

In a post yesterday, I discussed a point that Sam Savage makes about climate change in his book, [The Flaw of Averages](#). He makes another point that I think is very important:

. . . if we continue developing sources of renewable energy at our current *average* rate, we may indeed be doomed. But we won't continue at this pace because there will be a distribution of success rates, with some technologies evolving faster than others. The technologies that *do* evolve faster will get more funding than the others, further accelerating the advances, while the below-average technologies will be abandoned. Therefore, the expected pace of progress today underestimates the true pace of progress in the future.

This suggests that most — maybe the large majority — of the renewable technologies that people are touting today in fact won't turn out. But this may not matter, so long as some of them do and we can push them forward aggressively.

If you think about it, this is basically how drug companies make tons of money. They research large numbers of possible new drugs, which on average turn out to be disappointing, but they pour funding into developing the rare exceptions that turn into bonanzas. If it works for them with drugs, the same strategy can work for society as a whole with energy technology.