

[Matt Yglesias](#)

Mar 28th, 2010 at 8:31 am

[Human Achievement Hour](#)

A certain brand of libertarian ideology is about a principled dislike of government intervention into personal and economic affairs. Another brand, subscribed to by the Cato Institute's David Boaz, is about sticking it to hippies. This in response to environmentalist suggests that people observe an "earth hour" and—voluntarily, I note—conserve energy by turning out the lights, he suggests that we [deliberately waste energy in order to stick it to the hippies](#):

[The Competitive Enterprise Institute] rejects the rejection of technology. **They have declared the hour between 8:30 and 9:30 tonight to be "Human Achievement Hour." To join the celebration, just turn your lights on tonight and enjoy the human achievement of light when we want it.** And watch CEI's short [video history of human achievement here](#).

Because remember, kids, whenever you help contribute to the death of a Bangladeshi in coastal flooding, an environmentalist cries. Every time drought malnourishes an African child, Al Gore sheds a tear. So waste, waste, waste away. It's the human thing to do after all.

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Filed under: [David Boaz](#), [Environment](#),

70 Responses to "Human Achievement Hour"

1. *Nylund Says:*

[March 27th, 2010 at 11:47 pm](#)

With every passing year it seems like the conservatives in America define themselves more and more by simply what pisses off liberals. I don't think they actually think much bad will come from the policies of green energy, global warming prevention, believing in evolution/science, or eating certain leafy greens and fancy cheeses. They just have this juvenile need to be dickish to the "other team," like screaming "Jeter sucks!" to a Yankees fan. Their whole political philosophy has less depth than the whole Team Edward/Jacob thing marketed to the tween fans of Twilight. There, I've heard a decently argued case made for one or the other by my 12 year old niece, but why arugula is stupid and science is dumb? I'm still waiting for a reason that actually contains any logic.

2. *Sam M* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 12:11 am](#)

Uh... what? Turning on a light kills someone in a Bangladeshi flood? I am looking out my window right now and I am guessing that I see at least 100 lights. Are 100 Bangladeshis dead because of this?

Look at what they are saying. Turn a light on. TONIGHT. It is dark tonight, right? So presumably people will have their lights on anyway. So Boaz is saying to take a moment to appreciate what goes into that. That is, I don't think he's actually saying, "Kill a brown person tonight."

By which I mean to say:

A certain brand of progressive ideology is about a principled dislike of market intervention into personal and economic affairs. Another brand, subscribed to by CAP's Matthew Yglesias, is about sticking it to capitalists.

Because remember, kids, when in doubt, say that libertarians hate Bangladeshis.

3. *Rich in PA* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 8:54 am](#)

Sam, it looks to me like Boaz wants people to take a stand against the notion that actions have consequences. So even in abstract terms he's susceptible to ridicule.

4. *Ted* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 9:00 am](#)

This post is pretty good, but it would be better if it grasped that Earth Hour is almost as silly as Human Achievement Hour.

"A certain brand of environmentalism is about making the collective changes necessary to produce a sustainable economy. Another brand, typified by Earth Hour, pursues individual asceticism for the sheer pleasure of lifestyle definition and personal self-righteousness."

Yes, I know that in theory the point of Earth Hour is to publicize the problem rather than solve it. But it publicizes the problem *as if* it were something responsive to personal self-denial. For that reason, I think the stupidity of Human Achievement Hour (which Matt nails) is a pretty perfect mirror image of the stupidity of Earth Hour.

5. *DFH* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 9:01 am](#)

@2:

This response illustrates the problem pretty well. It amounts to "we're rubber and you're glue!" There's no point in addressing it.

Progressive: A mature political movement is addressed at particular policy goals, not the feelings or self-esteem of an opposing movement. Here, have a little shame. Maybe it will speed the maturation.

Conservative/libertarian/non-progressive/whatever: Oh, no you di'nt! Nyah! Nyah! So's your mother!

6. *Ted Says:*

[March 28th, 2010 at 9:03 am](#)

And in fact the emphasis on "human achievement" in HAH is really only intelligible once you understand the critical mistake the EH people have made, which is to cast environmentalism as if it were a voluntary abdication of technology.

7. *Warren Terra Says:*

[March 28th, 2010 at 9:25 am](#)

I'm with Ted at #4. Boaz's sentiments are contemptible, but the symbolic turning off of lights for an hour is also pretty silly. On the other hand, reducing energy use isn't silly at all, contra Boaz.

