

Vince Cronin's panel presentation script
Geosciences and Society Summit, Workshop 4, 21 March 2019

I represent the *International Association for the Promotion of Geoethics* — a co-sponsor of the Geosciences and Society Summit. The IAPG web address is written on the whiteboard behind me: <http://www.geoethics.org>. The IAPG is a young organization with sections in 30 countries on 5 continents, and a couple of thousand members. Membership is free, and I invite you to join our merry band by going to our website and filling-in an online membership form.

I'm also a proud member of AGU and would like to publicly express how grateful I am to Chris McEntee and all of the AGU leadership for their support of this meeting. I was particularly proud of AGU when the decision was made to move the meeting to the Bolin Center at Stockholm University. That action was an important expression of our community's ethics.

Doing what's right is often harder than the alternative, such as explaining the ethical issue away by saying that "It's just a business decision." The statement "It's just a business decision" is not an ethical justification — in fact, it's often an ethical abdication. Thank you for making what I believe was the right decision in holding the G&SS meeting at the Bolin Center.

With your indulgence, I would like you to think for a moment about why you came to this meeting in Stockholm. I suppose some of you were directed to come by your boss or supervisor. Some might have thought about what you hoped to learn or gain from this meeting — new knowledge perhaps, or new contacts. Others simply wanted to go to an interesting sounding meeting in an interesting place. All of those are fine thoughts.

Let me suggest two other responses. First, you came because of investments that you, your family, and society have made in you through whatever educational systems you were able to take advantage of. Hard work. Sacrifice. Opportunity. Society expects that, as you move out into the world from your family and university, you will bear your added intellectual riches in trust for all of humankind.*

I know that sometimes you feel powerless, but in fact each of you is nothing less than an absolute treasure to all of humanity. All you need do now is find ways to serve, and that is what meetings like this are intended to help you with.

The second response I would suggest will seem odd to some, but let's just see where this goes. I think you came because of the hope, faith, and love that is hardwired into you as a human being.

- Hope in the power of society to solve its existential problems with useful input from science, engineering, and technology, but always with human interactions in positive communities.
- Faith that we have enough power to actually have a positive impact on the solution to these problems.
- And love: the *word that shall not be spoken* at a science meeting? What about that?

My Jesuit friend Greg Boyle, with whom I went to high school, has written, "The wrong idea has taken root in the world. And the idea is this: there just might be some lives out there that matter less than other lives" (Boyle, 2014). Genocides are based on the false idea that some lives simply don't matter.

Our responsibility is to go stand with the poor and powerless so that there is no wall that separates us.** So that there is no *us* and *them*, no *übermenschen* and no *untermenschen*, just *us*.

There are less than 100 participants at this meeting. There are currently 7.7 billion people on Earth — a number that has tripled in just the last 75 years. I would like to think that we are all here on behalf of those who can't be here, but who will need the expertise and efforts of the geoscience community to survive. Never forget that those who lack wealth and power in this world — more than 90% of the human population of Earth, and all of the rest of the biosphere — will be disproportionately affected by the twin crises of climate change and the declining availability and quality of fresh water worldwide.

I assert that geoscientists have a moral imperative to work with and on behalf of this disadvantaged population as we find our way through these crises.

We must face our energy, water, and climate crises together. This sentence might seem to be merely an expression of practical necessity. But at its foundation, it is an expression of our concern for the wellbeing of others. Of our empathy. Of our morality. Of love.

OK, let's just say that we are here because each of us, in our own way, want to help society navigate to a healthier future.

There is an ethical foundation to pretty much everything we do in geoscience, but the work we engage in at this meeting has a particularly strong ethical component. I encourage you to think about that fact.

One of the most important things that I am working on with IAPG and other organizations is to spread knowledge of the basic vocabulary and fundamental concepts of ethics as applied to our work, so we can engage in more substantial conversations. I would like us all to have a functional understanding of words and concepts like dignity, agency, respect, truth, uncertainty, integrity, human rights, power, virtue, utility, empathy, reciprocity, and justice in all its relevant forms, including environmental justice.

In this respect, there are two practical questions: [1] what is the minimal set of ethical tools that we should provide to every geoscientist to help them along their path, and [2] how can our community provide this knowledge to them freely and efficiently?

This is one of the few things I have committed myself to work on as long as I exist. I invite any and all of you to help us develop geoethics as a coherent field that is useful to geoscientists as we grapple with fundamental questions.

Some References and Sources

Boyle, G., 2010, Tattoos on the heart — the power of boundless compassion: New York, Simon and Schuster, 240 p.

Boyle, G., 2014, Barking to the Choir — the power of radical kinship: New York, Simon and Schuster, 210 p.

Vince Cronin's contributions to the GSS 2019, available via

<http://croninprojects.org/Ethics-AGU-GSS2019/index.html>

<http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>

<https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/DemographicProfiles/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_population

* Paraphrased from James Blaisdell, a former president of Pomona College.

**Paraphrased from Greg Boyle's address upon receiving the Laetare Award from the University of Notre Dame, accessible via <https://news.nd.edu/news/rev-gregory-j-boyle-sj-2017-laetare-address/>