
18-APR-76 17:24:50-PST,3546;000000000000
Date: 18 APR 1976 1724-PST
From: LEDERBERG at SUMEX-AIM
Subject: Review of your book
To: Joseph at MIT-MC

Dear Joe:

I guess that what I get from your book is that you find it easier to dish it out than to take very small criticisms in kind. Did you give the targets of your criticism the opportunity to correct what may be misimpressions of their views, that you would demand for yourself?

Now believe me, there is a lot of what some of those zealots have to say that I believe to be nonsense, no less than you. And had you confined yourself to substantive criticism, rather than ad-hominem attack, I think you would have had a more persuasive book. I do not see how you can confuse [even] Colby with Hitler, either in motivation (which may be less important) or in conceivable impact.

As to 20 years ago vs. now: yes I think the zealous optimism may still be there, but it is obvious that you went out of your way to find rhetorical targets from the older writing, rather than to try to understand the current positions they would now espouse. Perhaps I am mistaken but have you taken the trouble to ask McCarthy or Simon or Newell whether they accept your characterization of their position? Certainly if you had, once again you would have had a book that leaned more on evidence and less on polemic.

You will note that I agreed with you that a clearer understanding of the actual capabilities and limitations of computer methodology is indispensable to the sound use of these instruments. (Fire, too). If I am not mistaken, a great many computer scientists (and me too) articulated the same criticism of relying upon the complex, and inherently untestable software of the ABM systems; though there were many other and even more compelling reasons to oppose their adoption. Again, you would have been an excellent person to have articulated these issues; and I think you failed on account of the emotionalism that so obviously embraces your thinking on these matters at this time. (And I expect you to respond: of course I am emotional when the lives of millions are at stake.). It is an interesting question just how far undue reliance on computer data management contributed to the moral and policy faults of the SE-Asian war: the data you give don't really tell much about that. On the other side, I am sure you are well aware how bitter the services were about the DOD's policy-analysis-office, and its 'computer-whiz-kids' who seemed to be using these tools to frustrate their own individual defense-budget demands.

Why don't you write the book that is worthy of your knowledge and insight, now that you have this one out of your system, and tackle the issues

of the actual uses and abuses of the machines, and not the silly straw men that you put up the first time.

I am glad to have your net address; I started to send you a copy of the review, but did not have the notebook handy, and thought (I guess mistakenly) that the article would be in print very shortly thereafter. I have not seen it yet; perhaps they won't even print it.

There is one phrase I would correct if I had the opportunity: yes, SOME will be innocent victims on account of OTHERS' delinquencies (no new story!!) so I should have been less condensed in my phrasing. Noone 'deserves' such consequences, not even the misguided. If there is time, I will correct that; if not, and you are intent of making a point of it in print, please quote me as agreeing.

Joshua
