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# CHEAPER, FASTER, BETTER: HOW WE'LL WIN THE CLIMATE WAR

*By Tom Steyer*
*Reviewed by Kenneth A. Barry*[*]

## I. INTRODUCTION

Readers of a political bent may recall Tom Steyer as a longshot candidate for president in the 2020 Democratic primaries. His backstory was striking: though a political newcomer, he was a seasoned hedge fund billionaire who now aspired to duel with climate change from the highest platform he could ascend. Steyer's foray into politics did not go very far – flanked, as he was, by other more plausible candidates waving banners almost as green. With thoughts of high office now set aside, the quixotic California capitalist has reappeared atop a new platform with the publication of *Cheaper, Faster, Better: How We'll Win the Climate War* (2024) ("*Cheaper, Faster, Better*").

The book is an amalgam of genres. Strands of memoir are woven around a core of initiatives proposed to address global warming and its impacts. The text also bristles with attacks on the perceived foes of renewable energy. Steyer first sketches his career transition from plutocrat to politician to full-time climate activist (or, to use his preferred label, "climate person") in the opening pages of the 240-page volume. Also introduced at the outset is his avowed mission to recruit readers to the ranks of "climate people." While his conscripts may not have the luxury of devoting themselves exclusively to the campaign, the author maintains that every citizen could – and *should* – redirect a significant portion of time and energy to the twin causes of curbing greenhouse gas emissions and spurring renewable energy development and deployment.

While you may not be able to tell a book by its cover, the outside jacket of *Cheaper, Faster, Better* offers some strong hints. First, the primary title reflects Steyer's conviction that a broad spectrum of engineering and agricultural innovations points to a better energy future – not just cleaner, but with lower costs and fewer other drawbacks. Second, the subtitle's reference to a "climate war" strikes a resonant note: that the determination and sacrifice of Steyer's parents' generation, victorious as it was in World War II, must be matched in scale and scope to defeat the threat of climate change. Third, the front cover hoists the battle flag of legendary activist Bill McKibben – author of *The End of Nature* (1989) – who hails Steyer's book as "a triumph." Pusillanimous, the book is not.

Across the enemy lines, so to speak, is the array of fossil fuel companies. Both Steyer's ideas and rhetoric treat this industry as the *bete noir* of the planet's current predicament. It is therefore understandable that those who regard oil and

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gas companies as relatively constructive and responsible corporate citizens may blanch at portions of *Cheaper, Faster, Better*. However, Steyer's partisanship aside, the book should hold the interest of many readers, given its breezy but cogent conversational style,[1] its anecdotal strolls down the author's memory lane, and its sprinkling of short but engrossing profiles of little-known entrepreneurs – *i.e.*, "climate people" – engaged in out-of-the-box efforts to solve tough industrial or agricultural challenges in a decarbonizing manner.

The easygoing, storytelling style of *Cheaper, Better, Faster* may not go down so well with readers who insist on verification for factual assertions. Although the book brims with the latter, there are no footnotes and only occasional references to independent sources. In this regard, it is more akin to a lecture series, where the audience has vouchsafed its trust in the speaker's candor. Readers with extensive backgrounds in energy policy and practices as well as novices might prefer that such assertions were anchored in footnotes they could peruse and evaluate independently, in lieu of Steyer's "trust-me-I-know-whereof-I speak" air. This reviewer soon came to view Steyer as a deeply committed advocate-evangelist, not a dispassionate analyst evaluating competing claims on the causes, consequences, and cures for climate change.

