

Just War, Citizens' Responsibility, and Public Intellectuals

To what extent do the moral principles of just war theory lend themselves to providing an account of the moral and political responsibility of citizens in general, and of public intellectuals in particular, in times of war?¹ An analysis of Michael Walzer's thought opens promising avenues for answering this question. It will be necessary, first of all, to re-examine the classic distinction between combatants and noncombatants – a thesis that Walzer defended but that several philosophers have criticized in recent years. The problem will then be to construe citizens' moral and political responsibility in times of war, and also to reflect on the precise role of a very specific category of civil society, namely public intellectuals. We will see that this responsibility does not appear sufficient for abolishing the distinction between combatants and noncombatants, which must be maintained. However, this responsibility must be examined more precisely, especially its relation to public debate and the role that it confers on public intellectuals in that debate. Using Walzer's moral arguments pertaining to war while taking account of the objections that have been made to them, it is possible to read in Walzer's thought a weak version of the responsibility of citizens and, conversely, a strong version of the responsibility of public intellectuals, in times of war.

A moral point of view on war

For over forty years, Michael Walzer has always coupled his university career with militant activism, each of which feeds the other. His numerous books and articles must therefore be read in light of the political struggles that he led throughout his life, in particular those concerning military conflicts in the world. Walzer authored one of the most influential works in just war theory, *Just and Unjust Wars*². This book is without a doubt the most widely read and discussed in the field. It is truly a contemporary classic, its renown far surpassing that of earlier foundational works of just war theory, such as *On the Law of War and Peace* (1625) by Hugo Grotius.

Although Walzer advances his thesis through arguments, he does not conceive of it as a complete *theory*. Indeed, Walzer is not interested in giving a perfectly coherent, ideal theory, but rather in

¹ In his own work, Walzer prefers to employ the expression "social critic" rather than "public intellectual." See *The Company of Critics. Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century*, Basic Books, New York, 1988.

² Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars. A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, Basic Books, New York, 1977.

offering an analytical framework for morally evaluating real war scenarios. Whence the importance of his recourse to history, announced in the book's subtitle: *A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*.³ For Walzer, what matters is not the history of the doctrine itself, but rather the analysis of real historical events as they relate to moral theses on war. The analysis of history, recent or remote, allows us to temper certain moral principles that are presented as valid *ceteris paribus*. Examples include, among others, the case of the Six-Day War in Israel, used to illustrate the problem of preventative strikes, and the case of the Korean War, used to illustrate the difficulty of respecting the Legalist Paradigm, according to which war must be pursued until justice is done (rather than until the initial state of peace is re-established). The analysis of historical facts sometimes provides concrete confirmations of certain fundamental principles of just war theory, while other times it presents counterexamples. As a consequence of the contingencies of history, moral rules can serve as important guides for choosing our actions, yet they cannot be followed blindly. The same is true in situations of political crisis: there are no absolute rules or ready-made analytical schemes to determine which options to choose. In short, Walzer's thought on war is anything but an off-the-rack philosophy or a recipe book.

War and moral responsibility

One of Walzer's battles, both as a university professor and as an activist intellectual, was to show that, although wars are sometimes inevitable and even legitimate in certain cases, this reality should not at all diminish the responsibility of those who primarily contribute to war, namely political decision-makers and the military. Walzer elaborates his entire reflection on just war on the basis of what has come to be called the domestic analogy, i.e., the idea that a State can defend itself or be defended if it is attacked, in the same way as an individual can.⁴ This is merely an analogy, however, as Walzer insists that the sphere of war must on no account be confused with the sphere of civic life – even if the latter has its share of crimes and horrors, these must nevertheless be evaluated in an entirely different manner. In other words, we must not lose sight of the specific character of war, for otherwise we will judge it according to inappropriate principles.

³ The history invoked here is not the "history of ideas." Indeed, it is initially surprising when one sees how little importance Walzer gives to the classical authors of just war doctrine in *Just and Unjust Wars*. He makes little mention of Grotius (three times, in footnotes), even less of Augustine, none at all of Augustine.

