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1397 [The New Pragmatism: Roles for Science and the Public in Making Policy](#)

Friday, February 19, 2010: 2:10 PM
Room 7B (San Diego Convention Center)

[Daniel Yankelovich](#), Public Agenda, La Jolla, CA

There is a tendency in public life to identify knowledge with science and to contrast it with the sort of raw opinion that is the opposite of knowledge. But these two categories are radically insufficient. The reality is that most of the decisions that affect our destiny are based neither on mere opinion nor on well-verified scientific knowledge, but on a vast, muddled middle ground that some people label "practical judgment" or something of the sort. I have come to the conclusion that the science community has to share leadership with political leaders to guide the public through the shoals of the various categories of knowledge and opinion. This is not a role that science has envisaged for itself. But the public's trust of science may well depend on it. The philosopher Hilary Putnam some years ago said: "A view of knowledge that acknowledges that the sphere of knowledge is wider than the sphere of "science" seems to me to be a cultural necessity if we are to arrive at a sane and human view of ourselves and of science." The public mode of discourse is drastically different from the science mode. People make judgments based primarily on their values, belief systems, world views and emotions. Facts play a much more minor role than they do for scientists. Somehow this gap needs to be bridged, and it cannot be bridged by loading the public with factual information, or attempting to make the public more science literate. How should scientists deal with this awkward reality?

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