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Engaged scientists and the question of neutrality and integrity: illustrative intellectual trajectories of geoscientists

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Scientists remain citizens and human beings. As so, they keep their critical mind and have visions for society and opinions on related crucial issues. The climate and ecological crisis makes no exception and has become the subject of more and more discussions among scientific communities. The bond between scientific research and societal issues can be seen in the common practice of national funding agencies asking scientists to explicitly define the societal values of their research activities (the so-called “knowledge utilization”). On such occasions, scientists need to prove that their findings will bring parts of technical, scientific, social, or even political solutions to a range of stakeholders, including decision-makers. Such a peculiar position raises many issues. In democracies, scientists and other experts are usually asked to remain neutral and only provide scientific and technical knowledge to support decision-makers (i.e., governments) who will make the decision.

The question of neutrality has particularly animated scientific communities for decades. May we, as scientists, activate only the rational part of our brains when doing science and activate the emotional one when we return to our daily personal and civic life? Should we remain neutral at all costs? When “business as usual” means making the ecological and social crisis more profound, does the concept of neutrality even exist? Is that ethical if doing nothing means supporting “business as usual”? Or should we admit that this is neither doable nor desirable?

In this paper, we suggest that being neutral and inactive is neither doable nor desirable for the sake of science and society. First of all, scientists are people, and their actions cannot remain completely value-free or independent from societal influences. Instead, the notions of objectivity, scientific rigor, and transparency, which all make part of scientific integrity, may be much more relevant to define good research practices. As long as these practices are followed, many ways of communicating with peers, stakeholders, and the public sphere may be considered, from appealed recommendations to stakeholders all the way down to (illegal) civil disobedience, as those may only differ by their degree of engagement in reporting the same facts. To which the ethics of responsibility should be added: we must say what we know (Resnik and Elliot, 2016).

We collected several testimonies from scientists from the earth and climate sciences engaged in activism and civil disobedience. The description of the several types of intellectual trajectories will

help us understand how scientists connect their values to science and how, at their scale, their vision helps them disseminate science to improve societies and reduce their impacts on global changes.

Resnik, D. B. and Elliott, K. C.: The Ethical Challenges of Socially Responsible Science, *Accountability in Research*, 23, 31–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989621.2014.1002608>, 2016.