⁴ Regarding this analogy, in particular its limitations, see my article "Autodéfense et conflits internationaux," *Raison publique*, no. 5, September 2006, pp. 67-85.

Just war theories propose three main categories for conceiving moral norms. The first two are the best known: *jus ad bellum*, or justice of resorting to war; and *jus in bello*, or justice during war. In addition to these two categories is a third that has been little studied until recently: *jus post bellum*, or post-war justice⁵ around which a new field has emerged, called transitional justice⁶.

Just and Unjust Wars was published in 1977, almost immediately after the Vietnam War – a war that Michael Walzer opposed. Although he was against this war, he always rejected the basic postulate of pacifism. In his view, sometimes war is not only necessary, but can also be morally legitimate. Consequently, Walzer also rejected the argument of the “realists” (of whom the best known representative is Hans Joachim Morgenthau), who maintain that moral considerations about war are of little use, are purely rhetorical, or even distract from what war really is. But from the perspective of just war theory, by contrast, it is important to give due seriousness to the *moral* reality of war. The norms proposed by just war theory impose limits on war: while it may sometimes be legitimate to resort to armed force, the act of aggression *per se* is never acceptable (a cardinal principle of *jus ad bellum*); in addition, not all means of waging war are permitted, even if the cause, e.g. legitimate defence, is just (principles of *jus in bello*). The reasons for waging war must therefore be distinguished from the means envisaged for combat. Walzer maintains, in line with a long tradition of thought on moral rights in war, that it is indispensable to make a principled distinction between the right to resort to military force and the moral rules governing war itself.

According to the logic of *jus ad bellum*, a war is justified if and only if it is a response to aggression. Coming to the defence of a third party is therefore entirely legitimate, for this moral right is not restricted to self-defence. The question as to whether the right of a State to defend itself takes priority over the right to defend another State is secondary. What counts is the very principle of defending a State or community under attack from the outside – or from the inside, as when a dictatorial regime seeks to crush its own citizens by bombarding them (as is presently occurring in Syria) or by

⁵ Larry May, *After War Ends. A Philosophical Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012 ; Brian Orend, *The Morality of War*, Broadview Press, Orchard Park, N.Y., 2006.

⁶ Ruti G. Teitel, *Transitional Justice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000 ; Jon Elster, *Closing the Books: Transitional Justice in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004. ; Rosemary Nagy, “Transitional Justice as Global Project: critical reflections” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2008, pp 275 – 289, Christian Nadeau, “What justice after war?. Elements for a theory of transitional justice,” *La Vie des idées*, 14 January 2010. ISSN : 2105-3030. URL : <http://www.booksandideas.net/What-justice-after-war.html> ; Elster, J., R. Nagy, and M.S. Williams, *Transitional Justice: Nomos*, New York: New York University Press, 2012.

organizing mass executions (as was the case under the Khmer Rouge regime). That being said, the defence principle constrains the right to resort to arms, not only by indicating when such recourse is permitted, i.e., when a defensive war may legitimately commence, but also when it must cease. A defensive war may not subserve other ends: for example, it cannot serve to forcibly democratize a country, much less to subjugate it to imperial designs. Walzer therefore strongly condemned the hegemonic claims that the Americans made when they intervened in Korea and Vietnam. Of course, the dichotomy between aggressors and defenders is overly simplistic, and cannot always correspond to the complexity of the situations that lead to conflict. Nonetheless, an act of aggression must be considered a breach of the political sovereignty and territorial integrity of the attacked country – a breach that therefore justifies a military defence.

According to the logic of *jus in bello*, i.e., the moral code that regulates the conduct of hostilities, a war is morally acceptable if and only if it is waged in such a way as to reduce violence to the bare minimum. Onerous as this criterion may seem, it expresses a very strong moral concern for both combatants and, especially, civilian populations.

The moral immunity of noncombatants

Michael Walzer defends the principle of the moral immunity of noncombatants. This cardinal principle of *jus in bello* stipulates that the military may not target civilian populations, even when the latter are collaborating with war efforts (for example, when civilians are working in an arms factory). However, Walzer agrees in part with the so-called doctrine of double effect, which excuses collateral damages inflicted on civilian populations if these damages were not the military's primary goals, but only secondary consequences that were difficult or impossible to avoid. Yet the burden of proof remains squarely on the side of the military: it must do all it can to avoid causing damages to civilians, or at least to minimize them in situations where complete avoidance is impossible (e.g., in guerrilla wars, in which the enemy lives in and amongst the civilian population or even belongs to it).