8. *Jeffrey Davis Says:*

[March 28th, 2010 at 9:29 am](#)

but the symbolic turning off of lights for an hour is also pretty silly

Except the whole "didn't use that energy for an hour", non-symbolic side.

9. *ChooChoo Says:*

[March 28th, 2010 at 9:34 am](#)

If turning on a light causes the death of a Bangladeshi then certainly MattY and all good progressives are morally bound to live without electric lighting.

Period.

Why is MattY (and each and every a-hole prog) not living in the dark?

Isn't the fact that they aren't proof that progs willingly and happily kill Bangladeshis?

Given MattY's lifelong use of electric lighting he has confessed to genocide.

Shouldn't he be on trial at the Hague?

10. *Merganser Says:*

[March 28th, 2010 at 9:39 am](#)

Hey Matt,

I'm a little surprised you haven't blogged this yet:

<http://greeninc.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/03/26/transportation-department-embraces-bikes-and-business-groups-cry-foul/>

(Or maybe I missed it?)

11. *The Tragically Flip Says:*

[March 28th, 2010 at 9:41 am](#)

Sam M gives us the "good faith" libertarian response:

Uh... what? Turning on a light kills someone in a Bangladeshi flood? I am looking out my window right now and I am guessing that I see at least 100 lights. Are 100 Bangladeshis dead because of this?

Yes Sam, sophistry like this will really persuade us that libertarians give a shit about the fate of anyone other than themselves. Each lightbulb kills a Bangladeshi, that's clearly what Y was saying.

Libertarians got called out on a childish tantrum that demonstrates their intellectual bankruptcy and emotional immaturity. Earth Hour might be pointless PR and "feel good" do-too-littlism but it is quite different from deliberately wasting energy in order to protest voluntary action by market actors who recognize the inevitable consequences of continuing on the path we are on.

12. [Gavin Andresen](#) Says:
[March 28th, 2010 at 9:44 am](#)

I think Mr. Boaz is dumb and insensitive to suggest sticking it to the hippies.

Then again, I think the hippies are just plain dumb for thinking that encouraging people to turn off lights and LIGHT FRICKING CANDLES INSTEAD will do anything to help the environment.

Last time I looked, most candles were made of paraffin. Which is a fossil fuel. And the wonderful thing about electric lights is that they're way better for the environment than candles (which were better than whale oil lanterns...)

And as for thinking that the symbolic gesture will get people to DO something about climate change– the latest behavioral economics / psychology research suggests it'll probably have the opposite effect.

13. [Jeffrey Davis](#) Says:
[March 28th, 2010 at 9:49 am](#)

the latest behavioral economics / psychology research suggests it'll probably have the opposite effect.

Yes, the goods straight from "Weasel and Imaginary Econometrics Vol 523."

14. [sleepy_commentator](#) Says:
[March 28th, 2010 at 9:51 am](#)

Actually, from a strictly logical environmental viewpoint, Earth Hour was an excellent time to consume electricity. So, please do not have fears for the actual human Bangladeshi persons you invoke in calumnizing each other, regardless of how much a jackass any particular person is.

15. [Richard Cownie](#) Says:
[March 28th, 2010 at 9:51 am](#)

"But it publicizes the problem as if it were something responsive to personal self-denial"

Average US household electricity usage is around 940kWH/month.
In europe it's around 450kWH/month, less than half as much.

Can we fix this by personal actions. Well, yes, definitely.

Over the past 2 years I've been making modest changes around my house: CFL light bulbs, a couple of dimmers, a new front-loader washing machine. Electricity usage has dropped from around 1100kWH/month down to about 650kWH/month. Still not great, but a big drop, and now well below US average.

And there isn't even a lot of "personal denial" involved, since the changes give us about \$900/year of savings to spend on ice cream and movies 😊

Sure, household electricity isn't the whole enchilada: but there are similar savings to be made in other sectors as well, with a little effort and a modest investment which pays back quickly.

16. *RSA* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 10:03 am](#)

And watch CEI's short video history of human achievement here.

For non-collectivists, these libertarians are pretty clueless about the nature of their examples of human achievement. The Egyptian pyramids? The Roman Colosseum? The Great Wall of China? The Taj Mahal? Bridges, dams, trains, rockets, ... Great achievements, certainly, but not exactly monuments to individualism.

17. *The Tragically Flip* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 10:11 am](#)

Last time I looked, most candles were made of paraffin. Which is a fossil fuel. And the wonderful thing about electric lights is that they're way better for the environment than candles (which were better than whale oil lanterns...)

