



R. R. WALZER

Walter Stoenen

RICHARD RUDOLF WALZER

1902-1975

RICHARD RUDOLF WALZER, who died on 16 April 1975, had been a Fellow of the Academy since 1956. His career spans two disciplines—Greek and Arabic—and three countries—Germany, Italy, and England.

He was born in Berlin on 14 July 1902, the elder son of a Jewish business man of modest means. He attended the Werner Siemens Realgymnasium, and there was every reason in his family circumstances for him to choose a remunerative profession. Yet at the end of his school days he turned to classical philology, a bold and unworldly thing to do, typical of the man we knew. He had to learn Greek at this stage; Hebrew he may have already known, for he had a good knowledge of it by 1923, and he was involved as a schoolboy and student in the Zionist movement—something which he later rejected. Admitted to Wilamowitz's seminar in 1923, he nevertheless fell especially under the influence of Werner Jaeger, whose seminal *Aristoteles* appeared in that year. It was Jaeger's 'private lecture' on the *Nicomachean Ethics* in 1924-5 that determined Walzer's next step: he began to prepare a demonstration of the spuriousness of the *Magna Moralia*, directed against the defence by von Arnim. The resulting doctoral thesis, a good deal expanded, appeared in 1929, Walzer's first major work. It is a very thorough and careful argument, approaching the problem mainly by contrasting the position of the *Magna Moralia* with that of the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics* in regard to free will and moral choice. Walzer succeeded in extending the evidence (some of it known for a long time) that there is a good deal of Theophrastus in the *Magna Moralia*, even if the author had no very clear view of what Theophrastus's ethical position actually was. The dissertation of another pupil of Jaeger's, C. O. Brink (1931), tackled the question more from the point of view of style and form, but did not upset Walzer's conclusions.

This is to anticipate. 1927 was a crucial year: the doctorate won *magna cum laude*, and the marvellous marriage to Sofie

Cassirer, with all the family brilliance and stimulation that that brought into Richard's life. Ernst Cassirer, the philosopher and historian of philosophy, was a cousin. Bruno Cassirer, Sofie's father, and his brother were connoisseurs of painting and built up the collection of French Impressionists that in later years so astonished visitors to the little Oxford house in Portland Road, who could not believe that here, on the stairs, was some original Monet or Cézanne or Renoir with which they were familiar from a reproduction. It was a wonderful enrichment of the young scholar's life; it was also the beginning of a lifetime of personal happiness amid many trying vicissitudes. Things did not even then go smoothly. Between doctorate and *Habilitation* nearly five years passed. Walzer taught Greek composition in the philological *preseminar*; but he did not enjoy the favour of Wilamowitz, whereas others did; and his future was unsure.

It was assured as a result of a suggestion that he should take up Arabic, and develop what seemed to be a subject of growing importance: the absorption of Greek philosophical and scientific thought by the Arabs. This was not only in itself of the first importance in intellectual history, but gave the possibility of recovering something of the lost Greek inheritance from Arabic sources. G. Bergsträsser had been involved in the Arabic Galen since before the First World War, and had published (1925), from an Istanbul manuscript, an account of Syriac and Arabic translations of Galen by the ninth-century physician, Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, who had travelled all over the old Hellenized provinces (where Greek could still be learnt) and translated, with his associates, more than a hundred works of Galen. Walzer now worked with Bergsträsser, who was in Munich, and joined Hellmut Ritter in Istanbul to study medical and other texts. The fruits of this began to be published in 1932; but, in a sense, the harvest went on for the rest of Walzer's life. Established in this new field, he obtained his *Habilitation* in February 1932, and taught as a *Privatdozent* in Berlin for about a year. Then came the Nazi cataclysm. He was dismissed from his post while he was in Italy in 1933, and was advised by friends that it was not safe to come home. He was not to teach in his native country again until after the war, when Bruno Snell (to whom he was devoted) had him come to Hamburg regularly in the winter as an honorary professor.

He never spoke much of his precarious and laborious Italian years, though they were warmed by the help of Giovanni Gentile and others. He lectured in the University of Rome, published in

Italian journals, and produced two little books, modestly thought of as written *tironibus academicis*, a selection of the fragments of Aristotle's *Dialogues* (1934) and an edition of the fragments of Heraclitus (1938). But Italy in its turn became unsafe, and he followed Sofie and her family to England and to Oxford. Here he found much help. He himself always especially honoured Sir David Ross, through whom he became a member of Oriel in 1942. During the war, he deputized on various occasions for the Regius Professor of Greek, E. R. Dodds, who was away for a time in China, and lectured on Plato and other topics. By the end of the war, he was making a notable contribution. He was appointed Lecturer in Mediaeval Philosophy (Arabic and Hebrew) in 1945, Senior Lecturer in Arabic and Greek Philosophy in 1950, and Reader in 1960; he moved from Oriel to St Catherine's as a Fellow in 1962; and he retired in 1969. This was a period of continuous work, increasingly on the Arabic side. Most of it was in Oxford, but there were the winter visits to Hamburg, and a stay at Princeton in 1953-4, to break the routine.

His Galen studies came to fruition first, in 1949, with an important article on Galen's moral philosophy and the monograph *Galen on Jews and Christians*. This little book is perhaps the best demonstration of the depth and breadth of Walzer's learning. It examines a relatively small subject with attention to all its ramifications, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, and patristic. Its detail is fascinating, and not without personal touches—the obvious pleasure in agreeing with Eduard Norden, the choice of Walter Pater's translation of Lucian's *Halcyon*, even when it is wrong—nor without a suggestion of a theme which afterwards became important in Walzer's final picture of 'Greek into Arabic', the part played by John Philoponus and sixth-century Alexandrian philosophy. Most important, it illustrates his ability to see the wider significance of a small thing: in his hands, the minute discussion of a few Greek and Arabic passages illuminated the whole debate about faith and reason in paganism, Islam, and Christianity.

