

Re114: *Visions of Loss* (Technological Danger, Part 2)

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Human loss of freedom by deference to authority, dependency on machines, and delegation of defense.

Wiener: freedom of thought and opinion, and communication, as vital; Russell: diet, injections and injunctions in the future; Horesh: technological behavior modification in the present; terrorist Kaczynski: if AI succeeds, we'll have machine control or elite control, but no freedom; Bostrom: wearable surveillance devices and power in the hands of a very few as solution.

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All bold emphasis added.

Mathematician Wiener

Is this what's at stake, in the struggle for freedom of thought and communication?

Wiener (1954), p. 217:¹

"I have said before that **man's future on earth will not be long unless man rises to the full level of his inborn powers**. For us, to be less than a man is to be less than alive. Those who are not fully alive do not live long even in their world of shadows. I have said, moreover, that for man to be alive is for him to participate in a world-wide scheme of **communication**. It is to have the liberty to test new **opinions** and to find which of them point somewhere, and which of them simply confuse us. It is to have the variability to fit into the world in more places than one, the variability which may lead us to have soldiers when we need soldiers, but which also leads us to have saints when we need saints. **It is precisely this variability and this communicative integrity of man which I find to be violated and crippled by the present tendency to huddle together according to a comprehensive prearranged plan**, which is handed to us from above. We must cease to kiss the whip that lashes us. . . ."

p 226: "There is something in personal holiness which is akin to an act of **choice**, and the word *heresy* is nothing but the Greek word for choice. Thus your Bishop, however much he may respect a dead Saint, can never feel too friendly toward a living one.

"This brings up a very interesting remark which Professor John von Neumann has made to me. He has said that in modern science the era of the primitive church is passing, and that the era of the Bishop is upon us. Indeed, the heads of great laboratories are very much like Bishops, with their association with the powerful in all walks of life, and the dangers they incur of the carnal sins of pride and of lust for power. On the other hand,

the independent scientist who is worth the slightest consideration as a scientist, has a consecration which comes entirely from within himself: a vocation which demands the possibility of supreme self-sacrifice. . . ."

p. 228: "I have indicated that **freedom of opinion** at the present time is being crushed between the two rigidities of the Church and the Communist Party. In the United States we are in the process [1950] of developing a new rigidity which combines the methods of both while partaking of the emotional fervor of neither. Our Conservatives of all shades of opinion have somehow got together **to make American capitalism and the fifth freedom [economic freedom²] of the businessman** supreme throughout all the world. . . ."

p. 229: "It is this triple attack on our **liberties** which we must resist, if **communication** is to have the scope that it properly deserves as the central phenomenon of society, and if the human individual is to reach and to maintain his full stature. It is again the American worship of **know-how** as opposed to **know-what** that hampers us."

Mathematician and philosopher Russell

Will this happen?

Russell (1952), pp. 65–66.³

"It is to be expected that advances in physiology and psychology will give governments much more control over individual mentality than they now have even in totalitarian countries. Fichte laid it down that education should aim at destroying free-will, so that, after pupils have left school, they shall be incapable, throughout the rest of their lives, of thinking or acting otherwise than as their schoolmasters would have wished. But in his day this was an unattainable ideal: what he regarded as the best system in existence produced Karl Marx. In [the] future such failures are not likely to occur where there is dictatorship. **Diet, injections, and**

¹The following are excerpts from the 1950 edition, within the later-removed chapter *Voices of Rigidity*. See References for a hyperlink.

²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fifth_Freedom

³Previously quoted, in part, in Re49 (Retraice (2022/11/13)).

injunctions will combine, from a very early age, to produce the sort of character and the sort of beliefs that the authorities consider desirable, and any serious criticism of the powers that be will become psychologically impossible. Even if all are miserable, all will believe themselves happy, because the government will tell them that they are so.”

Kaczynski says similar things throughout his ‘manifesto’.

Philosopher Horesh

Is this really happening already?

Horesh (2020), p. 158:⁴

“Meanwhile, a previously unimaginable level of thought control is fast being made accessible for every middle-income autocracy that chooses to use it. Visit the wrong website and your social credit score declines, look up the wrong book and it drops further, mention the wrong phrases on social media and it sinks so low that alarms go off in the camera rooms when your face flashes on the screen. **The opportunities this presents for behavioral modification are simply astonishing**, as the exploration of every forbidden idea or acquaintance can be made part of a social credit score, whose every drop causes another shock in the hearts of the lowly ranked. . . . Yet, whether or not China goes so far, they have developed the tools needed to implement a security regime more totalitarian than even that of the East German Stasi, at a fraction of the effort and far lower cost, for any autocrat who chooses to go that far. Russians and Turks, Poles and Hungarians, could soon find themselves entering a vise from which they never escape. For once such a security regime is implemented, resistance can be shut down in ways not previously imagined, while independent thinking is gradually snuffed out.”

Mathematician and terrorist Kaczynski

Are these the only possible conclusions of industrial society?