## II. STEYER'S ENVIRONMENTAL ODYSSEY

Steyer is not the first high-profile billionaire to step forward with a book testifying to growing climate change concerns or – having compiled a fortune – to seek out investments in companies with innovative technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In 2021, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates published *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster*.[2] Gates's book was a comprehensive and pragmatic study of the current state of play in various sectors of the economy, zeroing in on major sources that could ameliorate their emissions via either incremental improvements or major breakthroughs. One of the book's hallmarks was quantifying the "green premium" – a measure, across various products (electricity, vehicles, steel, cement, *etc*.), of whether the tradeoff of higher costs to achieve lower emissions is currently manageable or needs to be reduced for competitive viability in the market.[3]

Like Gates, Steyer turned to environmentally mindful investing and advocacy relatively late in life. He recalls how on a family visit to Alaska in 2006, he was astonished by the altered appearance of a once-snowy glacial valley he had admired twenty-five years earlier. Here are his stark conclusions upon beholding that denuded valley:

> First, climate change was real – and happening much faster than most of us imagined at the time. Second, climate change would affect us all: economies, governments, businesses, societies. *This will cause famines*, I thought. *This will cause wars.* The

1. In an "acknowledgement" section towards the end, the author concedes that it takes a village, crediting "many people who contributed to the writing, editing, and publishing of this book." TOM STEYER, CHEAPER, FASTER, BETTER: HOW WE'LL WIN THE CLIMATE WAR 239 (2024).

2. *See* Kenneth A. Barry, *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster*, 42 ENERGY L.J. 249 (2021).

3. *Id.*

> third thing I realized was perhaps the most important, although it was less a realization than a deep, immediate conviction: We can and must solve it.[4]

This passage, brief as it is, reveals the entire DNA of Steyer's book. Climate change is unquestionably happening before our eyes at an alarming pace, he asserts, and apocalyptic things will happen if societies don't acknowledge the threat and take prompt and decisive action to reverse its course.

The rest of the story, as broadcaster Paul Harvey might have said, is that Steyer, in 2013, quit his day job as founder of a successful hedge fund and became a fulltime warrior in the trenches of climate change.[5] His new enterprise, Galvanize Climate Solutions, is focused on investing in companies that he believes can contribute to solving emissions challenges. He also notes that he donates larger sums than anyone else to "Democratic campaigns and causes."[6] And, much like Bill Gates, he became a self-directed student of climate change and potential solutions, attesting: "I've now spent more than fifteen years immersed in the science, politics, finance, and technology behind the fight to protect our planet, and ourselves, from climate change."[7]

Student though he is, Steyer refuses to engage in the debate over whether climate change is both serious and imminent:

> One thing I won't spend much time on is debating whether climate change is real. That debate is settled. . . . No wonder that even the oil companies admit global temperatures are rising and that extreme weather is becoming more common.[8]

That "the debate is over" stance, though nearly universal among environmental advocates and supportive policymakers, necessarily glides past the question of *how much* global warming may be occurring due to natural swings in the long-term planetary climate and how much, in turn, can be attributed to human-caused greenhouse gas emissions. Steyer also consistently falls in line with the prevailing thesis among climate change activists that the more severe prognostications of future weather impacts are mainstream enough and should be taken seriously. He recalls with fondness how, back in 2010, he recruited an esteemed Republican and fellow Californian, George Shultz, to join him in publicly opposing a state ballot initiative launched by the oil and gas industry to rescind certain climate change initiatives passed by the legislature. Shultz regarded his support of Steyer's position as analogous to fire insurance or a business hedge, reasoning that "If your business has a 20 percent chance of bankruptcy, you'd have to deal with it, even though there's an 80 percent chance everything would be fine."[9] Steyer rounds off the anecdote with his own handicapping: "The odds of global catastrophe [if we act too slowly] aren't 20 percent, they're probably more like 99 percent."[10]

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4. STEYER, *supra* note 1, at 2.
5. *Id.* at 3.
6. *Id.* The author states this amount exceeds a quarter of a billion dollars.
7. *Id.*
8. STEYER, *supra* note 1, at 5.
9. *Id.* at 24.
10. *Id.* at 25.

However, there has been pushback against the more dire forecasts from some credible scientists in the field who've felt impelled to write books about their reservations concerning the so-called "consensus." Prominent among these dissenters is Steven E. Koonin, whose 2021 book, *Unsettled: What Climate Science Tells Us, What it Doesn't, and Why it Matters,* went into great detail on the necessity for further debate on the scientific evidence underlying the rate and severity of global warming,[11] as well as Judith Curry's 2023 book, *Climate Uncertainty and Risk: Rethinking our Response*, another deeply reflective analysis of what we know and what is legitimately regarded as uncertain or unknown regarding climate and the models attempting to project future trends.[12]

In fairness, Steyer himself does not claim to be a scientist, and parrying the arguments of these more skeptical authors doesn't necessarily fall to him. Nonetheless, readers should be aware that opinion in the scientific community is not quite as monolithic as *Cheaper, Faster, Better* would have it.