I doubt this is true unless one tries to maintain an equivalent level of absolute lighting through candles. I doubt most people risk fire by lighting enough candles to match the lumens provided by electrical lights.

Still, it's almost as if individual actors will find it difficult to reduce their carbon emissions as much as is required to avert catastrophic climate change and instead we will need some combination of coordinated societal actions through our governments to meet the need.

18. *Kolohe* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 10:15 am](#)

Cutting out the lights for an hour a year is as likely to have as much of an effect of climate change as going without non-aquatic meat was able to prevent priests from molesting pre-pubescent boys. That said, the CEI is having a BLT and a Heineken for lunch in Dubai during Rammadan – there's no need to be rude.

19. *Ted* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 10:27 am](#)

@15: Richard, I've got nothing against the changes you recommend; indeed, we've been replacing incandescents with CFLs in my house as well.

But I need to clarify what I mean by saying that the problem isn't "responsive to personal self-denial."

I agree that individuals can reduce electricity consumption significantly. And I don't think that doing so has to impose any intolerable burden.

But I don't believe that we will ever collectively solve this problem by exhorting individuals to conserve. Imagine, first of all, that we could convince enough people to conserve voluntarily — a big if — what happens next? What happens is that the price of electricity falls, allowing ... increased consumption elsewhere.

It's not a problem that is in principle amenable to voluntaristic solution. It has to be solved collectively, or not at all. And while voluntaristic gestures at the individual level do no harm (and maybe, who knows, some tiny good), I actually believe that it does harm when people claim, in public, that we could solve this problem if we just each "did our part to conserve." It gives people a fundamentally wrong idea about the nature of the movement we need to create — and it creates an opening for silly criticism of the Hum. Ach. Hour and "why does Al Gore fly on airplanes" variety.

20. *Ted Says:*

[March 28th, 2010 at 10:32 am](#)

BTW, the argument I'm making is heavily indebted to an editorial that came out a couple of years ago ... by ??? in the WaPo? I'd appreciate the citation, if anyone happens to remember it.

21. *The Tragically Flip Says:*

[March 28th, 2010 at 10:35 am](#)

The Egyptian pyramids? The Roman Colosseum? The Great Wall of China?

The Colosseum was successful in its day, but if libertarians had been around for the Great Wall or Pyramids they would have (rightly) decried them as big government boondoggles. Neither accomplished their actual intended purposes of repelling Mongols and securing treasures for dead Pharaohs.

22. *Richard Cownie Says:*

[March 28th, 2010 at 10:37 am](#)

"But I don't believe that we will ever collectively solve this problem by exhorting individuals to conserve"

Yes, we need government action as well – mostly some form of carbon pricing which will motivate consumers. And I'm not wasting my time exhorting people to be virtuous: I'm pointing out that you can put hard cash in your pocket by doing what also happens to be the right thing for the environment.

If conservatives believed what they claim to believe about personal responsibility and the profit motive, they'd be strong advocates for profitable investments in energy

efficiency.

23. [Vince CA](#) Says:
[March 28th, 2010 at 10:38 am](#)

Just bragging: My electricity usage peaked last month at 450kWh. That's my two year high. Usually we average 300, but since our daughter was born we feel bad about not putting the electric heater on at night in her room. It's not about privation, it's about noting what I need to live, and I don't need my house at 75F 24/7.

Earth hour was kinda default. The baby was in bed and we were reading in bed with LED booklights.

But yeah, turning off your lights definitely sends one kind of symbolic message—saving electricity is a good thing in general, and in the specific)—and turning on your lights to spite the hippies sends a very antagonistic message—hippies suck, burning fossil fuels rules bee-aches.

Video: dumber than rocks. The best they can do is mis-quote Herodotus and then render unfunny an otherwise really funny scene from Monty Python's *The Life of Brian*. 'Scuse me while I enjoy solar power individually generated for my personal abode.

24. [barbarian](#) Says:
[March 28th, 2010 at 10:55 am](#)

I'm with Y. here.

It happens to be true that old-fashioned, self-denial environmentalism isn't the best way to solve environmental problems. After all, even if all Americans could be persuaded to sacrifice, could we really ask the Chinese and the Indians to refrain from enjoying the electricity and meat that we've enjoyed for a century? Carbon pricing and technological innovation might help; asceticism won't.

But yes, there's a lot of "sticking it to hippies" in libertarianism, and I hate that shit. It makes us look bad. The people who are usually right on the merits, in my view, also tend to have a terrible attitude.