(Try to forget that Kaczynski killed three people and ruined many more lives. His vision of the future is quoted by many because it is nuanced and sharply observed; it is worth salvaging from the wreckage of his life.)

Kaczynski & Skrbina (2010), pp. 93–94:⁵

“172. First let us **postulate that the computer scientists succeed** in developing intelligent machines that can do all things better than human beings can do them. In that case presumably all work

will be done by vast, highly organized systems of machines and no human effort will be necessary. **Either of two cases might occur.** The machines might be permitted to make all of their own decisions without human oversight, or else human control over the machines might be retained.

“173. If the machines are permitted to make all their own decisions we can’t make any conjecture as to the results, because **it is impossible to guess how such machines might behave.** We only point out that the fate of the human race would be at the mercy of the machines. It might be argued that the human race would never be foolish enough to hand over all power to the machines. **But we are suggesting neither that the human race would voluntarily turn power over to the machines nor that the machines would will fully seize power.** What we do suggest is that the human race might easily permit itself to drift into a position of such dependence on the machines that it would have no practical choice but to accept all of the machines’ decisions. As society and the problems that face it become more and more complex and as machines become more and more intelligent, people will let machines make more and more of their decisions for them, simply because machine-made decisions will bring better results than man-made ones. Eventually a stage may be reached at which the decisions necessary to keep the system running will be so complex that human beings will be incapable of making them intelligently. At that stage the machines will be in effective control. People won’t be able to just turn the machines off, because they will be so dependent on them that turning them off would amount to suicide.

“174. On the other hand it is possible that human control over the machines may be retained. In that case the average man may have control over certain private machines of his own, such as his car or his personal computer, but **control over large systems of machines will be in the hands of a tiny elite—just as it is today, but with two differences.** Due to improved techniques the elite will have greater control over the masses; and because human work will no longer be necessary the masses will be superfluous, a useless burden on the system. If the elite is ruthless they may simply decide to exterminate the mass of humanity. If they are humane they may use propaganda or other psychological or biological techniques to reduce the birth rate until the mass of humanity becomes extinct, leaving the world to the elite. Or, if the elite consist of soft-hearted liberals, they may decide to play the role of good shepherds to the rest of the human race. They will see to it that everyone’s physical needs are satisfied, that all

⁴Previously quoted in Re49 (Retraice (2022/11/13)).

⁵Also quoted in Kurzweil (1999) pp. 179–180.

children are raised under psychologically hygienic conditions, that everyone has a wholesome hobby to keep him busy, and that anyone who may become dissatisfied undergoes ‘treatment’ to cure his ‘problem.’ Of course, life will be so purposeless that people will have to be biologically or psychologically engineered either to remove their need for the power process or to make them ‘sublimate’ their drive for power into some harmless hobby. These engineered human beings may be happy in such a society, but they most certainly will not be **free**. They will have been reduced to the status of domestic animals.”

Philosopher Bostrom

So far we have heard about losing power and freedom to machines or their controllers. Now we hear about what *preventing* (or trying to prevent) such losses might look like.

To secure ourselves against civilization-ending new technologies, would we accept the following? Would it work?

Bostrom (2019), pp. 465–466:

“For a picture of what a really intensive level of surveillance could look like, consider the following vignette:

“*High-tech Panopticon*

“Everybody is fitted with a ‘**freedom tag**’—a sequent to the more limited wearable surveillance devices familiar today, such as the ankle tag used in several countries as a prison alternative, the bodycams worn by many police forces, the pocket trackers and wristbands that some parents use to keep track of their children, and, of course, the ubiquitous cell phone (which has been characterized as ‘a personal tracking device that can also

be used to make calls’). The freedom tag is a slightly more advanced appliance, **worn around the neck** and bedecked with multidirectional cameras and microphones. Encrypted video and audio is continuously uploaded from the device to the cloud and machine-interpreted in real time. AI algorithms classify the activities of the wearer, his hand movements, nearby objects, and other situational cues. If suspicious activity is detected, the feed is relayed to one of several **patriot monitoring stations**. These are **vast office complexes, staffed 24/7**. There, a **freedom officer** reviews the video feed on several screens and listens to the audio in headphones. The freedom officer then determines an appropriate action, such as contacting the tag-wearer via an audiolink to ask for explanations or to request a better view. The freedom officer can also dispatch an inspector, a police rapid response unit, or a drone to investigate further. In the small fraction of cases where the wearer refuses to desist from the proscribed activity after repeated warnings, an arrest may be made or other suitable penalties imposed. Citizens are not permitted to remove the freedom tag, except while they are in **environments that have been outfitted with adequate external sensors (which however includes most indoor environments and motor vehicles)**. The system **offers fairly sophisticated privacy protections**, such as automated blurring of intimate body parts, and it provides the option to redact identity-revealing data such as faces and name tags and release it only when the information is needed for an investigation. **Both AI-enabled mechanisms and human oversight closely monitor all the actions of the freedom officers to prevent abuse.**”

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