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Michael Walzer

J. Toby Reiner

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*For my beloved wife, Meg,  
without whom I never would have finished this book.*

## *Introduction*

A common image of philosophy is that of abstraction from any particular set of values and meanings so as to find an objective or impartial position. On this view, philosophers should avoid social and cultural influences, because they can cloud a thinker's judgment, and political theorists should avoid political advocacy or at least ground it in arguments that they think all reasonable people can or should accept. This image has a long pedigree in the history of philosophy that goes back at least as far as Plato's Socrates. Plato's analogy of the cave suggests that only by escaping from ordinary notions can philosophers discover the real truth (Plato 1997: 1132–6). Plato even has Socrates argue in the *Phaedo* that philosophers should be in love with death because it releases them from the needs of the body, freeing them up to think without distraction (56–9). The image continues to appeal in recent thought. For example, Ludwig Wittgenstein, one of the most influential twentieth-century philosophers, once argued that what makes someone a philosopher is *not* belonging to any community of ideas (for discussion, Walzer 1981: 1–2). Within political theory, in *A Theory of Justice*, perhaps the most important work in the field in English since 1945, John Rawls deploys a thought experiment in which participants to debates about principles of justice lack knowledge of any specific details about themselves (Rawls 1971: 17–22, 136–42). Rawls suggests that to think in this way is to adopt “the perspective

of eternity" (587).<sup>1</sup> Like Rawls, Harvard philosopher Tim Scanlon argues that valid normative principles are those that nobody can reasonably reject (Scanlon 1998, Rawls 1993: 48–54).

In this book, I argue that what makes Michael Walzer a key contemporary thinker is that he embodies an important political and theoretical alternative to this traditional position. Walzer is one of the leading political theorists in the post-war USA. His body of work is both broad and varied: he has made contributions to just-war theory, distributive justice, philosophical interpretation, multiculturalism, Jewish thought, and many other topics. Walzer's arguments – including the "moral reality of war" (Walzer 2015a: 3–48), the "moral equality of soldiers" (34–41), "complex equality" (Walzer 1983: 3–30), "shared understandings" (312–21), the "moral standing of states" (Walzer 1980a), "social criticism" (Walzer 1987, 1988a), and "moral minimalism" (Walzer 1994a: 1–20) – have made major contributions to how political theorists think about their subjects.

Walzer's significance in political theory lies in his active embrace of the particularity of time, place, and commitment. This makes Walzer a much more *political* thinker than are most scholars in the field – indeed, a collected volume of his most important essays is called *Thinking Politically* (Walzer 2007). I will show that this is true in three interrelated yet importantly distinct ways. First, throughout his long career, Walzer has defended a position that is situated in the life of his own societies, refusing to "walk out of the cave, leave the city ... [fashion] an objective and impartial standpoint" (Walzer 1983: xiv). Rather, he has operated under the assumption that political theorists have a "license," granted to few other scholars, to stake out political positions and make contestable arguments for them (Walzer 2013a). This means that Walzer represents a type of political theory that seeks to avoid academic specialization, adopting a language that is accessible to, and continuous with, that of intellectual life more broadly. He regards it as a mistake for philosophy to seek "too much abstraction ... from the real world" (Walzer 2007: 308) and insists that theorists avoid infringing on democratic prerogative (Walzer 1981). This is Walzer's methodological contribution.