To summarize: in wartime, all combatants lose their right to life to the extent that they themselves represent a threat to the lives of others; conversely, all noncombatants retain their right to life precisely because they do not represent such a threat. The principle of noncombatant immunity, in order to be properly understood, must not be conceived independently of the logic of *jus in bello*, which assumes that there exists a set of moral norms which hold independently of the question of determining who is

ultimately responsible for having initially launched the hostilities. In other words, the immunity enjoyed by noncombatants does not depend on which side they happen to be on: both the civilians of the attacking country as well as those of the attacked country must be entitled to this immunity on the same basis.

According to certain authors,⁷ the mere fact of posing a threat should not be regarded as a necessary and sufficient condition for losing one's right to life, nor, more generally, should it be viewed as a criterion of liability. It would thus be entirely legitimate to append a supplementary condition to this principle: not only must there be a threat to others' physical integrity, but in addition this threat must be unjustified. Despite this amendment, one can still deny that representing an unjustified threat is an appropriate criterion for withdrawing an agent's right to life. Consequently, it is difficult to maintain the notion of an impassable barrier between *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. On the other hand, abandoning this distinction altogether would come at a high price that most just war theorists would not be willing to pay.

Here it becomes clear that agents' responsibility and imputability are conceived in relation to their membership of precisely defined groups. On the one hand, senior public decision-makers answer to the criteria of *jus ad bellum* while the military answers to the criteria of *jus in bello*; on the other hand, civilian populations are protected by both of these parts of just war theories. If one allocated the burden of responsibility solely on an individual basis, then one would have to allow that a considerable proportion of the civilian population could legitimately become targets of military attacks, since a great number of civilians actively participate, in one way or another, in the military industry. Moreover, we are all ultimately liable for the choices made by our leaders insofar as we elect them and also contribute to military expenditures by paying our taxes. Thus, we all share a certain responsibility and therefore cannot regard ourselves as the innocent victims or unwilling cogs of a militaristic machine. But if one had to accept the notion that there is no deep difference between the moral status of members of the military and that of members of civilian populations, then one would either have to allow the possibility that total war and the most despicable forms of terrorism might be legitimate, or else one

⁷ Jeff McMahan, *Killing in War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009 ; Lionel Mcpherson, "Innocence and Responsibility in War," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 34:4 (2004), pp. 485–506; David Rodin, *War and Self-Defense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002). On the topic of the moral immunity of noncombatants, see also David Rodin and Henry Shue (eds), *Just and Unjust Warriors: The Moral and Legal Status of Soldiers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 153–75.

would have to conclude that the only possible moral option is pacifism, which would amount to abandoning the very idea of just war altogether.

The scholars who criticize the moral immunity of noncombatants are well aware of the dangers of abandoning such a principle. That is why these critics argue for a weak conception of the responsibility of civilian populations that would neither fundamentally challenge the principle of noncombatants' moral immunity nor lead to the rejection of just war theories in favour of a strictly pacifist position. According to this conception, no military action is legitimate unless it is absolutely necessary; targeting civilian populations is only rarely, if ever, necessary; hence, targeting civilian populations – even when we have good reasons to think that they are morally liable due to their involvement (in one way or another or to varying degrees) in the war effort – is only rarely, if ever, legitimate. This does not amount to giving up the principle of noncombatant immunity wholesale; civilian populations can still be held responsible in wartime. Nonetheless, they cannot be legitimate targets of military or terrorist attacks.⁸ Another way of defending a similar argument is to show that adopting the principle of noncombatant immunity necessarily results in the reduction of the suffering caused by wars, regardless of whether the wars themselves are regarded *a priori* as immoral.⁹

The key is to dissociate the notion of noncombatants' moral immunity from the notion of legitimate targets in wartime. Noncombatants are not unaware of the military choices made in their name, and must consequently shoulder an important share of the responsibility – yet this consideration by itself does not entail that they are legitimate targets during armed conflict. Moreover, this position does not imply that noncombatants' responsibility should be conceived independently of just war theories.

