

A Word With You

By ROBERT CLANCY

Cybernetics, not so new or meteoric as dianetics, has attracted its share of attention. The subject of this two-year-old science is the machine as a brain, or the brain as a machine.

With such a seemingly mechanistic starting-point, it may sound surprising that cyberneticist Norbert Wiener relates his study to a social philosophy that calls for the full, free expression of the human being. But even machines these days are not so mechanistic, what with electronic computers, calculators that "think" and machines that suffer "nervous breakdowns."

A fabulous future is predicted for the calculators being developed. The only fear seems to be that with the full, free expression of these marvelous machines, human beings won't be needed so much any more; then what happens to *their* full, free expression?

But why should machines (or computers or robots) be regarded as anything but blessings lightening the toil of mankind and making possible more leisure, more progress? Surely it is something in our economic system that thwarts the blessing.

Some students of cybernetics must be aware of something of the sort, but their answer is, social control of the super-gadgets. If their studies compel them to look outside of electronics, they might study fundamental economics. They would learn the fallacy of social control and what it is that turns machines from a blessing into a curse.

Human beings may resemble machines in many respects but there are some differences, though our present-day economy invites comparisons. In fundamental economics, when a person labors for another, he is exchanging service for service. In our economy, the appearance is that he is "given a job." Feeding an "employee" with a steady stream of routine, dictated by man-hour studies and so forth, is the idea of maximum usefulness. The superior employee is a

higher grade calculating machine fed with more complex data. The idea of self-generated service, offered with initiative and loving care, in exchange for other services, is a discouraged rarity these days.

This is what an economy of restricted opportunities has done to us. The expanding horizons of science (and cybernetics) cannot be pushed much farther without a long pause for some serious calculating as to what the full, free expression of human beings must involve.

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