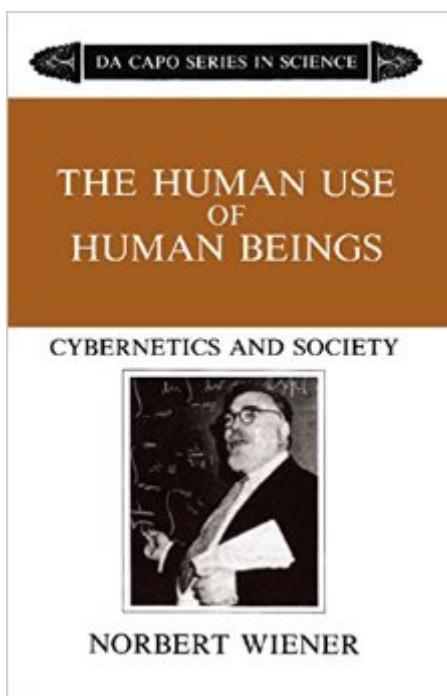


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The Human Use Of Human Beings: Cybernetics And Society (The Da Capo Series In Science)



Synopsis

Only a few books stand as landmarks in social and scientific upheaval. Norbert Wiener's classic is one in that small company. Founder of the science of cybernetics—the study of the relationship between computers and the human nervous system—Wiener was widely misunderstood as one who advocated the automation of human life. As this book reveals, his vision was much more complex and interesting. He hoped that machines would release people from relentless and repetitive drudgery in order to achieve more creative pursuits. At the same time he realized the danger of dehumanizing and displacement. His book examines the implications of cybernetics for education, law, language, science, technology, as he anticipates the enormous impact—in effect, a third industrial revolution—that the computer has had on our lives.

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Customer Reviews

Norbert Wiener was the intellectual giant central to the birth of cybernetics. As described in "The Human Use of Human Beings" (1950), cybernetics was coined by Wiener to describe the emerging post-war synthesis of control, communication, and information, and its applications to technology, biology, social sciences, and seemingly everything. It was a remarkably ambitious project, which

would eventually be sidetracked by personal politics and its displacement by digital computation and AI, but many of the prescient ideas of cybernetics and Wiener live on. To be honest, "The Human Use of Human Beings" is somewhat of a mess. The unifying vision is undoubtedly there, but Wiener is remarkably discursive, venturing into tangential topics such as linguistic history, Leibniz' philosophy of monads, ciphers, prosthetics, chess playing machines, trial lawyers, and "the idea that one might conceivably travel by telegraph". Yet, it wouldn't be Wiener otherwise. These are the disorganized thoughts of one of the twentieth century's great geniuses and polymaths. The book begins with cybernetics, that nexus of control, communication, feedback, information, entropy, and probability. To Wiener, the applied mathematician of statistical mechanics, his synthesis reflects "the impact of the Gibbsian point of view on modern life" (it is "Gibbs rather than Einstein or Heisenberg or Planck to whom we must attribute the first great revolution of twentieth century physics").

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