



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Jacob Bethem

Will defend his dissertation

Reinventing Energy Ethics

Abstract

Energy ethics are important to energy decisions but are often neglected, rendering energy decisions ethically haphazard. In addition, energy ethics are often deceptively conflated with energy justice. To help remedy these shortcomings, I redefine energy ethics using standardized frameworks with the purpose of supporting a prescription for action. Case studies demonstrating the importance of ethics to energy decisions include the questions of 1) Whether construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline in proximity to the Great Sioux Nation was ethical; and 2) Whether the Navajo Nation's pursuit of a solar energy future is ethical. I examine these questions considering reasoning from virtue ethics, deontological theory, and consequentialism alongside ethics of the Lakota Sioux, the Navajo Nation, and Hopi. I conclude: 1) The pipeline's construction was unethical because of insufficient spill prevention and response plans, impacts of oil combustion, and disrespect of tribes and temporary workers; 2) The Navajo Nation's transition to a solar economy was ethical because of consideration for tribal members' needs, despite a caveat that the tribe ought to consider sourcing the least destructive and toxic photovoltaics and should be mindful of end of product life disposal in advance, as options become available. Rather than taking ethical judgements and the supportive reasoning which is the crux of energy ethics controversies for granted, using a standardized framework makes ethical arguments more explicit. Without supportive reasons, action prescriptions are little more than opinions, but the transparency provided by systematic methods directly sharpens debate to precise points of dispute and strengthens the prescription for action to an obligation for an ethical energy future.

Monday, March 25, 2019

4:30 pm

Wrigley Hall, 481

Faculty, students, and the public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:

Tyler DesRoches (Chair), Martin J. Pasqualetti, & Elisabeth Graffy