

**Werner Jaeger.** *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture. Volume 1: Archaic Greece and the Mind of Athens.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. xxix + 510 pp. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-19-500425-0.



**Werner Jaeger.** *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture. Volume 2: In Search of the Divine Centre.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. xv + 442 pp. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-19-504047-0.



**Werner Jaeger.** *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture. Volume 3: The Conflict of Ideals in the Age of Plato.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. viii + 374 pp. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-19-504048-7.



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Old Ideals for a New World?

[Note: This review is part of H-Ideas Retropective Reviews series. This serie reviews books published during the twentieth century which have been deemed to be among the most important contributions to the field of intellectual history]

Mention the name Werner Jaeger, and you will most likely notice a glint of interest in the eyes of those who are searching for new ways of understanding the Western classical tradition. With his Opus Magnum in three parts, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, Jaeger has certainly contributed, above all, to our understanding of

the Greek classical tradition, in both Europe and North America.

After the trauma of the First World War, a new interest in the thinking and ideals connected with the nineteenth century humanistic tradition arose in Germany. Various attempts were made to renew this over one hundred year old tradition and make it relevant for a new era - a "humanism revival". Of these, the most thorough and systematic was Werner Jaegers.

Jaeger was born in Germany, in 1888, of a Protestant family. Attending a Catholic school, he has described how he acquired an early interest in different cultural traditions.[1] In 1914 he was appointed professor of classical philology in Basel (Friedrich Nietzsches old chair), and in 1921 he succeeded his old teacher Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff in the prestigious chair in Berlin. During the following fifteen years he was very productive. Not only did he write several books, he was also actively engaged in revitalizing the nineteenth century German humanistic tradition. He arranged conferences, held popular public lectures, and began writing his monumental work, *Paideia*. In 1936 he emigrated to the United States because his wife was Jewish. He first went to Chicago, and after a year moved to Harvard University where he stayed until his retirement in 1960. He died in 1961.

*Paideia* was written in three parts between 1934 and 1947, and so, Jaeger began the work while still in Berlin: the first part was published two years before his emigration. It then took ten years until the second part came out and the third arrived three years later. There is some evidence that Jaeger had wanted to continue his work into the middle ages and the "Christian paideia". As late as 1961, he published a small volume called *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*. With *Paideia*, Jaeger has to a large extent formed our contemporary understanding of this Greek concept. When ideals of education are discussed in an historical context today, Jaeger's name is often

mentioned,[2] although this is not to say that he is still considered the authority in this area. But Jaeger's work definitely made the paideia-concept widely known in the post-war era.

Something about the translation needs to be said: All three parts were translated by Gilbert Highet between 1939 and 1945 (the third part was translated from the manuscript and published before the appearance of the German text version). Gilbert fulfilled this huge task meritoriously, yet there remains a problem with the English translation.[3] Jaegers language is very much the language of the nineteenth-century, German educated, academic middle class: it carries within itself the ideals and imaginations--"Bildung"--of nineteenth-century views on knowledge and education as a means to mans growth as a moral and ethical being. Even though after the second world war, it became almost impossible to make such claims, Jaegers German is burdened by this old tradition, a burden which the English translation to a large extent actually neutralizes. As a result, Highets translation turns *Paideia* into a book different in tone and associations from the German original. I realize that this may have been unavoidable, but it is important to keep in mind if one only reads the translation. And, as I shall point out below, the connection with the nineteenth century ideal of "Bildung" does not apply only to Jaegers language but to his way of thinking as well.

Jaegers aim in *Paideia* is clear: he intends to establish a new perspective for the study of Greek culture. In his own words, his purpose is to "give an account of their [i.e. the Greeks] culture, their `paideia, and to describe its peculiar character and its historical development" (I: xvi). He uses the word "culture/civilization" synonymous with "paideia".[4] According to Jaeger, *paideia* is "a basis for a new study of Hellenism as a whole" (I: ix). Instead of studying separate areas like the development of the state, society, literature, religion, or philosophy alone, *paideia* would contribute to a

understanding of this development as a whole. This holistic view had not been attempted before, he says, and this comprehensive perspective would bring a deeper understanding of Greek influence throughout history.

In *Paideia* Jaeger describes what he sees as the history of this Greek ideal of education. The first part, *The Ideals of Greek Culture*, deals with the archaic period, starting with Homer and cover Hesiod, the Spartans, Solon, the Aristocracy and ending with the Tyrants. Then he continues into the sixth and fifth centuries BC, discussing the tragedies and comedies, the sophists and Thucydides. In the second part, *In Search of the Divine Centre*, he discusses his main subject, Plato, starting with "the Socratic problem" and "Plato and posterity" before devoting the rest of the book to discussion of a number of the dialogues. The discussion of the *The Republic* forms the main part, almost two hundred pages. Finally in part three, *The Conflict of Ideals in the Age of Plato*, he goes into Greek medicine and its connection to *paideia*, Isocrates and rhetoric, and Xenophon. Then he returns to Platos *Phaedrus* and *Laws*. The third part then concludes with a discussion of Demosthenes.

