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"Speaking for the Earth and Humans in the 'Age of Consequences'"

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The environmental humanities are suffused with a sense of urgency. As geoscientists sound the alarm about human treatment of the Earth, likewise environmental humanists seek to trigger the "conversation of humankind" that seems scarcely to be happening outside universities. This essay ponders the future of the environmental humanities, and specifically their relationship to the geosciences whose messages animate much current humanistic inquiry. It cautions against a too-hasty acceptance of the notion of a "global environmental crisis." It argues for forms of interdisciplinary work that give humanists parity-of-esteem with geoscientists. And it suggests that a modified paradigm of global environmental assessment might be a viable vehicle for greater humanistic influence in the global public sphere. Throughout, humanists must somehow balance trust in geoscience with a critical stance towards its core messages about a changing Earth system. This stance is anchored on the ground of democracy, the necessary political basis for any legitimate decisions about humanity's future on Earth. Steering the environmental humanities will be a major challenge given the need for humanists to retain academic freedom yet cooperate in order to exert influence outside the academic domain.

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