Another centre of interest of course was the Arabic Aristotle. Margoliouth's work on the *Poetics* at the end of the last century was well known, but the slightness of its contribution to Aristotle's text had discouraged the classical philosophers from going much further in this direction. Walzer kept an eye on all that was going on. He pointed out some interesting things in the Arabic *Metaphysics*, showing that different translators used different

Greek MSS and that the Arabic versions support some modern conjectures. More importantly, he produced a review article on translations recently published by Georr and Badawi, which remains a standard work of reference. His special justification for this was that he was indeed highly skilled in textual criticism in both languages. (It is not, I think, that he had special gifts of *divinatio*. Indeed (as I found once in reading the *Eudemian Ethics* with him) he was unduly diffident of his own ideas, and unduly credulous of others'.)

By this time, Greek was a subsidiary interest: the main weight both of his teaching and his research was much on the Arabic side. Even before the war, he had collaborated with Ritter and M. Guidi in the publication of some newly discovered works of al-Kindi, the ninth-century scholar from Baghdad who was the first Arab of note to produce treatises in the tradition of Greek science and philosophy. It was an important contribution of Walzer's that he described the Islamic background of these works as well as regarding them as sources of knowledge. One may perhaps generalize from this, and say that it was characteristic of him always to be careful to emphasize the separate individualities of the two worlds whose interaction he was studying. The Muslim translators, he saw, were doing something which was valuable in their own terms, not simply making an alien culture grow. Another aspect of this insistence on the essential independence of the two sides was that he was always strongly opposed to any attempt to trace Greek philosophical ideas to Oriental sources, whether it was Stoicism or late Neoplatonism. He held to the independence of the Greek tradition, its demand to be explained out of itself, as he did to the independence, in its own theological terms, of its Muslim successor.

It was not al-Kindi but al-Farabi (c. 870–950) who dominated Walzer's later years, and especially the *Views of the Citizens of the Perfect State*. The *editio princeps* of 1895 was unsatisfactory; Walzer's edition, begun in the 1950s and published posthumously in 1985, is a model of textual criticism in its field. Its extensive commentary aims to place al-Farabi in his Muslim setting (he supports the Shi'ite ideal of a ruler with prophetic gifts) and to explain the nature of his adaptation of Greek ideas. Particularly important in Walzer's argument was the history of the Aristotelian 'active intellect', which in al-Farabi becomes an intermediary between the supralunary and sublunary worlds and enlightens the material mind that reaches out to it as a kind of Angel of Revelation. Important too is his exposition of al-

Farabi's subordination of prophecy to philosophy and imagination to reason. Both in this book, and in a number of earlier articles, Walzer proceeds to locate the Greek sources of all this in some form of sixth-century Greek Platonism, which did not (as Plotinus had done) put Plato's practical philosophy into the background in favour of an emphasis on the *vita contemplativa*. Whether this is right or not is not yet agreed; but Walzer's evidence and judgement are, and will remain, of the first importance.

Walzer's scholarship was recognized in his later years by two publications that make it easier to view his achievement as a whole. A volume of his essays, under the title *Greek into Arabic*, was published in 1962; and the Festschrift, *Islamic Philosophy and Classical Philology* (1972), contains a bibliography.

He died over ten years ago; but the memory of his presence is extraordinarily vivid, the quiet man with the thick glasses whose patient courtesy never failed and who made you feel that the most minute details of verbal scholarship were part of the good life. He and Sofie made innumerable friends. The *soirées* in their home are unforgettable, with her energy and vivacity and his modest humour or occasional clumsiness or Malapropism. *Something* usually happened. These evening gatherings represent another bit of cultural continuity: the transplanting to North Oxford of a distinctly continental manner of entertaining graduates and faculty colleagues. The household was at its happiest during the years when the brilliant younger Arabist, S. M. Stern, lived with Richard and Sofie as a son; his sudden death from asthma was a distressing blow. Richard enjoyed Oxford life; but he enjoyed his travels even more, and he and Sofie and Samuel Stern were intrepid. He unburdened himself a little of his feelings about travel and life in general in 1973, in a Festschrift in honour of C. F. von Weizsäcker (whom he knew at Hamburg), in which he recorded his feelings on a recent 'Journey to Persia'. It was not only the landscape of Iran and its ancient ruins that impressed on his mind the lesson of the continuity of civilization that he was always rehearsing and teaching: it was especially his meeting with the Shi'ite scholars. He writes almost with awe:

I was questioned by the 90-year old scholar in Tehran about very specialist philosophical questions just as I could have been questioned centuries ago by the great theosophist Suhrawardi or by Avicenna himself . . . We took part in a service at the Shi'ite martyr's tomb in Meshhed . . . one felt almost frightened when surrounded by excited people whose state was bordering on frenzy.

He did not live to see the next phase in Iran. Indeed it was not so long after these happy travels that I met him for the last time in the corridor of the Radcliffe Infirmary: Sofie 'had a problem'. But it was he who went first.

D. A. RUSSELL

NOTE: That this notice is so late has been unavoidable; that it is possible at all is due to the kindness of Professor Friedrich Solmsen, who wrote down for me his memories of the young Walzer, and Dr F. W. Zimmermann, who enabled me to see something of the scope of his Arabic work. What is valuable is therefore theirs; for errors I am of course myself responsible.