25. [iluvcapra](#) Says:
[March 28th, 2010 at 11:00 am](#)

The Great Wall of China? The Taj Mahal? Bridges, dams, trains, rockets, ... Great achievements, certainly, but not exactly monuments to individualism.

Individuals can work around the edges, but the human race never accomplishes anything terrifically lasting without a lot of people being forced, or minimally nudged, to help 😊

We really should find a different word for "hippie," since it carries Boomer connotation.

26. [iluvcapra](#) Says:
[March 28th, 2010 at 11:04 am](#)

I suspect more than a few CEI donors and blog readers enjoy electric light because of the TVA and REA.

27. [Area Man](#) Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 11:05 am](#)

I agree with Ted (#4 and #15). Casting the problem in terms of individual austerity is both ineffective at solving it and politically counterproductive. Ironically, I think the environmental movement is a little *too* individualistic, and that's why stunts like this tend to have such an appeal. It's easier to tell people to turn their lights off for an hour than to tell them to join a campaign to put a moratorium on coal plant construction.

That said, to whatever degree Earth Hour is stupid, Human Achievement Hour is necessarily far stupider. Matt is right; the David Boaz's of the world have an irrational and childish disdain for all things perceived as left-wing or hippyish. I've had arguments with libertarian types over things like CFL bulbs, which would be an excellent idea even in the absence of environmental issues. But they desperately struggle to come up with some rationalization for not using them anyway. They'd rather throw away free money than do something that might validate the hippies.

28. *R. Stahl* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 11:17 am](#)

Dime store psychology or not – Boaz's lifelong problem has been sexual jealousy. Girls liked cool hippie guys. And, puked at the sight of ungainly dorks like Boaz. That's what made him a "conservative". It's really that simple.

29. *Harold* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 11:55 am](#)

Light pollution is a big issue. As is noise pollution. Turning off the lights is a good gesture to raise awareness, nothing more. It needs to be followed by legislation with teeth. It can be done. In some European cities there are restrictions on lighting at night. I noticed that the streets of Berlin, for example are darker and more peaceful than those here, without precluding a safe and lively urban night-life scene for people.

Apart from the horrific waste of energy it represents, light pollution is bad for people's night vision and messes up their metabolism (and may even be implicated in some forms of cancer) — noise stresses them out and causes deafness. But not only people are affected.

[Is light pollution killing our birds?](#)

When we first moved to Brooklyn many varieties of song birds regularly visited our back yard, which was on the migration flight path — goldfinches, indigo buntings, cardinals, blue jays, purple finches, chickadees. And when I was younger there was an even bigger variety in the countryside around N.Y.

Now we see only English sparrows.

We have done terrible things to the environment and I feel a pang of anguish for future generations growing up in such an impoverished natural world.

See also:

<http://www.njaa.org/light.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Light_pollution

30. *Tim Scanlon* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 11:56 am](#)

Pardon me, Matt, for raising a point that you know I have mentioned before, but it seems to me worth asking why it is that those on the right are so eager to “stick it to the hippies.” A large part of the answer, I think, is that “the hippies” are people who were and are suggesting that things are not OK, morally speaking, with American life and institutions: that we really ought to change our life style in response to the problem of climate change, that the way we have treated individuals we have captured violates basic moral norms, and so on. The fact that people on the right are so bothered by these charges indicates two things about them, I think. One is that even they are at least worried that the charges have merit. The second is that they care about the moral defensibility of our lives, and practices. In itself, this is a good thing about them, indicating a form of moral sensitivity. What is not so good is their response to it: not to take the challenges seriously but to hate and smear those who make them. This is a version of the familiar “attack the messenger” response that the Bush administration used so frequently, but in this case operating at a deeper level—as a psychological mechanism of denial rather than a conscious political tactic.

Environmentalists who are inviting us to turn our lights off for an hour are appealing to our sense that something needs to be done about our contributions to climate change. Insofar as awareness of this problem is troubling and uncomfortable, people who turn off their lights for an hour may gain some relief from this discomfort by doing so. If the environmentalists were inviting us to take this solace as an adequate way of dealing with the moral challenge—if they were saying, “Just turn off your lights for an hour and then you can stop worrying”—this would be evasive. It would be like inviting people to feel better by attacking the messenger, although with the important difference of not denying that the problem is real. But I think it is fair to say that this is not what environmentalists are doing. They are, rather, trying to get people to see the need for collective action, and to feel that it is possible to act collectively, and thus be more ready to support stronger action.

