

CAN WE SAVE DEMOCRACY AND THE PLANET, TOO?

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The current debate about the existence and the consequences of anthropogenic global warming is the most important instance of a general problem: How is scientific expertise to be integrated with democratic values? I shall use this urgent case to explore the general problem, and will argue that our current situation is handicapped by a number of misconceptions about both science and democracy. Specifically, public discussions are dominated by an image of science as value-free, and by a picture of democracy as thriving on open debate. When these misconceptions are traced to their sources, it becomes evident that ideals of the transmission of information are at odds with current social conditions, that standard scientific practices can easily foster public misunderstandings, and that there is an urgent need to rethink roles and institutions we often take for granted. Specifically, careful attention needs to be given to the role of the scientist, and the rules for public discussion of complex questions.