In disciplinary terms, this makes Walzer's work highly distinctive, because he draws upon narrative fields in the social sciences as much as, or more than, the tools of philosophy on which most other political theorists rely. Walzer's method is at core sociological, and his criticisms of important theorists such as Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, and Robert Nozick stem from their

rejection of “every sort of sociological politics, where principles are derived from conventional practices” (Walzer 1980c: 39–40). Walzer’s work also often draws on history, notably in his work on justice in war, which he illuminates with examples from across several millennia of military practice, starting as far back as ancient Greece. Indeed, his most famous book, *Just and Unjust Wars*, is subtitled *A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* because it was important to Walzer that he avoid too much reliance on the hypothetical examples to which many contemporary philosophers appeal so that his work spoke to participants in war (Walzer 2015a: xxviii–xxix; see also 335–46). In other works, his examples are anthropological and aim to illustrate differences in social, political, and moral meaning, value, and practice to illuminate Walzer’s core thesis that meaning does not inhere in nature but is always a collective product that varies across communities (see especially Walzer 1983). All of these disciplines are useful to Walzer because of their emphasis on storytelling. One of his central insights is that political theory must consider how particular peoples in particular times and places tell each other stories about how they relate to each other as a people.

Second, Walzer is noteworthy as an important social-democratic alternative to the liberalism that dominates much Anglo-American political theory and the post-Marxism and post-modernism of much European work. Indeed, Walzer is arguably the most important social-democratic theorist in the contemporary USA, which makes his work of particular salience in the context of the revival of social democracy during the US Presidential elections of 2016 and 2020. Probably the most significant feature of Walzerian social democracy is its appeal to community (Walzer 1990b), resting on the thought that liberal individualism tends to leave insufficient room for collective action, while Marxism is too quick to write off the lived experience of ordinary citizens, underestimating the merits of contemporary society (Walzer 1980b: 4–6). Walzer seeks radical change that starts from the values of particular communities, but reworks social practices to achieve equality by ensuring that practice lives up to principle. For Walzer, “Socialism is the effort to sustain older values within a social structure that accommodates liberated ... free and equal individuals” (Walzer 1980b: 12). This makes the vision reformist, but committed to the view that a long series of incremental changes can produce the sort of systemic transformation that is rightly considered revolutionary (Walzer 1980b: 201–23).

Walzer's social-democratic vision is the result of his long association with *Dissent*, a New York intellectual magazine on which he has worked since his undergraduate years in the mid-1950s and which he co-edited from 1975 to 2013. *Dissent's* platform throughout those decades has been to advance an American version of social democracy that breaks with the liberalism of the Democratic Party while resisting the authoritarianism it sees in much twentieth and twenty-first-century communism around the world. According to Walzer, he joined the magazine because its founders, Irving Howe and Lewis Coser – who taught him as an undergraduate at Brandeis University – were an inspiration, bequeathing to him the view that “there [is] a political space between liberal Democrats and communists – and that [is] a space worth living in” (Walzer 2013b: 104; see also Kazin 2013). One of the crucial features of this space is its commitment to making social change speak to the people whose position it seeks to improve much more directly than, the *Dissentniks* think, do many alternatives. As Howe put it, in words that resonate with Walzer's work on social criticism (Walzer 1987: 33–65), American social democrats should operate within the American “myth” of democracy while attacking failures to live up to that myth (“Discussion” 1976: 70). Walzer puts the point by arguing that a political theory, especially an egalitarian one, must take its starting point from “politics on the ground” if it is to have meaning to its purported beneficiaries (Walzer 2007: 304). This means that social democracy will be in part dependent on features specific to particular contexts, so there will be myriad types of social democracy that vary across societies. Walzer has as a result long combined commitment to equality with commitment to pluralism. Indeed, *Spheres of Justice*, his major statement of social-democratic theory – and in my view his most important work – is subtitled *A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (Walzer 1983).

Pluralism means in the first instance that there are multiple important social values and meanings that must be reflected in a plurality of distributive principles for which a theory of justice advocates. Walzer argues that, “Different goods should be distributed to different people for different reasons” (Walzer 1980b: 242). The principle by which people gain access to healthcare, for example, should not be the same as that by virtue of which people receive leisure time, commodities, or political power (Walzer 1983). Walzer insists that, because both people and social goods are diverse, equality requires the reflection of such diversity within a theory of justice (Walzer 1980b: 243), or that “many bells should

ring" (242). Walzer's pluralism is concomitant with an emphasis on particularism: the idea that different communities have varying moral standards that ought to guide their political practice, and so that distributive principles must vary across societies. To some extent, this idea, too, reflects the influence of *Dissent*, which taught Walzer that social democracy in America must be, in part, American (on this, see Walzer 1994a: 60–1; for discussion, Isserman 1987, Sorin 2002).

