

72-3955

EDER, Alan Harold, 1928-  
CLASSICAL HUMANISM, EDUCATION, AND  
READAPTABILITY.

The University of Nebraska, Ed.D., 1971  
Education, theory and practice

University Microfilms, A XEROX Company, Ann Arbor, Michigan

**THIS DISSERTATION HAS BEEN MICROFILMED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED**

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CLASSICAL HUMANISM, EDUCATION,  
AND READAPTABILITY

by

Alan H. Eder

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Education  
Department of History and Philosophy of Education

Under the Supervision of Professor Lyle K. Eddy

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 1971

**TITLE**

**HUMANISM, EDUCATION AND THE CONCEPT**

**OF READAPTABILITY**

**BY**

**ALAN H. EDER**

**APPROVED**

**DATE**

**Lyle K. Eddy**

**July 7, 1971**

**Erwin H. Goldenstein**

**July 7, 1971**

**James O'Hanlon**

**July 7, 1971**

**SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE**

**GRADUATE COLLEGE**

**UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA**

DEDICATION

For Mary Jane, Jon, Shelley, and Fredrik

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to acknowledge indebtedness and express my thanks to Professor Lyle K. Eddy, without whose patient guidance this work would not have been possible. My use of his insight and percipience, derived from his lectures and from innumerable conferences, is displayed in every chapter of this work.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Erwin H. Goldenstein whose interest and assistance made it possible for me to embark upon the program of studies that culminated in this work.

A.H.E.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. GREEK CULTURE: OF GODS OR MEN? . . . . .	1
II. CULTURE, READAPTABILITY, AND EDUCATION . . .	24
III. THE COURSE OF GREEK CULTURE: AN OVERVIEW . .	59
IV. GREEK TRAGEDY: FROM REVERENCE TO RIDICULE . . . . .	99
V. INTELLECTUALISM AND ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM AMONG THE GREEKS . . . . .	143
VI. THE SOCRATIC MODEL AND THE TASK OF SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION . . . . .	180
VII. THE GREEK QUEST FOR HEALTH . . . . .	211
VIII. FROM POLIS TO COSMOPOLIS AND "CULTURE" . . .	234
IX. CONCLUSION: HUMANISM AND READAPTABILITY . .	255
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	276

## CHAPTER I

### GREEK CULTURE: OF GODS OR MEN?

Perhaps the most long standing tradition in the history of education is that of classical humanism. It is not our purpose in this work to inspect that tradition in its entirety, but rather to note several features of it which depend upon a particular way of interpreting the historical phenomena upon which the tradition rests. It is our purpose to suggest an alternative way of viewing that material in the hope of providing new leverage for an examination of the problems of humanistic education today.

Classical scholars have usually discovered the very epitome of true education in the tradition arising out of the Greek cultural experiences. As ordinarily interpreted, the Greeks provide the model of ideal education, a model which is abandoned or deviated from at great peril. The virtues of classical culture are extolled by H. I. Marrou in his comments upon Hellenistic education:

. . . an acquaintance with the poets was looked upon as one of the first attributes of an educated man, one of the highest cultural values . . . In conversation, in private correspondence, in the serious situations of life that call for "famous sayings," always and everywhere the right word could be found--it was expected, welcomed, regarded as indispensable! Classical culture did not know any

romantic need to make all things new, to forget the past and be original; it was proud of its inherited wealth, proud of its pedantry, proud of being what our modern pedantry--whose only sign of progress seems to be that it has replaced literary scholarship by technical progress--would call the victim of a culture complex.<sup>1</sup>

One of the features of the humanist tradition, namely, an aversion for "technical science," is indicated in this passage. Moreover, it is Marrou's contention that ancient culture, in its wisdom, deliberately and knowingly repudiated technique. "It had no use for technique. It was not unaware of the possibility of technical development; it simply rejected it."<sup>2</sup>

Along with the repudiation of technique, goes a corresponding insistence upon the power of the subject matter to be studied to "humanize" the learner on its own merits. After describing the poor efforts of many Hellenistic teachers to interpret the classics, Marrou provides the following summary:

Poetry has its own proper merits and it matters little at the moment that Hellenistic teachers often failed to realize that it is thus its own best justification--they often

---

<sup>1</sup>H. I. Marrou, A History of Education in Antiquity, trans. George Lamb (New York: Mentor Books, 1964), p. 235.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 303.



found it difficult to explain why Homer was so important in education, and their efforts to turn him into a model moralist or orator are pathetic. Fortunately poetry is able to do without their well-meaning "explanations." These were often rather comic; the essential thing is that the tradition was preserved intact [italics not in the original].

