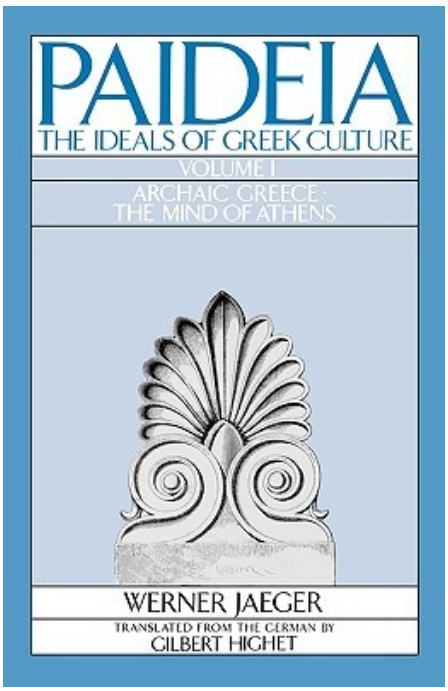

Paideia 1: The Ideals of Greek Culture: Archaic Greece: The Mind of Athens

Werner Wilhelm Jaeger , Gilbert Highet (Translator)

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Werner Jaeger's classic three-volume work, originally published in 1939, is now available in paperback. Paideia, the shaping of Greek character through a union of civilization, tradition, literature, and philosophy is the basis for Jaeger's evaluation of Hellenic culture.
Volume I describes the foundation, growth, and crisis of Greek culture during the archaic and classical epochs, ending with the collapse of the Athenian empire. The second and third volumes of the work deal with the intellectual history of ancient Greece in the Age of Plato, the 4th century B.C.--the age in which Greece lost everything that is valued in this world--state, power, liberty--but still clung to the concept of paideia. As its last great poet, Menander summarized the primary role of this ideal in Greek culture when he said: "The possession which no one can take away from man is paideia."

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From Reader Review Paideia 1: The Ideals of Greek Culture: Archaic Greece: The Mind of Athens for online ebook

Seward Park Branch Library, NYPL says

The first volume of 'Paideia : The Ideals of Greek Culture' focuses on Archaic Greece and 'The Mind of Athens'—in this volume Werner Jaeger traces the Greek art forms and their cultural and political implications from Epic, to Lyric, to Tragic character of the Fifth century BC. From the Aristocratic ideals of Homer, to the noble peasant ideals of Hesiod's 'Works and Days', from the blood nobility of Pindar to the Intellectual nobility of Plato, Jaeger's dense survey of the first few hundred years of Greek Literature certainly seems exhaustive—as this is my first attempt at so large and broad a work on the topic of Ancient Greek thought, I cannot say whether any other work is comparable to it, but if one does exist, it must be mighty good...

Jaeger at no point expresses an outright distaste for any one poet, though you get the feeling of where his preferences lie. For instance, I think it's safe to say his preference for the extollation of aristocratic virtues as seen in Pindar over the paranoid sinking-ship style of Theogonis is clear enough, I think. Though purely as a writer, Jaeger's work shines brightest when he gets to tell the reader about his favorites—for instance, when praising the emotional merits of Sappho, or the cosmic justice of Solon. That being said, I felt that the most inspired parts of the book where clearly the entries on Homeric and Tragic Greece, rather than the lyric poets (Solon perhaps being the exception). Of the tragedians, I feel that Jaeger holds tremendous respect for Aeschylus, enjoys Sophocles the most as an artist, yet has such sharp insight into the subjectivism of Euripides work. Behold, a marvelous passage from his chapter on Sophocles which almost has the blood rushing to one's face:

"Sophocles does not reply like Aeschylus with a theory of the universe, justifying the ways of god to man, but simply the form of his speech and the characters of his men and women. This can hardly be understood by those who have never turned to Sophocles for guidance at moments when, in the chaos and unrest of life, all principle and all structure seem to dissolve away, and have never restored the balance of their own lives by contemplating the firm harmonious repose of his poetry."

In faint biographical moments such as these Jaeger tenderly reaches out to his reader and subtly reveals his love of the subject... a love which runs deep.

What was most interesting for me was his passages on Heraclitus, Aeschylus, and Solon, who all have an acute concern for Justice and the individual in society—that is, more concretely, the divinity of law in human affairs. There is much we can learn about freedom from these artists, we who all-too-often suffer from what Jaeger might consider to be an unbalanced Ionian streak in our understanding of freedom and individuality. What we have here is a sort of 'public' individuality, one which is very much a part of a performance. Freedom is the allowance of this performance, which receives its semantic anchorage from that all-too-human strike at immortality, that which we call LAW. In reference to Heraclitus's cosmic anthropology, Jaeger states,

"[...] by the virtue of his own intellect, he harbors within himself the eternal law of the life of the universe, he can share the highest wisdom, from whose council springs the divine law. The freedom of the Greek lies in the fact that the subordinates himself, as one part, to the whole which is the city state, and to its law."

