

Acceptance of the Dana Medal of the Mineralogical Society of America for 2013

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Many thanks to the Mineralogical Society of America for rewarding me with the Dana medal.

First, this is the moment to express gratitude. I thank Volkmar Trommsdorff, Alan Thompson, and John Holloway for their guidance during my Ph.D. In my experience, the school of thought imprinted during Master and Ph.D. theses remains highly influential in later years and I hope that my own way of supervising reflects the inspiration and generosity I have experienced. Next, I want to thank my 20 year long collaborators and friends, Stefano Poli and Daniel Vielzeuf, with whom I enjoyed co-authoring many papers, some of them maturing over several years. This role is now more with Oli Jagoutz, our projects in Pakistan and Mongolia on previously uninvestigated geology have provided a wealth of knowledge that should lead to some spectacular outcome. I also thank those who, for some incomprehensible reason, thought I was worthwhile paying a salary to or having as a guest, in particular Dave Rubie, Jacques Kornprobst, Shige Maruyama, Dave Green, and the various presidents of ETH.

My final thanks go to my competitors and scientific enemies. As many of my friends and colleagues know, I largely prefer heated discussions over simple non-committal consensus, as I truly believe that thorough questioning is the only way forward. Being scientifically fierce and personally friendly is fully compatible. One learns more from criticism that nags the ego, than from gentle agreement.

Secondly, I would like to say some words about what the Dana medal means to me. I perceive this medal as recognition for many years of hard work (which most of us do not mind), but much more importantly, as a reward for the hardship of questioning my own findings over and over again. Experiments do give a universal answer, but explaining geological processes from such experiments is not straightforward. My aspiration is to venture into new areas and critically appraise existing and own newly gained knowledge until I have found out something that approaches the “truth.” In other words, my aspiration is scientific discovery.

Now, how do we measure scientific discovery? We are living in a time where rankings based on measures such as citations and the amount of money raised are part of our life. Where university



executives scroll through lists with numbers of papers published and where nobody seems to have time to evaluate scientific achievement. My dear colleague and friend Alan Thompson was and is intransigent toward what he calls “bean-counting,” either in the department, ETH, or any other institution worldwide. In fact, it squeezes my heart when I see young colleagues, aspiring to a career, struggling or wasting themselves with such terribly wrong measures. It is not better per se to publish 10 or 15 papers a year instead of publishing one or two. It is not necessarily better to obtain 500 citations/year instead of 50. There is no value in quantity per se, and we as scientists should know this best. None of the bean-counting measures are worth pursuing; worse still, they make us lose our way in the quest for scholarship.

The reason why we all spend this week at AGU is because science is fun, let us not forget this. Discovery is fun. Finding something out that nobody knew before is fun. More personally, if I obey the fundamental criterion of an experiment, that is repetition gives the same result, then there is some universal truth and knowledge to be defined and learned by the experiments.

I believe in and I think that we all should thrive on scholarship and savor the joy that results from it. As much as the Holy Grail has been a concept that has led nobles and knights for many centuries, true scientific discovery is what should be leading us. I am taking this medal as recognition that there is at least a tiny amount of scholarship in my work, and this is where I take my pride. Thank you and thanks to the Mineralogical Society of America.