likely to be (the probable), and what ought to be (the preferable)”. This statement is in concordance with the view that the alternative futures are understandable and knowable and

even tractable with the disciplined ways of futurology. In addition to the above mentioned character of the objects of the future, they are also objects of potentiality present, albeit dormant of factuality. It is evident that knowledge of this kind of objects with indefinite truth-values is not possible in the strict sense of knowledge of the standard sciences, as de Jouvenel and others have rightly pointed out. Futurology needs a relative concept of knowledge.

In his essay von Wright makes a difference between knowledge and the grounds of knowledge taken more or less for granted, i.e., grounds are regarded as certainties. In futurology we see that the contingent objects and knowledge of them do not allow one to separate knowledge and its grounds as in the standard sciences. Some knowledge elements, which are analogical to the grounds of objective knowledge, are called in futurology images or perceptions of the future. Futurological knowledge based on them is perceptual knowledge. In the scenario approach for example, scenarios are based on different perceptions or images of the future from the first start.

The concept of perceptual knowledge is then something which combines objective knowledge (scenarios) and the grounds (images, perceptions). We may conclude that there is a common agreement that knowledge of the future is possible but not in the same way as we know the present (knowing in a strict objective sense), but in a sense based on relevant grounds and assumptions. As a special character of knowledge, however, remains that a claim of the future has no truth-value determined at the moment of enquiry.

The term futures research is regarded in this article as the most rigorously disciplined part of futurology. The term prospective study may in some cases be a synonym of futures research, while futures study is more general and may be less disciplined than these two. However, futurology can hardly be regarded yet as a mature field of knowledge with a theoretically and empirically progressive research program. Rather it is at present an immature science consisting of a "mere patched up pattern of trial and error", from which maturing process of research programs can emerge.

It is obvious — because of the non-factual nature of futurology — that futures research has no domain of empirical observations separate from the experience of the other sciences. The accumulated empirical knowledge gained in any sciences may be utilized in futures research. And furthermore no methods of knowledge inquiry akin to sciences are outside use in futures research, if only consistent with the futurological problem in question. For example, systems approach, mathematical modeling and statistical analysis are among frequently used scientific methods in futurology.