IOW, Heraclitus (or, 'The Greeks'), in limiting their sphere of relevance to the Polis, could actually speak of

a freedom which was tangible, rather than a universal suprasensual freedom of the modern world, some inward looking locus of 'Being', of murky individuality. It's a radical difference and bears consideration. After all, outside the law is the chaos of Might over Right... is it not so? And cannot law takes a creative and almost artistic shade, as if we might sculpt law akin to Phidias?

My final note is that this book isn't "An Introduction To...". If you're reading this, you've probably read Homer, Hesiod, some major Tragedy, and hopefully Aristophanes (which I haven't read much of) and Thucydides. Though, if you've put in the time, you'll get a lot out of this book, written by one who truly has an enthusiasm for his subject. I think I'll tackle volume two sooner rather than later...

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max says

This is an impressive work by a profoundly learned philologist who received his classical training -- where else? -- in Germany. It is quite readable, and offers a wealth of insight into the educative purposes that classical Greek literature held for the Greeks themselves. He is especially good on the meaning of Homer and the manner in which his poetry permeated Greek society to a degree that we can hardly understand from our vantage point in a fragmented, postmodern, and secular world.

From the moment I opened this book I felt like I was in the company of a man whose knowledge was gigantic and who communicated it with considerable ease. It is a deeply enjoyable read that will greatly expand your appreciation for ancient Greek civilization -- much more so, in fact, than any number of readily available handbooks that provide cursory summaries of what the Greeks accomplished.

John says

I can't recommend it enough. I couldn't swallow the other parts, but the first is more than enough for me for it makes an unforgettable view on the pre-platonic Greeks, and their relation to western culture as a whole. Now I am always left wondering why nobody talks about Solon, or why what people call "presocratic philosophers" seems to leave out so much of the greek spirit, and thus miss the point.

Laura says

Muy altos los ideales de la educación que guian como modelo a las demás culturas subsiguientes. Tomados de la agrucultura los principios de la educación se aplican a los seres humanos,cultivarse es

posible.
Desde Sócrates a Platón la revision de los perfiles esperados en los hombres son bien explicados por Jaeger.

Paul says

An impassioned, authoritative, and in-depth account of how the character-shaping ideas of education and culture developed in ancient Greece, and how the civilization's first educators were its poets.

I forget how I first got to hear about this book. Probably it was offered by the recommendation engine on Goodreads or on Amazon. I was already acquainted with the Greek word *paideia* from reading the works of Mortimer J. Adler, the driving force behind the Britannica Great Books of the Western World. Adler himself had written a book with that word in the title: The Paideia Proposal: An Educational ManifestoThe Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto. Published in 1982, when Adler was 80, it is a call for sweeping change to the American educational system, from elementary school to postsecondary learning. The vision of Adler and his colleagues is to wrench public education away from vocational training, which it had largely become even in 1982, and toward the ideals of liberal education. He and the other members of the Paideia Group believe that this is the only way to save American democracy. As he puts it in chapter 1:

> Suffrage without schooling produces mobocracy, not democracy--not rule of law, not constitutional government by the people as well as for them.

Here in British Columbia, where I live, the issue of education is often in the news, usually in the form of conflicts between the provincial government and the B.C. Teachers Federation--the teachers' union. They have fought over things like who is to determine class sizes. What's never in the debate, at least not that I've seen, is the question of what education is *for*. What is the *aim* of our education system? Usually it's assumed to be employment: putting our kids in position to get "good jobs." Our universities are now almost entirely vocational schools: law, medicine, accounting, engineering, forestry, and so on. Adler was strongly critical of this approach. Vocational training does not teach us how to be citizens of a free democratic society--the society that we live in, or like to think that we live in.

Werner Jaeger, in this extraordinary volume, shows us how the ancient Greeks coped with this question. There was no such thing as public education, but, as he says at the very beginning of his introduction:

> Every nation which has reached a certain stage of development is instinctively impelled to practise education. Education is the process by which a community preserves and transmits its physical and intellectual character. For the individual passes away, but the type remains. . . . [M]en can transmit their social and intellectual nature only by exercising the qualities through which they created it--reason and conscious will. Through the exercise of these qualities man commands a freedom of development which is impossible to other living creatures. . . .

This short extract gives a fair sense, I think, of the caliber of observation and thought that the author maintains throughout the 510 pages of this volume (which comprises the first 2 books of his series: *Archaic Greece* and *The Mind of Athens*).

