

Progress Studies

Bridwell Institute Advanced Reading Group Syllabus
Fall 2025

Attendance is required. Your attendance and active participation are required. We will have 10 on-campus meetings. Students will be expected to attend all 10 on-campus meetings **plus one event during the semester for a total of eleven attendances**. Please note that this is a simple return to pre-COVID-19 rules for the reading group. Absences can be made up for by attending other Bridwell Institute events, some of which are listed below. **This will be enforced.** Failure to make all eleven attendances will result in no dispersal of stipend. Note that our schedule does not match up precisely with those of the other reading groups. **Note also that podcast episodes listed on the syllabus are required and are not optional unless stated otherwise.**

Meeting Times. Our on-campus meetings will be held on **Thursday** from 6:15pm-8pm in the new Bridwell Institute offices.

Dinner. After each session, we will bring in food to continue our conversation informally. You should expect this to last until about 8pm. This is considered an integral part of the program and you are expected to participate.

Stipend. Upon successful completion of the program, you will receive a \$1,000 stipend about a month after the program ends. (Thanks to the McLane Company, Inc. and the Armentrout Foundation for their generous support for this program.) There is much paperwork involved in order to process the payment. Taxes will not be withheld, but the payment will be reported to the IRS and you may be liable for paying taxes on that income. Please see Teffa Padilla to make sure all the required paperwork is in order (epadilla@mail.smu.edu). You can't get paid otherwise.

General Advice

Read Ahead. There are about 50+ pages of material assigned each week, and the material is not always easy. Please budget enough time in your schedule to do the readings ahead of time.

Come Prepared. You should have 3 or 4 specific questions or comments prepared in advance for each session – hopefully related directly to the texts. Your active participation is expected and planning ahead is the best way to make sure you are contributing to the group discussion.

Be Critical. Don't agree unthinkingly with the readings or each other. Reasonable people disagree, so be reasonable.

Be Humble. The writers we read did not know everything and neither do you. Be willing to listen to the writers and each other, and be willing to say, "I don't know."

PRIMARY READINGS

Tyler Cowen. 2018. *Stubborn Attachments: A Vision for a Society of Free, Prosperous, and Responsible Individuals*. San Francisco: Stripe Press.

J. Storrs Hall. 2021. *Where is My Flying Car?* San Francisco: Stripe Press.

Toby Ord. 2020. *The Precipice: Existential Risk and the Future of Humanity*. New York: Hachette Books.

Nate Silver. 2024. *On the Edge: The Art of Risking Everything*. New York: Penguin.

9/4/25 Week 1. Progress and The River

1. Patrick Collison and Tyler Cowen. 2019. "We Need a New Science of Progress: Humanity Needs to Get Better at Knowing How to Get Better." *The Atlantic*,

<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2019/07/we-need-new-science-progress/594946/>

2. Silver 2024, Prologue, Introduction, and Chapter 0, p 1-79.

3. Storrs Hall 2021, Chapter 1, p. 13-21.

4. REQUIRED Podcast Episode: "Nate Silver on Risk-Takers, Politicians, and Poker Players," 2024, *Conversations with Tyler*: <https://conversationswithtyler.com/episodes/nate-silver-2/> [NOTE: There are multiple episodes of this podcast with Silver. Make sure you are listening to the correct one.]

9/11/25 Week 2. The Sociology of Venture Capital and Cryptocurrency

1. Silver 2024, Chapter 5-6, p. 247-339.

2. REQUIRED Podcast Episode: "Sam Bankman-Fried on Arbitrage and Altruism," 2022, *Conversations with Tyler*: <https://conversationswithtyler.com/episodes/sam-bankman-fried/>

9/17/25 OPTIONAL Event: Phil Gramm on the Triumph of Economic Freedom: Debunking the Seven Great Myths of American Capitalism, 4pm Reception and 5pm Lecture, Crum Auditorium, Collins Executive Center

9/18/25 Week 3. 21st Century Utilitarianism

1. Silver 2024, Chapter 7 & 8, 340-404.
2. Cowen 2018, Appendix B, p. 133-136.
3. William MacAskill. 2022. *What We Owe the Future: A Million-Year View*. London: Oneworld, Chapter 8, p. 167-189.
4. REQUIRED Podcast Episode: “Will MacAskill on What We Owe the Future,” 2022, *Econtalk*:
<https://www.econtalk.org/will-macaskill-on-longtermism-and-what-we-owe-the-future/>

