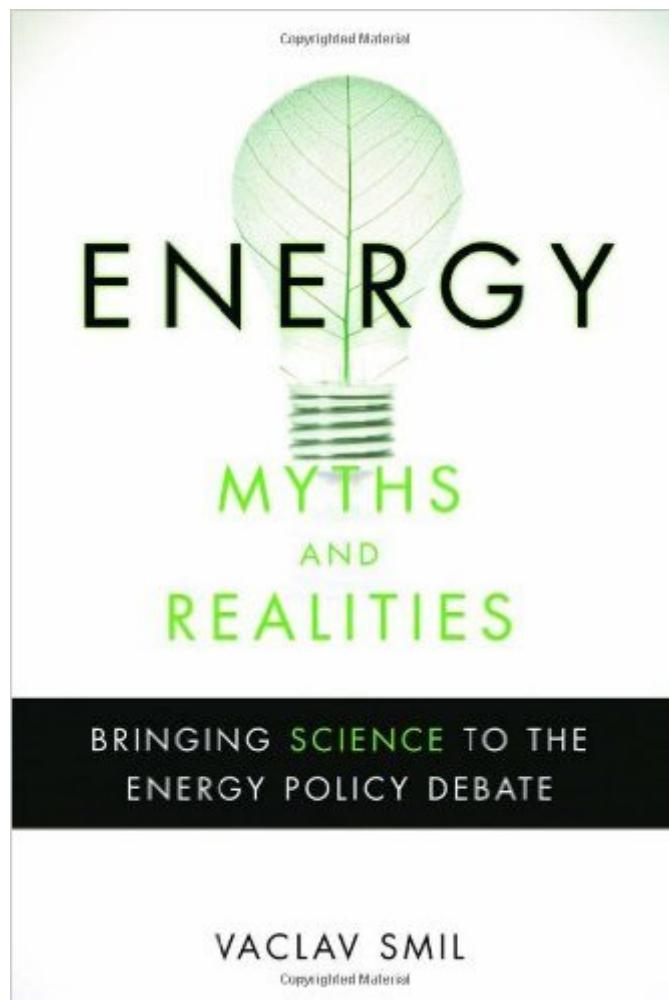


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# Energy Myths And Realities: Bringing Science To The Energy Policy Debate



## **Synopsis**

There are many misconceptions about the future of global energy often presented as fact by the media, politicians, business leaders, activists, and even scientistsâ •wasting time and money and hampering the development of progressive energy policies. Energy Myths and Realities: Bringing Science to the Energy Policy Debate debunks the most common fallacies to make way for a constructive, scientific approach to the global energy challenge. When will the world run out of oil? Should nuclear energy be adopted on a larger scale? Are ethanol and wind power viable sources of energy for the future? Vaclav Smil advises the public to be wary of exaggerated claims and impossible promises. The global energy transition will be prolonged and expensiveâ •and hinges on the development of an extensive new infrastructure. Established technologies and traditional energy sources are persistent and adaptable enough to see the world through that transition. Energy Myths and Realities brings a scientific perspective to an issue often dominated by groundless assertions, unfounded claims, and uncritical thinking. Before we can create sound energy policies for the future, we must renounce the popular myths that cloud our judgment and impede true progress.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

We have often heard authoritative statements made by various reputable individuals about new ideas for producing plenty of energy in the near future - cleanly, efficiently and cheaply. These often involved new approaches combined with new scientific/technological advances of various sorts. But as the months, years and even decades pass by, we are left still waiting for these ideas, or perhaps

some offshoots, to materialize. In this book, the author explains the reasons for these shortcomings and warns about any such statements that may currently be made. As the author puts it, the book is "aimed at criticizing assorted myths and misconceptions [about energy-related issues], and in doing so has mostly had to correct excessively positive or unjustifiably enthusiastic expectations and interpretation" (p. 156). Only in one case presented in the book has the opposite been done, i.e., to address a myth that is unjustifiably too negative. The myths discussed are related to: electric cars, cheap nuclear electricity, soft energy, peak oil, i.e., the so-called Hubbert's peak, sequestration of carbon dioxide, liquid fuel from plants, electricity from wind, and the pace of energy transitions. For some, this book may be an eye-opener; for others, it may confirm their suspicions. And for the enthusiasts who are, in all honesty, promoting some of these myths, the hard facts presented may be terribly discouraging. The writing style is clear, occasionally witty, very authoritative, rather formal but also relatively accessible. The book reads like a set of scientific reports - one for each topic being addressed; consequently, one might say that the prose is often rather dry.

Vaclav Smil's "Energy myths and realities" is a relatively good and interesting book about the alternatives to fossil fuels. The author discusses electric cars, wind power, solar power, biofuels and nuclear power. In fact, he debunks them! For instance, replacing fossil fuels with biofuels would lead to massive environmental destruction, less land available for food production and perhaps even massive starvation due to increased food prices. Wind power and solar power would only work in some areas, and can never replace fossil fuels on a national or global scale. "Greens" won't like this book. Smil is also sceptical of grand schemes for carbon sequestration, however, which presumably would make his book controversial among cornucopians, as well. The book has two shortcomings. One is that it tends to conflate technical problems and political problems. If the author is right, the problems with wind power are inherently technical, which would make this particular form of energy unrealistic no matter what. However, the problems Smil mentions in conjunction with nuclear power seem mostly political: economic downturns, curious political decisions, bureaucratic regulations and fear-mongering affecting public perception. Perhaps they are difficult to solve, but they are not unsolvable in principle. It's unclear why Smil gives nuclear power short shrift in this manner, and why he writes off breeder reactors (which, of course, work eminently well, if governments build them). The other problem is that Smil doesn't say how the energy crisis should be solved in the first place. Since he does believe in global warming being a problem, he should be for a phase-out of fossil fuels.

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