Good News on Energy and Climate: Ways Forward for Ethics, Environment and the Economy

Dr. Richard Alley
Pennsylvania State University

Wise use of the scholarship on energy and climate change can ethically improve the economy as well as the environment. We gain great good from the energy in fossil fuels, but we are burning them roughly a million times faster than nature saved them for us, so we must change. If we delay the change, the CO2 will cause warming through unavoidable physics. Each degree of warming is projected to cost much more than the previous degree. With the first degree of warming already largely or completely here, and much or all of the second degree committed, our decisions now affect more-damaging and more-expensive warming. Uncertainties motivate greater actions to reduce warming, as costs of emitting CO2 may be slightly less, slightly more, or much more than expected, with little chance of being a lot less. The “winners” of fossil-fuel use especially are wealthier people in colder places now; the “losers” from the resulting climate change especially are poor people in hot places, and future generations, highlighting the important ethical issues involved. Fortunately, we now know how to use existing technologies to build a sustainable energy system that can power everyone almost forever. The full scholarship is clear that starting now to move toward a sustainable energy system can be done in ways that help the economy as well as the environment, addressing the ethical issues and potentially bringing widespread benefits to all.

Friday, April 8, 2016 at 4:00 PM
in the Karl Herzfeld Auditorium of Hannan Hall - Room 108
Reception immediately following lecture

Parking and other information: (202) 319-5315 or http://physics.cua.edu/Herzfeld.cfm