

litical thought has long been overdue, and Dr. Margaret Canovan's slender volume is a worthy beginning in that it provides—in the style of a good term paper by a dedicated graduate student—an excellent survey of Hannah Arendt's main works. The book unfortunately dwells mainly on her most controversial works, ignoring many of the early papers and reviews which, in my opinion, shed much light on Professor Arendt's mature work. There is no reason, for example, to publish only a select bibliography when a complete bibliography of Professor Arendt's *opera omnia* would be both helpful and relevant to students. But this is a minor objection to an otherwise scholarly and judicious work.

Dr. Canovan's estimation of Professor Arendt's position in the scheme of things is higher than mine. She rates Professor Arendt with Eric Voegelin, Simone Weil, Bertrand de Jouvenel, and Michael Oakeshott. What they have in common with Professor Arendt, she maintains, is their reflective manner of approach to politics, their ability to write well, and their common opposition to academic orthodoxy. But this could be said of many writers, including such figures as Willmoore Kendall, Friedrich A. Hayek, and John Pocock. In fact Voegelin, Weil, de Jouvenel, and Oakeshott are all political and philosophical conservatives and all are political philosophers of the first rank, whose views are dramatically different from Hannah Arendt's. The comparison is not original with Dr. Canovan. Other writers have compared Professor Arendt to the same group of political philosophers, usually substituting the late Leo Strauss—perhaps the most gifted political theorist of our century—for Simone Weil. In fact the only thing Hannah Arendt has in common with these writers is her general interest in political theory and her opposition to certain trends in contemporary political science. Voegelin's brilliant review of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, which receives only passing mention in Dr. Canovan's book, personifies the differences between him and Professor

Arendt. It is the difference between a man striving to revive the classical *episteme politike* and a mere philodoxer.

There remains much of value in Hannah Arendt's work, particularly her early studies of the *vita activa*, totalitarianism, and revolution. One could go through those books with a red pencil, correcting mistakes and disagreeing with interpretations, but they remain solid contributions to our understanding of the twentieth century. Since the death of her husband, Heinrich Blücher—to whom she dedicated *The Origins of Totali-*

tarianism and who greatly influenced her best work—her work has taken an even more ephemeral, journalistic turn. The leftist effusions lately contributed to *The New York Review of Books* are very much below the quality of her earlier work. Many readers of Dr. Canovan's book would have been interested to learn the extent of Heinrich Blücher's influence on his wife's work, but Blücher is not even mentioned. Still Dr. Canovan has written the only and therefore the best introduction to Hannah Arendt's political thought, and she is to be thanked.

Lessons of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy by Ernest R. May

(Oxford University Press; 220 pp.; \$6.95)

Thomas N. Thompson

Professor May has written a useful and disturbing book about history's influence on American decision-makers. It is useful because of the author's well-known command of history. It is disturbing because of the lack of any satisfying analysis. The book, well written, is divided into two parts: "How the past has been used," and "How the past might be used." The "lessons" which make up part of the book's title suggest the author's primary focus of interest: historical analogy.

We all seek reassurance from the past. That is, we all try to comfort ourselves in the uncertain, problematical present by believing that every new experience is anchored in identity with, or even similarity with, past events. Reasoning by analogy is one way we achieve this sense of security. Analogies by their nature promise order and control. Analogies also seem to be self-evident, related to something readily familiar so as easily to avoid exhaustive description and analysis. Thus their frequent appearance in Washington.

Actually both policy-makers and scholars employ analogies as either tools of analysis or levers of advocacy. But, as Professor May ably demonstrates, a useful concept which offers a promising way of marshaling and organizing the data of experience is all too often used to prostitute history. Too much certainty in describing parallel situations hinders more than it helps. Sometimes the effort to obfuscate is intentional.

Of the unintentional type, Professor May shows that plans for dealing with Germany in the post-World War II world were made so as to avoid the alleged mistakes of the earlier war. During World War II, in contradistinction to World War I, there were no precise war aims on the part of the United States. Roosevelt clearly felt that during the First War the Germans had not felt the full consequences of losing the war. This time arrangements were made for the trial of German as well as Japanese leaders, no matter that both sides were guilty of various

atrocities. Similarly, economic institutions were set up with the intention of coping with the kind of deflation that existed between 1919-1921 and not the inflation that actually occurred. Roosevelt also thought about security problems as if postwar U.S.-USSR relations were to be negotiated as were those during World War I between Wilson and Clemenceau.

In his chapter on the cold war Professor May rightly notes that an anti-Soviet totalitarianism was an easy replacement for anti-Axis totalitarianism. What were understood as policies of appeasement made way for an uncritical attitude toward overstated and exaggerated fears about Western security. This in turn propelled an expansive notion of America's security requirements. Professor May is critical of U.S. policies only in the sense that he believes American policy-makers overlearned their "lessons" from the past. He points out, for example, that in the Truman Administration officials "appear to have thought about the issues before them in a frame of reference made up in part of historical analogies, parallels, and presumed trends and that the history employed for this purpose was narrowly selected and subjected to no deliberate scrutiny or analysis."

