

Letters

Philanthropic Foundations and Grants to Universities

At the end of his interesting and useful article, "Basic research and financial crisis in the universities" (4 Aug., p. 517), George Pake complains that two policy errors harm the financial support given to universities by both private foundations and government agencies. "Gimmickitus," he says, is the first error. "Even if a university has a good, solid program of distinction and quality under way, one cannot sell it to these agencies unless it is dressed up to indicate a new angle or some alleged new approach. . . . The tendency is to regard good, solid, substantial work as simply not exciting or 'innovative' enough to merit support."

The second faulty tactic, Pake said, is what he calls "the 'hit and run' approach of the foundations and government agencies. The thought here is that the foundation or agency money is to be used for a period of time as 'seed money.' The agency wants to get something started and then pull out. . . ."

I think that these two criticisms, insofar as they are applied to private philanthropic foundations, result from an incorrect and improper concept of the purpose and role of philanthropic foundations. An underlying error is the lumping together of the grants from private foundations and those from federal agencies. These two sources are unlike both in their potentialities and in the nature of their responsibilities.

Federal sources of support are renewed biannually; private foundations characteristically have fixed capital sums, and their continuing capacity to make grants rests upon the uncommitted portion of their income. If private foundations accept continuing responsibility for support, they are thereby adopting a policy of gradual suicide. Federal sources, in contrast, are able to have, and do and should have a responsibility for the general health of our educational institutions, this involving a broad national obligation to furnish

the continuing support which cannot be obtained from local sources.

As to the role of private foundations, our country's tax and inheritance laws, which specifically encourage individuals to contribute money for charitable and educational purposes, fully recognize the right of individuals to decide, within broad but defined limits, what the money is to be used for. Just as Pake has the privilege of deciding for himself whether to make a one-shot gift to the Boy Scouts or accept the responsibility of supporting a Korean orphan, so the founder of a philanthropic trust has the right to specify, within the existing legal framework, the purposes of his foundation; and the trustees have the legal, intellectual, social, and moral responsibility to administer the funds of the foundation in accordance with their own best judgment, subject to the law and the terms of the instrument which created the trust.

This point is by no means universally understood or accepted. Indeed one often meets the attitude that the money of a philanthropic trust is like the communal well in a village in India. If you want some water, you just come to the public source and draw some. On this view, no supposedly narrow-minded or opinionated officers or trustees should have the right to turn you away empty-handed when you come to a foundation.

Frequently one reads plans drawn up by some group (they are not always private groups—government officials and agencies have at times taken the same position) which blandly conclude that the necessary funds, or perhaps the matching funds, "are to be obtained from private foundations," just as though this merely involves turning open available faucets. If the faucet valves prove sticky, this sometimes arouses indignation. Who are these foundation officials and trustees, that they think they have a right to refuse? The clear fact that the wells would be almost instantaneously dry if the right of refusal did not exist is seldom appreciated.

The fact, of course, is that the mon-

ey of each philanthropic foundation is socially dedicated to a range of purposes—sometimes narrow and sometimes very broad—selected by the donor from the purposes approved by law, the specific allocations to be made by the judgments of trustees acting on the recommendations of experienced professional officers. These can properly be called *socially dedicated monies*, but they are not *public monies* to which any person, group, or institution has an inherent right.

Pake may concede that the trustees have the right to make the judgments, but may consider that the judgments are faultily exercised. Is he correct that foundation officers prefer innovative opportunities and generally shun continuing support? He is, in general, correct. There are special exceptions of individual institutions, or of activities within specified localities such as a city or a state. In such exceptional cases, continuing support of going enterprises can sometimes be favorably considered. The Duke Endowment has a special relation to Duke University, and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation has a special relation to the city of Flint, Michigan. But the large general purpose foundations, with widely spread operations, do indeed prefer innovative opportunities and do indeed shun continuing support.

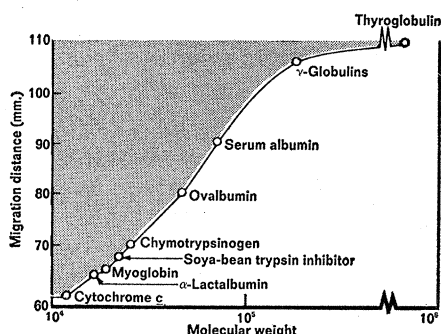
The head of a household who isn't sure how he is going to pay the rent and the grocery bills may justifiably be both confused and irritated by a rich relative who offers to buy a fine new set of encyclopedias for the children of the family. And it is completely understandable that a university administrator should worry about the rising costs of his core operations. He has every right to emphasize the magnitude of this problem to his community, his state, the parents of his students, his alumni, industries with relevant interests—and the federal government. But should he expect philanthropic institutions to destroy their capacity to support his new ideas, by immobilizing their assets through pledges of continuing support for his older ideas?

I think the answer is no. Seriously or even desperately as they need larger uncommitted and continuing support for core operations, I think the majority of university administrators agree with the majority of foundations that philanthropic funds should be used primarily to experiment, to explore, to

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try out new ideas. Foundations, in fact, are most frequently criticized for a lack of courage and imagination in supporting innovation, not for their failure to contribute to regular and on-going budgets.

There is a good deal more that can and should be said on this topic (1).

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Reference

1. W. Weaver, *U.S. Philanthropic Foundations—Their History, Structure, Management, and Record* (Harper & Row, New York, 1967), chap. 12.

Does Science Neglect Society?

Although I am essentially in agreement with Weisskopf's letter (25 Aug.) that we should support all that is valuable in our civilization, it is time that percentages of our gross national product be used with caution and modesty. As Seymour Melman points out, only a frighteningly small percentage of our GNP is being used to add to the real value of our society (1). A huge remainder, for example, \$50 billion, is being used primarily to increase or maintain our "overkill" capacity. It is because of the woefully inadequate sums being spent in the human sector of our society that a \$200-million item (merely two Polaris submarines) can cause such a furor.

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Reference

1. S. Melman, *Our Depleted Society* (Dell, New York, 1966).

One thing worries me more than the dollar drain connected with our present accent on basic science. There is a gigantic intellectual drain. No doubt the very top young minds today are attracted to basic science because that's the only place where there are clear, challenging, and solvable problems. This is wonderful to a certain extent. Our first-class minds are solving first-class problems. But I think they also use it as an escape. How many also turn their powerful intellects onto the many social and political problems facing the country? Some are willing to serve on summer studies but how many will take a year or two from research to attack our problems in urban affairs, pollution and con-

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