

Antoon de Baets, *Responsible History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).

In *Responsible History*, Antoon de Baets proposes a code of professional ethics for historians with the hope of beginning an international discussion about the duties of historians to the people they study – both living and dead. His previous research on the censorship of historians made him recognize the need for a discussion among professional historians about the tension between ethics, scholarly duty to present the truth, and academic freedom. This project, he argues, is urgent in light of recent examples of abuses of history and the rise in defamation cases against historians. *Responsible History* is a timely reminder that ethical questions should raise questions about duty, respect, and rights rather than the legal liability of research institutions. The book also makes a strong case for the unique ethical issues that historians face.

De Baets is the founder of the Network of Concerned Historians, an organization founded in 1995 to connect international human rights organizations and the community of academic historians who advocate on behalf of historians who face censorship or persecution. *Responsible History* draws on international human rights law to examine ethical questions about the rights of the living and the dead, and this framework is the foundation of his proposal for a code of ethics. The discussion of defamation cases against historians and the misuse and abuse of history and memory is evidence that history is a deeply political project. As such, professional historians need a compass to guide them through the complex and conflicting interests of those who seek to repress past injustices and the victims who have a right to know what happened. Moreover, in post-dictatorial societies that rested on the censoring of history, the credibility of the profession of history has been so severely undermined that a critical reflection on the morals and ethics of historians is required to restore the role of historical research in promoting democracy and human rights.

Understanding how history is misused is the necessary foundation for a code of ethics. Part I examines irresponsible history and begins with a theorization of the abuse and misuse of history. This discussion ranges from political abuses of history to prop up authoritarian governments whose power rests on the persecution of political opponents to plagiarism and the misrepresentation of evidence in academic work. Intent distinguishes between the abuse of history and careless research, and in both cases, the context in which the history is produced is crucial to determining the degree of control that the historian had over research and the dissemination of knowledge. The other chapters in this section explore the ethical use of dictators' secret archives and the defamation cases against historians. Both chapters provide a thoughtful discussion of why historians must consider the reputations of the dead subjects of their research as well as that of their descendents. De Baets disagrees with international law that states that the deceased do not have a reputation, and makes a case for the need for the protection of posthumous reputations as a precon-

dition to restoring the dignity the victims of genocides and deceased people who have suffered human rights violations.

Part II explores historians' duties and people's right to history. Both rest on the conception of intergenerational solidarity as a relationship between the past, present, and future. Inspired by UNESCO's *Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations towards Future Generations*, de Baets argues that historians' duties to the dead rest on the rights of the living to mourn their ancestors and to know the truth about the past. Yet de Baets cautions against obligatory memory that exalts the status of victimhood. Instead historians' duties to the dead should be based on restoring and preserving their dignity. Commitment to the search for historical truth, rather than a moral incentive, will best protect living people's right to know what happened to members of their family or ethnic community. The book concludes with a convincing argument for the need for an international code of ethics based on the following values: "freedom and integrity (of historians), respect (for those surrounding them), and the careful and methodically executed search for truth." (5). De Baets pays attention to opponents of professional codes of ethics, and provides logical arguments against them. He insists that an international professional code must be a living document. It cannot provide answers to all ethical dilemmas, but it will provide guidance to help solve ethical problems. His proposal for an international code of professional ethics is also available on the website of the Network of Concerned Historians.

Responsible History is recommended reading for all historians because it compels us to think about our role in society and the implications of our research. It will, I hope, reinvigorate the discussion about history and ethics.

Nancy Janovicek
University of Calgary