Main Currents in American History
by Gabriel Kolko
(Harper & Row; 433 pp.; $10.95)

Kenneth W. Thompson

President John F. Kennedy, in searching for a broad diversity of viewpoints for his administration, appointed a man he described as the "in-house Marxist" on the White House staff. Sixteen years later President Carter might take a page from President Kennedy's book, or at least assure himself that someone on his staff had viewed the shape of the world from alternative perspectives, including that of the most outspoken revisionist historian and critic of American capitalism, Gabriel Kolko. Predictably, President Carter or his principal foreign policy aides, once they listened, could disagree. Yet no form of intellectual and moral isolation is more complete than that of beleaguered top-level policymakers fearful of political rivals waiting in the wings with the hounds of time snapping at their heels.

Every major participant in the Vietnam debacle who has publicly acknowledged he erred identifies his foremost mistake as underestimating the will and the capacity of the North Vietnamese "to keep coming." Someone who had nothing to lose bureaucratically, who nevertheless had gained the trust and respect of senior officials, might have helped four Presidents and three Secretaries of State in the anguish of decision-making on Vietnam had he been allowed to recite, in tones of the court jester if need be, what experts knew about the North Vietnamese Communist movement.

So far there is little evidence that President Carter, any more than his predecessors, has provided for such a function in structuring his cabinet. Nor can a chief executive be blamed for eschewing the counsel of certain intellectuals whose arrogance is as monumental as their inability to grapple with concrete problems. In truth, the fault lies both with the President, anxious about his power, and with his critics, incapable of speaking other than ex cathedra. On the need for diversity of viewpoints Kolko offers a warning that any President should weigh:

"Of the 234 men who during 1944-60 held the key positions in the State, Defense or War, Treasury or Commerce departments, plus other relevant executive agencies dealing with foreign or military policy...those from big law, banking and investment firms accounted for 35 per cent of these key positions, while another 25 per cent...[came] from industry, utilities and miscellaneous business and commercial firms"

Using these figures and miscellaneous data such as the fact that another 16 per cent came from career governmental officials, most of whom subsequently left government for posts in business, Kolko goes further and with his own brand of ideological commitment constructs an all-inclusive theory to account for every move and countermove in American foreign policy. The sole motivating force of that policy has been to serve the interests and purposes of what he calls political capitalism at home and abroad. Our foreign policy has been and will continue to be countervoluntary and supportive of the status quo because the interests of big business, hard pressed by declining domestic markets, demand like-minded trading partners abroad and massive arms production at home to take up the slack in the economy. Nor does politics differ from foreign policy because "elitist and oligarchical in fact and not only its foreign policy can be explained, he argues, by reference to the need of politicians and union leaders to preserve and defend the capitalist system. The recurrent failures and blatant injustices of that system should have brought rebellion from those who have been its victims. But union leaders were coopted by the system: Meany dined with Rockefeller; and men such as Walter Reuther spoke only in "banal platitudes." In politics "the root of the problem...is money and the cost of successful politics." Of Watergate he writes: "If it were the mere discovery of corruption and kickbacks that justified the removal of Vice Presidents and Presidents from power, then hardly any of their detractors also in office would remain employed."}

There is more, however, to Kolko's global historiography than his indictment of American politics and foreign policy. If he is relentlessly critical and pessimistic about the American scene, he is triumphantly optimistic about the main currents of world history, a history tending inevitably "toward the Left." This movement "has irresistibly, if elliptically, characterized the history of our generation." It is America's profoundest failure not to understand that "the Second World War ripped the world assunder, the international status quo could never again be restored, and the traditional American solutions for the rest of mankind's problems as well as its own were to prove increasingly futile."

From so sweeping a conclusion the present reviewer must dissent, even while striving to be as open to Kolko's theory of history as Kolko is consistently closed to any positive role for the broad spectrum of Americans he condemns (Franklin D. Roosevelt was superficial and lacking in all moral and political purpose, and Dean Acheson a simplistic anti-Communist). It is not that Kolko has fallen short as an objective historian in some of the historical evidence he has amassed. There are valuable insights here about, for instance, the deep ethnic divisions in the American labor movement, the ambivalence of Italian, Irish, or East European workers toward remaining in America or returning, their exploitation by capitalists who play on mutual ethnic fears and hatreds. There is criticism of American policy in Vietnam and of the massive arms buildup that policymakers at the time might
usefully have taken into account. And there is a warning to the chief executive to beware of faking all his advice from establishment figures, who are long on pragmatic management skills but short on imagination.

The main defect of Kolko’s work lies in its essential dogmatism. Everything he approaches is made to fall into a single ideological framework. All is explained as contributing to the vindications of a quasi-Marxist world outlook. Yet neither the life of individuals nor answers to foreign policy are as simple as he makes them. To speak of the “increasingly violent experience, this absence of a hope of a better future…[as] the main heritage that American capitalism had at the end of its first hundred years hequeathed to its people and the international community” is to leave more than half the story unstudied and untold. For enlightened American capitalists have also spearheaded diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union, peace movements for the world, American participation in international organizations, equality of opportunity for minorities, and contributions to the well-being of humankind through a unique form of philanthropy administered by independent professional staffs. They have helped feed the world, conquer infectious diseases, and finance improved educational systems. The best of them have supported detente with the Soviet Union, promoted technical assistance to favor poor countries, and helped overthrow colonial regimes. And they have done all this and more for motives far more varied and many-sided than Kolko assigns them. Indeed, the strongest among them have often gone the farthest in according researchers and scientists greatest freedom to follow the truth where their inquiries lead them without interference or control.

