

The great foundations have turned away from endowment grants, and the new foundations that are formed do not enter this field. There are many reasons for this. One valid reason is that giving away money in great sums transfers the responsibility for its use to others, and a foundation often prefers to do its own thinking, beyond the mere selection of a few institutions from among many to receive its largess for the furtherance of their several purposes. This change in the policy of foundations, however, adds to the great sums being spent on a project basis. And the temporary project is not a sound way in which to carry on fundamental studies of depth or subtlety.

The project idea, introduced largely during the war and as a necessity at that time, is far better adapted to applied research than to fundamental research. This is part of the reason why fundamental research has not been expanded to the extent that it should be. The foundations here have to some extent missed an opportunity. As the government entered strongly into scientific research, they moved out. If they had moved into basic research, they might have preserved a balance. There was plenty of opportunity for them to exercise their talents of review and analysis in seeking areas of opportunity, for the scope of fundamental research has expanded far more than the means for its furtherance. There was hence opportunity to create new institutions, endowed and independent, where they were most likely to prosper. A bit of this has been done; and there are exceptions to the comments above, of course. Carnegie Corporation donated five million dollars for endowment to the Carnegie Institution of Washington when it was sorely needed. But in general the foundations have not tackled the problem of extending fundamental scientific research in this country, nor is there any great indication that they will do so.

New independent research institutions have been established by individual philanthropists—the day of great fortunes and of great altruism accompanying them is not over. Yet these have been largely directed at specific objectives, often in the medical field, and often of a semi-applied nature. This is not because men of wealth lack interest in search for the unknown or appreciation of the value, spiritual or aesthetic if you will, of the search for understanding, unencumbered by more immediate objectives. It is rather that such men understand better the sufferings and needs of humanity and are anxious to alleviate them.

This may be a reflection of our cultural immaturity. As we proceed, there may be more among us, highly successful in affairs, anxious to serve humanity, who will wish to look at the stars, or delve into the earth, or probe for the secret of life, not because it will add to the comforts or reduce the hazards of existence, but because it may render us a more dignified and understanding race with greater satisfaction in living. If so, there will be more and greater independent research institutions devoted to the search for knowledge for its own sake.

Miscellany

Government

Identical bills to amend the Atomic Energy Act of 1946 were introduced in both houses of Congress on April 15th by Representative W. Sterling Cole and Senator Bourke B. Hickenlooper, chairman and vice-chairman, respectively, of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy. The bills, proposed in response to a request by the Administration, would authorize the President to transmit certain categories of atomic weapons information to our military allies and would permit the AEC to exchange with friendly powers restricted data on the industrial applications of atomic energy. The recommended legislation would also clear the way for private development of atomic power by establishing regulations governing the licensing of critical materials to industry and the operation by industry of atomic facilities.

In an Executive Order dated March 17, President Eisenhower has given explicit recognition to the need for a sound national science policy and has set down clearly his views concerning the role to be played by the National Science Foundation as a central agency for the effective coordination of Federal scientific activities. Emphasizing the importance of science to the national security and welfare, the President expressed his strong belief "that this Nation must extend its support of research in basic science" and called upon the Foundation to make periodic policy recommendations designed to "strengthen the national scientific effort and furnish guidance toward defining the responsibilities of the Federal Government in the conduct and support of scientific research". The Foundation, he said, "shall be increasingly responsible for providing support by the Federal Government for general-purpose basic research through contracts and grants. The conduct and support by other Federal agencies of basic research in areas which are closely related to their missions is recognized as important and desirable, especially in response to current national needs, and shall continue."

Organizational changes providing for four associate directors of the National Bureau of Standards have recently been announced by NBS Director A. V. Astin. R. D. Huntoon, former director of the Bureau's Corona Laboratories, has been named associate director for physics. The three remaining posts have been filled by Wallace R. Brode (chemistry), A. T. McPherson (testing), and N. E. Golovin (administration).