It may seem strange to describe those on the right, whether cultural conservatives or libertarians, as wanting to believe that things are OK, morally speaking, with American life and institutions. Each of these groups believes, in their own way, that things are deeply wrong—with our attitudes toward sex, or with the excesses of big government. What is different in these cases, however, is that the changes they see as required to meet these challenges are seen by those making them as requiring no sacrifices on their own part. The demand are, rather, that other people should stop engaging in homosexual sex, or should stop free loading on the taxpayers. So these moral challenges are not threatening to those who make them, in the way that the claims of “hippies” appear to be.

31. *Anthony Damiani* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 11:56 am](#)

Ressentiment in action!

32. *Harold* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 12:28 pm](#)

Thank you #30, Tim Scanlon. I think — judging from my sporadic reading of out-of-town local

newspapers — that most Americans would want to save the birds, if they understood the issues. Turning off the lights is a good start.

33. *joe from Lowell* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 12:48 pm](#)

Shorter David Boaz: I want to poop in my diaper and you can't stop me! ha ha ha ha ha!

Environmentalism *is* a human achievement.

34. *joe from Lowell* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 12:55 pm](#)

ChooChoo Says:

March 28th, 2010 at 9:34 am

If turning on a light causes the death of a Bangladeshi...

No, that's not the argument. It isn't "turning on a light" that kills Bangladeshis – it's the emission of GHGs into the atmosphere. The problem isn't that Boaz and whatever sheep read him are going to have their lights on for that hour. The problem is the deliberate, symbolic meaning of why Boaz and the sheep are taking that action.

Their switch-flipping is a conscious expression of defiance to the idea that we should reduce the emission of GHGs into the atmosphere, and save Bangladeshis by doing so. Boaz (and the sheep, mustn't forget the sheep who read him) aren't killing Bangladeshis by using the amount of energy it takes to keep those lights on for that hour. They're killing Bangladeshis with the politics they are symbolically promoting by turning their lights on – anti-environmentalist politics that promotes capitalism and bashes environmentalism, even at the cost of destroying millions of lives and livelihoods.

35. *matt w* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 1:22 pm](#)

Also, everyone who doesn't understand the difference between "help contribute to the death of a Bangladeshi in coastal flooding" and "Turning on a light kills someone in a Bangladeshi flood [at a 1:1 ratio]" needs to go back to "How not to be an idiot" school.

36. *water balloon* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 1:28 pm](#)

For non-collectivists, these libertarians are pretty clueless about the nature of their examples of human achievement. The Egyptian pyramids? The Roman Colosseum? The Great Wall of China? The Taj Mahal? Bridges, dams, trains, rockets, ... Great achievements, certainly, but not exactly monuments to individualism.

Those are all actually monuments to the vanity of tyrants and the murderous oppression of pre-industrial societies. Libertarians should hate them.

I went to a party that was observing earth hour last night. I hadn't heard of it until then. Other than a lack of music the only thing it really accomplished was a lot of discussion of the futility of the whole thing as

people arrived to a candle lit house.

37. *E L* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 1:40 pm](#)

Michelle Cottle: "I've given up hope for a loyal opposition. I'd settle for a sane one."

38. *pseudonymous in nc* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 1:56 pm](#)

Perhaps they can demonstrate the human ability to reach the moon by building rockets and firing themselves off into space.

Tiny, tiny penises at Cato.

39. *johnnyk* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 1:59 pm](#)

It's about creating awareness. A mighty task indeed, when it comes to the stoneagers.

40. *pseudonymous in nc* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 1:59 pm](#)

And remember, the hallmark of institutional libertarianism is basically no more than utter irresponsibility when the consequences aren't staring them in their selfish fucking faces. Libertarian = permanent spoilt bastard child.

41. *Ben* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 2:31 pm](#)

Oh dear lord, this has got to be the worst post I've ever read by David Boaz. Not only does he ADVERTISE A RIVAL THINK TANK, but he also in the video there are a lot of monumetns to government hubris and waste. The Pryramids? Those were made by slaves and were tombs for tyrants. Not exactly achievements of individualism.

42. *joe from Lowell* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 2:40 pm](#)

Actually, the pyramids weren't made by slaves, but by (mainly) conscripted labor for a term of service.

Still, the point remains.

43. *Bob Roddis* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 2:56 pm](#)

Considering not just the current economic catastrophe but the mass poverty, the economic dislocations, depressions, misallocation of resources, the wars, the starvation, the pollution and the destruction of civilization (see Detroit and/or Hiroshima) caused by "progressive" Keynesian economics and wars to make the world safe for democracy, I'm leaving a light on in remembrance of their victims.