One question that has to be asked is, why did Jaeger chose *paideia* as the all-embracing concept to explain and understand the whole ancient Greek culture? The Preface to *Paideia* begins with these words: "I present to the public a work of historical research dealing with a subject hitherto unexplored. It treats *paideia*, the shaping of the Greek character, as a basis for a new study of Hellenism as a whole" (I: ix). Jaeger not only claims to be the first scholar to investigate *paideia* as a subject of historical research, he also aims to make this subject the basis for the study of a historical period of almost one thousand years. The reasonableness of this ambition could be, and has been, questioned. In a famous review of *Paideia* from 1935, Bruno Snell asked, if "a deeper understanding of the Greeks is achieved in this book through the problem of *paideia*".[5] His answer, simply

put, was no, it was not. He points out the fact that the term *paideia* actually wasnt used before the sophists, whereas Jaeger uses the word from the time of Homer onward. According to Snell, this obscures rather than contributes to the understanding of Greek culture.[6] The core of Snell's criticism is that Jaegers *paideia* ideal is very much related to the nineteenth century German idea of *Bildung*. Snell characterizes Jaeger's *paideia* as a "pale classicism", rather than a new way of understanding Greek culture.

Snell's review raises a more complex issue in regard to *Paideia*. For Jaeger, classical philology functioned as a transferor of the Greek, classical heritage and its ideals concerning how to educate, in the broadest sense, human beings. This view had much in common with the way classical philology as a new *Geisteswissenschaft* was perceived in early nineteenth-century Germany. The distinction between values and specialized scholarship that most scholars would make today was not an ideal two hundred years ago and was not for Jaeger either. To him humanities, culture, and education were closely connected. He concludes the Preface with these words: "But even today, it is impossible to have any educational purpose or knowledge without a thorough and fundamental comprehension of Greek culture. It was that conviction which created my scientific interest in the problem, and through it this book" [emphasis added] (I: x). In Jaegers view, it is the classical philologist who is able to achieve this comprehension of Greek culture, and, consequently, provides society with educational ideals and goals. *Paideia*, in other words, is Jaegers contribution to contemporary questions regarding the nature and purpose of education for a modern world. The question whether science, understood as a modern, specialized, value-neutral activity, actually can or should transfer ideals about how to educate human beings and how they in turn will shape their society, is, for Jaeger answered in *Paideia*. Today, most people would probably consider that a polit-

ical rather than a scientific question, just as Snell did sixty-five years ago.

The question concerning the relation of the scientific and the political aspects of *Paideia* has remained a subject of discussion. In a 1992 article, Beat Naf discusses Jaegers intentions in *Paideia* in relation to its reception in Nazi-Germany. He shows that Nazi-scholars did not receive *Paideia* positively; they considered it too aristocratic and so useless for their politics. On the other hand, Naf points out that, since Jaeger himself did not show any interest in the everyday political and cultural problems and did not explicitly mark his own position in relation to these in *Paideia*, his ideas about the Greek ideals in education could be used for any purpose.[6]

*Paideia* remains, I believe, an inspiring work about the Greeks and their intellectual culture, and about the relevancy of the classical tradition to the modern world. The German original as well as the English translation are both well written in a fluid prose that demands little specialized to understand. But *Paideia* needs to be read today with a full awareness of its historical circumstances, lest we miss one of the most challenging concepts of this work--Jaegers attempt to revive the idea of *Bildung*.

Notes:

All three volumes can also be purchased in a one-volume German edition: *Paideia: die Formung des griechischen Menschen*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989. 1398 pp. Table of contents, preface, index. DM 181 (cloth), ISBN 3-110-03800-5.

[1]. See his "Intellectual Autobiography" in the introduction to *Scripta Minora* (1960) in *Werner Jaeger, Five Essays*, transl. by A. Fiske (Montreal, 1966).

[2]. See *The Paideia Project On-Line: The Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*([www.bu.edu/wep/index.htm](http://www.bu.edu/wep/index.htm)).

[3]. See also W. M. Calder III, "Gilbert Highet", *Gnomon* 50 (1978), 430-32.

[4]. The German word used by Jaeger is "Kultur". Highet alternates between "culture" and "civilization".

[5]. Bruno Snell, "Besprechung von W. Jaeger, *Paideia*" (1935) in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Göttingen, 1966), 32.

[6]. Beat Naf, "Werner Jaegers *Paideia*: Entstehung, Kulturpolitische Absichten und Rezeption" in W. M. Calder, III, ed., *Werner Jaeger Reconsidered: Proceedings of the Second Oldfather Conference, held on the Campus of the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, April 26-28, 1990* (Illinois, 1992).

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