The Conduct and Misconduct of Foreign Affairs
by Charles Yost
(Random House; 234 pp.; $7.95)

Bill Weinberg

Charles Yost offers a low-key, objective account of America's topsy-turvy foreign policy since World War II, written by a man who has been intimately involved with that policy at a high level. What is most noteworthy is not so much what Yost says, since many of the same things have been argued by others, but the fact that Yost is saying them.

A career foreign service officer for more than thirty-five years, Yost brings to the book his experience as ambassador, member of the U.S. delegations at Dumbarton Oaks and Potsdam and, most recently, Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations. That Yost, a Democrat, was appointed Permanent Representative by Richard Nixon can be read either as a sign of scrupulous professionalism or cautious bureaucratise, depending upon one's point of view. In any case, he was an early casualty, leaving the post in February, 1971, after only two years.

All this is important to a careful evaluation of Yost's book. As one who came to it skeptical, I was pleasantly surprised by his frankness and objectivity. For example:

Neither side in the stupid nuclear arms race needs to match the other in every particular, or even in most particulars. As long as each has and can keep an invulnerable core of strategic weapons able to wreck enormous devastation on the adversary who lacks any corresponding defense on which he could rely with certainty, that is enough; that is "sufficiency."

If NATO still has a significant role to play, the same cannot be said of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, which was never more than a transparent cover for U.S. military support of a few Southeast Asian nations, most of which were less immediately threatened by external attack than by their own failure to reform their archaic political and economic structures.

What is most striking, most destabilizing and most intolerable over the long run is that so many of the major decisions about the fate of the area—war and peace, life and death in Korea, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia—have been made by people living thousands of miles away. . . . Villages are wiped out in order to "save them," millions of men, women, and children are moved about like cattle time after time; war is prolonged year after year when those most concerned, if left alone, could and would have made peace. Here, most grossly and most unpardonably, the great powers, from the depths of their ignorance and the height of their pride, have presumed to impose their justice and their creeds on peoples at least as civilized as themselves.

These are clearly not the words of a man hedging his bets. Yost says what he's got to say without the doubletalk (or think) of a bureaucrat, without the subtle (or not so subtle) self-serving of a politician and without the incessant jargon of many academics.

Yost has covered a range of issues, including the future of the nation-state, the role of public opinion in foreign affairs, the psychology of the leaders of the cold war, the growth of the military's role in our foreign policy decision-making process, the futility of a strategy of nuclear superiority, the role of alliances, the diffusion of responsibility away from the State Department, and so on. Yost's most valuable contribution is his discussion of the growing influence of the military in our foreign policy decision-making. We should have guessed that, in a country involved for the past twenty-three years in "military actions" of one kind or another, the power and influence of the military would increase. Others have warned us of this trend, to be sure, but none to my knowledge quite so clearly or persuasively as Yost.

He begins by pointing out that "since 1945 the military has played a role in the formulation and conduct of U.S. foreign affairs which, except in wartime, is wholly unprecedented in American history." The bases for this statement are the tremendous growth of military manpower, the creation and growth in scope and influence of the National Security Council, the huge increase in spending for "defense," the proliferation of military alliances such as NATO and SEATO and the existence of a vast network of military aid programs in foreign countries. Yost discusses the results of these factors:

The sum of all these developments during the twenty-five years after World War II was not only to create in the Pentagon the most gigantic and affluent military bureaucracy the world has ever seen, but to distribute throughout the foreign-affairs apparatus—in Washington and overseas—representatives of this bureaucracy au-
Yost calls for a curtailment of this growing trend toward the military's domination of foreign policy decision-making. He recognizes the real difficulties involved in reversing the trend but argues that not only our country but the entire world is in danger if we do not do so. One cannot believe that Yost is crying wolf. Much has been made lately of the growing power of the President, and rightly so. If those who perceive a gradual movement toward dictatorship have any case at all, it surely rests with the strength being concentrated in the executive branch, an occurrence which seems more ominous, given the military's growing role and power.

Yost does not stop with a general criticism. He lists several ways that the power of the military could legitimately be curtailed. First of all, he suggests a three-quarter cut in the service attachés (military intelligence) assigned to U.S. embassies, a drastic reduction of the U.S. military officer corps, and a three-quarters cut in the staff of the Central Intelligence Agency. (Yost's book should have appeared six months earlier; George McGovern needed the support.) Second, he envisions an expansion of the activities of the State Department to encompass some duties which have traditionally been handled by the military and/or the CIA. Finally, he recommends that the National Security Council, if it is going to remain dominated by military men, confine itself to giving military advice, which can then be related to conditions existing in the international community by others possessing broader perspectives.

The weakest portion of The Conduct and Misconduct of Foreign Affairs is its conclusion. Yost, undoubtedly influenced by his later years with the United Nations, looks to that institution for a ray of hope. Pointing out that the United Nations has lacked political power primarily because the superpowers have willed it that way, he maintains that the threat of nuclear holocaust brought on by the escalating arms race should move the superpowers to reevaluate their relationship to the U.N. Unfortunately, the vision of a strengthened United Nations with meaningful enforcement powers, though most palatable, seems quite remote.

One of the most interesting offshoots from Yost's book is the reflection upon the gap between his unofficial positions now clearly stated and the official positions necessitated by his place in the U.S. foreign policy hierarchy. It is at the same time encouraging and frightening. It is encouraging to learn once again that there are in high-level government positions clear-thinking men and women such as Yost who have not been blinded by their own rhetoric. It is frightening that a man of his responsibility could or would do so little to affect the direction of U.S. foreign policy. Yost offers yet another example of a phenomenon in American society today—the elusiveness of power. We hear daily from congressmen, Supreme Court justices, even the President—and now Yost—that they are powerless to do this or that. It is to Yost's credit, however, that he does not join Charles Reich in continuing the illusion that power is being diffused; he places the preponderance of power precisely where it lies—in the office of the President with the energetic support of his top advisors, including a number of military men. The Conduct and Misconduct of Foreign Affairs is written for the general reader, but its uncommonly good sense commends it to the professional foreign service officer as well.

A Theory of Justice
by John Rawls

Alan Emdin

Men have always been concerned with the standards of right and wrong by which they might judge the ordering of their common life. Such standards have been provided by tradition, by the gods or by various modes of philosophy. Perhaps the greatest philosophic doctrines were the classical teachings of Plato and Aristotle, which, through contemplating the unchanging nature of things, put forward standards so pure as to be unattainable in social fact.

In the persons of Descartes and Hobbes classical philosophy was rejected by early modernity on the ground that its metaphysics was untenable. Yet the thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries still believed that nature provided a basis for the rights of men and a guide by which social actions might be judged. Their concern was not for esoteric utopias but for rules naturally acceptable to all, rules which could guarantee minimal rights and security.

Even these standards did not go unchallenged for long. Bentham declared their talk of natural rights to be just so much "nonsense on stilts." In place of natural rights he advanced the criterion of whether an action's consequences maximized pleasure and minimized pain. Unlike natural rights, the existence of pleasure and pain seemed clear. While philosophers of the past might quarrel with the crudeness of Bentham's standards, they recognized that Bentham's approach allowed choice between alternatives, a possibility soon to be virtually denied in social and philosophic thought.

Economists came to the conclusion that one could not really speak of utility as a property of objects or