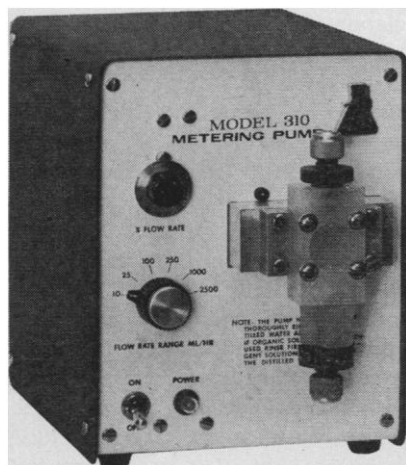


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emy of Sciences Panel on Technology Assessment, nuclear technology with appropriate assistance could provide and preserve "future options" and give more "attention and support to research and monitoring programs calculated to minimize technological surprise and to deal rationally with the burdens of uncertainty."

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## The University Is Not a Highway Department

There is much wisdom and sophisticated opinion expressed in F. Kenneth Hare's article "How should we treat the environment?" (23 Jan., p. 352). But his arguments are based on an implicit assumption which is unfortunately shared by many influential people in our universities, and which needs to be seriously questioned: The assumption that the university *should* answer the current call to solve society's very pressing social problems.

Since World War II those of us in the universities have done many things other than objective, detached scholarship and research, but most of us did stop short of taking the responsibility for the solution of practical social and political problems. Where we did take on such responsibilities we usually assumed them as a personal responsibility, without making them a university or institutional commitment, for we were aware that politics is a difficult and not always a gentlemanly game and that what is valuable in the university—intellectuality—is fragile and likely to be damaged in the arena of real, national politics.

We should seriously consider the possibility of letting ourselves be bypassed, as Hare suggests may happen, if we do not answer the call to solve social problems. Will it be damaging to the general welfare if we in the universities say to federal and state officials: build new institutions for groups of intellectuals who are "more flexible," who will share with you the direct responsibility for the solution of practical problems. Being so bypassed would not be such a terrible fate. We would still have many worthwhile tasks to accomplish in the university. We can devote ourselves to undergraduate education which in the past has not received a fair share of the re-

sources of the major universities; we can devote ourselves to the education and training of fewer but more scholarly graduate students, allowing the less scholarly and more politically interested students to enter the new institutions. We can devote ourselves to our fundamental and applied research activities which will, *perhaps*, help in the solution of social problems. Some of us can engage in intellectual activities designed to assist in the solution of social problems, but we can leave the actual responsibility for the solution of those problems to others in the new institutions—with, perhaps, some consultation if the new institutions need assistance.

I am aware that in some sense the university will be "hurt" if such a strategy is adopted. It will not receive the sums of money that the private foundations and the federal and state governments promise to those who will actively try to solve our current, pressing social problems. But what the university will lose in the race for resources, it will gain by not suffering the blows that inevitably come to the more "flexible" and politically responsive organizations.

Perhaps we in the university should leave the actual solution of political and social questions to men of action as we have in the past. These men control enormous resources and can create laboratories and research organizations to assist them. Perhaps the universities should leave the actual solution of foreign policy problems to the President, the Secretary of State, and the groups of scholars and advisers they call upon. Perhaps the universities should leave the actual defense of the country to the Department of Defense and its intellectual advisers. Perhaps we should leave conservation to the Department of the Interior together with the intellectual apparatus it creates. Perhaps we can leave the construction of highways and trains to the Department of Transportation.

As individuals and citizens we can contribute to the solution of all these problems by political action. As scholars we can produce ideas that may help men of action. But it might be best to recall that the university is not the Department of State, nor the Department of Defense, nor the Department of Housing. Most of all, we can remind ourselves that the university is not a highway department.

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