



An ethical criterion for geoscientists

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Anthropological researches have demonstrated that at some point in human history, man makes an evolutive jump in cultural sense: at first, he is able to perceive himself only as part of a community, later he becomes able to perceive himself as an individual.

The analysis of the linguistic roots of the word "Ethics" discloses the traces of this evolutive transition and an original double meaning: on the one hand, "Ethics" contains a sense of belonging to the social fabric, on the other hand, it is related to the individual sphere. These two existential conditions (social and individual) unexpectedly co-exist in the word "Ethics".

So, "Geo-Ethics" can be defined as the investigation and reflection on those values upon which to base appropriate behaviours and practices regarding the Geosphere (social dimension), but also as the analysis of the relationships between the geoscientist who acts and his own actions (individual dimension). Therefore, the meaning of the word "Geo-Ethics" calls upon geoscientists to face the responsibility of an ethical behaviour.

What does this responsibility consist of and what motivations are necessary to push geoscientists to practice the Earth sciences in an ethical way?

An ethical commitment exists if there is research of truth. In their activities, Geoscientists should be searchers and defenders of truth. If geoscientists give up this role, they completely empty of meaning their work. Ethical obligations arise from the possession of specific knowledge that has practical consequences. Geoscientists, as active and responsible part of society, have to serve society and the common good.

The ethical criterion for a geoscientist should be rooted in his individual sphere, that is the source of any action even in the social sphere, and should have the intellectual honesty as main requirement. It includes:

- respect for the truth that they look for and for other's ideas;
- recognition of the value of others as valuable for themselves;
- spirit of collaboration and reciprocity;
- identification of a common goal, despite the diversity of views;
- responsibility of their technical-cultural expertise;
- opening to the comparison even in perspective of a resizing of their certainties;
- reflection on the mutability of knowledge and roles;
- awareness conveying scientific knowledge to others is valuable.

On these bases geoscientists' activity becomes a real service for society.

Geoethics should be above all an opportunity for Geoscientists to raise the awareness of their individual and social responsibility, an occasion to improve their understanding of the space and time in which they move and operate, with the perspective to contribute to the wellbeing and economic progress of mankind. Before acting and understanding how to act, Geoscientists should recognize the value of their actions, so that they will assure a real and long-lasting rootedness of practices, codes and regulations.