



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Jacob Bethem

Will defend his prospectus

Energy Ethics, Transitions, and Indigenous Communities

Abstract

As societies transition to more sustainable energy systems, research is needed to guide the many important decisions that arise which have significant impacts on quality of life. Coupled with the technoeconomic considerations are social and environmental dimensions which are varied and often imbued with uncertainty as they must take into account a plurality of interests, capabilities, values, governance structures, cultures, knowledge, resources, and histories. This dissertation begins to address this need by investigating one salient aspect of such a transition – energy ethics, applying it to a discrete group of underrepresented people who are already experiencing its consequences – indigenous communities.

The first chapter constructs the particular methods which will be applied to the cases and defines “energy ethics” as a task of applied ethics. This contribution is a departure from existing literature claiming the name “energy ethics” which more often applies principles of justice rather than ethics or is descriptive rather than critical. It is a refinement of existing application methods, applied to new cases. Ethical theories are used to overcome objections that energy justice is nebulous and impractical, making it ineffective for guiding actions.

Conventional ethical theories – virtue, duty, and consequentialism, are applied to two cases related to impacts of the renewable energy transition on indigenous communities. The first case asks, “Should the Navajo Nation pursue a solar energy economy as they transition away from coal?” The second asks, “What are the ethical arguments entailed in the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline?”. The integrated approach, using multiple, sometimes conflicting theories, helps decisionmakers to avoid merely accommodating their existing personal biases.

Thursday, April 26, 2018
11:00am
Wrigley Hall, Room 323

Faculty, students, and the public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Tyler DesRoches (Chair)
Dr. Mike Pasqualetti
Dr. Elisabeth Graffy