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"Political, Ethical, and Societal Aspects of Issuing Warnings to Humanity"

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The scientific community has a sustained history of issuing warnings to society's leaders and policy-makers. In such cases, scientists take on the task of alerting those in power to issues they may not notice or not wish to see. A distinctive thing about environmental warnings authored by leading scientists is that they are addressed to "humanity." This paper argues that attempts to "speak truth to humanity"—despite the undoubted quality of the data and analyses—face three sorts of problem. There is firstly the difficulty that humanity is not a unified entity in the way that is often assumed and that, in practice, citizens may not be in a position to act in the way that is presupposed by those who issues the warnings. Secondly, though the declaration of a climate emergency may appear to be a desirable corollary of speaking truth to humanity, there are good reasons from political science to think that such declarations will be made for messier and complex reasons. Finally, even the more technical aspects of the warning documents may contain normative or social scientific components; they are not exclusively technical. Together these points argue for the engagement of humanities and socials sciences scholars in future attempts to offer compressive, integrated warnings to humankind. (Abstract)

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