Much of the secondary literature on Walzer's work in political theory does not do much more than mention his association with *Dissent* (see for example, Benbaji and Sussmann 2014: 2, Orend 2000: 49), but I will show that it is crucial to understanding his social-democratic commitments, as well as his approach, his arguments, and the topics on which he focuses. One marker of its significance is that Walzer regards his work for *Dissent* as integrally connected to his political theory: he never decides until he has finished drafting an article whether to publish it in *Dissent* or a political-theory journal, although if he does pick the latter, he will subsequently add footnotes and make the prose "muddier."<sup>2</sup> The close connection of these two genres in Walzer's corpus points to the third major way in which Walzer's commitment to situated theory is significant, which is that in important ways his work blurs the line between academic and public-intellectual discourse (Krupnick 1989). He has also published many important commentaries in the *New Republic*, another important magazine for left-liberal work. He is often interviewed for or included in histories of New York intellectual life since the mid-twentieth century (Jumonville 1991, Isserman 1987, Sorin 2002, Young 1996; see especially Jumonville 2007, which lists Walzer as a "third generation New York Intellectual.")

As a public intellectual, many of Walzer's articles stray far beyond the usual remit of political theory: he has written extensively on literature (see especially Walzer and Green, ed. 1969), urban planning (Walzer 1986e), technological development, and above all has produced much political commentary. This last was particularly important to both his early and his most recent work, including a striking call for Martin Luther King to run for the US Presidency in 1964 (Rosenblum and Walzer 1963). Not only does Walzer treat public-intellectual writing and political theory as more closely related than would most participants in both enterprises, but in important ways he *prefers* the former, arguing that a political theory that does not seek to enter into broader public discourse produces an "alienated politics" marked by "endless

esotericism" ("State" 1989: 337–8). Such political theory is, Walzer holds, further from the world of political discourse than it should be and consequently tends toward intellectual elitism (Walzer 2007: 308), whereas public-intellectual magazines are "home to an ongoing conversation ... a political argument in which many people participate" (Walzer 1994b: 165). Walzer became a political theorist because he wanted to make normative arguments about issues of pressing public concern (Walzer 2007: 306–9). His notion that political theorists have a license to make normative arguments is in effect the claim that they can act as public intellectuals. This makes Walzer a significant figure bearing in mind, as I discuss in the conclusion, a common story about American life that suggests that public intellectuals have been crowded out by academic specialization in recent decades (on this, see Furedi 2004, Jacoby 2000, Etzioni and Bowditch 2006; for discussion, Hauck 2010).

On Walzer's account, then, political theory should be socially situated and politically engaged. That is, it should seek to provide interventions in political debates that evoke common understandings in a plausible, persuasive manner. This makes him an important critic of the Rawlsian approach to political theory, which proceeds mostly by using the techniques of analytic philosophy, the dominant mode of Anglophone philosophy today.<sup>3</sup> In general, analytic philosophers tend to work within the Enlightenment tradition, and see the tasks of philosophy as either providing an account of the meaning of and relationship between concepts or providing perspective on the underpinnings of other disciplines (Pettit 2012: 5–7). For many decades, this meant that analytic political philosophers restricted themselves to analyzing the meaning of political and moral concepts, but following Rawls it has often come to revolve around the construction of normative theories of justice, rights, equality, and so on (for discussion, Pettit 2012: 6–13). Walzer is wary of such theories in part because of their philosophical ambition, instead arguing for a limited conception of the tasks of philosophy in which theorists leave open room for continued disagreement and do not seek to resolve political debates. Walzer sometimes criticizes analytic theorists for being "anti-political" (see above all Walzer 1980a, 1981, 1989/90), instead advocating a "democratic idealism," by virtue of which each community has the right to govern itself by its own standards (Walzer 1994a: 58). Walzer's vision of democracy involves pluralizing the modes and means by which ordinary citizens participate in decision-making processes. It is because he emphasizes the importance of political

action by large numbers of citizens as one of the key means of creating a more just and egalitarian society (Walzer 1971a, 2004a) that he argues that philosophers should leave major theoretical questions unresolved.

