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1. **Commentary**
2. **[Paul B. Farrell](#)**

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## Climate change: Big problem for Big Oil's deniers

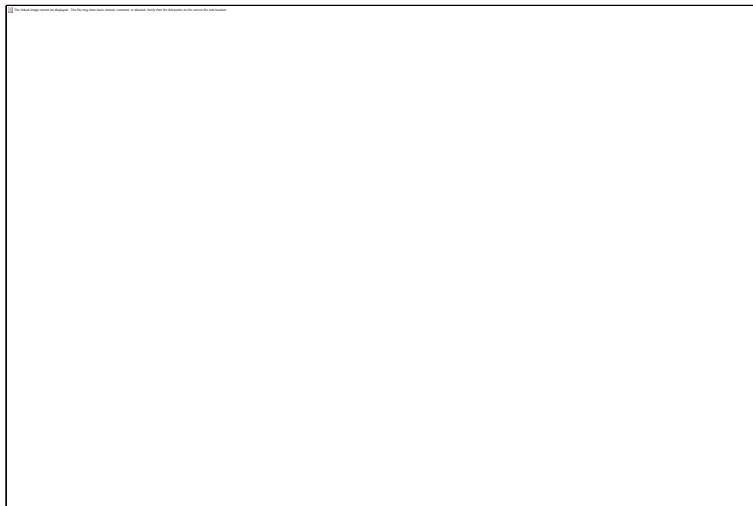
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*Commentary: Sabotaging capitalism and the economy by 2020*

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SAN LUIS OBISPO, Calif. (MarketWatch) — The indictment: “Exxon Mobil continues to look like a finishing school for psychopaths.” A Daily Kos article focuses on CEO Rex Tillerson’s remarks at Exxon Mobil’s annual meeting. If true, it raises disturbing issues for America’s 95 million investors analyzing the world’s biggest company with a \$390 billion market cap.



*Getty Images*

An Exxon Mobil oil refinery in Joliet, Ill.

But are Exxon Mobil and other Big Oil corporations “finishing schools for psychopaths?” If the most powerful growth engine driving America’s economy is run by psychopaths, America’s in deep trouble. We must ask: Is the Big Oil cartel acting in the best interests of America or merely in the short-term interests of shareholders and insiders like Tillerson, who makes \$40 million a year? And are they killing our future?

<http://www.marketwatch.com/story/big-oils-big-psychological-problems-2013-09-18>

Seriously, do you believe Exxon Mobil is really a finishing school, boot camp or some kind of bizarre mind-altering organization that hires, trains and creates psychopaths to run the world's biggest energy corporation in an era when the Pentagon says climate change is the "mother of all national security issues," America's biggest economic issue?

The facts: "The CEO of Exxon Mobil Corp. says there's no quick replacement for oil and sharply cutting oil's use to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions would make it harder to lift 2 billion people out of poverty," according to Daily Kos.

So, "what good is it to save the planet if humanity suffers?" asked Tillerson rhetorically at Exxon's annual meeting in May. Daily Kos's rhetorical response: "Raise your hand if you think Exxon Mobil's corporate board gives a crap about lifting two billion people out of poverty."

No, they don't: Exxon's investors agreed with Tillerson: He first "jousting with environmental activists who proposed that the company set goals to reduce emissions from its products and operations." But in the end, "shareholders sided with the company and voted nearly 3-to-1 to reject the proposal."

## **Are Big Oil companies really run by high-functioning sociopaths?**

So the question still remains: is Exxon Mobil really a "finishing school for psychopaths?" Most Americans have a powerful image of a psychopath seared in our minds by Hollywood: Norman Bates in Hitchcock's classic "Psycho." Hannibal the Cannibal in "Silence of the Lambs." Michael Myers in "Halloween." Freddie Krueger in "Friday the 13th."

The best image of a business psychopath is Patrick Bateman, the wealthy Wall Street investment banker and serial killer in "American Psycho." For more examples, read "Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths Go to Work," "The Sociopath Next Door" and "Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of Psychopaths Among Us."

Hollywood's dark image doesn't quite fit here: Big Oil only seems like "finishing schools for psychopaths." The better question was articulated in a BBC episode of Sherlock Holmes, "Study in Pink." Scotland Yard raids Sherlock's home on an illegal drug search. Inside, an overzealous forensic expert believes he solved the case after finding evidence "in the hands of our favorite psychopath!" Sherlock Holmes retort drips with contempt: "I'm not a psychopath ... I am a high-functioning sociopath. Do your research." So let's do it.

About the same time as the Daily Kos piece, New York magazine published some of Bernie Madoff's prison interviews: Madoff asked his prison therapist, "Am I a sociopath?" Her reply reassured Bernie, "you're absolutely not a sociopath. You have morals. You have remorse." Relieved, Madoff said, "I am a good person." A Wall Street insider cons clients out of \$65 billion, destroying their lives, and he's "not a sociopath?"