9/25/25 Week 4. Artificial Intelligence

1. Silver 2024, Chapter Infinity, p. 405-460.
2. Ord 2020, Section of Chapter 5, p. 138-152.
3. Storrs Hall 2021, Chapter 14, p. 195-207.
4. REQUIRED Podcast Episode: “The AI Apocalypse Debate,” 2023, *The Studies Show*:
<https://www.thestudiesshowpod.com/p/episode-11-the-ai-apocalypse-debate>

[NO MEETING ON 10/2/25]

10/9/25 Week 5. Existential Risk

1. Ord 2020, Introduction and Chapters 1-3, + First Section of Chapter 4, p. 3-102.
2. REQUIRED Podcast Episode: “Humanity on the Precipice,” 2021, *Rationally Speaking*:
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/humanity-on-the-precipice-toby-ord/id351953012?i=1000544601628>

10/15/25 OPTIONAL Event: Nicole Chambers on From the Stockyards to the Stock Market: A Discussion about the Texas Stock Exchange, 4pm Reception and 5pm Lecture, Crum Auditorium, Collins Executive Center

10/16/25 Week 6. Progress, Risk, and Climate

1. Ord 2020, Final Two Sections of Chapter 4, p. 102-120.
2. Storrs Hall 2021, Chapter 7, p. 90-105.
3. Hannah Ritchie. 2024. *Not the End of the World: How We Can Build the First Generation to Build a Sustainable Planet*. New York: Little, Brown Spark. Introduction and Chapter 3, p. 1-16 & 66-114.
4. REQUIRED Podcast Episode: “Hannah Ritchie on Eating Local,” 2023, *Econtalk*:
<https://www.econtalk.org/hannah-ritchie-on-eating-local/>

[NO MEETING ON 10/23/25]

10/30/25 Week 7. Bullet-Biting Classical Liberalism

1. Silver 2024, Chapter 1776, p. 461-472.
2. Cowen 2018, Chapter 1-4, p. 15-78.
3. Nate Silver. 2025. “One Year Later, Is the River Winning?” *Silver Bulletin*,
<https://www.natesilver.net/p/one-year-later-is-the-river-winning>
4. Eliezer Yudkowsky. 2017. “Moloch’s Toolbox.” In *Inadequate Equilibria: Where and How Civilizations Get Stuck*, available at: <https://equilibriabook.com/molochs-toolbox/>
5. REQUIRED Podcast Episode: “Nate Silver on Life’s Mixed Strategies,” *Conversations with Tyler*, 2025, <https://conversationswithtyler.com/episodes/nate-silver-3/>

11/6/25 Week 8. The Appropriate Paradigm?

1. Cowen 2018, Chapter 5-6 & Conclusion p. 79-126.
2. Virginia Postrel. 2024. "The World of Tomorrow." *Works in Progress*, <https://worksinprogress.co/issue/the-world-of-tomorrow/>
3. REQUIRED Podcast Episode: "Rob Wiblin Interviews Tyler," *Conversations with Tyler*, 2018, <https://conversationswithtyler.com/episodes/rob-wiblin-interviews-tyler/>

11/13/25 Week 9. Let It Rip I

1. Storrs Hall 2021, Chapter 2-6 & 8, p. 23-89; 107-120.
2. Ryan Murphy & Colin O'Reilly. 2022. "Anti-Growth Safetyism." *Works in Progress*, <https://worksinprogress.co/issue/anti-growth-safetyism/>
3. Tamara Winter. 2022. "Interview: J. Storrs Hall on Getting Lost in Stagnation. *Works in Progress*, <https://worksinprogress.co/issue/interview-jstorshall/>

11/20/25 Week 10. Let It Rip II

1. Storrs Hall 2021, Chapter 11-13; 15-17; 19-20, p. 156-191; 208-249; 264-290.
2. John Myers. 2023. "Taming the Stars." *Works in Progress*, <https://worksinprogress.co/issue/taming-the-stars/>