

be of immense help to policy makers, particularly in a world of rapid change. It has never been more necessary to gain a clearer idea of the long-term consequences of our actions -- or of our inactions.

But much of the writing associated with futures studies today strikes me as being clustered around the twin poles of excessive optimism and excessive pessimism. Both extremes have tended to overshadow the centre. The pessimists tend to produce research which leads us to believe that the time may have already come when the forces of man and nature have created situations which are beyond control. The pessimist-futurologist philosophy might be summed up in the following lines:

"The world today is at a cross-roads. One road leads to greater hopelessness and despair, the other to utter destruction and extinction. God grant us the wisdom to choose the right road."

(That's a quote from Woody Allen, by the way.)

The optimist school, on the other hand, appears to worship at the high altar of technology. Breakthroughs in technology are seen as providing universal answers to the ills of developed and developing countries alike. Preliterate societies are somehow to be propelled into the information age through the massive application of new technologies. The question of how this is to be done, by what means, and above all what the side effects will be, is often left unanswered.

Without wishing to be critical of futures studies in general or unfair to some of the excellent work which has been done, these recurring twin themes have in part been responsible for the fact that policy makers have not been able to benefit from futures research to the extent they could have.

I think, however, that this is changing as techniques and approaches become refined. Here I would like to pay tribute to your association, and to your conference which has chosen a specific theme for study and which has oriented the discussions in such a way that they do promise to provide useful information about possible future courses of action which will be of use to policy makers.