U.S. oil and natural-gas supply chain found that those emissions were about 60 percent higher than the Environmental Protection Agency had estimated. Such fugitive emissions, as they are called, are thought to be equivalent to 2.3 percent of gross U.S. gas production.

Headlines decried natural gas as unnatural, painting it blacker than coal. Bill McKibben concluded, with the rhetorical restraint befitting the country’s leading climate catastrophist, that turning from coal to natural gas is “as if we proudly announced that we kicked our OxyContin habit by taking up heroin instead.”

Without doubt, methane leakages during extraction, processing, and transportation do diminish the overall beneficial impact of using more natural gas, but they do not erase it, and they can be substantially reduced. In its detailed 2020 assessment of life-cycle emissions resulting from natural-gas and coal supply, the International Energy Agency concluded that “an estimated 98 percent of gas consumed today has a lower life-cycle emissions intensity than coal when used for power or heat.” Moreover, a 2019 assessment found that about three-quarters of today’s methane emissions from the oil and gas industry can be controlled by deploying known technical fixes—and, most significantly, that about 40 percent of those emissions could be avoided at no net cost.

Even the most efficacious drugs have undesirable side effects; even the best technical fixes have downsides. To think that the supposedly greenest alternatives, photovoltaics and wind turbines, produce no fossil-fuel footprint and bring only benefits is to ignore reality. So too does the uninformed judgment about the evils of natural gas: It is not a perfect choice—nothing is—but its benefits surpass its drawbacks, and they could be raised even further.
We get ever more generation capacity from natural gas and ever less from coal.