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Symposia in Utopia

The modern symposium is a far cry from that of the Greeks, whose *symposion* was an after-dinner period of computation and conversation. The *symposion* has evolved. In our society, one descendant is the cocktail party, which, while it retains the ancient conviviality, has lost some of the original intellectual function. Another is the scientific symposium of our day, which emphasizes the formal exchange of ideas by authorities.

The best of such symposia are timely, definitive, and instructive in summarizing what is known up to the moment when the session opens. Current knowledge is surveyed for the benefit of teachers and research workers, new ideas are introduced, and new lines of research are suggested. A lively interchange of opinion often occurs—to the benefit of all.

If we could arrange an ideal symposium of the modern type, what should we work toward? Some 9 or 10 months before the scheduled date, the program chairman and his advisers should agree on the subject—one of considerable interest and with new developments, and one that would not conflict with any others being arranged elsewhere. The subtopics should be outlined in logical sequence; to develop each, the best man in the field should be selected. Each proposed speaker's specific competence and fluency would outweigh all other considerations.

Immediately thereafter, each invited person should receive an outline of the symposium—topics, subtopics, and chosen speakers—so that he may appreciate its scope and stature. Months before the meeting, full abstracts of the papers should be exchanged among the participants. Such arrangements would lead to a well-integrated program, devoid of both duplication and conspicuous gaps. Scheduled discussion leaders often enhance a symposium. These also should receive the same information in advance, so that they would be prepared to participate effectively in the program.

With this degree of preparation, both the "elder statesmen" and the younger research workers could contribute, more readily than they may at present, to the interplay of thought and the exploration of new approaches to research. A 3-hour session at a symposium like this would not seem long, for the logical progression of ideas and the clash of well-informed opinion would make time pass rapidly.

A symposium so arranged would certainly be worthy of publication. This could be facilitated if more planning were done beforehand. Each symposium paper should be complete with references and footnotes at the time of its presentation. If papers were prepared in this way, the editor (logically, the program chairman) would need to do little more than to write a preface and edit the text.

The principal danger in all this is that, after a symposium so successful in content, organization, and reception, both the arrangers of the program and the speakers will be called upon again, but, in Utopia—why not?

RAYMOND L. TAYLOR, AAAS

Erratum: In the editorial "The State Department's opportunity in science" [D. W., *Science* 123, 205 (10 Feb. 1956)] the word *misrepresentation* in the last sentence of the third paragraph is a typographical error. The sentence should read: "In sharp contrast with many excellent recommendations of the Hoover Commission, this one seems to us to be completely wrong and probably to arise from a misinterpretation of the attachés' functions."