



Summer 2019

## Thank You Fossil Fuels & Good Night: The Twenty-First Century's Energy Transition by Gregory Meehan

Rameez Burney  
*University of New Mexico*

### Recommended Citation

Rameez Burney, *Thank You Fossil Fuels & Good Night: The Twenty-First Century's Energy Transition by Gregory Meehan*, 59 Nat. Resources J. 371 (2019).

Available at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nrj/vol59/iss2/16>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Natural Resources Journal by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [amywinter@unm.edu](mailto:amywinter@unm.edu), [lsloane@salud.unm.edu](mailto:lsloane@salud.unm.edu), [sahrk@unm.edu](mailto:sahrk@unm.edu).

## BOOK REVIEW

*Thank You Fossil Fuels & Good Night: The Twenty-First Century's Energy Transition* by Gregory Meehan (University of Utah Press, 392 pages: 2017)

To understand how Natural Resources translates into today's globalized world, is by doing an economic analysis. That is exactly what Gregory Meehan does in this study of alternative fuel in his book, *Thank You Fossil Fuels & Good Night*. Meehan sets out his book by first introducing the general problem with alternative sources of energy, forms of alternative energy, countries and their different approaches to alternative energy, followed by current inventions and adaptations. It is effective in setting up the understanding of what alternative sources of energy look like, how they are applied, and what the future looks like. The book reads more like a textbook and less like a linear novel. At times it becomes hard to follow due to the language. Meehan uses heavy economic and vocabulary related to natural resources. The book was written for an audience who already understand alternative fuel sources. Without previous knowledge the book can become a bit dense to keep up with. I discuss each point in the order that it occurred; alternative sources of energy, different countries and their approaches, and economic analysis of the forms of energy.

Meehan's discussion of alternative fuels circles around the idea of economic viability. Meehan admits that Fossil Fuels are not going away anytime soon, we have a variety of sources to choose from. He encourages industry to move away from their reliance on fossil fuels, such as petroleum and coal, and move toward cleaner forms of energy such as solar and nuclear. Meehan mentions that although we have unfettered access to fossil fuels that it is limited to those who could afford it, and later on to those who can still retrieve it. One point to note is that Germany has the same amount of energy as the whole of Africa. Highlighting the inequities of the energy industry. Meehan insinuates that alternative energy would be cheaper and could therefore be offered to everyone. Although this is a nice ideal to strive for, it doesn't seem likely. The industry will attempt to draw profitability off of anything with a value. Solar Energy is not cheap, it might be over the long run, but the installation and maintenance are so high that it would not be a viable option for those without the economic means. Therefore, it is unlikely that people will invest in the short term.

Meehan looks at about 13 countries and analyzes the different approaches and trajectories each is on, with respect to alternative energy sources. The countries that he looks at are; The United States, Canada, Brazil, Germany, Norway, Spain, Italy, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Japan, China, India, and South Korea. Each country has a different approach based on their own economies. The United States has a more robust plan, compared to Canada who is extremely reliant on their exportation of Fossil Fuels. Most of these countries all have different plans centered around alternative energy but again they are reliant on fossil fuels.

The economic analysis is heavy but leaves something to be desired. Meehan was predicting the cost of acquiring fossil fuels to increase with time. This would happen because the cost of recovering the fossil fuels would increase because of the

technology needed to dig deeper or extract more efficiently. Mining for resources would become so expensive that the most viable solution would be to develop alternative means such as nuclear energy. But this is a long-term side effect of over mining for fossil fuels.

As fossil fuel extraction becomes more expensive, so too does the building and maintenance of alternative sources. For example, wind turbines and solar panels use material that is, for lack of a better word, scarce. Hence Meehan's point, that alternative sources need greater investments to develop the technology. But that suffers from the same problem, investment is unlikely. Alternative energy is a great long-term investment but in the short term it does not hold much value as an investment, because fossil fuels are still a vibrant source.

All in all, Meehan has written an efficient critique of the current dependence on fossil fuels that many countries suffer from. Its idealistic, as many authors are on the subject, because it is more optimistic about the market than is the case. Meehan stated that alternative sources of energy would be cheaper options and could be offered to more people. This is true, but he never shows how this is the case. Meehan mentions that alternative sources are all around us, the issue becomes, how do we harness and use them? Meehan goes on to show how expensive these sources of energy are, and how they are not as effective as the current fossil fuels in use. I expect Meehan believes that a shift to alternative energy is inevitable.

Because of increasing populations, the demand for energy is increasing. Access to fossil fuels will become more difficult as we tap our current sources for as much fossil fuel as we can get. The world will shift toward more alternative sources of energy as the price to make and maintain them will become cheaper than mining for fossil fuels. Asking investors to start investing in a market which may or may not exist after the investor's lifetime may prove unfruitful. Investors look for gain, and when any gains are beyond their lifetime, investors tend not to invest.

Industry is keenly aware of the shifting market. Exxon and Chevron will make changes in the energy industry, they are the actual audience that Meehan desires. Alternative energy is used, currently, by those who can afford it, because right now it is the more expensive than using fossil fuels. But Meehan's point still holds true, the world is going to shift toward a cleaner form of energy, because fossil fuels will become harder to mine. When that happens, it would be better to have prior investments in the field than to deal with a new disruptive technology. Industry should invest in alternate sources of energy, if they don't, they might start to become a thing of the past.

Rameez Burney  
J.D. Candidate 2020  
University of New Mexico