Wiesner speaks to Hillel

By David Koffman

According to legend, when the Jews of 17th century Prague, expecting a pogrom, their Rabbi Loew took a mass of clay and formed it into a Golem, an automaton whose purpose is to serve man, to protect them. But there came a time when Rabbi Loew was not able to control the Golem, and it acted on its own will, so he had to destroy it. Modern man has created a Golem of his own in the form of his technological society.

This is the legendary basis for the title of the late Prof. Norbert Wiener’s last book, “God and Golem, Inc.” It was also the starting point for the Hillel Society’s discussion on October 11. Dusan Wiesner and Prof. Rosenblith spoke and answered questions on Prof. Wiener’s book and on their own ideas on the subject.

As “the prophet of cybernetics,” Prof. Wiener brought together skill in mathematics, linguistics, psychology, and biology to concentrate on the relationships between men and machines. This is the basis for speculation on how man must come to terms with his technological creativity.

At the discussion, Prof. Wiesner spoke first. He characterized the problem of one of evolution. Evolution must be viewed as an all-inclusive process, beginning with the “big bang” which started the universe on its course, and continuing to the creation of life, intelligence, the social organization, and now technology. For man, it has meant advances, beginning with organized society, which have been extensions of himself. As his ability to create increases, he creates at a socially accelerating rate, his creations become more and more complex, and it becomes almost impossible to see where he is going. The most recent evolutionary advance is the self-organizing organization — the attempt to discover how man himself functions and how to control that functioning.

Man has not fully appreciated the results of this evolution. He has not really comprehended how his technology has, to a large extent, run away from him. For instance, the automobile was accepted and used with little thought for its sociological effects. Today, thousands of people killed every year attest to the destruction humans which is as much a part of the auto as are its benefits. The net effect appears good, but as the rate of technological evolution increases, we will have less time for second thoughts — we will have to be more careful.

Prof. Wiesner is essentially optimistic. If we maintain a basic attitude of concern over bad effects, we should be all right in the long run.

Prof. Rosenblith started from a different angle. With machines, and computers in particular, we are dealing with symbols. The question arises of whether we understand the symbols we are manipulating well enough to trust the computers in all that is being symbolized. Will the results be good or bad?

“Men must learn the meaning of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in technology terms. We must learn to manipulate good and evil in terms of things like the automobile before they become unchangeable as in most other things.”

Machines go back to the social organization; the city was one of the first machines. Powered machines — what we usually mean when we say machines — have given man freedom, but increased freedom means increased ability to hurt ourselves, increased danger. The necessity of balancing the good and bad effects of discoveries becomes paramount. We must combine the localistic tradition of introspection with our efforts to improve human wealth.

This need is obvious in our present work in molecular biology, transplantation of organs, genetic selection, pesticides, and automation of industry. When it comes to accurate additional extensions of our ability to influence our environment, greatest empiric is a wise warning.

Fundamental to our effort to control our advance is a recognition of the importance of our ignorance; only by this recognition can we learn the prescription of long-range effects. Along with this concern must come an understanding of the need for control and awareness, as mentioned earlier by Prof. Wiener. Prof. Rosenblith concludes that this is the “protest of commitment.” It goes along with the need to free the computer from the search going. In this respect, both men agree with Prof. Wiesner that some sort of optimism is necessary.

LSC presents aquaculture inventor to speak on “Underwater Living”

The Lecture Series Committee will present Jacques-Yves Cousteau on Sunday evening, October 31, at 8:30 p.m. in Kresge Auditorium.

Captain Cousteau, co-inventor of the aqualung, is Director of the Oceanographic Institute at Marseille. He inspired the design of the highly manouverable jet-propelled two-man observation craft called the Diving Saucer which has carried men to depths of over two thousand feet. Its dives in the Red Sea were the subject of the film “The World Without Sun.” Among his achievements is the underwater excavation of a Third Century B.C. Greek wine ship off the coast of Marseille and the discovery of the fabulous Abu Dhabi oil field on the floor of the Persian Gulf.

The lecture is free and open to the public. The title presentation is in Living and Working Underwater.

Speaker at radical meeting says “Current trend is toward Facism”

“Forget our present coercive government, even the government we had before the current trend to Facism,” warned Adam Reed III, addressing about 30 members of an MIT group known as the “Radicals for Capitalism,” on September 9.

President Lyndal Merrill ’65 introduced the group previously called Bituminous at the school’s third meeting of the year.

Reed continued by attempting to develop an intricate system of government over which the job-owning citizen over cities would be given, voluntarily, an idea of citizenship, to freely competing private companies.

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Jamesinto 10 statues, too, various printed.

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