

The Importance of Open Society for Democracy

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This talk will highlight an important challenge posed by the use of science in a democracy, namely, the fact that science is permeated with “value judgments.” These judgments are choices (e.g., how to design or interpret studies) that are left unsettled by available evidence but that can have important social consequences depending on how they are handled. Value judgments threaten science’s character as a reliable source of information that all decision makers, regardless of their values, can rely on. I will argue that the open science movement provides one of the most effective ways to address this problem. By making value judgments “open” or “transparent,” decision makers can determine whether or not they can rely on particular scientific findings or analyses. Nevertheless, I will also argue that the open science movement faces complications that still need to be addressed in order to fulfill its potential for addressing the challenge that value-laden science poses to democracy. First, the open science movement is not sufficiently directed to all the stakeholders who need information about value judgments. Second, efforts at openness or transparency are themselves subject to value judgments that complicate the communication of information.