ABSTRACT

**Human Sacrifice in Walzer's Just War Theory**

Does Michael Walzer’s Just War Theory provide enough protection for civilian lives? Or is Walzer too willing to sacrifice individual lives on the altar of war and national sovereignty? Michael Walzer is the author of the most influential contemporary work on Just War Theory, *Just and Unjust Wars*. Though Walzer grounds his version of Just War Theory on a foundation of human rights, he ultimately sets aside human rights protection in two notable ways: first, he follows convention in accepting civilian casualties as a normal part of war; and second, Walzer accepts the massive violation of human rights and large-scale killing of civilians in a situation of Supreme Emergency. In this paper, I’ll survey Walzer’s arguments for basing Just War Theory on a foundation of human rights. I’ll examine Walzer’s view of the relationship between human rights and the rights of political communities. After looking at Walzer’s concerns about attempts to break the rules of war, I will examine cases where Walzer sees the killing of civilians and the breaking of war rules as legitimate. My paper will criticize Walzer for not providing a convincing example of how a Supreme Emergency might justify the large-scale violation of human rights. Further, I will argue that Walzer is too ready to sacrifice human lives in the service of political communities. As a result, Walzer's Just War Theory, despite his claims to treat human rights as “something close to absolute”, does not provide adequate protection for human rights or civilian lives. After looking at Walzer’s attempts to answer similar criticisms in his more recent work, I will conclude by proposing an alternative approach to Just War Theory. My approach sees human rights as regulative ideals, and it values human life above the political sovereignty of nations. By setting strict prohibitions on the killing of civilians, this alternative approach does not recognize a Supreme Emergency exception, nor does it permit the massive violation of human rights or the large-scale killing of civilians.