

into politics. Only later in America, whose political traditions she cherished but whose social forms bewildered her, did she write the books that brought her fame and showed her to be one of the brightest stars among the stellar minds who fled the Third Reich.

Concerning a life so rich and protean as Arendt's there are bound to be disagreements over emphasis and focus. Though Young-Bruehl claims to be writing a "philosophical biography," she is much better at conveying the personal and historical context of Arendt's thought than at exposing its intellectual sources. (Even so, Arendt's friendships with American intellectuals such as Alfred Kazin, Robert Lowell, Dwight Macdonald, and the *Partisan Review* crowd are neglected.) For instance, Arendt's thought took a more hopeful turn after *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), yet Young-Bruehl never tells us how Arendt came to ground her idea of public action as political freedom in the classical tradition as well as in the experience of modern revolutionary councils.

This is not to suggest that Young-Bruehl is incapable of such intellectual exertions, nor is she entirely uncritical of her former teacher. She raises questions about Arendt's much-disputed *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and reveals Arendt's private hesitations about its controversial thesis. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Arendt wrote the book too soon and too carelessly. She offered no concessions to her readers and was granted none in return. The costs were great, among them the destruction of her friendships with Gershom Scholem and, more wrenchingly, Kurt Blumenfeld.

Finally, Young-Bruehl makes no attempt to assess Arendt's status as a thinker. There may be good arguments for forgoing such an evaluation, but one cannot help thinking that Arendt's uniqueness has gone understated. A creative, at times eccentric, mixture of philosopher, historian, and political theorist, her work often irritated more cautious practitioners of these disciplines. Conversely, figures as diverse as Irving Kristol and Jürgen Habermas have counted themselves among her followers. But as much as one learns of Arendt's intellectual debts to Heidegger and Jaspers, Kant and Augustine, her thought still seems *sui generis*. Only Camus, for whom she had the highest regard, shared her strong attraction to

the revolutionary impulse without giving it a Marxist gloss. And she did not grow politically cautious in her later years. As much as Herbert Marcuse, another student of Heidegger's, Arendt's thought influenced and reflected the New Left's emphasis upon action and its lack of interest in economics. The irony is that it was a German-Jewish emigré who taught Americans about what is supposed to be the crowning achievement of their political culture: the traditions of political action and dissent.

World history, not choice, led Hannah Arendt to America. Her unique angle of vision is and will remain of inestimable value, opening up new possibilities for political thinking and for the life of the mind as well. She brought political thought back to its roots in the *polis* and thought in general back into contact with the *vita activa*. Hers is a story we needed to be told, and Elisabeth Young-Bruehl has done it well. [WV]

THE FATE OF THE EARTH

by Jonathan Schell

(Alfred A. Knopf; 244 pp.; \$11.95)

Albert L. Huebner

The Fate of the Earth has demolished the tenet that the unthinkable is not the stuff of which best-sellers are made. One of the reasons for the book's remarkable impact probably is good timing: First serialized in *The New Yorker*, it rolled off the presses just as there was an upsurge of reaction to the nuclear arms race. And though not without flaws, it fills the need for a thorough, yet thoroughly accessible, account of the nuclear predicament.

Schell begins with the images offered by earlier essays concerning the unthinkable: the devastating thermal and blast effects at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the proportionately greater devastation that would be produced by any of the now-common megaton weapons if detonated over a population center. Despite the staggering carnage described in these essays, their emphasis on such local, primary effects has encouraged some policymakers to go on thinking about, even overtly *talking* about, "winning" a nuclear war. But Schell perceives, quite correctly, that nuclear weapons are

qualitatively as well as quantitatively different from the conventional variety. *The Fate of the Earth* gives an account of the secondary and interactive effects of nuclear devices that is essential to any assessment of nuclear policy.

The total effect of detonating many nuclear bombs will be far greater—perhaps incalculably greater—than the sum of the effect of each. After the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, assistance was rendered the victims by those outside the target area. In a wider holocaust, there may be no "outside." Surrounding areas will be devastated as well; in a full exchange, the Soviet Union, for example, would have more than enough bombs to strike every U.S. community of more than 1,500 inhabitants even *after* hitting strategic military targets. Areas not directly attacked would be struggling with the economic and social collapse that is likely when a complex society suffers disruption on a grand scale.

Beyond this grim catalogue of catastrophes lies the possibility of ecological collapse. To consider just one of the several routes to this *ultimate* catastrophe: Detonation of only a fraction of the nuclear weapons that are already available could degrade the atmosphere's ozone layer to such a degree that sunshine becomes lethal and food production is virtually impossible. Nuclear war threatens extinction of the human race, not because every person in the world would be killed by immediate explosive effects or by the deferred effects of radioactivity, but because a holocaust could make the biosphere unfit for human survival.

By any rational criterion, then, the present nuclear policy of mutual annihilation is militarily absurd. One consequence of this folly is that much of what is done in the name of "national security" only heightens our insecurity. Less tangible, but no less important, is the corrosive effect of accepting a strategy that projects us into the dual role of victim and perpetrators of mass slaughter. Schell observes that this strategy "commits us all to actions that we cannot justify by any moral standard. It introduces into our lives a vast, morally incomprehensible—or simply immoral—realm, in which every scruple or standard that we otherwise claim to observe or uphold is suspended."

