The man in black
Mining Morality

PROSPECTING FOR ETHICS UNDER THE EARTH, ON THE OCEAN FLOOR, AND IN OUTER SPACE
Moving towards the center of moral consciousness

- What’s in your smart phone?
Moving mining closer to the center of moral consciousness

500,000 abandoned mines in the U.S.
Mining my own past

The tallest smokestack in the world – Anaconda, Montana
Mining my own past

Kellogg, Idaho

The Sunshine Mine disaster

The mines—and miners—of Zambia
Mining my own past

The Berkeley Pit of my youth

The Berkeley Pit today
Mining Morality (or, the morality of mining)

“Mining is the material basis for life, making it difficult to exaggerate its significance. . . . And yet we are ready to discuss almost any other ethics before the ethics of mining. Some view the concept as a contradiction in terms, others are alarmed that mining continues to exist at all, or simply find the topic supremely boring. We have more faith in our capacity to restrain or end violence and war than to address the ethics of mining.”

Mining Morality (or, the mining of morality)

▶ “The way we think about war tests all our thinking.” Is the same true for the way we think about mining?

Mining as a metaphor for ethics (reflection on the moral life)

▶ “Everything begins with mining” – “The unexamined life is not worth living”

▶ Finding and recovering the good

▶ Generalities and particularities

▶ “There is a maddening futility about speaking of ‘mining,’ as if it were singular or coherent. It is like talking about ‘Africa’ or addressing the ‘international community’ in the fashion of humanitarians, as if it is all one big thing. Rather, there are many mining industries, and each has its own culture, directives, structure, purpose, and pathologies” (Siegal, “The Missing Ethics of Mining”).

▶ “[A]lthough there is necessity in the general principles [of the natural law], the more we descend to matters of detail, the more frequently we encounter defects” (Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, I-II 94.4)
Mining Morality

- Mining as problem solving – e.g., the deep seabed, or outer space.
- New technologies and strategies - New ethical challenges (the invention of the crossbow, computer technology, the birth of the bomb), new ethics?
- Mining is a **human endeavor**:
  - “Mining is a matter of noticing, of seeking and finding, of asking and answering, of digging in or moving on, of buying and selling, of owning and owing, of producing and polluting, of truth-telling and cheating, of protecting a workmate, of falling asleep at the switch. It is a matter of succeeding and failing, of oppressing the weak, of rescuing the same, of risking and possibly losing all. It is a matter of dreaming or having one’s dreams—or one’s body—crushed or poisoned by a process that can be terribly cruel. It is a matter of life and death. Ethics asks about such things as well” (W. George, “Introduction” [draft] to “Mining Morality”).
- Mining is a matter of **relationships**
  - To other human beings
  - To other living beings
  - To rocks and trees
  - To God (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*)
A modest approach: Not a full-blown ethics of mining, but prospecting for ethics . . .

. . . under the earth, on the ocean floor, and in outer space.
Assembling the prospector’s self-sharpening tools

Insights from Bernard Lonergan
- Levels of conscious intentionality
- Scale of values
- Emergent probability
- Progress and decline
- Conversion

Principles of Catholic social thought
- Human dignity
- The priority of labor
- Common and private property
- Care for creation

International law
- Human rights law
- Environmental law
- Care for the “commons”
- Future generations
Mining site #1: Butte, Montana: “The Richest Hill on Earth” – and a moral morass

- Property rights
- Pollution
- Health and safety issues
- Political corruption
- High finance
- Racism
- Religious intolerance
- Gun violence

- Drunkenness
- Prostitution
- Workers’ strikes and the I.W.W
- International business
- Populism
- Many moral “goods”
Mining site #2: Niger: Mining uranium for whom and for what purpose?

Why Niger?
- A major supplier of uranium
- One of the poorest nations in the world
- A former colony with a neo-colonial reality
- A geo-political flashpoint for WMDs
- A land with labor issues
Uranium – to what end?

**Weapons of war?**
Minute-man missiles in Montana

**Peaceful Purposes?**
Excelon nuclear power plant in Illinois

**Differences or connections?**
Richland, WA
Mining site #3: Nauru: “A microcosm of . . . human affairs”

- Phosphate mining
- Ecological and other devastation
- From colonialism to the League to the World Court
- Trusteeism
- A teacher and his student
Mining site #4: Potato-sized polymetallic nodules on the ocean floor.

- The deep seabed: “common heritage” or res nullius?
- Seabed mining: a matter for international law
- UNLOS: an environmental treaty
- Future generations count
- A “preferential option for the poor”?
Mining site #5: Minerals in outer space

- October Sky: From coal mines to NASA
- Mining at 28,000 MPH
- 1967 Treaty on principles governing the activities of states in the exploration and use of outer space, including the moon and other celestial bodies.
- An ethics for extra-terrestrials or for us?
Conclusion: An Initial Prospector’s Report

As Shefal Siegel argues, an ethics of mining is “missing.” We don’t really have one. If we are to recover and develop that ethics, we must first become convinced that mining matters.

By paying more attention to mining, we may at the same time discover or rediscover rich “veins” of the moral life that can and ought to be explored. In this way we not only stand a better chance of developing a morality of mining—or a mining morality. We will also be undertaking a more thorough investigation of the moral life. We will be mining morality.

Everything begins with mining—including, one might suggest, the moral life. So, as we leave today let us together put on our miners’ hats with their lanterns attached and descend into the mines so that we might ascend into the full light of the moral life—a life of caritas and veritas. Let us make it a part of our life’s work.