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Common Error No. 6 [1]

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6. "Nuclear power is uniquely dangerous and should be banned."

Most forms of energy production are dangerous. The number of deaths or serious injuries caused by the generation of nuclear power is very limited, even including those caused in the Soviet state-sector Chernobyl disaster. The numbers which result from other power sources are documented.

Coal mining, for example, kills several hundred each year throughout the world in mining accidents. It kills thousands of miners from lung diseases. It kills hundreds of thousands from its acidic and polluted smoke. Oil and gas kill their numbers in fires and explosions, and from suffocation. Hydro-electric power claims its victims as dams burst upon villages. The generation of electricity kills by the air-pollution which power stations cause, however they are fired. If solar power, wind power or wave power ever could be developed to supply a sizable fraction of the needs of an advanced economy, no doubt they, too, would claim their victims in various ways. Remember: wind power is not pollution free. It takes energy and materials to make and install those windmills.

Nuclear power may not be 100 percent safe. It is not, however, uniquely dangerous, and is safer than many of its rivals. It offers a relatively clean, cheap, and safe source of power. It is, in the form now being used, a renewable source. The new reactors use fuel more efficiently and are safer, and new and more secure methods of waste disposal and storage are continually being developed.

It would take many, many mishaps for nuclear power even to approach the coal industry in terms of damage to life and health. And nuclear power could never have the environmental impact caused by the burning of coal, especially of the dirty coal which is easier for developing countries to afford. Fusion power is probably the best future possibility, if it can be done, but until then nuclear power is a relatively clean and safe option.

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