“Progressives” (the most conformist, anti-intellectual and reactionary clowns around) who refuse to attain even the slightest familiarity with the substance of their opponents views are the true infantile spoiled children.

44. [Crossed Signaling](#) Says:
[March 28th, 2010 at 3:12 pm](#)

[...] Matt Yglesias mocks my colleague David Boaz for favoring “Earth Hour” with “Human Achievement Hour.” “Earth Hour,” which transpired last night, is a consciousness-raising stunt in which people are asked to turn off their lights for an hour as a gesture of commitment to the goal of retarding global warming. ” “Human Achievement Hour,” which occurred at the same time last night, is a consciousness-raising stunt in which people are asked to turn on their lights as a gesture of appreciation for the great humanitarian progress represented by energy-intensive technologies. [...]

45. [Sam M](#) Says:
[March 28th, 2010 at 4:06 pm](#)

The Tragical FLip says:

“it is quite different from deliberately wasting energy in order to protest voluntary action by market actors”

What in the hell are you talking about? The hour Boaz mentions is from 8:30 to 9:30 pm. WHICH IS A TIME WHEN IT IS DARK OUTSIDE. Meaning that the vast majority of people will have their lights on anyway. Or at least Boaz would presume they would.

Do you consider turning on your lights when it’s dark out to be deliberately wasting energy? Then when do we have your approval to use lights?

If I tell you to flush the next time you use the toilet, and to think of all the human ingenuity that went into the modern sewage system, would you think that I just told you to waste water?

Or would you have flushed it anyway?

Wait. Don’t answer that.

46. [Bob Roddis](#) Says:
[March 28th, 2010 at 4:22 pm](#)

If “progressives” were really so concerned about the supposed flooding of Bangladesh due to the use of electricity, I would expect Little Matty and all of his minions to just turn off their computers for months on end. Or permanently.

47. [Ted](#) Says:
[March 28th, 2010 at 4:25 pm](#)

@45: For what it’s worth, Sam, the promoters of Human Achievement Hour are encouraging people to turn on **all** their electric devices. It’s not just lights. So the time of day is a red herring. This little “celebration” really is designed to waste electricity.

48. *Ted Says:*

[March 28th, 2010 at 4:29 pm](#)

Bob's brilliant insight @46 demonstrates the underlying problem with Earth Hour. It really invites this sort of misunderstanding.

In Bob's case, the "misunderstanding" is disingenuous, of course, and prompted by malice. But people who are less politically engaged will misunderstand the goals of the movement in a similar way through sheer ignorance.

49. *wiley Says:*

[March 28th, 2010 at 4:43 pm](#)

Having the hour during daylight, when people have lights on unnecessarily would have been the smarter thing to do. *Leave yourself sitting in the dark* is not a positive message.

50. *fletc3her Says:*

[March 28th, 2010 at 4:51 pm](#)

I don't honestly care too much whether people recycle or not. But, it does drive me a bit much when people refuse to recycle because they think it's some kind of plot which is making somebody rich at their expense. As if putting a soda can in one garbage can or another is somehow an abridgment of their freedom. Put the can wherever you want. Hell, throw it on the ground if you really feel the need to. But, don't pretend you're taking a principled stand by doing so.

Earth Hour has nothing to do with saving electricity. Turning off the lights for an hour is a symbolic gesture. So, by all means, vote with your lights in favor of climate change, but I'm not going to give you a brownie button for your petulance. I forgot all about Earth Hour. I went to see the *How To Train Your Dragon* movie and was driving home. If I'd remembered, I would have shut off my headlights. 😊

51. *Bob Roddis Says:*

[March 28th, 2010 at 5:11 pm](#)

malice [mæɪlɪs]

n

1. the desire to do harm or mischief
2. evil intent

I'm not motivated by malice. That's what motivates "progressives". I just made an obvious point. If you found a bunch of long-winded vegans out in the woods hunting and eating animals, you might think that they were not really serious about their professed beliefs.

52. *Reality Man Says:*

[March 28th, 2010 at 5:24 pm](#)

I'm not motivated by malice. That's what motivates "progressives". I just made an obvious point. If you found a bunch of long-winded vegans out in the woods hunting and eating animals, you might think that they were not really serious about their professed beliefs.

No, you're just throwing shit without an argument and hoping something sticks. Grow up. Hell, an island that India and Bangladesh both claimed has just gone underwater. There are people in the world besides you and the world doesn't revolve around your penis.

