

"Criticism of Foundations" and

"Our Readers Rate the Foundations"

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Criticism of Foundations

ALFRED DE GRAZIA

Much is said but little is written about the relation of foundations to social research. A favorite topic of the convention lobbies seems never to find its way into print. Some say a taboo, with sanctions, is at work. We prefer to believe in ordinary oversight. In either event, more needs to be recorded about foundation research programs, both on the credit and on the debit side.

The 7300 foundations of America include less than fifty that are in a legal or realistic sense "free" to give more than a pittance to social research. These few foundations gave to such research, in 1953, about \$11,000,000, an insignificant amount when compared with the expenditures of governments and universities on social research. However, the free foundations, with their money, are critical influences in universities of the first rank and among scholars who are actually or potentially the intellectual leaders of their professions. Following upon this primary impact come secondary repercussions throughout American society.

The human element of this oligarchy of research amounts to about one hundred executives. The number may reach several hundreds if those active board members who have power over policies and those appointive outside committees who have sporadic grant-making powers are included. In either case, an aggregate that has much to do with shaping American social science is small.

The philanthropoids, to use Dwight McDonald's ugly term, are limited in many ways. Their bureaucratic setting limits most of them. Internal conflict is not uncommon, and its possibility often yields a silent veto over the individual executive's imagination. Moreover, the Tax Exempt Organizations Branch of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service may supervise them; but it must administer an inconceivably confused law that frames its activities in odd and not always useful forms. State agencies enter even less into foundation affairs. Recently two congressional investigations of foundations occurred, the so-called Cox and Reece Committees of the House of Representatives; both left a great deal to be desired from every critical viewpoint, although their proceedings, and studies based upon them, added greatly to our meagre information about tax-exempt organizations. A National Information Bureau provides restricted intelligence about the structure and financing of particular foundations. Articles on foundations occasionally appear in the general press but are apt to be uncritical, filled with awe, and devoid of any material save a "human interest" story. The discerning audience for critical writing about foundations, and especially about the free foundations, as with many another subject in our infinitely subdivided society, is almost entirely limited to customers and regulators.

The annual reports of the free foundations, though uncritical, at least explain their major policies and permit some inductive analysis of their programs and effects. Foundation executives themselves have generally been raised in the liberal tradition of J. S. Mill and of academic freedom. Their conduct therefore tends normally toward consultation, public reporting, and self-appraisal, and away from

autocracy and conspiracy. Furthermore, the social network in which they are enmeshed includes a large number of the very people who need most to communicate with them.

There would almost appear to be no problem. All of these controls, external and internal, guarantee a fairly high level of representation and responsibility in this small but vital group.

Moreover, the solution of certain fundamental problems cannot be expected of foundation leaders. They cannot be asked to decide whether foundation resources might better be paid over directly to private universities. Nor can they be reproached for deficiencies of imagination or genius, inasmuch as these qualities are almost entirely lacking, or at least undiscoverable, in the greater environment that embraces the foundations; to state it another way, a genius would be foolish to expect more than a random chance of recognition of his genius by foundation executives.

Still, some element of criticism seems to be lacking in the atmosphere in which the free foundations work. The foundations do not know how to receive criticism and those who pay attention to foundations do not know how to give it. Academic journals ignore foundation relations. The middle-brow and high-brow magazines do no better. There is altogether too much cringing and fawning by the actual and potential beneficiaries of foundation largesse; we see it at PROD via our correspondence and in our frustrated attempts to persuade several scholars of strong views to put their thoughts into print.

We suggest, therefore, that those university administrators and scholars who are griped by foundation practices should go on record with chapter and verse. If they seek but cannot find evidence, let them suggest hypotheses; that is fair scholarship. The same may be said to academic associations and professional journals.

Moreover, the foundations can invite or submit to criticism to the same extent that universities and scholars often do. They might ask themselves, for example: "Why do scholars like us intellectually but dislike us viscerally? Why are we set up in the middle of New York City? Are we sending out honest, even if disagreeable, letters of rejection? Have we backed anyone but favorites in the scholarly race? If so, how did he turn out? Do we have a policy, and, if not, must we pretend to have one? How many petty projects are we forcing upon men who should be doing more important studies? Could one man do the entire work of this foundation, with much the same results?"

