

the structuralists she chooses to confront the works of Althusser and Habermas, formidable foes representing respectively the neo-Marxist and the Critical Theory schools of thought.

Hekman's argument can be summed up in this way: Structuralists, like the Marxists and the Functionalists, tend to reify constructed categories—classes, roles, modes of production, institutions, and the like—so that they lose all connection to the people who comprise them; subjectivists, like the phenomenologists, hermeneuticists, and common language analysts, tend to eschew the construction of categories and thus are left with nothing but the description of intersubjective meanings. The structuralists lose touch with their subject matter, while the subjectivists lose the ability to do causal analysis. Weber's neo-Kantian ideal-type methodology, however, admits both the intersubjective meanings of everyday life and the construction of scientific categories.

These books should be read and pondered for years to come; their implications are profound for the understanding of both modern society and modern social science.

**THE AGE OF TRIAGE:
FEAR AND HOPE IN AN
OVERCROWDED WORLD**
by Richard L. Rubenstein

(Beacon Press; vii + 301 pp.; \$15.50)

Berel Lang

If ever there was a basis for the claim that civilization is making moral progress, it disappeared with the mass murders of the twentieth century—the Turkish war of extermination against the Armenians, Stalin's Gulag, the Nazi death camps. However, in science and technology we have made considerable progress, and ironically it is these advances that provided the means for the moral enormities. We may argue, of course, that scientific and technological advances did not necessarily lead to mass murder; so the question persists, perhaps the most important of all contemporary social questions: What in fact *did* cause these acts of political barbarism, what *made* them happen? Richard Rubenstein, who addresses this large and complex question, can hardly be faulted for failing to answer it. But *The Age of Triage* is marred by two serious distortions: a myth-like simplification of the causes of genocide that, in turn, gives way to an appeal for a magical solution. As in all melodrama, where feeling substitutes for fact, this one manages only to trivialize the

events.

The Age of Triage offers as its thesis a rough equation: "surplus" populations leads to social disruption and ultimately to annihilation of the surplus. Evidence for this process, Rubenstein asserts, antedates the twentieth century—for example, the land-enclosure of Tudor England and the Irish famine of 1846-48. (Continuing his indictment of the English, Rubenstein considers the famine to have been contrived by them, and also inculcates them for the Nazi genocide against the Jews.) The same phenomenon of surplus population triggered the more recent designs for exterminating the Armenians, Kulaks, Jews, and Kampuchians. It will soon threaten the United States of Ronald Reagan unless the policies of his administration can be altered.

The battlefield-hospital term "triage" serves as a metaphor in these otherwise quite different instances of actual or potential mass killing: A surplus population is chosen for elimination in order to assure the survival of other parts of the population. Some practical measures *might* be taken now (and presumably could have been taken in the past) to break the causal chain—for example, a program of guaranteed employment that would, Rubenstein supposes, absorb the surplus population of the unemployed. But even such mild remedies are more easily named than applied, Rubenstein acknowledges. What is required, therefore, is a religious revolution—not a Marxist one or even necessarily a theistic one, but one that breaks through the general commitment to individualism and to utilitarianism and replaces it with collective altruism. How *this* revolution is to be achieved, or why we should find this an easier problem to solve than the one of surplus population, is beyond "the limits of our analysis."

So high are the moral and practical stakes that it may seem captious to question the terms in which Rubenstein analyzes them. But if philosophy or theology has any role in social theory, surely it is to distinguish first between fact and fervor and then to comprehend the facts themselves. It is unclear that Rubenstein's account accomplishes either of these ends. We could reasonably expect to learn what constitutes or defines "surplus population": Is it determined by the inability of a given land area to support more than a given number of people? Obviously it is mistaken to claim *this* as a feature of the Nazi genocide, or even, for that matter, of the land-enclosure in England; and Rubenstein himself adduces other factors—for example, the less marginal competition for power and place

between the German Jews and an "insecure indigenous middle class."

Not an "objective" surplus, then, but a *perceived* surplus has caused the events Rubenstein describes; that is, a part of the population is considered expendable by another part that is in a position to do the expending. But if *this* sense of "surplus" is supposed to explain why the Nazis killed the Jews (and not only, after all, the *German* Jews) or why the English forced the mass emigration from Ireland, we are back to explaining opiates in relation to their "dormitive power."

What have we learned? Why some groups rather than others come to be viewed as surplus; why some perceptions of surplus population, but not others, have led to attempts at annihilation; how the actions in response to such judgments are initiated, and by whom—these are the basic questions for any historical analysis, and they remain untouched. Rubenstein's only explanatory model is that of Malthus and the Social Darwinists, with its premise of scarcity and presage of a continuing war for survival. Biologists and economists systematically raised objections to that model, and we might note as well its moral complications: that the events Rubenstein describes were, in effect, natural, even inevitable, and that their perpetrators hardly can be blamed.

It is possible, though far from self-evident, that this century's large-scale political acts of murder do, as Rubenstein contends, have a single and common origin. And if there is such a cause, it probably involves the network of social and economic conditions that increasingly are overriding the more visible cultural differences among nations and peoples. This, in fact, seems to be the only sense in which we can speak of "One World." But where writers like Hannah Arendt and F. A. Hayek find the origins of totalitarian movements in sociological and psychological causes that are in some measure independent of the system to which they lead, Rubenstein moves in a circle—from surplus populations to those agents who, for reasons of their own, define the surplus. Only a religious and magical release can break this circle.

