



Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

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# Normative Energy Ethics

## Lecture Series



July 5,  
2023  
17.00 CET

**Power systems, ethical issues, and social implications:  
some reflections emerging from a course experimentation  
at Politecnico di Milano**

*Viola Schiaffonati, Associate Professor at Politecnico di Milano*



**Viola Schiaffonati**

In this talk I will describe the context, the contents, and some peculiarities of a course on the ethical issues and social implications of power systems designed for master engineering students at Politecnico di Milano, Italy. Starting from the acknowledgment of the importance of incorporating the discourse on education in the energy ethics debate, the talk aims at showing an example of how philosophical analysis could be integrated into a technical-engineering curriculum. In particular, I will focus on a thought experiment conceived for this course to show the promises and perils of moralizing technologies in the case of power systems. Thought experiments have been playing a key role in science and philosophy as tools to both expand and constrain imagination. I will then show how they can play an important role for didactical purposes as well, in the context of the challenges of the current technical education. I will also discuss the importance of carefully design thought experiments in order to

raise open questions and help students learn their importance. Moreover, I will show how the course has been carefully designed to be taught at the same time by a philosopher of science and technology and an electric engineer such that each lecture integrates the philosophical and ethical analysis into more technical elements. While these considerations are not the results of a systematic assessment (for example in terms of analyzing both evaluation questionnaires and students' outputs and results), preliminary results show many promising elements to be further considered.



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contact: [energy-ethics@itas.kit.edu](mailto:energy-ethics@itas.kit.edu)

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