

P.O. Box 1
Carrboro, N.C. 27508
June 7, 1960

Mr. Thomas J. Watson, Jr.
390 Madison Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10022

Dear Mr. Watson:

Thank you for your letter of June 2nd. In preparing this note for you, I change "hats" to put on my "philosopher's hat." This letter and the enclosure explain some of the history of SEP No. 20-B and the 1959 WJCC social responsibility program and with my letter of May 24th under my "citizen's hat."

Perhaps you have a philosopher on your staff to whom you would prefer such material to be addressed? However, since I don't find any philosophy department in the directory, I am sending this material to you.

The new program at Harvard University for the study of the social impact of automation is of particular interest to me, because I made a research proposal to the Sociology Department at Harvard nineteen years ago for the development of a method of study of the impact of new inventions. I enclose a copy of SEPR No. 41, "Proposed Social Engineering Research Program," October 24, 1945. At this time I discussed this proposal with Professors Carl Zimmerman and Pitirim A. Sorokin.

Professor Zimmerman pointed out that my three-dimensional chart on page six of SEPR 41 was similar to the classification developed by Auguste Comte a hundred years ago. I decided that I needed to catch up with Sociology, before proceeding further with the proposal. As a start I audited Professor Sorokin's graduate seminar in Sociology in the Fall Semester of 1945 with the permission of Dean Wild. I considered the possibility of changing from engineering to sociology.

However one thing that particularly bothered me was that Prof. Sorokin said that the history of civilization shows that each time a particular civilization starts to breakdown there is a high probability that the society will accelerate its decline by obstructing the study of the most urgent problems. This led to concern whether switching to sociology might just lead to conflict with such obstacles.

In 1947 at the University of California, I took a graduate economics course from Professor J. B. Condliffe, formerly on the staff of the League of Nations. He pointed out how in England that there were many professional people who developed a second field as a hobby, i.e., a banker might as a hobby become a miner or a philosopher. This gave me an idea on how to beat the social processes which Prof. Sorokin mentioned--namely the obstruction of the study of the most important social issues could be bypassed by making such studies a hobby, clearly separated from one's paying job.

I then completed my graduate studies in electrical engineering, while making my study of the social consequences of technology a hobby. My hobby led to some valuable concepts and techniques. The development of Cybernetics and Information Theory made possible a clearer understanding of sociological systems. The major problem I have run into is the relative lack of interest on the part of business leaders compared to the concern of socialists and other left-wing groups. I have maintained a relative balance by studying the whole spectrum of political views on these issues from communists on the left to John Birch Society members on the extreme right.

Recently I have made contact with a more logical supporter of the right, Mr. Louis O. Kelso, a San Francisco lawyer, and author of The Capitalist Manifesto, N.Y.: Random House (1958). Mr. Kelso has agreed to speak at our local chapter meeting of the Society for General Systems Research at Stanford Research Institute on June 25th.

If you are interested in obtaining copies of my other notes in the Socio-Engineering Problems series, please let me know.

Sincerely yours,

Frederick B. Wood

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enc: SEP No. 41