MIT Institute Archives & Special Collections. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. News Office (AC0069)

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

March 18, 1964

To Members of the Faculty:

It is with deep regret that we have learned of the death of Dr. Norbert Wiener, Institute Professor Emeritus, in Stockholm, Sweden, on Wednesday, March 18. One of the world's great mathematicians, he was also one of M.I.T.'s most distinguished professors. During his forty-five years of association with this faculty, he was a symbol of fine scholarship and, indeed, of the highest goals of M.I.T. We respected him not alone for his productive and creative mind, but equally for his warmth of understanding and for his humanity.

Norbert Wiener came to M.I.T. in 1919 as a young instructor and throughout his years here influenced the development of research and education at the Institute. After his retirement in 1960 he continued to teach and to be a stimulus to many. He left Cambridge on January 20th to spend several months at the University of Amsterdam, which planned to award him the title of Honorary Professor of Medicine. After a visit in Norway this month Dr. Wiener went to Stockholm to lecture at the Royal Institute and planned to spend several days in Copenhagen before returning to Amsterdam. He was to go to Naples for the Spring School of Cybernetics and, later in the year, to Mexico City for a stay at the Institute of Advanced Studies.

Dr. Wiener was born on November 26, 1894, in Columbia, Missouri. His father, Leo Wiener, a brilliant student of Slavic languages, came to the Harvard University faculty in 1897, and the son grew up in an atmosphere of intense scholarship. Norbert Wiener was reading by the time he was four, and he entered Tufts College at the age of eleven, graduating three years later and receiving his doctorate from Harvard at the age of eighteen. He then studied at Cambridge University, Göttingen, Columbia University, and Copenhagen.

From very early in his career Dr. Wiener's professional interests were concerned with then unexplained irregularities in mathematics. He attempted to formulate procedures by which such irregularities could be reduced to a minimum

WIENER OBIT. LTR

Use copy created from Institute Archives record copy. © Massachusetts Institute of Technology

MIT Institute Archives & Special Collections. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. News Office (AC0069)

and nature's random movements be brought together into a harmonious whole. His The Fourier Integral and Certain of its Applications (1933) is an elaboration of this work, and he carried it into new directions in Fourier Transforms in the Complex Domain, written jointly with R. E. A. C. Paley in 1934. He developed other aspects of this interest in his extensive analysis of brain waves and the evolution of what he called cybernetics.

His book, Cybernetics -- Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine (1948), explored similarities between the human brain and modern computing machines, seeking to discover to what degree the human nervous system, carrying its stimuli signals to the brain, is purely a mechanized process. He published in 1950 his most generally popular book The Human Use of Human Beings and in 1958 the highly important mathematical work Nonlinear Problems in Random Theory. He also wrote, among other books, two autobiographical volumes, Ex-Prodigy (1953) and I Am a Mathematician (1956), and contributed extensively to the mathematical literature. In God and Golem, Inc., to be published by the M.I.T. Press in April, Dr. Wiener related the problems of cybernetics to religion and philosophy.

Professor Wiener is survived by his wife, Margaret Engemann Wiener; two daughters, Mrs. Gordon Raisbeck of Lexington and Miss Peggy Wiener of Albany, New York; his mother, Bertha, of Belmont; a brother and two sisters, one of whom is the wife of Professor Philip Franklin of the Department of Mathematics.

J. A. STRATTON

Use copy created from Institute Archives record copy. © Massachusetts Institute of Technology