

The Oil Drum: Campfire

Discussions about Energy and Our Future

(Peak Oil) Ignorance is Strength ?

Posted by [Nate Hagens](#) on May 16, 2009 - 8:09pm in [The Oil Drum: Campfire](#)

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Successful adaptation to issues surrounding resource depletion will require (at least) 1)the ability to think about the future, 2)the recognition that if nothing is done the future will be worse off than the present and 3)the ability to act now, while time and resources are still available to act. Many reading this site qualify for at least 2 of the above. My own sharing of discoveries, analysis and opinions about Peak Oil with friends, family and acquaintances over the past 5 years, has met with a wide disparity of reactions. There is a significant group of people that fall into the category of *'thanks, but I don't want to know anymore about this topic'*. They don't often use those exact words, but might reply to an email about Cantarell decline rates with a picture of their son at baseball practice, e.g.

Tonight's Campfire relates to the spigot of information surrounding Peak Oil and Limits to Growth more broadly, etc. Are you happy you learned about the coming energy transition or do you long for the days of Peak Oil ignorance? If you could do a rewind would you want the Peak Oil information spigot fully open, a moderate flow, or a bare trickle?

A decade ago my view of the distant future was where the DJIA would be, where I might retire and with whom. Now my future probability distribution includes famine, war, anarchy, ecological destruction, population dieoff and other unpleasantness. I remember when reading "Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight" and "Overshoot" during a 2 week span caused my world to go a bit topsy-turvy. Since then I have spent 20-60 hours a week reading and researching the wide boundary issues surrounding ecological (and energy) overshoot. But despite my trepidations about future social/environmental outcomes, I like my current life - it is full of challenge and meaning, and every day I encounter new 'unexpected reward' in the guise of the global puzzle which is our upcoming energy transition. I am hopeful, but not optimistic.;-)

But there are many that in spite how it might positively affect their own survival, advantage, health, comfort or future enjoyment, do NOT want to hear about limits to growth and the necessity for significant social change. In fact, my best friend in the world, a very bright and conscientious man, who understands the possible negative impacts Peak Oil may have on his and his families' lives, has specifically told me he doesn't want to think about these things until they happen - there is little he can do in any case (in his opinion). He would prefer to enjoy the heavily-subsidized-by-oil lifestyle of the typical American for as long as he can, and thoughts of gasoline shortages and World Wars infringe too much on his current happiness.

Though this certainly isn't my choice, it IS a natural reaction. Worry can create a larger flow of stress hormones (cortisol) and other negative impacts on our immune systems. Optimism has likely had adaptive benefits. Our mirror neurons and positive reactions to 'happy' people and 'positive' forecasts has been well studied. Therefore, it is certainly an understandable strategy that someone would choose to either remain ignorant or 'stop the flow' of information that entails

undue worry and consideration about any future beyond the next few weeks or months.



Nate and some 'peak oil unconcerned'...

My dogs and cats only think about today. No doubt if they miss a few meals they will start to get progressively uncomfortable, but their ability to think about the future can be measured in seconds or minutes. Even if I could convey to them the possibility that one day their bottomless bowl of Science Diet might run low they would still look at me with blissful uncaring. Even though humans, probably due to our sunk cost of built infrastructure, have lower discount rates, many of my friends show the same lack of concern. Instead of being frustrated and trying a different tack to 'wake them up', I now am beginning to wonder - perhaps they are better off and/or happier for it?

Some questions for the Campfire:

1. If you are Peak Oil aware, do you sometimes wish you'd never have heard about it, or are you happy for being ahead of the herd?
2. Is there any benefit to being unaware/uninformed? Is ignorance strength/bliss after all?
3. Will being Peak Oil aware really have an advantage? And will that advantage be physical (basic needs covered) or mental (greater psychological resilience)
4. Is adaptation and mitigation to resource depletion one example of taking personal responsibility for the future, irrespective of the outcomes?
5. Optimism is healthy (for individuals). Peak Oil is unhealthy (for individuals). So how do we hone in on the fine line between optimism and realism? Or do we?

****Bonus question - based on our demographic survey 3 years ago, have you increased alcohol intake since learning of Peak Oil**

Note: when I say 'peak oil' on this site, I refer to resource depletion in general, though other authors specifically mean the date of oils peak.



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