

## Extract from “The Mark Gable Foundation” – Szilard (1948)<sup>1</sup>

“Would you intend to do anything for the advancement of science?” I asked

“No,” Mark Gable said. “I believe scientific progress is too fast as it is.”

“I share your feeling about this point,” I said with the fervour of conviction, “but then **why not do something about the retardation of scientific progress?**”

“That I would very much like to do,” Mark Gable said, “**but how would I go about it?**”

“Well,” I said, “I think that shouldn’t be very difficult. As a matter of fact, I think it would be quite easy. You could set up a foundation, with an annual endowment of thirty million dollars. Research workers in need of funds could apply for grants, if they could make out a convincing case. Have ten committees each composed of twelve scientists, appointed to pass on these applications. Take the most active scientists out of the laboratory and make them members of these committees. And the very best men in the field should be appointed as chairman at salaries of fifty thousand dollars each. ....”

“I think you better explain to Mr Gable why this foundation would in fact retard the progress of science,” said a bespectacled young man sitting at the far end of the table, whose name I didn’t get at the time of introduction.

“It should be obvious,” I said. “First of all, **the best scientists would be removed from their laboratories and kept busy on committees passing on application for funds. Secondly, the scientific workers in need of funds would concentrate on problems which were considered promising and were pretty certain to lead to publishable results. For a few years there might be an increase in scientific output but by going after the obvious, pretty soon science would dry out. Science would become something like a parlour game.**”

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<sup>1</sup> Szilard (1948). The Mark Gable Foundation. <https://www.gipsa-lab.grenoble-inp.fr/~pierre.comon/FichiersPdf/theMarkGableFoundation.pdf>