In important ways, Walzer's arguments for a more politically engaged approach anticipate the new "realism," which is one of the major growth areas in Anglo-American political theory. Like Walzer, new realists argue that political theory must leave room for democratic decision-making and not seek to resolve political debates (Williams 2005: 3, Galston 2010: 390–4, Larmore 2013: 294–8). Insofar as realism is an offshoot of analytic political theory, Walzer's criticisms should be understood as an internal critique of certain tendencies within the analytic approach, and especially of Rawlsian liberalism. However, Walzer's particularism takes his critique a step beyond most realist arguments (for a fuller discussion on this point, see Reiner 2016: 383–5), which generally do not focus on variation in normative standards across cultures.

I will argue that Walzer's particularism is key to understanding his method and illustrates that his work does in fact follow a roughly consistent philosophical methodology. Walzer treats meaning as a human creation, something that communities establish in the course of their ongoing lives (Walzer 1983; the key influence is Geertz 1973). Philosophers must start with social meanings because, on Walzer's account, there is no alternative: meaning does not exist outside society. As a result, our identities develop in the societies that create meaning for us. This means that the world has a "moral reality" of its own, consisting in the sets of meanings that we create via social construction (Walzer 2015a: 3–20). However, these meanings are susceptible to myriad readings. It is the task of political theory to interpret, systematize, and clarify sets of meanings. This work can, Walzer insists, aid the social-democratic project by exploiting inconsistency between meaning and practice, or between different parts of the sets of meaning, to argue for change, often radical change, to the status quo that, nonetheless, emerges out of a socially situated set of norms (Walzer 1987). Readers of Walzer will likely recognize these arguments from his theory of justice (Walzer 1983). It is important to emphasize that Walzer's just-war theory also takes as its foundation meanings that human beings have created in the history of war and uses those meanings as evidence that moral discourse about war is comprehensible and coherent (Walzer 2015a: 4–16). Similarly, Walzer attempts to reform military practice to make room for collective self-determination and communal



self-governance – this was at the heart of his objection to the American war in Vietnam (Walzer 2015a: 97–100).

Critics have often suggested that Walzer's appeal to social meanings fails to recognize the degree of contestation, conflict, and domination that goes into processes of social construction.<sup>4</sup> This points to a seeming paradox in Walzer's career, when considered politically: while he has always defined himself as a social democrat and criticized liberalism from a position that he takes to be to its left, both liberals and radicals have often read his work as resting on somewhat conservative assumptions (see most notably Said 1986). Understanding Walzer, then, means coming to terms with the distance between his self-description as a leftist and an egalitarian and much of his reception. For example, in reviewing *Spheres of Justice*, Ronald Dworkin famously claimed that justice must be "our critic, not our mirror," and that appeal to social meanings cannot be the basis for egalitarian political theory (Dworkin 1983a: 4, Cohen 1986, Daniels 1985). To liberals, Walzer's approach seems to stifle individual freedom to choose a set of values to guide one's life.

