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IAPE Speakers and Events

For information about upcoming events, see the sidebar to the right on the main page of this site (www.ohio.edu/appliedethics). Below is additional information about some of the recent IAPE events listed at "Archives (Recent)" on the menu at left.

Oil and Gas Pipelines in Ohio: A Public Forum" (November 20, 2014):

(For local reporting on this event, see the articles in [The Athens News](#) and [The New Political](#). For additional relevant information see the [press release](#) and [reports](#) at www.theoec.org).

Topics include: (a) new proposed pipelines in Ohio, (b) how state and federal agencies regulate pipelines, (c) impacts to landowners, organic farmers, and farmland, (d) eminent domain and landowner rights. Speakers include Nathan Johnson of the Ohio Environmental Council, Ted Auch of FracTracker, and Michael Hollingsworth of Shostak & Hollingsworth Co., LPA. This event is co-organized by Alyssa Bernstein, Director of the IAPE, and Amalie Lipstreu of the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA), with help from Christine Hughes, an owner of local food businesses. Time and place: 6:30 - 8:30 pm, Porter Hall.

Note: Pipeline-related issues are discussed in a National Public Radio program: "[The Keystone XL pipeline has created a heated debate over climate change and energy independence](#)", Dec. 15, 2014 (first of a series of programs).

Global Ethics Day (October 16, 2014):

Below -- items (1) - (5) -- is a record of correspondence regarding Global Ethics Day between the IAPE's Director and others.

(1) On September 13, 2014, the Director of the Institute for Applied and Professional Ethics (Alyssa Bernstein) sent to 50+ Ohio University faculty members the Carnegie Council's announcement of Global Ethics Day, and requested their ideas and suggestions.

(2) On October 8, 2014, the Director sent the following message to the same 50+ faculty members:

The important ideas expressed below in one paragraph (quoting a recent academic article) can stimulate valuable discussion with students on (or near) Oct. 16, which is Global Ethics Day (as announced by the Carnegie Council; see my previous e-mail message copied below). I have discovered the article while doing research for the courses I am currently teaching (Environmental Ethics and Philosophy of Law). The authors write about the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, "Citizens United v. FEC," which they say equates corporations with people and money with speech. The issues mentioned are of global importance for various reasons including economic globalization, the power of U.S. corporations (such as ExxonMobil, the world's largest publicly traded international oil and gas company), and climate change.

The authors argue that the court's decision has aggravated serious problems such as the following: "For example, for-profit corporations have no incentive to consider un-priced externalities, like pollution, since fixing pollution is costly and lowers profit. Similar arguments can be made for other market failures, such as monopolies. Even worse, for-profit corporations have a clear incentive to perpetuate market failures in these situations." They argue that such corporations are obligated to base their expenditure decisions solely on a project's expected effect on wealth, and that the court's decision empowers such corporations to use their wealth to defeat attempts to take the political action necessary to remedy such market failures. In conclusion they say: "It would be a strange world where one day we [the U.S.A.] may fight profitable wars, rather than just wars, and we may educate only those children who are worthy because they are expected to be good investments."

The article excerpted above, written by professors of finance and accounting, is: "People, Corporations, Economic Decisions, and Political Speech, by Gerhard Barone & Kent Hickman, *Atl Econ J* (2012) 40:219-220. Note that since this article is only two pages long, you may assign it to your students without overburdening them. You may also wish to encourage them to learn which members of the U.S. Congress support or oppose the proposed constitutional amendment that would overturn "Citizens United v. FEC," and also to vote in the election next month.

For easy access to further relevant articles and websites, please see (and refer your students to) the website of Ohio University's Institute for Applied and Professional Ethics (<http://www.ohio.edu/appliedethics/>).

Please feel free to reply with any thoughts you may have, including criticisms. You have received this message because I am personally acquainted with you and I have reason to think that you are likely to pay attention to it. Please forward it to other professors not on the e-mail list above.

(3) On October 8, 2014, the Director received the following reply (reprinted with permission) from Lenny Bernstein (father of OU Classics professor Neil Bernstein [no relation (of kinship; only friend and neighbor in Ellis Hall) to IAPE Director Alyssa Bernstein]), who had been a lead author on the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) AR4 Synthesis Report and who had worked 20 years for Exxon and 10 years for Mobil:

Neil:

Alyssa's right. Feel free to share this e-mail with her.

Corporations are interested in environmental impacts only to the extent that they affect profits, either current or future. They may take what appears to be altruistic positions to improve their public image, but the assumption underlying those actions is that they will increase future profits. ExxonMobil is an interesting case in point.