Citizens' responsibility and public intellectuals' responsibility

⁸ See Richard J. Arneson, "Just Warfare Theory and Noncombatant Immunity," *Cornell International Law Journal*, 39 (2006), pp. 663–88, p. 120; Helen Frowe, "Self-Defence and the Principle of Noncombatant Immunity," *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 2011, pp. 19–20; Jeff McMahan, *Killing in War*, p. 225. For a good summary of this argument, as well as an evaluation of its real import, see Seth Lazar, "Necessity in Self-Defense and War," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 40:1, 2012, pp. 3–44 and "Necessity and noncombatant immunity," *Review of International Studies* / Volume 40 / Issue 01 / January 2014, pp 53–76.

⁹ According to Seth Lazare, one of the main problems with the principle of necessity is that it is presented as a prima facie obligation: "The principle of necessity is defined by its inverse: the infliction of unnecessary suffering is always impermissible. Undeserved, involuntary human suffering is without exception bad, and is prima facie proscribed; if it is unnecessary, then there is nothing to override this prima facie prohibition," *Necessity and noncombatant immunity*, p. 56. But it is crucial, Lazare argues, to provide a moral foundation for this principle and also to empirically ascertain what it can imply.

In what follows, I will use Walzer's arguments, along with the objections that have been raised against the thesis of noncombatant immunity, to defend a weak version of citizens' responsibility and a strong version of intellectuals' moral and political responsibility. Intellectuals are citizens, yet they also possess a particular status that grants them a crucial role in public debates and, correspondingly, a greater responsibility than that of other citizens in the political community.

Before turning to the more precise question of intellectuals' responsibility, we must first understand how to construe citizens' collective responsibility when their State goes to war in their name, whether to protect them or to protect another State or population in danger. Do the State and its leaders bear the moral responsibility for the military campaign on their shoulders alone? Or can we not suppose that the citizens share at least a part of the responsibility? In a sense, this question is symmetrical to that of States' responsibility regarding their own citizens when they enter into conflict with a foreign State – a problem that Brian Orend calls “internal *jus in bello*.”¹⁰ However, this question goes beyond strict *jus in bello* insofar as it addresses not only citizens' conduct during war, but also before and even after war (*jus post bellum*).¹¹

According to Walzer, the people who are primarily responsible – and, more precisely, who could be imputed with war crimes – are senior leaders, both political and military. The distinction between combatant and noncombatant no longer holds at this level, since in principle the civil leaders are the ones who decide to inaugurate a war, not the commanders of the military. This does not necessarily imply that political leaders are legitimate targets in war, however; their responsibility is tied to the decisions that they make as well as to the capacities that they employ for putting those decisions into practice.

The responsibility of senior leaders is especially great when they command the State without the population's assent, but it is also considerable when the leaders are elected and consequently

¹⁰ Orend, Brian, "War", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/war/>>.

¹¹ On this question, see also Camillo Bica, “Opposing a War and/or Supporting the Warrior: The Moral Obligations of Citizens in an Immoral War,” *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol. 38 No. 4, Winter 2007, pp. 627–643; Avia Pasternak, “The Collective Responsibility of Democratic Publics,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 41, Number 1, March 2011, pp. 99–123; Anna Stilz, “Collective Responsibility and the State,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy*: Volume 19, Number 2, 2011, pp. 190–208; in response to Stilz's theses, see Endre Begby, “Collective Responsibility for Unjust Wars,” *Politics*, 2012, vol 32(2), pp. 100–108.

accountable to the voters. *Qua* representatives of the people, they cannot act against the latter's will, for their actions are authorized by the election that brought them to power. Granted, citizens' real ability to make their will heard by their elected representatives is often limited: a large proportion of the political decisions pertaining to war, such as the decisions to declare or to terminate war, will be made without their express consent. However, this does not necessarily mean that they are totally bereft of influence over their own government. Taking account of the limits on their actual powers, then, what responsibilities do citizens have in times of war?