If "progressives" were really so concerned about the supposed flooding of Bangladesh due to the use of electricity, I would expect Little Matty and all of his minions to just turn off their computers for months on end. Or permanently.

Not enough people read Matt's blog to make a difference. That's why we need collective action to change incentives via cap-and-trade or carbon taxes.

53. *Bob Roddis* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 5:37 pm](#)

I would think that anyone truly concerned with alleged human contributions to warming would demand immediate cessation of US warfare and empire building around the world. The US military [burns a heck of a lot of oil](#).

But I guess we have to keep slaughtering third world people so progressives can remain politically viable when insisting that we shut off a few lights.

Of course, the evil Mr. Boaz suggests that we [stop the wars](#).

54. *Bob Roddis* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 6:06 pm](#)

There is also this circular argument that insists we must have our military in the middle east in order to "get the oil". If the military came home and didn't try to "get the oil", I think we would still be able to buy all the oil we need. But if we couldn't, then the price would rise, and we would just have to use less oil. The military would then use less oil and we would all use less oil.

Further, if the Fed wasn't creating funny money which encourages and allows people to buy big trucks they probably can't really afford and allows them to borrow for vacations and to put gas in the SUV, we'd be using a lot less oil. Further, the Fed has always funded the military and it's crazy overseas excursions.

Bangladesh would be saved from floods by the demise of the Fed. Obviously, Fed defenders must hate the Bengalis. Such malice.

55. *ScentOfViolets* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 6:14 pm](#)

Also, everyone who doesn't understand the difference between "help contribute to the death of a Bangladeshi in coastal flooding" and "Turning on a light kills someone in a Bangladeshi flood [at a 1:1 ratio]" needs to go back to "How not to be an idiot" school.

If looking at ways to annoy "liberals" is their *raison d'être*, pointing out their malignant stupidity is the best recipe I've found to really put these pinheads' knickers in a twist. That is, don't argue the point of the exercise with them, shout it out from the rooftops just how stupid they are for interpreting the piece in just

that way. Remember Bush getting riled up and saying he was “plenty smart”? Same principle.

56. *Midland* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 6:16 pm](#)

If “progressives” were really so concerned about the supposed flooding of Bangladesh due to the use of electricity, I would expect Little Matty and all of his minions to just turn off their computers for months on end. Or permanently.

Yep, but most progressives and moderates tend to do okay balancing the moral and practical judgments of everyday living and don't need or want pouty conservatives to set arbitrary and/or ridiculous standards for them.

But, when you're willing to discuss these matters at some rational level, we'll be here to listen!

57. *Midland* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 6:20 pm](#)

Also, everyone who doesn't understand the difference between “help contribute to the death of a Bangladeshi in coastal flooding” and “Turning on a light kills someone in a Bangladeshi flood [at a 1:1 ratio]” needs to go back to “How not to be an idiot” school.

The classic stat-single fallacy: you want to do something that is meaningful statistically, across a population, and the snippy guy insists on judging it as a 1:1 action.

What's the official academic name for this?

58. *ScentOfViolets* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 6:24 pm](#)

What in the hell are you talking about? The hour Boaz mentions is from 8:30 to 9:30 pm. WHICH IS A TIME WHEN IT IS DARK OUTSIDE. Meaning that the vast majority of people will have their lights on anyway. Or at least Boaz would presume they would.

Let's follow that policy right here. Presumably when it's dark out, most people already have the lights on – in my experience, too many lights on. So Boaz wants to have additional, unnecessary lights on, just to annoy the DFH's.

By contrast, I'm the fuddy Dad that grumbles about wasting electricity: There is no reason for the kitchen or bathroom lights to be on when there's nobody in the room, ditto for my daughter's bedroom. Turning off those lights harms precisely no one, and indeed saves a certain amount of electricity as well as wear and tear on the bulbs. And so really, a lot of this “environmental awareness” is just what thrifty Dads throughout history have doing . . . so thanks for pointing out this bit of idiocy which is all the more idiotic for being deliberate 😊 No doubt Thrifty Dad and his grumblings to turn the thermostat down and do all of your shopping in one trip to save gas is just so much weenie environmentalism too.

59. *Jamey* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 6:33 pm](#)

A certain brand of libertarian ideology is about a principled dislike of government intervention into personal and economic affairs. Another brand, subscribed to by the Cato Institute's David Boaz, is about sticking it to hippies.

Or maybe not so much sticking it to hippies as that some libertarians can't hide the fact that they are knee jerk pro-business interests, even when it conflicts with their own libertarian principles.

