Book Reviews

The Tempter. Norbert Wiener. Random House, New York, 1959. 240 pp. $3.75.

Norbert Wiener, ever the student of communications, has turned his creative efforts to yet another form of this protean process. In his novel, *The Tempter*, he has tried to communicate to his readers a description of the complex interactions among science, engineering, and business and of the intimately related complex set of moral problems arising therefrom. Unhappily, there is so much noise mixed with the signals that it is difficult to decide just what message Wiener intended the reader to receive.

This is the story of Gregory James, written in the form of an extended autobiographical letter, or confessional, to the son of Mordecai Williams, James' mentor and employer, who was also the head of the Williams Control Corporation, with which James had been so closely identified. James records his rise from an immigrant "greenhorn" to chief engineer; during this process the success of James and of the firm is assured through an elaborate industrial version of the shell game. James recognizes the importance of a general theory of controls developed, but not patented, by a crochety, independent, and poverty-stricken Englishman, who is also his friend. In order that Williams Controls can get the jump on its competitors, it must appear to own the patents for such ideas and their development. This is accomplished by feeding the ideas to Domingues, a vain, but aspiring, Mexican engineer on the campus of a small American college, who had been a college friend of James in Europe. Domingues' talent for original thinking is limited, but his ability to embroider (and make his own) the thoughts of others is good. Meanwhile, the control concepts are developed into hardware by an imaginative engineer on the Williams Controls staff. Williams Controls, with much fanfare, buys the ideas from Domingues, who patents them and gets all the publicity, while the staff engineer (quiet and unassuming) gets a raise, and his younger engineering associates get disenchanted. The Englishman is offered a substantial sum, but, compared with that paid Domingues, trivial and he—naturally—rejects it.

From time to time, James is concerned with the basic morality of his actions, but for him the possible immoralities implied in my brief description of the plot are balanced by his good intentions, his admiration for Williams, and his estimate of the requirements for loyalty to the firm to which he has committed himself (and which has done very well by him). He further explains his actions, if he does not excuse them—though the reader is not sure that this distinction is clear in the protagonist's own mind—by admitting that he needs a comfortable standard of life and that he enjoys participating in the business of business (both of which, he presumes, derive from his comfortable childhood life as the son of a well-to-do Armenian rug seller and scholar). But at the end of the book, James is unhappy about the way things have turned out and about his part in them, and the reader is unhappy with the quality of the insight and analysis Wiener has provided. This is especially so with regard to the protagonist's limited exploration of the place of science and its special morality in those businesses which use the services of scientists and creative engineers.

James implies that, with his later wisdom and hindsight, he would have done things differently had he been given another opportunity. But it is not at all clear to me *what* he would have done differently and, more important, *why* he would have done it. Given his conflicting set of values, one suspects that if James had followed an alternate set of decisions, he would have been unhappy with their outcome, too. He might have been truer to the values of friendship involved with the Englishman and to the value of integrity between scientists, but what then of his friendship for Williams and his estimate of the validity of a business-engineering value system which he accepted and which many scientists find most useful, both for the standard of living it provides and for the opportunity of extending science it affords.

Wiener's public statements and essays, as well as his choice of plot and preoccupation in this novel, have made it abundantly clear that the moral problems posed are profoundly important ones to him. As such, one could hope for an outspoken and insightful study of these problems, developed in ways which Wiener, with his experience and integrity, may very well be uniquely qualified to perform. These are, of course, tough (and perhaps insoluble) problems, and Wiener has certainly done a service by pointing out, to those readers who have accepted the prevalent public-relations image of science and engineering, that these problems of morality also plague those businesses and personalities that use and are used by scientists and engineers. (And he does demonstrate the role of our archaic patent system in these problems.)

Nevertheless, Wiener does not give the reader the basis for resolving these moral dilemmas, nor does he consider them in general and specific forms with sufficient depth to enhance substantially the reader's capacity for his own fruitful exploration of the dilemmas posed.

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Administration and Policy-Making in Education. John Walton. Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, Md., 1959. 207 pp. $5.

Administration and Policy-Making in Education is no handbook of administrative practices or manual of management procedures. Its theme is at the theoretical level. Policy-making, observes Walton, is not done by administrators or by scholars, but by the people and their legislative representatives (page 77). Consistent with this, he thinks of community surveys and citizens' committees as means of ascertain-