



What scientists can learn from Plato's Symposium

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Conferences and scientific meetings are as old as science itself. The ancient Greeks were (in)famous for organizing so-called symposiums. During a symposium (from Greek, drinking together), attendees followed a program that contained both social and scientific aspects, focused around a certain topic. Whilst drinking and eating, all participants were expected to share their vision on the topic of interest by giving an oral presentation. The goal of these meetings was to arrive at a new common understanding and to come closer to the truth. Plato *et al.* knew very well how to organize an effective scientific conference, which should make us overthink the way we are organizing present-day conferences. Scientific meetings aim to connect researchers, share research and unravel the truth. The question is now: how do we get this done effectively? Plato knew that discussing science with strangers is difficult and he believed that talking about heavy matter could be done best when combined with social events. What if we try to go back to the times of Plato and model our conferences after the ancient symposiums? We might drop laying on couches and covering ourselves in ivy and flowers. However, a mix of social and scientific events will contribute to achieving the ultimate goal of why scientists go to conferences: to connect, to share and to unravel the truth.