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"Confessing Anthropocene"

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What is the best way to communicate with far future human (and/or posthuman) societies? This sounds like a question for science fiction, but I ask it in the context of a pressing issue in environmental ethics: the (very) long-term disposal of high-level spent radioactive fuel. To date, the moral justification for burying the waste underground has hinged on the technical possibilities of communicating a message of warning to people living ten thousand years in the future. I argue that the problem with this approach is not only that it insufficiently acknowledges the inevitable failure of the message (though I also consider this); additionally, it serves to mask deeper ethical reflection on the legacy of human life to the deep future. To remedy this, I consider what it would mean to think about deep-future communication as an act of confession. What are the advantages of this category, ethically and politically, over that of warning or instruction? I draw upon the classic theological and philosophical exploration of the confession in that of Saint Augustine and subsequently in Derrida's mimicking of him, in the light of which I consider the ethics of confession and witness as being haunted by the legacy of one's actions into deep time. Notwithstanding its critical reception among certain philosophers, a confessing tone may become increasingly pertinent to activists, artists, and faith communities making sense of humanity's ethical commitments in deep time. (Text from author's abstract)

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