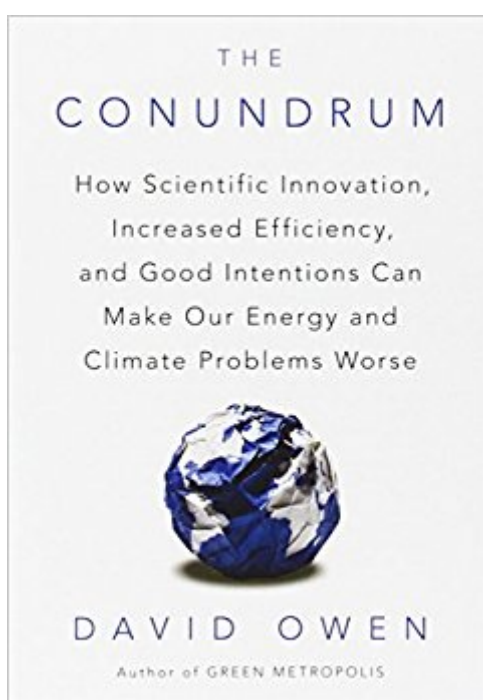


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# The Conundrum: How Scientific Innovation, Increased Efficiency, And Good Intentions Can Make Our Energy And Climate Problems Worse



## Synopsis

Look out for David Owen's next book, *Where the Water Goes*. The Conundrum is a mind-changing manifesto about the environment, efficiency and the real path to sustainability. Hybrid cars, fast trains, compact florescent light bulbs, solar panels, carbon offsets: Everything you've been told about living green is wrong. The quest for a breakthrough battery or a 100 mpg car are dangerous fantasies. We are consumers, and we like to consume green and efficiently. But David Owen argues that our best intentions are still at cross purposes to our true goal - living sustainably and caring for our environment and the future of the planet. Efficiency, once considered the holy grail of our environmental problems, turns out to be part of the problem. Efforts to improve efficiency and increase sustainable development only exacerbate the problems they are meant to solve, more than negating the environmental gains. We have little trouble turning increases in efficiency into increases in consumption. David Owen's *The Conundrum* is an elegant nonfiction narrative filled with fascinating information and anecdotes takes you through the history of energy and the quest for efficiency. This is a book about the environment that will change how you look at the world. We should not be waiting for some geniuses to invent our way out of the energy and economic crisis we're in. We already have the technology and knowledge we need to live sustainably. But will we do it? That is the conundrum.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Owen's unflinching perspective is particularly refreshing. —Mother

Jones — “Elegant... Owen’s core argument is not that we shouldn’t try to save the environment. Rather, he says that our focus on technological innovation, particularly efficiency, is misguided.” — Slate — “A contrarian page-turner” — Bloomberg Businessweek

David Owen is a staff writer for The New Yorker and the author more than a dozen books. He lives in northwest Connecticut with his wife, the writer Ann Hodgman.

I have enjoyed everything David Owen has ever written. He is able to write clearly about some of the most complicated topics, always with a twinkle in his eye. But this book is truly a conundrum. For every opening to a better future he mentions, he counters with its true cost and sure failure. Humanity has reached a point where it cannot win; if we continue to prosper, we will devastate the planet even more than we have, with no way to fix it, but if we cut back on progress and growth, we will prolong the planet’s habitability but in ways that make life not much fun to live. I love to travel, but it uses huge amounts of energy. Otherwise I live a pretty low carbon life: I walk to work, have a “clean” (Hah!) diesel car that got 54mpg on a trip I took two days ago, keep my very small house at 61 degrees in the winter and use shade trees to keep it cool enough I don’t need AC in the summer, wash all my dishes by hand in the sink (dishes don’t need to be all that clean), and turn off everything but the hot water heater and refrigerator when I am gone more than a day. I also don’t have a TV. Despite my sacrifices, I love living like this. I wish everyone would, as it would make a huge difference if people turned off lights, didn’t idle their cars, walked more, and weren’t so selfish as to value their comfort over the waste it takes to keep it. We can’t give up!

I disagree with most of Owen’s arguments but find them interesting and thought provoking. Owen suggests that increased efficiency results in more bad behavior as far as energy consumption is concerned by way of a “Jevons rebound”. The point might be best illustrated by efficient public transport and improved roads resulting in more urban sprawl, doing more harm than good (if you think suburbs are harmful). Unfortunately, I think Owen is a bit too pessimistic and alarmist. Worst of all, his solutions rely on heavy handed government policy versus market driven innovation. Overall I enjoyed the book and recommend it to anyone interested in energy policy. Owen’s thoughtful points serve as balance to optimists like Bryce and Lovins.

Just because it looks green, doesn’t mean it is. The environmental movement is full of good

intentions, but much of what it has done either provides no benefit or actually harms the environment. David Owen does a masterful job of showing some of the worst fallacies in the environmental movement and does so as someone trying to save the movement from itself. Were it not for two things, he would be widely considered one of the best environmental thinkers of our time. The first problem is that he is not the type of person willing to live as a vegan without a car. While he seems to have a great awareness of what needs done, he doesn't manage to live in the manner he knows is necessary. That can make him a little hard to take serious at times. Second, he has more problems than solutions. It is very clear that the NIMBYs which have stopped us from building more high density cities based on Subways and Elevators need to be broken. It is very clear that energy efficiency gains give us nothing if they do not come along with higher energy prices. However the pathways to make that happen are opaque.

Nice book

Yes, it is--as Mr. Owen so eloquently explains. This tight and succinct book will clarify for you the energy issues that are so urgently before us. He offers real solutions, too. Coupled with Ozzie Zehner's book "Green Illusions", your worldview of the energy and environmental challenges before us will be radically changed-- by facts!

Interesting read. I had to read it for an Environmental Science class but actually enjoyed it. It's not so scientific as the author breaks it down in ways you're able to relate to and understand.

It took me too long to get around to reading this book not unlike the way it takes me too long to getting around to changing the things in my life that do not line up with my environmental commitment. The Conundrum inspires me to do better without being overly moralistic. A good read.

Fascinating fascinating book and very well written. Analyses the issues well and makes it easy to read.

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