



Oil isn't evil. Users are.

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Women's chit-chat at the coffee shop

I was in a coffee shop the other day, sitting beside two young women with very strong opinions about the evil oil and natural gas industry. These were not lumberjack shirt and hiking boot activist types, but carefully styled and impeccably dressed women of the world. They had been to Disney World and "just LOVED it!" They skied and hiked and owned expensive bicycles. I learned all of this in the first four minutes of their non-stop conversation.

Then the chat turned dark and ominous. Climate change is killing the polar bears, raising sea levels, poisoning the Chinese, and it is all because of those nasty pipelines, they said. Apparently, all pipelines must be stopped. Dirty oil must be left in the ground, and billions must be invested in renewable energy, or the planet would be destroyed. And they didn't want that to happen.

Understanding the issues

I was immediately depressed, but not by their conclusion. I was saddened by the lack of understanding of our societal realities as demonstrated by these young women. Every time any of us drinks a coffee, unless we grew the beans in our solarium, we use oil. Every time we sit in a coffee shop we use electricity for light and power, often generated by natural gas. The shop itself is heated by something other than sunlight. The pipes delivering potable water to make the coffee are plastic, made from oil. Energy is required to pump that water from its source to the faucet in the shop. The trash is carried away by diesel fuelled trucks. The list goes on and on.

Those women hadn't walked to Disney World, in itself one of the more energy-



consumptive recreational playgrounds on the planet. Airplanes need fuel, and so do taxis or rental cars. Their expensive skis and bicycles contained metal and perhaps carbon fibres (gasp!), and travelled a long way from where they were manufactured to where they were purchased. To hike anywhere pretty you must travel from your home to an open space, usually by car with the bikes strapped on the back. More raw materials and energy consumed, and emissions generated, just to save the planet by a few hours of eco-friendly skiing, hiking or cycling.

Look around you. The device you are reading this article on uses energy and was built from metal and plastic. It is the product of mining and oil extraction. The furniture you are sitting on, the material in your clothes, and the paint on the walls came, at least partially, from the oil and natural gas industry. If the planet is being destroyed, you are doing it. Therefore, you are evil. What do you plan to stop doing first? No, not tomorrow. Right now.

Acknowledging the situation

Before we can have intelligent conversations about oil and gas, pipelines, energy, greenhouse gasses, and climate change we have to realize we all live in a world reliant on hydrocarbons, one way or another. That reliance may shift to other energy sources over time, which is a good thing and a laudable goal to work toward, but it cannot and will not happen overnight. Any intelligent energy conversation cannot be about good versus bad, or right versus wrong, or them versus us. We are all in the same boat or, as I noticed when the young women left the coffee shop, we are each in our own massive SUV with vanity plates. Whether we realize it or not.

Olivier R i b e r t
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"Climate change is not going away, so we need to focus on adapting our Businesses and Investments to reduce our vulnerabilities."