

239 Meadow Road,
Santa Cruz
January 5, 1969

Joshua Lederberg
The Washington Post

% The San Francisco Chronicle,
5-th & Mission,
San Francisco, California

Dear Sir:

First let me confess to being a fan of yours, then let me request yet another column on this Sunday's subject. My concern centers on your treatment of the limitations of computers and man.

In seeking the limitations on understanding, you raise a fundamental and fascinating issue. But you must be wary of saying certain problems are insoluble simply because some particular computation is not feasible. There are lots of wrong ways to solve problems. The real limits are more like those of relativity, quantum effects and psychological experiments, where untainted data is itself unattainable, even in principle. My recommendation is to redo paragraph seven of your column.

Suppose that we find, in some recursive manner, that man can never understand man in detail. Such knowledge would be irrelevant to the query that has nagged man since machines were born: "Can we build superior mechanical substitutes for ourselves?" In terms of history this would be the ultimate technical achievement of man since presumably the substitutes would carry on from there. I am sure that your readers would be interested in your views.

Thanks for your column, I enjoy it.

Sincerely,


W. M. McKeeman