Walzer did not neglect this problem, nor did he deem that it lay outside of the purview of moral reflection on war. This issue takes up an entire section of his classic work, *Just and Unjust Wars*,¹² and in a sense one can venture that it in fact constituted the mainspring of his personal activism throughout his life, particularly the numerous controversies that he engaged in concerning the United States' armed interventions abroad. Yet this question must be further clarified in order to examine the status of the responsibility of citizens in general, and of intellectuals in particular, in the crisis situations immediately before, during, and after war. For although this political and moral responsibility of citizens is not of the same order as the responsibility of military leaders, the very notion nevertheless puts into question the strict distinctions between, on the one hand, *jus ad bellum*, *jus in bello* and *jus post bellum*, and, on the other, between combatants and noncombatants. This raises the question: How far can citizens' moral responsibility extend?

In Walzer's view, the responsibility of the citizens of a democratic society must be conceived *distributively*; conversely, collective responsibility must *not* be conceived holistically, as if society were monolithic. While the domestic analogy may seem to support the idea that society is comparable to an individual, it is merely an analogy: a society, considered as a whole, has the right to defend itself, just as an individual does; however, the moral evaluation of a society's right to defend itself, to go to war, to sanction a war undertaken in its name, etc., depends on a social dynamic in which citizens do not all play the same role nor exercise the same powers. One could disapprove of some citizens for their indifference, yet without thereby regarding them as guilty of the crimes committed by their government or their army.¹³ For various reasons, it is not always easy to directly oppose the rise of bellicose passions within a community. Given the moral gravity of war, on the other hand, it seems that

¹² *Just and Unjust Wars*, Part five, "The question of responsibility: Democratic responsibility," pp. 296-303.

¹³ See *Just and Unjust Wars*, *op.cit.* p. 300.

a citizen opposed to a war pursued by her fellow citizens would have to dissociate and distance herself from them and their undertaking. She would not cut herself off from them entirely, however. As Walzer recalls, maintaining a strong connection to the community can be important, yet this bond is no excuse for not opposing the militaristic appetites of her society.¹⁴

As Jacob T. Levy has recently shown, Michael Walzer's oeuvre contains a constant theme that can be found both in *Spheres of Justice* as well as in *Just and Unjust Wars*: "the idea of the moral significance of states,"¹⁵ i.e., the idea that "the political community is probably the closest we can come to a world of common meanings. Language, history and culture come together (come more closely together than anywhere else) to produce a collective consciousness." This is a key thesis of Walzer's in *Spheres of Justice* – and in my view we should take it very seriously when we reflect on the moral and political responsibility of citizens in times of war. For indeed, at issue here is citizens' capacity for participating in a common culture. This common culture does not exclude pluralism; on the contrary, pluralism can quite possibly be at the heart of a political community's culture, whether the community is a cultural minority, a nation or a State. But, as Walzer observes, it is especially within our own political community – among equals – that we are most likely to develop ourselves as moral persons. Consequently, a society defines itself both by what the citizens want as well as by the manner in which they interact.

A community does not necessarily form a homogeneous whole. Walzer notes to the contrary that in pluralistic societies, social choices are constantly questioned and developed through individuals' interventions. We test our moral choices by measuring them against our everyday experiences. However, phenomena such as the rise of bellicose forms of nationalism in Europe preceding the outbreak of the First World War stem from veritable choices within a culture shared and maintained by the majority of the civilian population. In a democratic society – or at least a minimally democratic society – social elites can glorify a culture of bellicose and revanchist nationalism and then proceed to carry the general population along; after all, latter are free to consent to such a militarization. Nonetheless, a critical and dynamic relationship between the members of a society remains possible and desirable. As *Spheres of Justice* clearly shows, there are no *a priori* moral principles that could

¹⁴ *Just and Unjust Wars*, *op.cit.* p. 301.

