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"The Anthropocene and the Environmental Humanities: Extending the Conversation"

Castree, Noel

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"The Anthropocene" is now a buzzword in international geoscience circles and commanding the attention of various social scientists and humanists. Once a trickle, I review what is now a growing stream of publications authored by humanists about the Holocene's proclaimed end. I argue that these publications evidence environmental humanists as playing two roles with respect to the geoscientific claims they are reacting to: the roles of "inventor-discloser" or "deconstructor-critic." Despite their importance and their differences, as currently performed these roles hold environmental humanists at a distance from those geoscientists currently trying to popularise the Anthropocene proposition and a set of related grand ideas (like "planetary boundaries"). This is unfortunate because geoscience—like other branches of science—tends to enjoy a higher profile in key decision-making arenas than do humanities subjects. The same can be said of particular social science fields, such as environmental economics. By surveying the wider, febrile geoscience landscape in which the Anthropocene proposition is situated, I reveal opportunities for "engaged-analysis." This involves simultaneously working on and with geoscientists, so too their kindred spirits in the social sciences. "The Anthropocene" concept may soon be among the key signifiers that frame the thinking of societal decision-makers. Environmental humanists can, if so minded, shape its meaning and implications directly. But this will involve more practitioners interested in global environmental change operating outside the "usual" arenas, such as established disciplinary conferences and journals. Engaged analysis offers a way to play the inventor-discloser and deconstructor-critic roles in places where knowledge aspires to inform environmental policy and practice. Though challenging and risky, the potential rewards are considerable. (Text from author's abstract)

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