For Marxists and other radicals to Walzer's left, he can appear too sanguine about the impact of power, oppression, and domination,<sup>5</sup> for while he recognizes all those processes, he insists that social construction involves *both* coercion *and* consensus, and so is a mixed and mysterious process (for examples, see Walzer 1987: 33–65, 1993a, 1993b, 2003). As a result, he holds, social norms tend to be meaningful not just for dominant groups, but for all members of the societies in question. However, Walzer's appeal to community values is not uncritical: socialists, he argues, seek communities "of a certain sort, not of any sort," and do so "for the sake of knowledge and self-management" more than of "intimacy and good fellowship" (Walzer 1980b: 12–13). What this means is that while, for Walzer, political theorizing must both start from communal norms and proceed with reference to values that the theorist takes the community to hold, it need not end up endorsing communal conclusions or dominant political arrangements. Immanent critique, which holds that practices are deeply antithetical to underlying norms is, Walzer argues, both always possible and the most powerful form of criticism because it shows people that they are failing to live up to standards to which they feel they ought to live up. Justice, Walzer holds, is like the mirror Hamlet shows his mother: *both* our mirror *and* our critic (Walzer 1988a: 151–2). The most distinctive feature of Walzer's political theory is this quest to combine the interpretive search for meaning

with the egalitarian commitment to reform. This is a characteristically *Dissentian* project, reflecting the desire to develop a brand of social democracy that is in some respects indigenous to the United States. In this regard it is noteworthy that the magazine, too, has frequently faced criticisms on the grounds that it does not dissent from American liberalism as much as it proclaims to (see for example Glazer 1954, Podhoretz 1958; for discussion, Bloom 1986: 285–90, Jumonville 1991: 83–6, Wald 1987: 311–43). I give a mixed assessment of Walzer's balancing act. I seek to show that Walzer's theory of complex equality (Walzer 1983) contains the seeds of a genuinely critical interpretive theory but that Walzer's pluralism is on occasion in tension with his egalitarianism.

In short, Walzer's significance is both political and theoretical. He represents a strand of social democracy that emphasizes the importance of community and the particularity of political debate, as well as the inevitability of ongoing contestation, and insists that theoretical debate be conducted in conversation with social movements. Relatedly, he insists that political theory as an enterprise be both multi- and inter-disciplinary, going beyond philosophy into an array of social-scientific fields and resembling public-intellectual analysis. The remainder of this introduction surveys Walzer's career and provides a chapter outline of the book.

### Walzer's Career<sup>6</sup>

Walzer was born in March 1935 to first-generation Jewish immigrants from Austrian Galicia and Belarus and raised in the Bronx. His parents read *PM*, a left-wing newspaper that supported the Popular Front against fascism. In 1944, the family moved to Johnstown, Pennsylvania where his father had been offered a job as manager in a jeweler's store. The major industry in Johnstown was Bethlehem Steel, and so Johnstown gave Walzer his first encounter with union politics. He went to Brandeis to study in 1952. As a university named after the first Jewish Justice of the Supreme Court, Brandeis was sponsored by the Jewish community. Its President, Abram Sachar, recruited radical faculty who, because of the anti-communism of the time inspired by Joseph McCarthy, could not get jobs elsewhere. Most notable was the Frankfurt School theorist, Herbert Marcuse, whose influence on the student body was enormous. However, Walzer felt that Marcuse's critique of American society was too strong (Walzer 1988a: 170–90), so

when he met Coser and Howe, who also taught at Brandeis and who rejected both McCarthyism and communism, he found them inspirational. Thanks to their influence, Walzer started writing for *Dissent*, which they had recently founded, and told his parents that his new career plan was to be an intellectual, not a lawyer. While still an undergraduate, Walzer received a grant to assist Howe and Coser on a book project criticizing the American Communist Party (Howe and Coser 1962).

After graduation, Walzer received a Fulbright Fellowship and spent 1956 to 1957 at Cambridge, where he began to research English Puritanism, which was to become his PhD topic, and reported on British politics for *Dissent* (Walzer 1957, 1958a). *Dissent* was particularly interested in the British Labour Party as a model of social democratic politics that, it felt, was useful to American socialists. From 1957 to 1961, Walzer was a graduate student of government at Harvard University. His advisor, Samuel Beer, both gave him his first teaching experience and taught him the method of comparative history that Walzer used in his early academic work (Walzer 1965, 1974). This method, testing theories by comparison between different historical periods, is an ancestor of Walzer's approach in *Just and Unjust Wars*. In his last year at Harvard, *Dissent* sent Walzer to North Carolina to report on the sit-in protests against segregation that were to kickstart the civil-rights movement. Walzer also organized a New Left club at Harvard, and engaged in community organizing in support of the burgeoning civil-rights movement, including picketing Woolworths.