¹⁵ Jacob T. Levy, "What it means to be a pluralist," in Yitzhak Benjani and Naomi Sussmann, *Reading Walzer*, Routledge, London and New York, 2014, p.123.

serve to regulate our social choices; on the contrary, moral principles are first identified and chosen by the community itself.¹⁶

What of the moral responsibility of public intellectuals or scholars who deem it necessary to use their knowledge to oppose the warmongers? And, by contrast, what moral responsibility falls on those pundits who stoke the hostile passions of the population and thereby force the leaders to go to war, to make it continue, or to end it – all without due consideration of the possible legitimacy of any of these goals?

One important consideration that emerges from this thesis is Walzer's perspective on what one could call current world political affairs. As we know, Walzer himself was an activist intellectual who never hesitated to speak out about political events, especially those that involved American capabilities. This attitude was confirmed when he agreed to sign the famous "Letter from America," in which he and other thinkers (from both the left and the right) backed the invasion of Afghanistan as a reprisal for the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Walzer's analysis of political and historical phenomena does not rest on rigid philosophical or theoretical abstractions, such as liberalism or communitarianism in political philosophy, or consequentialism or deontology in moral philosophy.¹⁷ Walzer's entire method, if one may express it thus, is based on the importance of *contingencies* for thinking about normativity. Norms are not imposed on reality; rather, it is reality that creates or provides norms. This position is not relativism *per se*, or at least not radical relativism; in fact, Walzer's thesis seeks to bring out the heuristic and moral limits of objectivity rather than to declare its impossibility. And it's precisely because of these limits that intellectuals are led to play a very important role in public debates, especially in the times of political crisis just before or during war.

While Walzer disavows the exaggerated claims of the universalist positions adopted by those who champion a kind of moral Platonism, he nonetheless takes up a task of social criticism, whereby he can evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a political project of a given community – whence his clear commitment to particularism. In Walzer's view, moral and political norms are not entities discovered by means of philosophical investigations; rather, they proceed from the decisions and will of the

¹⁶ See the Introduction to *The Company of Critics. op.cit et Interpretation and Social Criticism*, Harvard University Press, 1987.

¹⁷ Walzer had no qualms about defining himself as a liberal and a social-democrat. What he rejects are those philosophical forms of liberalism that strive to establish themselves as a system, such as that of Rawls or Brian Barry.

members of a particular political community which thereby forges its own identity. Intellectuals have a place within the community, but they cannot claim to establish principles whose value transcends the political will of the community. At most, the intellectuals' task will consist in giving social practices a normative coherence or in clarifying their meaning. This does not mean that the theoretician's task is limited to merely reflecting back a society's moral preferences like a mirror. The goal is not to simply condone the established order. Intellectuals also play an active part in shaping communities' moral preferences and choices – a responsibility that becomes crucial in times of crisis, when citizens are more likely to prefer simplistic arguments, whether out of moral panic or out of a desire to conform to what they believe to be the majority's opinion.

Does this imply that citizens' responsibility in wartime and its relation to intellectuals should be conceived within the framework of what is generally called the ideal of deliberative democracy? That is not certain. On several occasions Walzer voiced concerns regarding the theories of deliberative democracy, which he regarded as providing an important, yet clearly insufficient, element of the legitimacy of public decisions.¹⁸ But conversely, Walzer generally avoids basing his arguments on an ideal scenario, and he has always kept to this method or way of proceeding, as evidenced by the stands he has taken on the current civil war in Syria. Walzer refuses to issue a blanket judgment that would be too remote from the facts, for he has always mistrusted the 'view from above' taken by all too many philosophers. It was along these lines that he explained his reasons for revising his opinion concerning the possibility of military intervention in Syria. We must appreciate that the facts confronting us sometimes stem from contingencies that we must take into consideration when morally evaluating which options to choose.

So what exactly do the proper function and responsibility of intellectuals consist in? Generally speaking, intellectuals are not invested with political powers, nor do they even necessarily have a personal stake in whether or not their country goes to war. Of course, it is entirely possible for intellectuals to voluntarily serve as tools for political propaganda in exchange for something, for instance if they are corrupt or if they are very close to the highest echelons of power. In such cases, however, neither corruption nor proximity to power enter into consideration *per se*, but at most aggravate the intellectuals' voluntary participation in militaristic propaganda.

