

moral considerations are in play. It’s a moral fudge, the one Weber warned was inevitable. The fact that it’s inevitable can become its own excuse for political irresponsibility. ‘Look,’ the politician says, ‘I know politics is the devil’s business, just like Weber said. I worry about it all the time. I’m not a monster. I hate this stuff. But someone has to do it and it happens to be me. I don’t sleep at night so you can sleep at night. Is that good enough?’

The answer is no: it’s not good enough. It’s not just the politician’s call. Weber was over-enamoured of the solitary, tragic political hero at a time when politics was often tragic and seemed to be calling out for heroes. In the early twenty-first century the balance of risk has changed. Civil disorder is not always the number one danger. There are also the threats to the shared principles of political conduct that stable politics has made possible. Politicians have responsibilities not only to their own citizens but also to constitutional proprieties, to international law and to global public opinion. These all impose constraints that they ignore at their and our peril. Politicians can’t simply be accountable to their consciences. Someone or something else must also hold them to account.



THE PERILS OF PEACE

But who is going to do it? Stable politics poses a moral challenge to citizens as much as it does to politicians. We too can become squeamish about violence, knowing that someone else is taking care of it. We focus on our own lives and material comforts and turn a blind eye to the nasty stuff. Drone warfare suits an age in which people prefer not to engage with the most difficult political questions: out of sight, out of mind. Can politicians be blamed if they exploit the leeway we give them to do it the way that suits them best?

The danger of modern politics is that stability produces disengagement. Citizens who are protected from the most destabilising threats of violence start to lose interest in politics altogether: it becomes the background noise in their lives. But violence never goes away entirely. Instead it gets franchised out to government agencies who take advantage of our inattention to abuse the power we give them. They do it because they can. So the unintended consequence of the control of violence is that we allow