The Greeks came to see that this process of education was a matter of shaping the soul, of giving it a desirable form in a manner analogous to the way that a sculptor shapes marble or bronze. This desirable form of the soul came to take the name of *arete* or "excellence." The best men had *arete* in the highest degree, exemplified by mythical heroes such as Odysseus or Achilles. But how was this education effected? How

were ordinary boys shaped into excellent men? In Jaeger's words, the Greeks

> considered that the only genuine forces which could form the soul were words and sounds, and--so far as they work through words and sounds or both--rhythm and harmony. . . .

Words, sounds, rhythm, harmony: we're talking about poetry. The educators of ancient Greece were its poets.

Jaeger notes how every society attends to the training of its young: teaching children the practical and moral rules by which the society lives, and adding technical training to that, so that the children may have the skills needed to make their way in life. This process must be distinguished from what he calls *cultural education,* "which aims at fulfilling an ideal of man as he ought to be." For this latter task, what counts is not utility but the society's idea of the Beautiful. He thinks that the contrast between these two views of education can be seen throughout history, and proposes to refer to the former as *education* and the latter as *culture*. Jaeger goes on to say:

> Culture is shown in the whole man--both in his external appearance and conduct, and in his inner nature. Both the outer and the inner man are deliberately produced, by a conscious process of selection and discipline which Plato compares to the breeding of good dogs. At first this process is confined to one small class within the state--the nobility. . . . But as the two types were taken over by the bourgeoisie in its rise to power, the ideals inspiring them became universal and at last affected the whole nation.

But this about the nobility is an important point, for Jaeger then says that

> all higher civilization springs from the differentiation of social classes--a differentiation which is created by natural variations in physical and mental capacity between man and man. . . . The nobility is the prime mover in forming a nation's culture. The history of Greek culture . . . begins in the aristocratic world of early Greece, with the creation of a definite ideal of human perfection, an ideal toward which the elite . . . was constantly trained. . . . All later culture . . . bears the imprint of its aristocratic origin. Culture is simply the aristocratic ideal of a nation, increasingly intellectualized.

That's all taken from one paragraph on page 4. I find this to be a tremendously provocative set of ideas. When we remember that the original meaning of the word *aristocracy* is "rule by the best," we can see the power of this notion of culture. The purpose of culture is to shape people into being the best that they can be.

Jaeger shows how this ideal of human excellence evolved in ancient Greece, and how the ideal was given given form and voice by poets, starting with Homer, whose works had enormous authority throughout the ancient world for centuries. Homer was universally studied not just for the quality of his verse, but because of the educative power of his poems. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* taught men--and women--how to *be*. The characters in these epics were the benchmark against which living men and women were measured.

As time went on, Greece changed, and its cultural ideals changed with it. The word *paideia* itself, which originally meant simply "child-rearing," eventually morphed into the concept that we would probably call "culture." Jaeger shows how these changes are reflected in the work of the poets after Homer: Hesiod, Tyrtaeus, Theognis, Pindar, and others. It's not all about poets; other great minds also contribute, notably the lawgiver Solon. The birth of the city-state, the ideal of justice, the birth of scientific speculation, the rise of individualism--all these are reflected in the work of the poets, who express the ideas in potent, pithy form for their society. The ideas strive and clash with each other, poetry and society mutually shaping each other.

That's all in Book 1, *Archaic Greece*. The volume also contains Book 2, *The Mind of Athens*, which focuses on the great dramatists of Athens, the sophists, and a final chapter on Thucydides, whom Jaeger terms a "political philosopher" and the first political historian.

Again and again I was amazed at the depth and reach of Jaeger's thought. His understanding of ancient Greece must be virtually unrivaled. It's not just that he knows that world and its art so well; it's that he has reflected deeply on the significance of both, and their interconnection. And although the book is about ancient Greece, it reads like a discussion of the issues of today, for ideas do not die; they throb beneath our own body politic. It is tremendously relevant.

There is no actual poetry in the book. Familiarity with the poets and their work is assumed. I had read some of the works--Homer, Hesiod, the dramatists, and Thucydides--but I was still fascinated to read about the others I had not read. I could still experience the reflected glow of their work in Jaeger's appreciative analysis. But of course, the more of it you have read, the more you can gain from his discussion.

There are 2 more volumes in this series on *The Ideals of Greek Culture*. I don't know what's in them, but I'm dying to find out. I've read thousands of books in my life, but only a handful compare with this one for depth and quality. I'm amazed at how much he achieved, and I'm really surprised that I had never heard of him before.

Güis Guerrero-Enterría says

Aqui solo esta referenciado el primer volumen. son tres. Magnifica y preciosa historia de la Grecia clásica y sus instituciones educativas. Las preguntas pedagógicas por supuesto siguen siendo validas en un mundo donde la formación en muchos aspectos se devalua por minutos.
