

# The Moral Case For Fossil Fuels



## Synopsis

Could everything we know about fossil fuels be wrong? For decades, environmentalists have told us that using fossil fuels is a self-destructive addiction that will destroy our planet. Yet at the same time, by every measure of human well-being, from life expectancy to clean water to climate safety, life has been getting better and better. How can this be? The explanation, energy expert Alex Epstein argues in *The Moral Case for Fossil Fuels*, is that we usually hear only one side of the story.

We're taught to think only of the negatives of fossil fuels, their risks and side effects, but not their positives—their unique ability to provide cheap, reliable energy for a world of seven billion people. And the moral significance of cheap, reliable energy, Epstein argues, is woefully underrated. Energy is our ability to improve every single aspect of life, whether economic or environmental. If we look at the big picture of fossil fuels compared with the alternatives, the overall impact of using fossil fuels is to make the world a far better place. We are morally obligated to use more fossil fuels for the sake of our economy and our environment. Drawing on original insights and cutting-edge research, Epstein argues that most of what we hear about fossil fuels is a myth. For instance . . .

**Myth:** Fossil fuels are dirty. **Truth:** The environmental benefits of using fossil fuels far outweigh the risks. Fossil fuels don't take a naturally clean environment and make it dirty; they take a naturally dirty environment and make it clean. They don't take a naturally safe climate and make it dangerous; they take a naturally dangerous climate and make it ever safer.

**Myth:** Fossil fuels are unsustainable, so we should strive to use "renewable" solar and wind. **Truth:** The sun and wind are intermittent, unreliable fuels that always need backup from a reliable source of energy—usually fossil fuels. There are huge amounts of fossil fuels left, and we have plenty of time to find something cheaper.

**Myth:** Fossil fuels are hurting the developing world. **Truth:** Fossil fuels are the key to improving the quality of life for billions of people in the developing world. If we withhold them, access to clean water plummets, critical medical machines like incubators become impossible to operate, and life expectancy drops significantly. Calls to "get off fossil fuels" are calls to degrade the lives of innocent people who merely want the same opportunities we enjoy in the West. Taking everything into account, including the facts about climate change, Epstein argues that "fossil fuels are easy to misunderstand and demonize, but they are absolutely good to use. And they absolutely need to be championed. . . . Mankind's use of fossil fuels is supremely virtuous because human life is the standard of value and because using fossil fuels transforms our environment to make it wonderful for human life."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“With more politicians in climate science than scientists, the refining fire of debate has devolved into the burning of heretics. Alex Epstein’s *The Moral Case for Fossil Fuels* may make your blood boil, but his cool reason and cold, hard facts will lead us beyond hysterics to a much better future.”

—PETER THIEL, technology entrepreneur and investor

“If you want to see the power of fine logic, fine writing, and fine research, read Epstein’s book. In my long career, it is simply the best popular-market book about climate, environmental policy, and energy that I have read. Laymen and experts alike will be boggled by Epstein’s clarity.”

—PATRICK J. MICHAELS, director, Center for the Study of Science, Cato Institute

“Alex Epstein has written an eloquent and powerful argument for using fossil fuels on moral grounds alone. A remarkable book.”

—MATT RIDLEY, author of *The Rational Optimist*

“In this brave book, Alex Epstein provides a clear, full-throated response to the catastrophists who want us to replace nearly all of our existing energy systems with expensive, incurably intermittent sources like wind and solar. We need more people like Alex who are willing to make the case for hydrocarbons. As Alex shows, those fuels are allowing billions of people to live fuller, freer, healthier lives.”

—ROBERT BRYCE, author of *Smaller Faster Lighter Denser Cheaper*

Alex Epstein started the Center for Industrial Progress to offer an alternative environmental philosophy to America, one that is antipollution but prodevelopment. A popular speaker on college

campuses, he has publicly debated leading environmentalists. He lives in Orange County, California.

