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## New Year's Resolutions and Future Shock

As I sit down to the momentous task of preparing my 1991 New Year's resolutions, it occurs to me that modern science has made obsolete many of the maxims by which sincere and conscientious people such as myself have guided our lives. Although scientists are expected to alter the technologies of nutrition, communication, locomotion, and the like, we assume that the homilies identified with personal rectitude and moral uplift will remain inviolate. Yet viewed against the advances in society, these homilies become testimonials to the rapidity of change.

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched." The modern chicken will have been analyzed by ultrasound and amniocentesis, will have had its sex determined and its DNA sequenced. It will not only have been counted but discounted before it is hatched.

"It's not over until it's over." Of course, most things are over long before they're over. Elections, for example. The pollsters are now able to predict every aspect of campaigning, from the type of television commercial that will change voters' minds to how they will vote on election day. Sooner or later, we will save a great deal of money by simply eliminating elections.

"Speak softly and carry a big stick." The updated version of this old maxim would certainly be, "Speak into the microphone and carry an AK47." The congressional version is, "Speak loudly and notify everyone you won't use the stick."

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be." People who do not have plastic cards and mortgages, and who have not invested in some go-go get-rich-quick scheme, are certain to spend their lives paying taxes, sending their children to school, and fading into that unrecognized middle known as the backbone of America. In an up-front society, backbones never get mentioned.

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," can be modernized to, "I've never seen a billboard I didn't like."

"Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." It is of course important to keep eating and drinking, but no one can be merry about it, because we now know that food and drink are filled with carcinogens, teratogens, and fat. Since life expectancy keeps steadily going up, "tomorrow" is obviously interpreted as sometime between 114 and 116 years old. While you can plan on living longer, you should be extremely morose about it, and point out that the bubonic plague was trivial compared to the trials of those dying of Alar in apples and the red dye in maraschino cherries.

"Don't shoot until you see the whites of their eyes." In a world with launch-on-warning missiles and satellite snooping, by the time you see the whites of their eyes the fat lady is singing.

"*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*" That is generally regarded as a tranquilizer, which implies that technology changes but human nature remains invariant. But even that's no longer true. In an era of computers, DNA sequences, nuclear missiles, and population explosions, the relationships between human beings are changing. The follies of the past—prejudice, chauvinism, exploitation, complacency—have different faces in a crowded and technologically advanced world. Modern science is providing us with the knowledge about our environment and ourselves that may teach us to avoid those follies, but whether we are willing to use our new knowledge of human motivation is not clear. Sometimes that knowledge leads to politically unpopular conclusions, such as the urgent need to find alternatives to fossil fuels. Everyone is for fuel efficiency. No one is in favor of restrictions on building locations to make mass transportation economically feasible. Then the temptation is to give moralistic reasons for avoiding harsh reality. The "right to have a house where I want it" and the "right to drive to work" are great moral and conflicting policies. The good solution may be labeled "scientific," implying that the cold-blooded brain is at work, and the easy solution may be called "humane," implying that the caring and empathetic heart is making the decision. In the long run, however, facing scientific facts may be more humane than clinging to comforting anachronisms.

So perhaps there is at least one proverb that has not been changed by time: "Necessity is the mother of invention." Let us, therefore, guide ourselves in 1991 so that we can have the will to recognize the necessity and the resourcefulness to provide the inventions.

—DANIEL E. KOSHLAND, JR.

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DANIEL E. KOSHLAND JR.

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