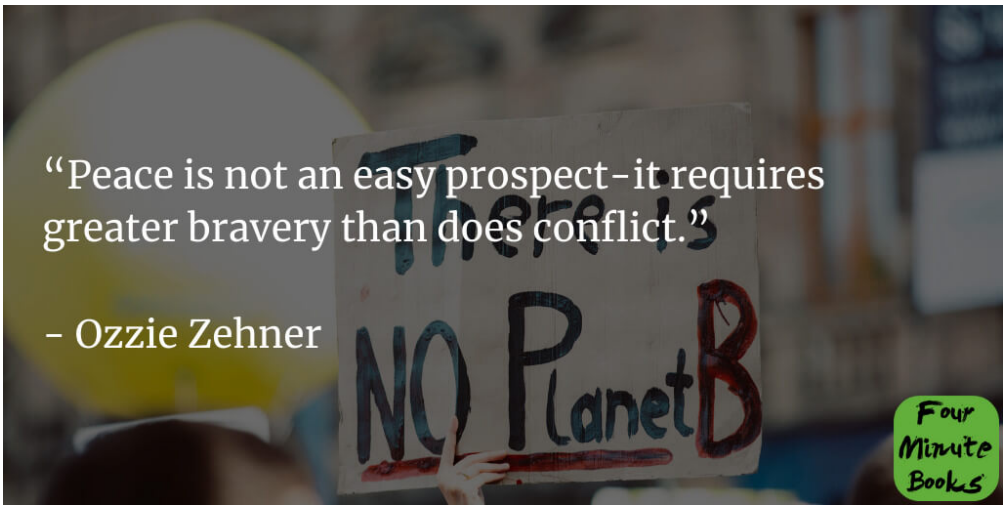
Green Illusions Summary

1-Sentence-Summary: *Green Illusions will open your mind to the true nature of our problem with energy by explaining the potential dangers and inefficiencies of alternative energy sources like wind, hydrogen, solar, and nuclear, and identifies the real culprit of our energy crisis and how to stop it.*

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



More and more, people of today are starting to push for modern societies to "go green." People see the devastating effects of climate change and want to do something about it. Right now, a lot of the environmentalist hype is around alternative sources of energy such and solar or wind.

We want to drop harmful fossil fuels and run to these other types of energy. But do we consider if they are really the solution we think they are? In *Green Illusions: The Dirty Secrets of Clean Energy and the Future of Environmentalism* by Ozzie Zehner we get a fresh take on how we can save the planet. Shockingly, much of the hype around alternative energy is overrated. The truth is, all types of sustainable energy sources have serious drawbacks that no one is talking about.

He's not anti-green. But rather he wants all of us to take responsibility. He'll help you realize that us putting hopes on new technological solutions to environmental problems is likely an excuse that will allow us to keep up our excessive material lifestyles. I mean, if we *really* cared, wouldn't we start with our own constant consumption?

Let's see how much we can discover in just 3 lessons:

1. Producing alternative energy sources like wind isn't sustainable.
2. The real problem with our energy crisis is that we demand a lot of it.
3. With the help of our government, we could enact laws that can help us take better care of our planet.

Is renewable energy all it's cracked up to be? Let's get right to these lessons and find out!

Lesson 1: Wind and other alternative energy sources are sustainable, but producing them isn't always.

But alternative energy sources are renewable, so what could be wrong with that? One of the biggest problems with these energy sources is that the equipment and processes to actually produce power are not so renewable.

For example, a hydrogen-powered car might seem like the perfect solution for making our transportation green. These cars get their power from a hydrogen fuel cell that only emits water. But the hydrogen production for the fuel cell needs significantly more energy than the cell itself can provide. This is because refrigeration and high pressure, which need huge amounts of energy, are the only way to convert hydrogen gas into liquid.

Wind energy comes with similar problems. The wind might be free and renewable, but the turbines that turn the wind into energy aren't. **When you actually look at the energy it takes to produce and transport the energy, you see that wind turbines actually need a lot of conventionally produced energy.**

And while people might argue that it leaves less of a carbon footprint, they'd be wrong. The CO_2 emissions that happen during the production of turbines are so high that the carbon footprint is often as much or more than conventional energy.

Lesson 2: The biggest challenge to our energy struggles is our high demand for it.

We push for alternative energy but are ignoring the true core of our energy crisis: our huge demand for energy. But this is like treating the symptoms instead of the disease itself. Rather than find ways to make more energy, wouldn't it be better to find ways to use less?

Believe it or not, improving energy efficiency can actually increase the demand for energy. With the invention of the steam engine in the 1800s, coal demand skyrocketed. When inventor James Watt created a more efficient steam engine in 1865, people thought coal consumption might decline. But as the Jevons Paradox states, the efficiency of the engines actually made them more popular and affordable, and coal usage increased.

Similarly, making modern devices more efficient makes energy cheaper, and this brings us back to where we started: with high consumption and not enough energy supply. If we know this, why do we prefer solutions that only address energy production rather than reduction?

The author thinks this is because our economy is dominated by productivism.

This is an attitude that values the production of things as this is what makes the money. The bottom line is that we can't commercialize and sell energy reduction ideas. Which means that they can't benefit the economy.

Lesson 3: We could take better care of our planet if we could get our government to implement the right laws.

We can convince people to change their behavior, but the government also needs to help if we are to change the way things are. **In doing this, they also need to keep in mind that measures put in place need to not just decrease energy, but they also need to improve the well-being of the people and they can't be too expensive.**

Rather than focusing on income with taxes, we need to focus more on consumption. The prices of goods around us don't reflect how much energy we really need to produce them.

This worked in California, where they placed cost penalties on products that required heavy energy use. Because of this measure, California's per-capita energy consumption has remained stable while the rest f the nation's has doubled.

Another thing we can do is make more conscious packaging. A third of the trash American's produce is packaging material. Imagine all the energy spent producing all of this material just for it to be thrown away. The US could require companies to bear the cost of recycling and disposing of their packaging as they do in Europe.

Lastly, the government should enforce "No junk mail" stickers on mailboxes as they do in Europe. This would help reduce energy wasted on unwanted junk mail. It is estimated that American junk mail has a carbon footprint equivalent to eleven coal-fired power plants.

Green Illusions Review

I'm really on the fence about *Green Illusions*. On one hand, these ideas bring up an important mindset of questioning that we should take into our plans and efforts to heal our planet from the harm that we've done to it. But on the other hand, it felt like there were a lot of assumptions made and some claims and ideas that just seemed too radical to work.

Who would I recommend the Green Illusions summary to?

The 62-year-old who wants to become more informed about the truths behind the fight against climate change, the 29-year-old who wonders if renewable energy sources are actually all they're cracked up to be, and anyone that's concerned about our planet and wants to help heal it.