## **How to tell high-functioning sociopaths from psychopaths**

<http://www.marketwatch.com/story/big-oils-big-psychological-problems-2013-09-18>

This distinction between a psychopath like the rich Wall Street banker in “American Psycho” and “high-functioning sociopaths” like Sherlock and Bernie is missed not only by Americans who should know better — forensic experts, politicians, billionaires, Wall Street, Main Street investors and journalists — but also by the American Psychiatric Association’s latest update to its “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,” where they continue confusing matters by batch-processing the two types as “antisocial personality disorders.”

Sherlock’s retort clarifies the distinction: He’s contemptuous of being labeled a psychopath. But he’s bragging about being a sociopath. Prides himself in this identity, wears it as a badge of honor. Similarly, if Big Oil does some research it would also see some positive traits in the gulf between a “high-functioning sociopathic personality” and a psychopath — a distinction that defines the core of American capitalism.

The core distinction is this: Psychopaths are narcissists with no conscience, no loyalties, outsiders who don’t fit, rebels against social norms, impulsive risk takers. They are unstable and have a hard time holding jobs and lasting relationships.

Both types engage in antisocial behavior: But a sociopath’s behavior will appear normal, controlled, even charming. Yes, they’re often successful in the business and financial worlds because they’re master manipulators capable of building strong, trusting relationships. If the sociopath engages in unethical, immoral or criminal — even violent — behavior, it’s premeditated, the goals well-planned, the risks calculated, the threats of exposure minimized.

## **Yes, many capitalists are successful high-functioning sociopaths**

So what marks the antisocial behavior of a sociopath? In spite of his prison therapist’s absolutism, Madoff fits. So does that charming con man and forger in “Catch Me If You Can.” But he was so skilled the FBI later hired him to help catch other criminals.

And that same theme is driving the plots in two TV dramas, “The Blacklist” and “White Collar,” an obvious sign this behavior is becoming ingrained and accepted in American business.

More proof: a recent survey found this behavior is already widespread across the majority of Wall Street insiders, the engine driving American capitalism. If you read the bios of early American capitalists Morgan, Rockefeller, Gould, Carnegie and compare them with the new billionaires added annually to Forbes list and America’s widening inequality gap, you’ll see why high-functioning narcissists were very much what Adam Smith envisioned as the core personality type that makes capitalists successful in a cutthroat competitive world.

## **Big Oil’s climate disasters: People must adapt as we focus on profits**

American capitalism works because it is a \$16.6 trillion economic war zone where high-functioning narcissistic sociopaths compete with millions of other high-functioning sociopaths as well as other competitors who sometimes value the public interest as much as profits. And while Madoffs frequently emerge, more often than not we see capitalists like Bill Gates, billionaires signing his Giving Pledge and others backing the X-Prizes.

<http://www.marketwatch.com/story/big-oils-big-psychological-problems-2013-09-18>

So where does Exxon Mobil and Tillerson fit on this economic battlefield? A decade ago the Bush Pentagon said climate change was the “mother of all national security issues” with “warfare defining human life” by 2020, a time bomb ticking louder and louder.

Exxon has been America’s leading climate science denier. A 2007 Newsweek editorial reported that at a Senate Environment Committee hearing Barbara Boxer said: “Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, citing a report by 600 scientists in 40 countries.” But right after, “a conservative think tank long funded by Exxon Mobil offered scientists \$10,000 to write articles undercutting the new report and the computer-based climate models it is based on.” Their goal, sow doubt, is now the battle cry for all climate science deniers.

## **Profits for stockholders trump public climate disaster costs**

But what about long-term national interests? Stockholder short-term profits always win! Bloomberg News says even though Tillerson now admits climate change is real, the public will have to “adapt to a sea-level rise.” He doesn’t trust “climate models to predict the magnitude of the impact,” reports Associated Press. Humans “have spent our entire existence adapting. We’ll adapt.” Climate change is “an engineering problem and there will be an engineering solution.”

And in a recent BusinessWeek interview when Charlie Rose asked: “Is your philosophy, drill, baby, drill?” Tillerson answered: “My philosophy is to make money. If I can drill and make money, then that’s what I want to do” to make “quality investments for our shareholders.” Proof: Exxon Mobil is spending \$37 billion a year drilling for new oil and gas reserves. That’s how aggressive capitalists compete in today’s arena.

No wonder America’s top environmental activist Bill McKibben says “there’s not a more reckless man on the planet than Tillerson.” For him, Exxon climate change is just a short-term “risk management” problem solvable by engineers. But if McKibben’s Foreign Policy warning is true — that “it may already be too late” to stop the climate change ticking time bomb — then Tillerson’s making a colossal blunder for Exxon investors.

Tillerson’s reliance on short-term “risk management” strategies is a high-stakes gamble on the future of Exxon. Waiting till the last minute ... till the Pentagon’s 2020 target date ... till the ticking bomb ignites ... till it’s too late for engineers relying on myopic risk-management strategies ... till the disaster is too big for alternative long-term “crisis management” strategies to work ... waiting till a climate-change disaster triggers a global economic collapse. Exxon investors should challenge Tillerson’s potentially lethal gamble.

But what do you think? Is Exxon a “finishing school for psychopaths?” Or more for “high-functioning sociopaths?” Or just another of the 21st century’s millions of average narcissistic capitalists who, collectively, are sabotaging the rest of America? By threatening the future of America’s largest energy powerhouses?