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Abstract title

A HIPPOCRATIC OATH FOR GEOLOGISTS?

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Abstract

The Oath of Hippocrates is the first and the most popular moral code for the physicians. Throughout varying historical fortunes, from its almost complete oblivion in the Middle Age to its rediscovery and high recognition in the Renaissance, the Oath, written in the second half of the fifth century B.C., continues today to be pledged in many Faculties and Schools of Medicine and in many professional associations throughout the world, both keeping to the original text or one of the modernized versions. It is widely regarded as a cornerstone of the medical approach.

Historically, the Oath of Hippocrates marks the first sharp changeover to a rational approach to the illness and to the human health; for this reason it is reserved only to people who is able to operate because of their scientific knowledge of medicine. Human health and defence against the illness always are seen as one of the basic goods of Mankind; so, the Oath enforces the ethical duty of a rational and positive use of the power possessed by the individuals because of their capability to apply scientific knowledge on the other men, becoming patients.

Every oath entails a personal moral engagement. But, the public Hippocratic Oath sworn by the physicians over the world has marked through the centuries the awareness of an assignment of universal value, that goes well beyond the professional duty, becoming a mission that calls for the total willingness to operate in art and consciousness where and when need arises.

The awareness of the sacred value of the Human life is profoundly rooted in every man. The awareness of the value of our planet as the unique and often not renewable resource for Human life has emerged rather recently and not yet on a worldwide scale. Also the understanding of the planet as a living system, with its natural and unavoidable processes, including those (geo-hazards) with dangerous effects for man, is anything but widespread and well established. And, only now governments are reaching a greater appreciation of the guiding role of the scientific approach for the management of our planet, of its health and for the defense against dangerous events.

From that derives the special responsibility of those who possess the knowledge of the geological processes and the power arising from (or, better, which ought to arise from) it; this responsibility goes beyond a merely correct professional conduct.

Geologist is like a physician. He or she are ethically involved; he or she must be fully and consciously engaged, wherever and whenever geological knowledge can provide a contribution to solving problems linked to the sustainable use/management of land and the Earth's resources. This means to be ready to go beyond geologist's professional duty and economic convenience, willing to counter any political, industrial and social interests conflicting with the health of the planet; being conscious that the latter, in the short or long time, represents the real interest of the society; aiming to assure a harmonic interaction between geologists, governments and population, in considering the cost-benefit ratio, the technological capabilities, and the public media.

For these reasons, the authors, who are members of the recently set up Commission of Geoethics of the FIST (Italian Federation of Earth Sciences), consider it useful to submit to the Italian geological community the proposal for the introduction of a voluntary Hippocratic Oath for geologists, through which they would solemnly and publicly declare their consciousness to be the repository of the geological knowledge and of its entailed ethical duty.

Presentation mode

VOLUNTEERED ORAL

Choice of session

1st OPTION U1 - GEOETHICS AND GEOLOGICAL CULTURE: the contribution of Earth Sciences to a cultural renewal of society

2nd OPTION U2 - Earth Sciences and school: "vertical" curricula, "hands on" practices and context of meaning