

This I believe

I believe in the power of skepticism. As a child, if something appeared in print as a text book or a newspaper, I believed it must be true. The publishers would not go to all the trouble of printing stuff that was not true.

Because a scientific study “proved” butter was bad for your health, my mother quit buying butter and bought margarine. Margarine didn’t have nasty old cholesterol; it was made from hydrogenated vegetable oils. Eggs were supposed to cause heart attacks because they are high in cholesterol, too.

Later studies have “proven” that butter is better for you than the hydrogenated oil in margarine and eggs raise the good cholesterol along with the bad. Those studies always seem to be 20 to 40 years later when the damage is already done. My skepticism is probably saving my children from some form of brain cancer as I consume the national average of the current “safe” no-calorie artificial sweeteners but I don’t allow my kids to have them. After all, they have their whole lives ahead of them.

I am equally skeptical of the projections of doom and disaster from continued development. Not that I don’t think that we need to take actions to prevent damage and correct damage we have already caused to the environment, I just think the projections are overly pessimistic. Still, I believe alarmists serve a purpose. Just the hue and cry of disaster may be enough to change the actual outcome from the projected outcome.

The Y2K projections of shortages, blackouts and disaster from mass computer program crashes caused some people to panic and stockpile whole un-hulled grains, hand powered grinders and wood fired ovens. I believe the publicity of those outrageous projections also caused business leaders to take a serious look at their systems and to devote the manpower to evaluating and correcting their systems prior to failure. Many of the programmers that came along in the heyday of early coding didn’t expect their programs to still be around in the year 2000. Also, computer disc space and memory were very expensive so it was required to take as little space as possible. The publicity generated by the alarmist caused behavior changes that prevented the disaster.

I believe that we are more skeptical and distrustful of scientists, policy makers and the media today than anytime in human history. I believe that that is a good thing. We should question and verify, test and retest yet keep working toward the goal of establishing the best life we can and to help others see and preserve the best in life on earth.