Exxon first got interested in climate change in 1981 because it was seeking to develop the Natuna gas field off Indonesia. This is an immense reserve of natural gas, but it is 70% CO₂. That CO₂ would have to be separated to make the natural gas usable. Natural gas often contains CO₂ and the technology for removing CO₂ is well known. In 1981 (and now) the usual practice was to vent the CO₂ to the atmosphere. When I first learned about the project in 1989, the projections were that if Natuna were developed and its CO₂ vented to the atmosphere, it would be the largest point source of CO₂ in the world and account for about 1% of projected global CO₂ emissions. I'm sure that it would still be the largest point source of CO₂, but since CO₂ emissions have grown faster than projected in 1989, it would probably account for a smaller fraction of global CO₂ emissions.

The alternative to venting CO₂ to the atmosphere is to inject it into ground. This technology was also well known, since the oil industry had been injecting limited quantities of CO₂ to enhance oil recovery. There were many questions about whether the CO₂ would remain in the ground, some of which have been answered by Statoil's now almost 20 years of experience injecting CO₂ in the North Sea. Statoil did this because the Norwegian government placed a tax on vented CO₂. It was cheaper for Statoil to inject CO₂ than pay the tax. Of course, Statoil has touted how much CO₂ it has prevented from being emitted.

In the 1980s, Exxon needed to understand the potential for concerns about climate change to lead to regulation that would affect Natuna and other potential projects. They were well ahead of the rest of industry in this awareness. Other companies, such as Mobil, only became aware of the issue in 1988, when it first became a political issue. Natural resource companies - oil, coal, minerals - have to make investments that have lifetimes of 50-100 years. Whatever their public stance, internally they make very careful assessments of the potential for regulation, including the scientific basis for those regulations. Exxon NEVER denied the potential for humans to impact the climate system. It did question - legitimately, in my opinion - the validity of some of the science.

Political battles need to personify the enemy. This is why liberals spend so much time vilifying the Koch brothers - who are hardly the only big money supporters of conservative ideas. In climate change, the first villain was a man named Donald Pearlman, who was a lobbyist for Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. (In another life, he was instrumental in getting the U.S. Holocaust Museum funded and built.) Pearlman's usefulness as a villain ended when he died of lung cancer - he was a heavy smoker to the end.

Then the villain was the Global Climate Coalition (GCC), a trade organization of energy producers and large energy users. I was involved in GCC for a while, unsuccessfully trying to get them to recognize scientific reality. (That effort got me on to the front page of the New York Times, but that's another story.) Environmental group pressure was successful in putting GCC out of business, but they also lost their villain. They needed one which wouldn't die and wouldn't go out of business. Exxon, and after its merger with Mobil ExxonMobil, fit the bill, especially under its former CEO, Lee Raymond, who was vocally opposed to climate change regulation. ExxonMobil's current CEO, Rex Tillerson, has taken a much softer line, but ExxonMobil has not lost its position as the personification of corporate, and especially climate change, evil. It is the only company mentioned in Alyssa's e-mail, even though, in my opinion, it is far more ethical than many other large corporations.

Having spent twenty years working for Exxon and ten working for Mobil, I know that much of that ethical behavior comes from a business calculation that it is cheaper in the long run to be ethical than unethical. Safety is the clearest example of this. ExxonMobil knows all too well the cost of poor safety practices. The Exxon Valdez is the most public, but far from the only, example of the high cost of unsafe operations. The value of good environmental practices are more subtle, but a facility that does a good job of controlling emission and waste is a well run facility, that is probably maximizing profit. All major companies will tell you that they are trying to minimize their internal CO₂ emissions. Mostly, they are doing this by improving energy efficiency and reducing cost. The same is true for internal recycling, again a practice most companies follow. Its just good engineering.

I could go on, but this e-mail is long enough.

(4) On October 12, 2014, the Director sent a follow-up message to the same 50+ faculty members:

Some of you have asked me to recommend a short text that would be not only brief but also easy to read and to discuss with students on (or near) Oct. 16, which is Global Ethics Day (as announced by the Carnegie Council; see my previous e-mail message, copied below). Listed below are two recommendations (one of which is a newspaper article, the other of which is a single sentence).

On Oct. 16, in addition to discussing global ethics in my own classroom, I expect to speak in two other classrooms to which I have been invited. Although my schedule does not permit me to speak to additional classes on that day, I will be glad to do so later in the term if you begin the conversation with your class on or near October 16th and/or assign a relevant text. If you plan to do this, please let me know.

Here are two recommendations (I will be glad to recommend other texts for this purpose if asked to do so):

(1) the newspaper article by Dr. James Hansen published today in the Des Moines Register and available on the website of Columbia University's Earth Institute (<http://csas.ei.columbia.edu/2014/10/12/iowa-roots-speaking-truth-to-power/>), and

(2) the following quoted statement: "Individuals strive to maximize utility and for-profit corporations strive to maximize wealth."