## III. DENOUNCING THE FOSSIL FUEL COMPANIES

In their public utterances, U.S.-based oil and gas companies often suggest they are part of the *solution* to climate change. Rather than denying the challenges posed by the issue, they portray themselves as well-positioned to develop new, less carbon-intensive sources of energy as well as continue to furnish the nation's (and much of the free world's) energy needs with comparatively cleaner fossil fuel production versus that coming from certain foreign sources. This makes some business sense – why *wouldn't* these companies want to be players in new, cost-effective energy sources if they're going to happen anyway? – but Steyer will have none of it. The book paints them as incorrigible dissemblers and obstacles to a cleaner energy future.

There isn't much gray area in this aspect of *Cheaper, Faster, Better*. In one chapter that implores policymakers to "Do the Obvious Thing,"[13] Steyer draws a hypothetical comparison between "Industry A" and "Industry B." While the former is experiencing waves of innovation and "experiencing explosive growth," he posits, the latter "is doing basically the same thing it's done for the past century."[14] Among other points of comparison, he states, is that Industry B "relies on trillions of dollars in annual government subsidies to remain competitive" and "is causing enormous amounts of human suffering."[15] Industry B, he reveals at the end, is (unsurprisingly) the producer of fossil fuels. The absoluteness of this comparison is typical of the book's jeremiad against oil and gas firms. One might ask: are the "trillions of dollars in subsidies" from just the U.S., or globally? How much of the "subsidies" arguably are business tax deductions, permitted for companies of

11. *See* Kenneth A. Barry, *Unsettled: What Climate Science Tells Us What it Doesn't and Why it Matters*, 43 ENERGY L.J. 237 (2022).

12. *See* Kenneth A. Barry, *Climate Uncertainty and Risk: Rethinking Our Response*, 45 ENERGY L.J. 111 (2024).

13. STEYER, *supra* note 1, at 13-31.

14. *Id*. at 13.

15. *Id.* at 14.

many sorts, rather than outright governmental largesse?[16] Should the "human suffering" (presumably the result of global warming) be counterweighed against the many advancements in human welfare and safety that fossil fuels have enabled since they displaced more unwieldy forms of energy (or as natural gas/LNG have partially displaced coal, a higher emitter of greenhouse gases)?[17]

A bit later, Steyer acknowledges that, at least in the past century, fossil fuels "allowed us to do incredible things."[18] But the tables have turned, the author contends:

> Right now, the thermometer is rising across the globe. . . . [T]he global warming caused by burning fossil fuels is devastating the planet and threatening all the progress fossil fuels once helped us achieve.[19]

The ensuing passage submits that, even though it's "impossible" to predict the "exact weather" ten years from now, in "broad strokes" the future is "pretty easy to predict" and that future is bleak. What follows is a parade of ecological horribles worthy of a fire-and-brimstone Sunday sermon depicting the eternal punishments of hell.[20] Summing up, Steyer avers:

> Climate change is the most dangerous global threat facing humanity right now. And that's not a controversial statement, or at least it shouldn't be. It's like saying two plus two is four.[21]

Boring in still further on the oil and gas industry, this chapter boils down fossil fuel's "story" to a short list of hopes and fallbacks, *i.e.*;

- The earth will self-regulate;
- Carbon capture technology will be economical enough to remove the emissions we discharge;
- If those two hypotheses don't "work out," we'll be able to geoengineer our way out of the crisis.[22]

Steyer finds each of these "stories" unlikely, even if they can't be completely refuted (because nothing about the future is completely certain).[23] In short, it would be foolhardy to rely on them, he counsels, and potentially be stuck in an irreversible planetary crisis if they don't "work out." Still further on, the book dives into the history of the whale oil industry and its political allies in the mid-19th century, who insisted it would remain dominant even if petroleum was creeping into its