This book is well written, easy to read and understand. It provides an alternative way of looking at fossil fuels, the bane of many environmentalists who fail to see the big picture. In my view, most environmentalists, like me, have good hearts and have the desire to improve the lives of human beings without destroying the planet we all live on. Unfortunately, many environmentalists do not consider how the resources of our planet, such as fossil fuels, have allowed human beings to flourish, as Epstein explains, which has greatly improved our lives. In most cases, environmentalists only consider the negative risks and potential problems associated with fossil fuels. This book presents a very good case for looking at the benefits of fossil fuels, and, in my opinion, suggests that the failure to utilize more fossil fuels would be morally wrong. My reading of the book leads me to believe the author is asking the reader, "How can we, in good conscience, keep the same energy we use on a daily basis out of the hands of the underdeveloped/undeveloped countries, knowing that the energy from fossil fuels has enriched our lives and improved our standard of living?" I would certainly recommend this book to those environmentalists who have an open mind, and enough critical thinking skills to evaluate the book honestly. For the ideologues' whose minds cannot consider other view points without retreating to a safe place, don't buy the book. It may disturb you to discover that other rational beings live on the planet. I know that this book provided me with an idea that I had not considered before, which is the standard of value we should be considering when making policy and economic decisions, and it is first and foremost human life.

This is an eye opening book. It turns the conventional wisdom on fossil fuels and catastrophic climate change on its head. And it does so with patient, clear, well-researched statistics and information on the inestimable benefits of fossil fuels for material civilization -- benefits which we all take for granted but would disappear if fossil fuels were largely eliminated in favor of unreliable "renewables" like wind, solar and biomass. Epstein shows that while the greenhouse effect does exist, global warming is comparatively mild and that past predictions of its catastrophic effects have been wildly inaccurate. This is a path breaking book that is absolutely vital for ensuring mankind's continued survival and well-being. It deserves the widest possible exposure and recommendation.

Almost to the end in just a few days. Direct, well-referenced and with historical context on many facets of the topic. Developing countries have as much right to inexpensive energy as today's

first-world nations did during their development. The author describes in detail, both historically and currently, how those seeking grants and influence thereby sell their credibility as hundreds of their dire predictions have come to nothing. Predictions of the 70s have us all wearing gas masks in the cities by now and also predicted that Britain would be a near-desert wasteland by 2020. The world was to be soon to run out of oil. So many of these negative predictions failed to foresee the ability to "scrub" emissions, failed to foresee advances in oil and gas extraction, and basically underestimated the scientists and engineers who have accomplished so much in the face of such negativity. Dusting off those dire predictions and holding them up to the light gives us some inkling of how likely the new set of dire predictions may play out. New to me was a detailed examination of research indicating accelerated growth in many plants with the slight increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide. One of the best revelations was a side-by-side comparison of global temperature change of the 102 computer models that FAIL epically to predict anything. Only two of the 102 models come anywhere close and even those two overshot reality by a sizeable margin. Truth is: it's complicated far beyond the ability to predict.

The book is well written, easy to read and its arguments are well explained with supporting facts and examples. Its basic premise is implied in the title, the use of fossil fuels is essential to supporting human life. The book defines the standard, human life, as the reference as it discusses the advantages and disadvantages of using fossil fuels. The book provides a critically required view in ongoing environmental discussions. It should be read by fossil fuel proponents and opponents and its positions embraced, modified or logically refuted. The book should not be consigned to the dust bin of history to avoid refuting its arguments.

As a literature teacher, and someone with almost no technical knowledge in this field, I thoroughly enjoyed both the content and the easily digestible ideas in this book. I've always been suspicious of the fear mongering I see regarding fossil fuels and their destructiveness. Yet it still affected me to see oil spills and dirtied water caused by drilling or to hear about the "raping" of the planet. Fortunately, this book gave a level headed and logical discussion on these and all related issues. I was heartened to notice that the book did not discount the gravity of the claims that fossil fuels do cause pollution and cause some harm. These are serious issues that cannot be idly shucked aside. But, nor can reasonable men and women simply ignore the immense benefits provided by fossil fuels. If you are like me and often found yourself conflicted while listening to someone berate the energy industry, then this book will

give you a firm grounding of both sides of the argument, and so, if you choose to, you too can point out the truth of the flaws in the industry, and perhaps, provide an interesting anecdote about The Bigger Picture. That, after all, is the mark of a mature adult.

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