No doubt many foundation leaders ask this kind of question of themselves. However, the small, attentive, and anxious foundation public needs to be part of the discussion. The work of free foundations is too important to be controlled; but it is also too important to pass without informed public comment.

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Our Readers Rate the Foundations

ALFRED DE GRAZIA

In the June 1963 issue of the *ABS* we asked some of our readers to rate and comment on a list of 20 foundations and similar agencies that

support or conduct research in the behavioral sciences. By press time, we received some 43 replies. (If replies coming in subsequently differ substantially from the ones examined here, we shall report them in a future issue.)

The replies already received are illuminating. There is nothing approaching unanimity of opinion on a given agency, due no doubt both to different orientations of our respondents and to varying experiences with a knowledge of specific organizations. Some distinct patterns appear, however, as the accompanying table indicates.

Of the agencies rated by a majority of our respondents, three received consistently high responses: the Social Science Research Council, the Russell Sage Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation. At the bottom of the scale were the Ford Foundation and the National Science Foundation, which between them received almost as many ratings of "poor" as all other agencies combined. They also were rated by a larger proportion of the respondents than any other organizations.

One respondent suggested that such ratings may only be "general impressions based on subconscious impulses," and in view of the apparent lack of information about the programs of many foundations, this may well be true. However, we do not detect any clear biases in our limited sample. Of the two governmental agencies, NIMH was well-regarded, NSF received the lowest ranking of any organization. Foundations which devote large, medium, and small resources to the social sciences are distributed rather evenly through the rankings. Other variables may be at work, but we conclude that many responses were determined by our suggested criteria: the importance of topics and quality of individuals selected for support by a foundation, and the degree to which it contributes to the ABS agenda for the social sciences.

A number of respondents took the opportunity to comment on the sponsoring agencies. We quote a representative sampling:

More funds are needed for research on (1) peace, (2) race relations, (3) community planning.

It is my general impression that the foundations support little original work. Particularly, government [agencies are] prone to request that the study be done, to all intents, before a grant will be given.

Large foundations are serving to bureaucratize research, to the disadvantage of the individual scholar, and fostering a spirit of quantity rather than quality. Too, the "cult of personality" and "name" research makes it easy for the once-good researcher to get funds for trivia and junk work.

What is needed are more foundations which will consider individual projects. Support has become too institutionalized.

There is a growing tendency to support "dramatic" studies rather than studies of more professional importance.

One respondent expressed the hope that "foundations are not unduly influenced by popularity contests such as this. Their functions should not be merely to respond to current dominant interests in scholarly and scientific disciplines." Another criticized some foundations, e.g., the Rockefeller, for favoring one school of thought over others.

In conclusion, we should bring to our readers' attention the names of other organizations rated by our respondents as doing a fair or better job of supporting social research. They include the American Jewish Committee, the Council on Library Resources, the Falk Foun-

dation, the Field Foundation, the Foundation for Economic Education, the Hogg Foundation, the Knapp Foundation, the U.S. Office of Education (criticized as well as praised), and the Social Security Administration.

The ABS Foundation Poll

Rank order	Agency	Number of responses	Average rank ¹
1	Social Science Research Council	34	3.88
2	Russell Sage Foundation	27	3.63
3	Carnegie Corp.	33	3.61
4	Twentieth Century Fund	20	3.55
5	Wenner-Gren Foundation	12	3.42
6	National Institute of Mental Health	26	3.31
7	Resources for the Future, Inc.	13	3.31
8	American Council of Learned Societies	22	3.18
9	Rockefeller Foundation	29	3.17
10	Fund for the Republic	31	3.06
11	Samuel S. Fels Fund	12	3.00
12	Lilly Endowment	15	2.87
13	Rockefeller Bros. Fund	14	2.86
14	W. K. Kellogg Foundation	19	2.79
15	Ford Foundation	38	2.74
16	Alfred P. Sloan Foundation	13	2.54
17	National Science Foundation	36	2.36

¹ Computed from the following scoring scale: Poor=1; fair=2; good=3; excellent=4; superior=5.