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16. Much later in the book, Steyer inveighs against the oil depletion allowance specifically. *Id.* at 187-88. The oil depletion allowance has long been controversial. It's often justified, as Steyer explains, as an incentive to encourage risk-taking in drilling. But it's also been rationalized as an equivalent to taking depreciation in tax accounting on a "wasting asset" (mineral reserves), and depletion applies to many other extractive industries. Moreover, the oil depletion allowance is reserved for independent oil and gas companies, not the big integrated majors. These finer points aren't raised by Steyer.

17. The multiple benefits of fossil fuels to mankind are touted in Alex Epstein's 2022 book, *Fossil Future*, a treatise as enthusiastic (and as one-sided) about oil, gas, and coal as Steyer's book is dour. *See* Kenneth A. Barry, *Fossil Future*, 44 ENERGY L.J. 301 (2023).

18. STEYER, *supra* note 1, at 18.

19. *Id.*

20. *Id.* at 19.

21. *Id.* at 21.

22. STEYER, *supra* note 1, at 23.

23. *Id*.

territory. Drawing a parallel, Steyer contends that oil and gas today is likewise a fading industry caught in a web of denial. In one of his edgier epigrams, the author remarks:

> In fact, I'd argue that the oil and gas industry is in a much worse place today than the whaling industry was back then. Why? . . . Whaling killed the whales. Oil and gas are killing us.[24]

Yet, despite the blinding clarity of it all, Steyer worries that the wheels of public policy aren't turning with the necessary urgency:

> . . . [I]f you look at the numbers right now, that change isn't happening fast enough. Powerful forces in business and politics are pushing back to keep the status quo in place for as long as possible. The technology to bring cheaper, cleaner, more reliable energy to everyone is improving rapidly. It's already here in many cases, but not yet in all of them. And the political will to act isn't materializing nearly as fast as we need it to.[25]

Steyer still isn't through raking the fossil fuel industry over the coals. Employing a common vulgarity throughout the next chapter ("Sharpen Your Bull**** Detector"), the author attacks the industry as a shrewd and persistent purveyor of damaging disinformation. "Oil and gas," he inveighs, is "quite possibly the most politically powerful industry on earth. We're facing what might just be the largest, most well-funded bull**** machine in human history. And the fate of humanity depends on whether we fall for it."[26]

The author catalogs some cases-in-point. For example, he undercuts the notion that natural gas is a cleaner "bridge fuel" to a future when societies can switch entirely to renewable energy. While it's quite true, he continues, that natural gas burns much cleaner than coal "in the lab," out in the real world, he submits, the propensity of natural gas to escape closed systems and "send methane into the atmosphere" can, "without a whole lot of leakage make natural gas even dirtier than coal."[27] And, he questions, while the U.S. and some other wealthier nations may be able to develop technologies capable of finding and plugging leaks, "what about the other 80 percent of the world?"[28]

In a similar vein, Steyer dresses down the oil and gas industry as exemplars of deception, taking advantage of credulous pigeons like some less scrupulous practitioners in the investment industry he left behind. In a concluding passage, Steyer allows that, although not everything a fossil fuel company says is "guaranteed to be a lie," neither do their spokespeople "deserve to be trusted implicitly," because they "have lied through their teeth for decades" and have "been making suckers out of us for way too long. . . ."[29]

The industry's goal isn't even to win the argument, the author supposes, but merely to preserve the status quo while its participants and their executives make

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24. *Id.* at 29.
25. *Id.* at 31.
26. STEYER, *supra* note 1, at 40.
27. *Id.* at 41-42.
28. *Id.* at 42.
29. *Id.* at 49.

"tens of billions in new profits" and "tens of millions in salaries," respectively.[30] Manifestly, then, a central thrust of *Cheaper, Faster, Better* is that the conventional energy sector has sold its soul – and sold out the planet – for corporate and personal gain. As previously noted, that's a tough line of argument for those readers more sympathetic to the hydrocarbon industry to swallow whole.

