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TECHNOLOGY: THE FUTURE AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT.

The Future of Futurism

DOWN WITH THE TECHNO-UTOPIANS! UP WITH THE TECHNO-REALISTS!

By *Reihan Salam*

Posted Thursday, June 29, 2006, at 12:12 PM ET



It's easy to make futurists look silly. For every prediction that comes true (or that *sort of* comes true—Nostradamus predicted that someone named "Hister" would do something terrible one day), about 20,000 more do not. Just take a look at some of these forecasts from

the 1970s: an economically vibrant Soviet Union will put America to shame, a new Ice Age will cause mass starvation, and a single eight-track cassette will hold all human knowledge.

Even so, it's not fair to say that all futurism is misguided. Just most of it. In his 1976 *Time* essay "Is There Any Future in Futurism?" Stefan Kanfer wrote that you could divide futurists into neo-Malthusians and Cornucopians. Neo-Malthusians are convinced that the world is going to hell. Some, like *The Population Bomb's Paul Ehrlich*, blamed population growth; others, like the *Club of Rome*, blamed economic growth. Either way, the prescription remained the same: You've got to change your evil ways, Earthlings.

The Cornucopians, in contrast, promise vast riches. Growth is the solution, not the problem. According to the 1976 Hudson Institute report *The Next 200 Years*, the coming decades would see declining population growth (true), a rising standard of living (also true), superintelligent robots in every home (do you own an Xbox?), and vast undersea cities (glub glub). Over the last few decades, it's safe to say that the Cornucopians generally got things right and that the neo-Malthusians generally got things wrong.



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