Reasoning from the recent past has led to costly misperceptions too. On the American intervention in Vietnam Professor May is at his best. Yet one cannot be certain that our Vietnam miseries have so much to do with faulty historical judgment. It is on this issue that the book is so bothersome, for the analysis that Professor May makes avoids the issue of the soundness of a particular policy in the first place. The problem is not how to build a better mousetrap. The problem is how to get rid of it. It is not enough to assert that the Vietnam nightmare is a product of intellectual error. Such an analysis would suggest that if policy-makers would only be more careful and accurate with their history, policies would have a better chance of succeeding. This reduces the issue to a technical matter.

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This is not to say that Professor May is unpersuasive. But the listing of so many analogies which were used to promote America's policies in Vietnam can only take us so far toward sound analysis. To state the matter simply, the key to the American presence in Vietnam is the logical outcome of the unprecedented growth of a consistently expansionist America, especially in Asia, where much of that expansion went unchallenged. In this expansion we can trace an inordinate American power and a concomitant determination to use that power so as to ensure a liberal-capitalist version of congenial international order.

In this context debates over the rationales for intervention and escalation became largely ad hoc justifications for policies that were already determined by America's self-image. This self-image has been inherently capitalist, so as to preclude any competitors from America's control. Thus to suggest, as does Professor May, that a tighter

grip on our analogies might have restrained Lyndon Johnson, or even Richard Nixon, is to suggest more innocence and disinterest than is appropriate for the rulers of an empire. For Professor May fails to give American decision-makers the credit they deserve. It is clear, for example, that Vietnam was perceived as a threat to America's preponderance in the world. It is equally clear that Vietnam has played no small part in reducing that preponderance.

It is because of this situation that Professor May's plea that historians be asked "to supply perspectives on events" will never be heard. It is like the fiddler at a country square dance. When he stops playing what people want to hear and dance to he can start looking for another barn. What we need are studies of the dynamics of American imperialism, particularly capitalism. Professor May writes about bureaucracy as a dynamic. We need to know more about the ideology and interests that provide grist for the mill.

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Briefly Noted

World Culture and the Black Experience by Ali A. Mazrui

(Washington University Press; 111 pp.; \$2.95 [paper])

Three lectures by a Kenyan-born political scientist at the University of Michigan. The assumption and hope is a universal cultural convergence. In these generally engaging, if not pathbreaking, talks he relates that universal vision to African particulars of language, religion, and education. Of particular interest is Mazrui's critique of various genetic-viewpoints associated with Jensen, C.P. Snow, and others, and frequently used to explain cultural differences.

American Religious Thought by William A. Clebsch

(University of Chicago Press; 212 pp.; \$6.95)

Stanford's Clebsch skips the denominational and theological wrangles in order to get at what he believes to be the more distinctively American stream of religious thought. That means Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and William James. Despite what would seem to be the narrow intellectualism of this approach to "American religious thought," the study of this American trinity is at some points fresh in insight and is especially useful in highlighting the role of Jonathan Edwards in the shaping of American sensibilities.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION (Act of August 12, 1970; Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code)

1. *Title of Publication:* WORLDVIEW
2. *Date of Filing:* September 27, 1974
3. *Frequency of Issue:* Monthly
4. *Location of known office of publication:* 170 East 61th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021
5. *Location of the headquarters or general offices of the publishers:* Same
6. *Names and addresses of publisher, editor, and managing editor:*
Publisher: Council on Religion and International Affairs, address as above
Editor: James Finn, address as above
Managing Editor: Susan Woolfson, address as above
7. *Owner:* None. The Council is a private operating foundation.
8. *Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities:* None
9. *For optional completion by publishers mailing at the regular rates (Section 132.121, Postal Service Manual):*
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A. Total no. copies printed (Net press run)	6168	6300
B. Paid Circulation		
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D. Free distribution by mail, carrier or other means		
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Philosophical Anthropology by Michael Landmann

(Westminster; 256 pp.; \$7.50)

The author teaches philosophy at the Free University of Berlin and here presents an overview of various anthropologies—cultural, biological, rational, religious—about which he means to be emphatically philosophical. The result is a solid survey that

should serve as a useful introduction to a kind of synthesis with which most Americans are unfamiliar.

The Black Experience in Religion

edited by C. Eric Lincoln
(Anchor; 368 pp.; \$3.95 [paper])

Twenty-six essays by many of the

well-known analysts of black religion and culture, and by some who deserve to be better known. The anthology includes restatements of familiar postures by James Cone, William Jones, Albert Cleage, and others, together with new departures signaled by, for example, Preston N. Williams's "The Problem of a Black Ethic."

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