Walzer took up his first teaching position, at Princeton University, in 1962. This spell lasted only four years, and included a second year in the UK in 1964, but is important in Walzer's intellectual development because while there he made the friendship of the philosophers Robert Nozick and Stuart Hampshire. Nozick introduced him to the Society for Ethical and Legal Philosophy (SELF), a discussion club that Walzer credits with providing him with his training in philosophy (Walzer 2007: 304–5). Through SELF, Walzer also met John Rawls some years before Rawls published *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Walzer found SELF particularly appealing because his interests were moving away from his early academic work in the history of ideas, yet few politics departments at the time taught contemporary theory. Also appealing was that SELF was influential in American philosophy's reengagement with public affairs and politics. However, Walzer found the use of increasingly far-fetched hypothetical examples by some members of SELF frustrating,<sup>7</sup> and

sought to combine philosophical analysis with narrative history and sociological insight. While at Princeton, Walzer published his PhD thesis as his first book, *The Revolution of the Saints* (1965).

In 1966, Walzer returned to Harvard as a professor. While there, he became increasingly involved in the anti-Vietnam War movement and determined to write a book justifying his opposition to it. He had been interested in military ethics all his life, because he was a Jewish boy who grew up during World War II. Thanks to Hampshire's encouragement, Walzer's second book, *Obligations* (1970a), considers moral issues relating to war, including treatment of prisoners-of-war and conscription. Walzer spent most of the 1970s working on *Just and Unjust Wars*, but also published a handbook for movement activists (Walzer 1971a) and his final major work of comparative history, a defense of the moderate party in the French Revolution – the Girondins – against the more radical Jacobins (Walzer 1974). Walzer published *Wars* with Basic Books, because one of their editors, Martin Kessler, heard him give a lecture on the justification of fighting World War II (for a version of which, see Walzer 1971b), and encouraged him to publish his manuscript with Basic. This was the start of a long relationship: Basic also published *Spheres of Justice* and *The Company of Critics*.

Walzer became co-editor of *Dissent* with Irving Howe in 1975, around the time that he began to take regular trips to Israel. Now, he goes every year to attend the Hartman Institute's Annual Philosophy Conference (see discussion in Chapter 7). Walzer is also a member of the Board of Governors of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. During the 1970s, Walzer taught classes at Harvard on a broad array of topics, including nationalism, moral obligation, socialist thought, and the history of literature, including Shakespeare's account of different political systems.<sup>8</sup> Of particular importance was the class that he co-taught with Nozick in 1970–1971, in which Nozick defended capitalism and Walzer socialism. This class became the basis of both their later books on the subject (Walzer 1983; Nozick 1974).

On the back of the success of *Wars*, Walzer was appointed Foundation Professor of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton in 1980. The position came with no teaching obligations, so Walzer has devoted the rest of his career to writing, and his already prolific output soon became a flood. Around the time he moved, Walzer published *Radical Principles* (1980b), a collection of essays on social democracy originally written for *Dissent* and other public-intellectual venues. It reflects on Walzer's experience

with the New Left movement politics of the 1960s, the emergence of the New Right in the 1970s, and prospects for democratic socialism in the US after the demise of the New Left. The most significant theoretical essay is “In Defense of Equality” (1973a), which is Walzer’s first published statement of his social-democratic theory, complex equality. After he finished *Wars*, Walzer devoted himself to revisiting the theory, which is the basis of *Spheres of Justice* (1983). One important change to the theory after “In Defense” is increased emphasis on social meanings in *Spheres*. This reflects the influence of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, Walzer’s colleague at the Institute with whom he had lunch regularly. Geertz’s *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) influenced Walzer greatly, suggesting the importance of the social construction of meaning (for discussion, see Reiner 2016).<sup>9</sup>