## IV. FOUNDATIONS FOR ACROSS-THE-BOARD DECARBONIZATION

In a chapter entitled "Know What to Know,"[31] Steyer gets down to some brass tacks. He offers short synopses of opportunities in five sectors to cut their emissions: electric generation, transportation, manufacturing, agriculture, and buildings. These are quick-hitters, more suitable for a beginner than an advanced student of decarbonization. For example, under "transportation," Steyer simply notes that electric cars, trucks, buses, and charging networks are the way to go – but that shipping (*i.e.,* by larger trucks or boats) as well as aircraft are a greater challenge, as current battery technology isn't up to the task. New battery technologies or alternative fuel sources (he mentions green hydrogen as the most promising of the latter) will be necessary to "move down the technology cost curve."[32]

Steyer follows up these synopses with a more extended discussion of carbon sequestration. This field of technological development has been, for some time, controversial in the environmental community because, first, it offers a permission structure for burning more fossil fuels and, second, it's inherently suspect because it's being promoted by fossil fuel companies. The book straddles the line, however, suggesting that "sequestration can certainly be part of the solution," but cautioning that "anyone who says that sequestration can get us to net zero . . . is either wildly ignorant, naïve, or lying."[33]

## V. THE IMMORALITY OF PRESERVING THE STATUS QUO

I have already tried to convey how impassioned the book is in castigating the oil and gas industry for its purported callousness in the face of the climate catastrophes Steyer envisions. Presumably, a strategic goal is to stir outrage in the minds of prospective "climate people." However, the extent of the opprobrium is so remarkable that it's worth underscoring. In a chapter called "Stop Rooting for the End of the World,"[34] the author chastises the elites who lead the oil and gas industry, implying that they are at best morally numb to what they are accomplishing in their lives.

Digging into his own biography, Steyer recounts that his father was a young Navy prosecutor in the Holocaust trials at Nuremberg following WWII. The lesson he draws is that the misdeeds of the Nazi regime were enabled not just by "comic-book villains or deranged megalomaniacs" but also regular people self-

30. STEYER, *supra* note 1, at 50.
31. *Id*. at 55-70.
32. *Id*. at 65.
33. *Id.* at 69.
34. STEYER, *supra* note 1, at 73-87.

justifying their actions as "inevitable, or good, or necessary."[35] His analogy to the fossil fuel industry is that its enablers tend to justify their roles as necessary because modern civilization needs oil and gas. He scolds them for misspending their talents in a dead-end industry when they could be making good money in the vanguard of the green energy revolution. Steyer acknowledges that the professionals at the helm of the fossil fuel industry could be excused in 1980 or 1990, as they may have been "genuinely unaware" of the "terrible side effects of burning fossil fuels."[36] But such a posture is inexcusable today; in the author's scathing words: "You're living a perfectly normal life. Yet you owe your wealth and social position to your willingness to knowingly inflict misery on millions, if not billions, of human beings."[37]

The chapter even wags a finger at Warren Buffett. Steyer bows to the Oracle of Omaha as "the best investor in history." However, Buffet's Berkshire Hathaway conglomerate has invested billions in oil and gas – an implied prediction that there'll be a substantial market in fossil fuels for a long time to come.[38] Steyer concludes that while Buffett is "a good man," he happens to "think and hope that Warren is wrong."[39]

Some pages later, Steyer lectures large environmental organizations for being "too incremental" in opposing climate change. His rap against these groups, with their "conservation" roots, is they are wont to "let the perfect be the enemy of the good."[40] The context is that they opposed a bill that would have expedited the permitting of gas pipelines and, more importantly, that of clean energy projects. The problem these groups have – one that Steyer thinks they should get over – is that clean energy projects (such as new mountaintop wind turbines or solar farms on undeveloped land) can have environmental tradeoffs, such as habitat disruption.[41]

## VI. NO NEED TO PROP UP RENEWABLES?

In a chapter curiously named "Kindness Doesn't Scale,"[42] Steyer argues that it's wrongheaded (and unnecessary) to talk about a "green premium" and how much caring consumers should be willing to pay up to be served with cleaner, renewable energy. Flipping the concept on its head, he first assures readers that he remains a "proud and committed capitalist"[43] and then asserts that *economic self-interest* (the lubricant of capitalism) should drive customers to prefer renewable power as well as devices that run on electricity.