¹⁸ WALZER, Michael (1999), "Deliberation, and what else?," in Stephen MACEDO (ed.), *Deliberative Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press: pp. 58-69.

The complexity of the issues surrounding war seems to grant intellectuals a special role within civil society, which in turn suggests that they have a special moral responsibility in times of war. To affirm that intellectuals enjoy a particular status and that, therefore, a certain type of responsibility is incumbent upon them, does not imply that they are gods to be glorified, nor, conversely, demons to be despised. It can often be tempting to fetishize the role of intellectuals, and indeed the latter often do so themselves, out of narcissism. But even on a relatively modest conception of intellectuals' role in the context of public debate, their moral responsibility in times of conflict appears very great indeed. With their skills, their status and their corresponding position of moral authority, they can both inspire large-scale movements against unjust wars or, conversely, act as the mouthpieces *par excellence* of militarist propaganda. They can also – and perhaps this is where their true responsibility lies – provide the tools for an adequate evaluation, by all citizens, of the pros and cons of a war already in progress or on the point of breaking out. Thus, in democratic societies one can disapprove of intellectuals when they fail to speak up in and recall what democratic society is along with what it can and cannot do, explain the reality of war without hiding it behind a flag or an ideology, and most of all, tirelessly challenge citizens to justify their moral choices according to legitimate criteria.

Clearly, it is difficult to assign a high level of moral responsibility to political communities in times of war, as this responsibility is largely indeterminate, resulting from a set of contingencies, alliances and agreements. Consequently, it would be implausible to claim that society is so unified that it can be imagined as a single moral agent. Yet this caveat does not preclude the notion of collective responsibility of political communities in times of war, which becomes far more manifest from the perspective of *jus post bellum*, which is concerned with the long period of post-war transition. But while intellectuals do not constitute a homogeneous moral community either, they nevertheless have a moral status, one that is conferred on them by their profession (journalist, university professor, writer, etc.) and which is associated with a certain capacity for persuasion, or at the very least, with a certain knowledge that, when properly presented, can favour greater prudence in making social decisions. And for this reason, intellectuals have a far greater responsibility. In some cases, they are even the authors, in a way, of the narrative framework of the social exchanges surrounding violent conflicts.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the political debate about just war cannot be settled in advance, as we must understand the unified normative framework in which it is embedded before we can hope to find the right answers. Moreover, Walzer's thesis of noncombatant immunity explained the reasons why we can deem that citizens have a real moral responsibility without our thereby legitimating military attacks against them. This examination then led to the question of how to construe citizens' moral and political responsibility in times of war. Finally, we clarified the type of responsibility of a certain category of citizens, public intellectuals, who are at the center of public debates which can either favour or hinder going to war and who continue to play an important role throughout the conflict.

In September of 1914, not long after the outbreak of hostilities in the First World War, the Bureau of War Propaganda in Great Britain organized a secret meeting to which it convened the most renowned British authors. Among them were Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling and H. G. Wells. When Kipling, who had watched with great pride as his son went off to war, learned that he died soon after on the front, he bitterly regretted his enthusiastic militarism and penned the following verses: "If any question why we died/ Tell them, because our fathers lied".¹⁹ Almost a century later, intellectuals such William Kristol, Charles Krauthammer, and Michael Ignatieff,²⁰ among many others, succumbed to the sirens of militarism and gave their approval to the invasion of Iraq. These are no isolated cases; they reflect an enduring reality. Public intellectuals may be led either to criticize a political decision or else, by contrast, to defend it within society, even to demand it from those in power. Of course, they surely do not single-handedly sway a decision as momentous as the decision to go to war, for in reality their influence depends in great measure on what the public is willing to hear. Nevertheless, these intellectuals undeniably play a significant role in wartime – a role that must be taken with the utmost seriousness.

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¹⁹ *Common Form* (1918).

²⁰ Michael Ignatieff has admitted that this was a mistake. But my point here is to understand whether this moral mistake – to the extent that we agree that it is one – can be regarded as a mere error of judgment, or if it implies a greater responsibility, and hence a greater imputability.

Translated from the French by Adam Westra