

SIMONE WEIL: A Life

by Simone Pétrement
 Pantheon, 1977, 577 pp.
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Simone Weil thwarts classification. None of the labels of 20th-century political philosophy can be applied without contradiction to this woman who believed that expression of truth was incompatible with the word "we." Weil supported all causes that she considered just and lived her convictions—in discourse with the Catholic Church, in political struggles in the streets, in the Spanish Civil War, working in fields, in factories, in trade unions, in schools. Yet as a philosophy teacher and writer (*Waiting for God*, 1951; *Gravity and Grace*, 1952), she always remained a solitary searcher for the truth. This calling, incompatible with complete subordination to any party, church, or ideology, made her a disappointment to many, as her lifelong friend and biographer Pétrement shows. Born of Jewish parents but almost anti-Semitic in her religious writings, Weil died at 34 in 1943 of tuberculosis exacerbated by the near-starvation diet she had adopted to identify herself with the plight of Jewish compatriots under the German occupation of France.

—George F. Putnam ('78)

WAR: Controlling Escalation

by Richard Smoke
 Harvard, 1977
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 419 pp. \$18.50
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The term escalation, as now generally used in describing conflicts between nations, conveys the sense of a steady upward movement toward greater violence. In this tightly reasoned book—one of the most important products of academic social science to appear in the last decade—Smoke, a Research Fellow at the Wright Institute in Berkeley, Calif., shows that escalation does not necessarily work so simply. He emphasizes how nations often blindly cross limits at which conflict might be contained and move instead to higher levels of violence in all types of confrontation short of total war. He analyzes five historical cases, beginning with the Spanish Civil War of 1936–39 and proceeding backward through the Seven Years' War of 1756–63—when the British and French engaged in an action-reaction spiral of increasing cost and intensity before each side realized belatedly that the other had been acting defensively at every step.

—Samuel F. Wells, Jr. ('77)