

BOOKS

THE GESTALTS OF WAR

by Sue Mansfield

(Dial Press; 274 pp.; \$16.95)

THE WAR TRAP

by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita

(Yale University Press; 223 pp.; \$24.00)

Gordon C. Zahn

War, notably the imminent prospect of a "final" war, is beginning to dominate public discussion, as well it might. Debates and demonstrations, ecclesiastical pronouncements and other statements from on high have given voice to a deep concern that, until recently, seems to have been repressed. Any contributions to a better understanding of these issues by competent social scientists are to be welcomed, and this applies to the two volumes under review.

Mansfield's subtitle describes hers as "an inquiry" into the origins and meanings of war as a social institution—a modest statement of purpose and, considering the range of subject matter indicated, deservedly so. Mesquita goes a step beyond this to offer "a general theory of war and foreign conflict initiation and escalation." If both fall short, as I believe they do, both also deserve credit for the imagination and initiative they display.

Although Sue Mansfield's principal focus is psychological, she shows a good grasp of the contributions made by cultural anthropology and comparative religion. Her discussion of war and human nature is fairly standard stuff, but she does provide some valuable insights into the part ascribed to warfare in ancient myths and primitive religion. The introduction of the "gestalt" frame of reference, not to mention the sometimes intrusive terminology, is less compelling than the author obviously believes it to be. The gestalt approach works well when applied to the behavior of individuals in situations of conflict and war, but the mechanism accounting for what is, in effect, a contagion or duplication of such gestalts among whole populations in wartime needs more careful development; otherwise we are left with the dubious notion of a reified society operating

through a kind of "collective gestalt." Had the author omitted the gestalt formulation altogether, it would not have lessened the value of her inquiry to any significant degree.

Mansfield's writing style makes the book eminently readable, something that only the specialist is likely to say of Mesquita's. The latter's chapter titles and introductory paragraphs offer considerable promise, but the promise is dashed almost immediately as the author plunges into his elaborate mathematical models and calculations. This reader confesses to being intimidated at the start and soon giving way to something verging on resentment.

The key to Mesquita's general theory and the propositions he derives from it is the assumption that wars are initiated (or evaded) by decision-makers on the basis of "expected utility." The idea that leaders start wars if they expect to come out ahead and avoid wars they expect to lose seems reasonable enough, even without pages of mathematical equations and diagrams to support it. And when we add the author's well-advised reservations that every situation must take into account special contingencies, personality factors, and other imponderables, one must admire his continued confidence in the "generality" of his theory. Mansfield, I suspect, would have much to say about the operative gestalt of such decision-makers as a factor in their determinations of expected utility.

Mesquita's "expected utility maximizer" is, in his terms, "a particular type of rational actor"—but be warned that his interpretation of "rationality" relates to that which is calculated or calculable. Thus to him Adolf Hitler was an eminently "rational" leader. Still, if one accepts the terms, limitations, and approach, the theory works. One might quibble over the hint of circularity in his empirical validation, which indicates that initiators of war (presumably the most likely "expected utility maximizers") do come out ahead more often than not. Some military theorists might ascribe this more to the advantages of advance preparation and surprise. Readers who have kept in good repair their facility for more ad-

vanced mathematics may find the book well worth struggling through.

As for me, perhaps my bias in favor of "classical sociology" is at fault, but I found both books overshadowed by W. I. Thomas's "definition of the situation" concept as well as the famous "theorem" derived from it. If men define a situation as real, it *is* real in its consequences. This says it all and says it better. What we need from the social scientist that is not provided by either of these studies is a clearer and more coherent identification of the nature and sources of the "definitions" (the gestalts, if you will, of the leaders and the led, along with the "expected utility" calculations of both) that dominate international relations today. With this we could begin to develop a deeper awareness of the dreadful consequences that are almost certain to result if those definitions are not broadened to include the moral considerations that are too often lacking—and quite impossible to express in mathematical terms. [WV]

COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN DEVELOPING NATIONS

by Göran Hedebrö

(Iowa State University Press; viii+142 pp.; \$7.95 [paper])

Arnold Zeitlin

With the Development Decade of the '60s came the conviction among educators, developers, and communicators that it was only necessary to deliver the gospel of development and the people of the underdeveloped world would see the light and find their way. Transistor radios and infant television systems carried the message by sound and picture. From the seminar rooms of the Third World sprang a new breed of development journalists. As Göran Hedebrö recalls the thinking of this period: "The key to national development was seen as a rapid increase in economic productivity. The role of the media was to mobilize human resources by substituting new norms, attitudes and behaviors for earlier ones in order to stimulate increased productivity." But, he concludes sadly: "Socioeconomic gaps between developed and developing countries are increasing instead of decreasing; the number of il-