In arriving at that conclusion, Steyer states that natural gas won out over coal in the marketplace and, in turn, "what natural gas did to coal, renewable energy

35. *Id*. at 78.
36. *Id*. at 78-79.
37. *Id*. at 79.
38. STEYER, *supra* note 1, at 81.
39. *Id*.
40. *Id*. at 97.
41. *Id*.
42. STEYER, *supra* note 1, at 159-74.
43. *Id.* at 160.

can do to oil and gas."[44] By way of illustration, he contends that "in many places, the cheapest form of electricity is now solar or wind" and "[m]any of the cheapest, best vehicles are electric, too" (not counting the "massive taxpayer subsidies that the oil and gas industry receives").[45] A bit later, he augments this narrative with the observation that "[r]ooftop solar isn't just cleaner than traditional power, it's far cheaper."[46]

This is one of the more noticeable places where the author's advocacy side seems to take precedence. Readers may question whether the EV business in the United States, led by Tesla, offers "many of the cheapest" vehicles, as well as whether customer uptake, even though spurred by governmental incentives, is showing acceleration. Looking to Europe for comparisons, readers may take note of a recent opinion piece in the *Washington Post* by an Anglo-German historian, Katja Hoyer, describing "the slow death of German industry, coupled with high energy prices and uncontrolled migration," that's fueling the rise of the far right. Her September 9, 2024, article, *Volkswagen's Woes and Germany's Decline*, focuses on how the country's pro-EV policies forced Volkswagen to "direct its investment and creative energy towards electric vehicles, a market that has fallen short of expectations."[47]

As for the assertion that rooftop solar energy offers homeowners far less expensive energy than conventional system power, while solar has indeed become low-cost per kwh of output, there's the need for grid backup to intermittent power to consider. Can home batteries completely cover the gaps? Are people willing to decouple from the grid, or will they pay extra for its reliability, and if so, how much? Isn't utility-scale solar (complemented by dispatchable resources) more cost-effective than home rooftop anyway? These are critical questions elided by Steyer's sunny outlook. Further, when the author represents that solar "is now 33 percent cheaper than natural gas,"[48] shouldn't he, for context, mention that China – no stranger itself to industrial policy and subsidies – has set about to dominate the market for solar panels and has, so far, achieved its goals?[49]

Steyer also conjectures that the "gap in price is almost certain to keep growing," because that's what happens with newer technologies.[50] In contrast, he adds, "[t]he price of oil shoots up every time the cartel that includes Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran and other petrostates decides to artificially cut supply. Meanwhile, solar

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44. *Id*. at 167.

45. *Id*.

46. STEYER, *supra* note 1, at 171.

47. Katja Hoyer, *Volkswagen's Woes and Germany's Decline*, WASH. POST: OPS. (Sept. 6, 2024, 8:00 AM), https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/09/06/volkswagen-factory-germany-populism-merkel/.

48. STEYER, *supra* note 1, at 171.

49. *See* DANIEL YERGIN, THE NEW MAP: ENERGY, CLIMATE, AND THE CLASH OF NATIONS (2020) (reviewed at Kenneth A. Barry, *The New Map: Energy, Climate, and the Clash of Nations*, 41 ENERGY L.J. 375 (2020)). Yergin writes: "What catapulted solar into the mainstream was the marriage of Germany's environmental politics with Chinese manufacturing prowess. . . . Adding in Chinese companies that manufacture in other countries, brings the total share [of China's solar panel dominance] up to almost 80 percent. . . . When It comes to solar wafers out of which the cells are produced, China's share is even greater – almost 95 percent." *Id*. at 395-97.