The terror of being declared surplus in Rubenstein's fatal formula is much worse than discovering oneself an outcast in the various racisms of our time. No one doubts, of course, that the political forces at work in the twentieth century seem ominous; and even a casual observation of contemporary America supports Rubenstein's contention that social justice is in short supply. It is also arguable that, given the massed and impersonal forces that now shape political

reality, there is small chance that any person or group can deliberately effect social change. Should one take a more optimistic view of the possibilities of individual social action, however, he must still have an understanding of politics that sees no ghosts in the machine and rejects hollow promises of salvation. WV

LIVING WITH NUCLEAR RADIATION
by Patrick M. Hurley
(University of Michigan Press; viii + 131 pp.; \$18.50/\$9.50)

NUCLEAR POWER: BOTH SIDES
by Michio Kaku and Jennifer Trainer
(W. W. Norton & Co.; 279 pp.; \$14.95)

Albert L. Huebner

These two books offer a study in contrasts. Although both attempt to clarify for the lay public major issues in the heated controversy over nuclear power, they differ in scope, in method, and, most of all, in achieving clarity.

It is Patrick Hurley's contention that widespread misconceptions about radiation interfere with the public's ability to make a rational evaluation of nuclear power. He proposes to remedy this by offering a clear, accurate presentation of the facts about "one factor only: nuclear radiation," while avoiding "the larger questions in the debate."

So narrow an approach might be useful, but it is perilous. It invites the intrusion of hidden assumptions and leads to seriously flawed conclusions. Hurley says, for example, that "as a result of public pressure the cost of new nuclear power installations has been so increased as to have slowed the growth of the industry severely." But this public pressure is hardly the sole result of misconceptions about radiation. Some people oppose nuclear power because they fear its link to nuclear weapons; others think it just too expensive. These moral and economic considerations are only a few of the "larger questions" in the nuclear controversy. Moreover, there is considerable evidence to indicate that the troubles plaguing the nuclear industry are largely its own creation, having little to do with public pressure at all.

Even on matters well within Hurley's adopted constraints he guards an unfortunate silence: The exposure a nuclear worker may receive is ten times that allowed a member of the general public, so that these workers are subjected to considerable dif-

WEBER, THE IDEAL TYPE, AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY

Susan Hekman

Contemporary social science methodology and epistemology are in a state of disarray and fragmentation, with many competing approaches clamoring for attention. *Weber, the Ideal Type, and Contemporary Social Theory* makes an important contribution to contemporary social science literature because it integrates and synthesizes the major social theory perspectives and then relates them back to one of the "founders" of present-day social science: Max Weber.

SUSAN HEKMAN



WEBER, THE IDEAL TYPE, AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY

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"[*Beyond Dogma and Despair*] contributes to the development of a political ethics. Its method is a critical long-march through the literature of French existential phenomenology, the nonorthodox Marxism of the Frankfurt school, and the philosophical works that anticipate or are closely related to these perspectives. . . . A valuable guide. He writes with clarity about thinkers who deal with the most difficult epistemological and ontological conundrums. . . . It is impossible to convey in a brief review the diversity, richness, and subtlety of the material Dallmayr explores. . . ." --*Contemporary Sociology* \$19.95 cloth

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ferential risk. Average *actual* doses to workers have been declining, in part because radiation exposure is being distributed over a much larger number through the widespread use of temporary workers—occasionally referred to as radiation "sponges"—for tasks in high-radiation environments.

This expanding use of temporary workers needlessly increases the collective radiation dose to society. Furthermore, the temporary workers are particularly vulnerable because they are subjected to substantially higher radiation exposure than are permanent nuclear workers, and the situation is aggravated by the absence of a central data bank to monitor total occupational exposure. A recent report prepared by the U.S. General Accounting Office indicates that the situation will become worse; it projects a substantial increase in the number of temporary workers needed to operate the nation's nuclear power facilities through 1991.

Despite these shortcomings, *Living with Nuclear Radiation* provides in a compact and accessible format an impressive range of general information about an important subject. Hurley is correct in asserting that misconceptions about radiation abound. His book won't make much of a contribution to the nuclear debate, but it *will* provide its

readers with a better understanding of how radiation—from medical X-rays to excessive radon in improperly insulated homes—impinges on their lives.

In contrast, *Nuclear Power: Both Sides* represents a major addition to the nontechnical literature on the nuclear power controversy. Kaku and Trainer sought out leading authorities on the major elements of the conflict: radiation, reactor safety, waste disposal, economics, alternative energy paths. Even the political setting in which the nuclear debate is taking place is considered.

They integrated this material, cut through the impenetrable jargon of the specialist, and wrote an introduction to each section. Then, using an elaborate system of checks and balances, the manuscript was further honed by specialists other than those contributing directly to the book. The combined talents of Kaku, a physicist, and Trainer, a professional writer, worked exceptionally well in accomplishing this formidable task.

The result is a work that offers not only the balance and thoroughness intended, but more. The essays are intelligent and informative. Beyond that, their authors offer a personal perspective on issues that adds an important dimension to the book. John