Notice that the above statement is a general description (it does not say that individuals should strive to maximize utility, nor that for-profit corporations should strive to maximize wealth). Should individual human beings strive to maximize utility? Should individual human beings strive to maximize wealth? What do morality and justice require of individual human beings and of corporations?

The above quoted statement is taken from the end of the following paragraph, which is quoted from the same article quoted in my last e-mail message (copied below).

"[T]he dissenting opinion quotes prior Court decisions in concluding that 'the special characteristics of the corporate structure require particularly careful regulation.' (558 U.S. at 2) The special characteristics of corporations that the dissenting opinion lists in support of this conclusion include: limited liability; perpetual life; separation of ownership and control; and favorable treatment of the accumulation and distribution of assets (558 U.S. at 75, among others). In this paper, we highlight an additional characteristic, rooted in economic theory, that we believe adds to the distinction between persons and for-profit corporations. Specifically, we argue that individuals strive to maximize utility and for-profit corporations strive to maximize wealth and that this fundamental distinction and its consequences should have been considered

by the Court."

For easy access to further relevant articles and websites, please see (and refer your students to) the website of Ohio University's Institute for Applied and Professional Ethics (<http://www.ohio.edu/appliedethics/>).

Since the recommended texts and excerpts are short, you can assign one or more of them to your students without overburdening them. You may also wish to encourage them to vote in the important election next month. Links to sites with information about voter registration, voter ID requirements, and where and when to vote are on the above website (www.ohio.edu/appliedethics/).

Please feel free to reply with any thoughts you may have, including criticisms. You have received this message because I am personally acquainted with you and I have reason to think that you are likely to pay attention to it. Please forward it to other professors not on the e-mail list above.

(5) On October 16, 2014, the Director spoke and led discussions about global ethics in three courses: Environmental Ethics (PHIL 3350), Political Anthropology (ANTH 3510/5510), and Difficult Dialogues: Religious Beliefs (CLWR 2210).

(*)"Vote Suppression, Democratic Values, and Struggles for Voting Rights (Constitution Day, September 17, 2014):

Panel including Daniel Tokaji (Professor of Law and Senior Fellow with Election Law @ Moritz, Ohio State University), Piers Turner (Assistant Professor of Philosophy and co-leader of the Democratic Governance group of the Ohio State University Center for Ethics and Human Values) and Patricia Gunn (Associate Professor of Law at Ohio University's Department of African American Studies) will take place in **Clippinger Laboratory, Room 194, 4:30-6:30pm, on Wednesday, September 17th (Constitution Day)**. Three lectures of 20-30 minutes each will be followed by open discussion. This event is organized by Professor Alyssa Bernstein, Director of the OU Institute for Applied and Professional Ethics, and co-sponsored by OU's Philosophy Department and the OU Center for Law, Justice, and Culture.

Descriptions:

Professor Gunn will discuss, from the point of view of Constitutional Law, the effect that deprivation of their legal right to vote had on African Americans in the context of the Civil Rights Movement.

Professor Tokaji will give a talk entitled "Three Dimensions of the Right to Vote". He has provided the following abstract:

In recent years, voting rights advocates have become increasingly concerned about "vote suppression," in the form of laws like voter ID that make it difficult for eligible citizens to vote and have their votes counted. Professor Tokaji will argue that vote suppression is real, but has been conceived of too narrowly. While most of the attention has focused on the right to participate, that is just one of three dimensions to the right to vote. Properly conceived, the right to vote includes not only participation but also representation and influence. It is in these latter areas where the most serious, yet less fully appreciated, threats to the right to vote exist. Practices that deny equal representation include partisan gerrymandering and racial vote dilution, while the vast sums spent on campaigns and lobbying imperil the ideal of equal influence. Professor Tokaji will argue that the U.S. Supreme Court, rather than providing solutions, has become part of the problem with respect to all three dimensions of the right to vote.

Professor Turner will give a talk entitled "Democratic Values and Voting Rights". He has provided the following abstract:

Proposed reforms to the regulations around voting rights--such as those concerning voter ID and restrictions on early voting--are introduced against a background set of democratic values and commitments, including political equality, autonomy, public accountability, community, and stability. Proponents and critics alike have tended to focus on political equality and autonomy issues. The basic worry is that fraud (or, conversely, an overzealous effort to stamp out fraud) undermines the equality of influence fundamental to democratic decision-making by giving greater voice to (or suppressing the voice of) some set of individuals. This then affects the autonomy of some individuals by diminishing their say over the laws that bind them. These issues are important, but considerations of public accountability, community, and stability must also factor into our account of the value of voting rights. I argue that once these other democratic values are taken into account, the burden of proof is clearly placed on those who would make it more difficult to exercise one's voting rights.



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