Two years after *Spheres*, Walzer published *Exodus and Revolution* (1985), his personal favorite among his books because the exodus story has fascinated him since his bar mitzvah – his Torah portion was on the golden calf and the purge of the idolaters. *Exodus* is Walzer’s first major work on Jewish thought, and is also significant in that it resulted in a heated debate between Walzer and Edward Said, who criticized Walzer’s account of the exodus as a thinly veiled defense of Israel at all costs (Said 1986, see exchange of letters in Hart 2000). In the late 1980s, the Palestinian Intifada led Walzer to devote increased attention to criticizing terrorist modes of resistance to Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories (which he also opposed). Walzer’s defense of Israel, and the controversies it has occasioned, will crop up throughout this book. I discuss it at greatest length in the conclusion.

Walzer spent most of the second half of the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s developing a theoretical justification of the interpretive method he used in *Spheres*, determined to prove that philosophical interpretation was compatible with the social-democratic project of radical, egalitarian critique. The most significant statement of this justification is *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (1987), while *The Company of Critics* (1988) considers some of the most important intellectuals of the twentieth century and tests the theory against their practice. Walzer praises such leftists as Albert Camus, George Orwell, and Ignazio Silone for practicing what he calls “connected criticism,” which combines commitment to a community with commitment to its reform (Walzer 1988a: 101–52). By contrast, he is critical of radicals such as Simone de Beauvoir, Herbert Marcuse, and Michel Foucault for practicing what Walzer considers alienated or oppositional criticism (153–209). Walzer characterizes this most

emphatically in the claim that Foucault's political positions were "less an endorsement than an outrunning of the most radical argument in any political struggle" (192). Walzer's work on interpretive method also attempted to reconcile the particularism of that method with his appeal to human rights in *Wars*. In *Thick and Thin* (1994), he argues that a thin universal morality always co-exists with a thicker particular morality, with military ethics relying on the former and distributive justice on the latter (Walzer 1994a: 1–20; see also Walzer 1990a). In 1993, on the death of Irving Howe, Walzer and new co-editor Mitchell Cohen, who was also working on reconciling universal and particular values (see Cohen 1992), assumed increased responsibilities at *Dissent*.

The collapse of the USSR and the new waves of immigration to the USA prompted Walzer to turn his attention in the 1990s to questions of cultural diversity and civil society, which also helped him clarify his relationship with the communitarian moment in political theory. This was his major focus in that decade. However, after September 11, 2001, Walzer resumed focus on just wars, and engaged in heated critique of mainstream left responses to the attacks on the World Trade Center (Walzer 2002a, 2003, 2004b). In 2018, he published *A Foreign Policy for the Left*, which collates and updates many of the essays that this engagement occasioned. He has spent much of the last two decades working on Jewish political theory, co-editing a collaborative project on *The Jewish Political Tradition*, of which three volumes have been published (Walzer et al. 2000, 2003, 2018; see also Walzer 2012a).

Although Walzer retired as *Dissent* editor in 2013 and is now emeritus at the Institute, he remains prolific in his mid-80s, and continues to update and restate many of his most important arguments. For example, he used the opportunity of the publication of a fifth edition of *Wars* in 2015 to add an appendix criticizing much contemporary just-war theory for relying too much on analytic philosophy and not enough on history (Walzer 2015a: 335–46; see also Walzer 2013a). In 2019, at the request of young activists, he republished *Political Action*, a handbook for movement politics originally written in 1971, as a *New York Review* book (Walzer 2019).

## Approach and Chapter Outline

Walzer's work is so wide-ranging that my treatment must be selective. Throughout, I try to reconcile breadth and depth, giving a