There is nothing in libertarian ideology per se that should be telling people to waste as much as possible. However, wasted energy is still good for the bottom line for energy companies. The more energy you waste, the more the energy companies and the coal and oil companies profit.

Boaz here is revealing himself here to be a shill for corporate interests who only subscribes to libertarianism because it generally promotes corporate interests.

60. *Bob Roddis* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 6:57 pm](#)

1. How is the antiwar Mr. Boaz a shill for "corporate interests" unlike Barack "Goldman Sachs" Obama?
2. When I became a libertarian in 1973, many libertarians I knew were hippies. Many still are.
3. In fact, libertarians just like to stick it to cement-head "progressives" who inflict such murder and mayhem upon the people of the world.

61. *ThresherK* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 7:35 pm](#)

Still, it's almost as if individual actors will find it difficult to reduce their carbon emissions as much as is required to avert catastrophic climate change and instead we will need some combination of coordinated societal actions through our governments to meet the need.

Or, shorter: Didn't somebody once say "This won't get solved by me changing a few frakkin' light bulbs!"

(Not verbatim.)

62. *Bob Roddis* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 7:51 pm](#)

"[C]oordinated societal actions through our governments to meet the need" is the wet dream of all "progressives" who see the rabble simply as rats in a maze who need perpetual and ongoing manipulation by their betters.

Global Warming is simply the latest excuse and manifestation used to inflict the dream upon the [formerly?] unsuspecting public.

I'm glad that Little Matty recognizes that libertarians will NEVER give into his fascist vision of people as rats in a maze.

63. *Nick Feronti* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 9:35 pm](#)

Any of you who endorse a “human achievement hour” are morons. Go to the library, find a book about global warming, read it. You motherfuckers think this is some joke about making Manhattan a beach resort. Im so sick of this shit. The world will get hot. Food will be much harder to grow. People will die. Hows that for human achievement?

64. *dreww* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 9:40 pm](#)

GOOLD

65. *Sam M* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 10:05 pm](#)

At 47, Ted says:

“For what it’s worth, Sam, the promoters of Human Achievement Hour are encouraging people to turn on *all* their electric devices.”

For what it’s worth, you are entirely wrong. From CEI’s website:

“agencies and businesses will be celebrating Human Achievement Hour without even realizing it. Just by not shutting down their lights, operations and stores, they will be acknowledging that productive effort and the pursuit of happiness are a better alternative than sitting in the dark.”

Nobody has encouraged anybody to waste anything. The entire premise of this post is false. Worse, by far, is the fact that it ENACTS the very sort of silly name-calling MY professes to be complaining about here.

David Boaz is not, in fact, encouraging anybody to waste electricity because he wants to stick it to hippies. What happened is, MY COMPLETELY MADE THAT UP because he likes to stick it to libertarians.

He’s right about it being petty and stupid, though.

66. *Njorl* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 10:43 pm](#)

I recall the turning tide in the mid-late 90s when Republicans decided that being pro-business and igoring the environment was not enough. Gingrich got the Republicans to take a stand against the environment – not for the sake of growth, or profits, or even lazyness. It was considered a goal unto itself to inflict harm.

67. *ScentOfViolets* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 11:04 pm](#)

Uh... what? Turning on a light kills someone in a Bangladeshi flood? I am looking out my window right now and I am guessing that I see at least 100 lights. Are 100 Bangladeshis dead because of this?

The stupidity, it buuuurns!

Want to admit that you said something extremely idiotic, with absolutely no excuse for doing so?

Or will you, like so many of your kind, refuse to let go of the banana 🍌

68. *joe from Lowell* Says:

[March 28th, 2010 at 11:16 pm](#)

Do you consider turing on your lights when it's dark out to be deliberately wasting energy?
Then when do we have your approval to use lights?

I consider turning lights on for no other reason than to express opposition to environmentalism to be wasteful, but only minimally so. Worse, however, is the stated political purpose – to demonstrate and advance a political agenda that revolves around not addressing environmental problems.

69. *Realist* Says:

[March 29th, 2010 at 12:31 am](#)

Bob Riddis,

Honestly curious: do you think any amount of damage from global climate change would justify government control of emissions? Supposing the threat from global climate change is real and vast, do you expect it would be solved without government intervention? By what mechanism?

70. *Lekowitz* Says:

[March 29th, 2010 at 1:32 am](#)

Matt

How many Bangladeshi children have you killed with all your hours on a computer? By your own logic you have a lot of blood on your hands.

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