The other defect, which brings us back to our initial starting point, is that Kolko’s work is conspicuously lacking in policy prescriptions. George C. Marshall, when he was Secretary of State, asked his associates to submit a one-page summary of every working memorandum they sent him addressed to the question: “Having written this lengthy report, what is it you want me to do?” It is here that intellectuals and especially dogmatists are most deficient. The failure of successive administrations to call on dissenters to advise them is at least partly attributable to this weakness. It will not do for the intellectuals to condemn problem-solvers and yet fail themselves to offer viable alternatives to the prevailing solutions of policymakers.

It is tempting to describe all Third World countries as tending to the left or indistinguishable from one another or guided by the general corpus of British Socialist opinion. To speak of “Arab socialism” may appeal to ideologues on the Right or the Left, but how then is one to explain President Sadat’s open door for capitalist-oriented policies of the mid-1970’s? Foreign policy more often is guided by complex international and practical considerations, including, but not limited to, the survival and independence of the nation. Policymakers learn to live with ambiguities and uncer-
satisfying to some to describe the world from the standpoint of inevitable ideological trends, as Kolko does, but the imperatives of foreign policy for West or East, North or South, seldom if ever yield to what the historian Frederick Burkhardt called "the grand simplifiers." In short, ideology is a necessary but insufficient explanation of foreign policy.

On Guilt and Innocence
Essays in Legal Philosophy
and Moral Psychology
by Herbert Morris
(University of California Press; 161 pp.; $8.50)

Joseph Amato

As you might expect from a collection of essays, this is not an organically conceived or systematically composed work about guilt and innocence. The essays do, however, express a unity of approach, and style, and that gives the work both unity and integrity.

Morris's writing is lucid, his manner of presentation straightforward, his development of ideas thorough, his tone mild and probing. He is no reductionist: The world of self and the world of action are not compressed into homogenized modes of being. He insists that the meaning of moral realities and human actions invariably exceeds in depth and in diversity our understanding of them. One additional point of unity characterizes his approach and style: Morris—a philosopher of ethics housed in the UCLA law school—consistently turns to the law for those insights and distinctions he considers essential to his subject.

In his first essay, "Punishment for Thoughts," Morris argues at length what seems, at least intuitively, obvious: There is a value to the longstanding distinction that morality deals with thought, and law with conduct. In "Persons and Punishment"—surely one of the most interesting essays—Morris speaks provocatively of the right of punishment. Punishment, according to him, provides an ordeal of suffering upon which a person can rest his claim for readmission into the community. In other terms, community is a "mutuality of benefit and burden"; by wrongdoing a person thus severs himself from this first binding moral assumption of the community. Punishment makes explicit the suffering of his admitted wrong and provides a tangible experience for requesting his right to reenter the community. More simply, punishment is an essential rite of passage.

Morris understands that people do bad things. He disputes the reasoning and fears the results of a community that would make all wrongdoing but a matter of therapy. (Psychological theories do have a nasty potential for totalitarianism.) Conversely, Morris disagrees strongly with those whose desire to defend the place of reason and responsibility in human affairs lead them to deny the existence of any wrongdoing that is separable from reasoned responsibility: for them, every wrong must have a culprit! In his appendices to "Person and Punishment" (book reviews of Szasz's Manufacture of Madness and Fingarette's The Meaning of Criminal Insanity) Morris sets forth a sensible bid for middle territory between warring "mongers of madness" and responsibility.

In "Guilt and Suffering" Morris again seeks out middle ground. This time he tries to find a place between those who praise and those who disparage guilt. On the one hand, guilt is considered to have a positive function in the moral life; it leads a person to recognize the relations he has injured and the need to reorder himself so as to restore these relations. On the other hand, Morris points out, guilt, like punishment, is not in itself sufficient to restore those personal human relations of love that demand of a person far more than "mutual sharing of benefits and burdens." Approaching the threshold of depth psychology, Morris says guilt can be the source of a mental state, self-destructively induced, in which one takes pride.

In the essay "Shared Guilt" Morris starts beautifully by declaring his intention to explore the words of Father Zossima's brother to his mother: "Little heart of mine, my joy, believe me, everyone is really responsible to all men for all men and for everything." Enroute to this end Morris makes some very insightful distinctions between types of complicity and responsibility, desire and intention, and the direct and willful carrying out of a wrong. He weaves in searching observations about how we all might have "the hand that kills tenderly (Nietzsche); how our falterings, weaknesses, and selfishness account for the existence of evil. At the very end of his journey (after dealing with types of complicity, the wrongs of omission, and the commonality of the impulses toward evil) Morris insinuates that Zossima is expressing "a primitive belief that the act of one member of a tribe is the act of each and every member of the tribe."

Here Morris stops, leaving unasked questions about the degree to which all modern men might remain "primitives." How does the doctrine of progress entail a notion of universal and collective guilt? Or again, why did a nineteenth-century Russian intellectual such as Dostoevski choose to idealize such primitive conceptions throughout his major writings?

"Lost Innocence" is a fine closing essay. It centers on the tale of Adam and Eve's fall. Morris leads us back and forth across the meaning of our lost innocence. The loss, according to Morris, lies precisely in the terrifying