

# AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE

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## Come, Now, and Let Us Reason Together

The central program of the 1972 AAAS Annual Meeting, described in the 24 November issue of *Science*, gives some notion of the vitality and scope of the meeting and of the investment of human effort that it represents. Topics of seminal importance for science, for technology, and for the interplay between these and society are presented in depth by able people drawn from a variety of backgrounds and interests. The meeting serves numerous audiences—from bench scientists to members of the general public. It continues to serve the scientific community in such a way as to command the confidence and backing of the scientists of the country.

Most of the meeting's symposiums deal with the professional interests of scientists and engineers; but special efforts are directed toward the broader problem of the relation of science to society and toward communicating with the general public concerning science, technology, and social change.

There are, then, three principal purposes that the Annual Meeting seeks to serve: to give in-depth presentations of important scientific and technical areas in such a way that they are of interest to a spectrum of disciplines; to present comprehensive symposiums on central scientific and societal problems whose treatment requires the knowledge and insights of a number of professions, both scientific and nonscientific; and to present programs designed to increase the public understanding of science and the ability to use science and technology for the promotion of human welfare.

Although the principal focus is upon advances in science, approximately one-third of the central program this year (nearly 30 symposiums) deals with science and social issues, including such topics as land-use controls, minorities in science, aggression and violence, prison research, behavior control, and genetic engineering. Within such a meeting, all reasoned and responsible views have a place. Most programs will incorporate an audience participation portion of significant length in which discussion from the floor is welcomed. Because the AAAS is committed to the open competition of ideas, arrangers of issue-oriented symposiums have been encouraged to include differing or conflicting viewpoints in their programs. In this way, constructive concern and criticism are increasingly represented in the formal program. Thus the AAAS provides a setting in which scientists can devote their energies to major social issues and can attempt, through their special expertise, to contribute to the solution of some of society's problems. A large portion of the meeting may be correctly viewed as a forum for the consideration of public policies involving science, and for the shaping of the contributions that science can make to the betterment of society.

In such a setting, disruption has no place. We welcome participants who use the meeting to bring ideas into confrontation; we condemn acts that deny others the opportunity to present their views or to engage in dissent. As an association, we shall take whatever steps we can to prevent this kind of interference. We believe that the effort to provide the scientific and technical community with the opportunity for full and free discussion of some of society's most pressing and difficult problems is one of the most important things we can do and is essential for the advancement of science.

The participants and others who attend our meetings should be protected from the mischief of disrupted meetings; and the public, who are informed of the proceedings by an able corps of science writers, should not have its right to know interfered with.

There will always be a place within the AAAS Annual Meeting for thoughtful and emphatic dissent. There is no place for the activities of a self-selected few who would prevent the views of others from being heard.—MINA REES, *Chairman, AAAS Board of Directors*