I've suggested that the considerable impact *The Fate of the Earth* has had is

partly explained by the growing number of people who want to reclaim their moral principles by ending the nuclear terror. These readers can't be entirely satisfied with the book. Though Schell writes firmly and precisely as he delineates the nuclear problem, firmness and precision disappear as he wrestles with finding a way out. His passages plod toward some goal, become mired in abstractions, and usually arrive at a useless generality.

Schell's treatment of national sovereignty, which he regards as a major villain, illustrates the point. On page after page he tells us that it is the system of sovereign nations, extended into the age of nuclear weapons, that has brought us to the edge of extinction. Perhaps so, but daily headlines provide convincing evidence that this system isn't about to self-destruct. What is Schell's solution? "Just as we have chosen to live in the system of sovereign states, we can choose to live in some other system." For most of the world's people this remark is inaccurate, and it isn't very useful to anyone.

Fortunately, the diverse groups around the world that constitute the growing movement against nuclear weapons are capable of fashioning their own paths toward an elusive goal. The need is to incorporate more and more informed, committed people in that movement. *The Fate of the Earth* makes an important contribution here by its skillful unveiling of the political and moral bankruptcy that underlies entrenched nuclear policy. One can only hope it reaches many more readers.

THE CONDUCT OF JUST AND LIMITED WAR

by **William V. O'Brien**
(Praeger; 510 pp.; \$39.95)

Terry Nardin

One of the more encouraging developments of recent years is the revival of concern for the regulation of warfare. We see evidence of this concern in the conduct of belligerents, in public debate, in international and military law, and also in the writings of moralists, political theorists, and military strategists. Although there will always be vigorous disagreement about the principles that should guide the use of military force, a serious effort is again

being made to articulate such principles. Indeed, in view of the rapid accumulation of specialized studies on regulated warfare, there is an increasing need for general works that consider the relation of different traditions of thought. *The Conduct of Just and Limited War* is such a work.

O'Brien sets out to integrate the scholastic just war tradition and the secular tradition of positive international law. More ambitiously, he seeks to bridge the even wider gap separating these two traditions from that branch of strategic studies concerned with limited war. This latter effort derives from the sound premise that justice requires the controlled and discriminate application of military force: "there can be no just war without limited war policies and capabilities." It is not enough to define just war standards; one must also consider the conditions required for them to be effective. O'Brien devotes many pages to case studies illustrating the extent to which just war constraints have been observed during recent major wars in order that the moral, legal, and prudential standards of the past may be brought to bear on future wars, and in particular how the military forces of the United States should be equipped and trained to fight within the limits prescribed by the traditions of just and limited war.

In the course of these inquiries the author reaches a series of moral conclusions that many readers will not welcome. On the issue of Vietnam, for example, he is a revisionist. Although O'Brien grants that the American forces relied on disproportionate and often indiscriminate firepower, he concludes that these violations of the rules of war were not so grave as to make the Vietnam war an unjust war. He gives considerable weight to the judgment that the intervention was a justified attempt at resisting international aggression, comparable to American resistance to the Communist invasion of South Korea, but he asserts this judgment with scarcely any supporting argument. Looking for even more trouble, O'Brien goes on to defend Nixon's Christmas bombing campaign against North Vietnam and the invasion of Cambodia.

Others will be put off by the author's treatment of nuclear deterrence and nuclear war, rejecting as naive his rather sanguine view of the efficacy of deterrence and his cautious defense of the moral acceptability, in certain cir-

cumstances, of limited nuclear war. Although no new arguments are presented, he restates the familiar case for "flexible response"—the development of a capability on the part of the United States and its allies to wage limited counterforce, theatre, and tactical nuclear wars. O'Brien's discussion of the only limited nuclear war to have occurred so far, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, is also unsatisfactory. It merely repeats the old justifications without even considering, much less rebutting, some of the most powerful objections that are offered against dropping the bomb. Here, as in the case of the Vietnam debate, one senses that the author has given up trying to persuade those who do not share his basic assumptions.

It is unfortunate that O'Brien has felt compelled to push his moral investigation of past events to such firm and, I think, unwarranted conclusions. The book's simplistic conception of moral reasoning as the "application" of general "prescriptions" to particular performances is equally unsatisfactory. Yet these defects are perhaps of little moment, given the author's main intention. The book is, and should be read as, an effort to demonstrate the mutual relevance of the just war and limited war traditions and to get American political and military leaders to pay more attention to the accumulated wisdom embodied in them. What these traditions teach has less to do with the correctness of particular verdicts than with the overriding importance of restrained, principled conduct in war. O'Brien is entitled to his version of the past. His readers—some of them presumably those officials to whom the book is addressed and upon whose fateful decisions we all depend—must draw their own conclusions for the future. WV

THE HOUSE AND FOREIGN POLICY by Charles W. Whalen, Jr.

(University of North Carolina Press;
193 pp.; \$18.95/\$9.95)

Robert F. Drinan

The author of this thoughtful study was a Republican congressman from Ohio in the years 1967 to 1979. Immediately after leaving the Congress he became a Democrat. He confesses in this volume