50. STEYER, *supra* note 1, at 171.

just keeps getting cheaper."[51] It's true that the cartel hasn't gone away; but its clout has been diminished considerably by U.S. and other Western Hemisphere production growth, and the cartel currently seems concerned primarily with price stabilization and maintaining as much market share as it can manage.[52]

## VI. CONCLUSION

There is much more one could say about *Cheaper, Faster, Smarter* as it weaves its way between autobiography, profiles in innovation, and exhortations to get involved in the "climate war." What to make of this investment tycoon turned climate action radical?

Steyer takes on multiple guises. He can assume the mantle of personal coach urging his recruits to think outside the box or resist the pressures of conformity. He can be like a prophet raging in the wilderness or a modern-day Cassandra, warning of the calamities to come, whether or not heeded by the power brokers – only to reemerge as a self-styled climate optimist[53] proclaiming that the "clean energy revolution hasn't just begun – it's become unstoppable."[54]

Though the author's homilies and digressions drawn from lifelong experience are many, he always manages to bring them back to his primary theme of driving action on climate change. There are more than a few passages where informed readers may raise an eyebrow. For example, when Steyer rebukes Texas Senator Ted Cruz for not only airily dismissing the climate change issue but also suggesting that "carbon pollution was 'good for plant life,'"[55] he might have qualified this riposte by acknowledging that there is a vital carbon dioxide/oxygen exchange and that more plant growth reduces atmospheric CO2. That's why there's such a fuss over the shrinkage of the Brazilian rain forests, or why tree planting may be rewarded with carbon offsets.

Or take the author's riff on "environmental justice," where he decries that "poor people in disadvantaged neighborhoods are . . . breathing toxic air from refineries. They're drinking toxic water from fracking."[56] One's reaction may be: sure, environmental controls may not be perfect, but we do have rigorous laws and regulations applicable to refineries and an EPA in the hands of Democratic leadership for three out of the last four administrations. Furthermore, the notion that properly supervised fracking pollutes groundwater has long been debunked. In this light, such pokes at U.S. refineries and fracking seem like the kinds of broadsides you find in fundraising letters from advocacy groups, not a book scrupulously examining the state of play in environmental regulation of energy production.

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51. *Id.* at 171-72.

52. It also seems worth noting that oil – whatever its volatility – is no longer a major fuel in U.S. electricity production.

53. STEYER, *supra* note 1, at 227.

54. *Id.*

55. *Id*. at 117.

56. *Id.* at 105.

At its essence, *Cheaper, Faster, Better* is Cook's tour[57] through the landscape of encouraging developments in renewable energy and decarbonization, coupled with a tenacious assault on what the author views as a stranglehold the fossil fuel industry has on modern civilization. As noted, Steyer believes the former will win out over the latter, but not without a struggle. The book also sounds a few environmental ethicist overtones, brooding over how the conventional energy industry is violating Mother Earth:

> There's also the broader question of our relationship to the natural world. The fossil fuel companies don't just represent an industry. They represent a mindset focused on extraction—that the only way to enjoy the benefits of the modern world is to destroy the natural one. This idea, that plundering is an unavoidable part of life, is a recipe for tragedy and disaster. It's also clearly unsustainable.[58]

A book like *Cheaper, Faster, Better* speaks to two audiences. On the one hand, Steyer is preaching to the choir of likeminded activists. On the other, he's reaching out to new converts. I hesitate to be overly critical of such advocacy literature – a popular genre – simply because getting a complete and balanced picture involves exploring other books or media.[59] It's apparent that a "climate person" like Tom Steyer is guided by Senator Goldwater's famous credo (slightly modified): *moderation in defense of the planet is no virtue.* And one must give him his due; Steyer has surely paid for his platform.

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57. *Cook's tour,* MERRIAM-WEBSTER, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Cook%27s%20tour (last visited Oct. 2, 2024).

58. STEYER, *supra* note 1, at 237-238. This inspired passage near the close of the book avoids mentioning that the major "clean energy" technologies of today – wind and solar power or EVs, for example – also depend on extractive industries for their manufacture.

59. An excellent starting point would be Dan Yergin's *The New Map: Energy, Climate, and the Clash of Nations* (2020).