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THE PESSIMIST AND THE OPTIMIST

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Suppose that in 1945 a respected sage had been asked, "What do you see for the future?" and he had replied, "Rust, sand and soot." He would have been considered a *pessimist*.

An *optimistic* sage might have replied instead: "The future will be powered entirely by atomic energy. Contagious disease will be eliminated by antibiotics such as penicillin. Harmful insects will be eradicated by DDT and similar chlorinated hydrocarbon insecticides."

In retrospect, the *pessimistic* sage would have been right and actually optimistic. The *rust* would be oxides of iron and other metals used to store audio and video programs, computer data, and bulky paper records on disks and tapes. The *sand* would be silicon used to make camera lenses, computer chips, fiberglass for insulation, television picture tubes and optical fiber cables to carry messages. The *soot* would be carbon used for everything from diamond-coating of metal surfaces to structural fiber for fishing rods and golf clubs.

Today's industrial wastes, pollution and garbage may be as useful to the next generations as rust, sand and soot are to us. Finding uses for today's wastes is the task of researchers and teachers of science, technology and social studies.

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