For in the last resort classical humanism was based on tradition, something imparted by one's teachers and handed on unquestioningly. This incidentally had a further advantage; it meant that all the minds of one generation, and indeed of a whole historical period, had a fundamental homogeneity which made communication and genuine communion easier. This is something we can all appreciate today, when we are floundering in a cultural anarchy. In a classical culture all men have in common a wealth of things they can all admire and emulate: the same rules; the same metaphors, images, words--the same language. Is there anyone acquainted with modern culture who can think of all this without feeling a certain nostalgia?

The ideal of this type of education, finally, is summarized by Marrou in a quotation from Julian the Apostate:

It aimed at developing all of [the student's] potentialities without mutilating a single one, so enabling him to fulfil to the best of his ability whatever task should later be imposed upon him by life or the demands of society or his own free choice. Ideally such an education was supposed to result in a kind of indeterminate human product of very high intrinsic quality, ready to respond to any demand made upon it by the intellect or circumstance . . . The Ancients were very much alive to the value of this kind of latent potentiality, which was never better

---

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 305.

described than in a lyrical passage by Julian the Apostate, in which the traditional "Hellenism" is contrasted with what he believed was the barbarism of the Christians. Any gifted person, he says, who has received a classical education, is capable of great things in any direction: he can take the lead in science or politics, just as easily as he can become a man of war, an explorer or a hero: he comes down among men like a gift from the gods . . . .<sup>4</sup>

Ultimately the ideal indicated here by Marrou must be traced back further than the Hellenistic period; it has its origins in ancient Hellenic Greece, the Greece of the fifth century B.C. It is to this experience that we must go, according to most classical humanists, in order to get at the roots of true education. Werner Jaeger, historian of the Greek concept of paideia, writes:

In approaching the problem of education, the Greeks relied wholly on [a] clear realization of the natural principles governing human life, and the immanent laws by which man exercises his physical and intellectual powers. To use that knowledge as a formative force in education, and by it to shape the living man as the potter moulds clay and the sculptor carves stone into a preconceived form--that was a bold creative idea which could have been developed only by a nation of artists and philosophers. The greatest work of art they had to create was Man. They were the first to recognize that education means deliberately moulding human character in accordance with an ideal . . . . Only this type of education deserves the name of culture . . . . Throughout history, whenever this conception reappears, it is always

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 303.

inherited from the Greeks; and it always reappears when man abandons the idea of training the young like animals to perform definite external duties, and recollects the true essence of education.<sup>5</sup>

Man, Jaeger continued, was always at the center of Greek thought, in their art, their philosophy, their religion with its multiplicity of anthropomorphic deities.

They are the expressions of an anthropocentric attitude toward life, which cannot be explained by or derived from anything else, and which pervades everything felt, made, or thought of by the Greeks. Other nations made gods, kings, spirits: the Greeks alone made men.<sup>6</sup>

Jaeger amplified this point further:

By discovering man, the Greeks . . . realized the universal laws of human nature. The intellectual principle of the Greeks is not individualism but "humanism," to use the word in its original and classical sense. It comes from humanitas: which, since the time of Varro and Cicero at least, possessed a nobler and severer sense in addition to its early vulgar sense of humane behaviour, here irrelevant. It meant the process of educating man to his true form, the real and genuine human nature . . . . That is the true Greek paideia, adopted by the Roman statesman as a model. It starts from the ideal, not from the individual. Above man as a member of the horde, and man as a supposedly independent personality, stands man as an ideal; and that ideal was the pattern towards which Greek educators, as well as

---

<sup>5</sup>Werner Jaeger, Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, I (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), pp. xxii-xxiii.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. xxiii.

Greek poets, artists, and philosophers always looked. But what is the ideal man? It is the universally valid model of humanity which all individuals are bound to imitate. We have pointed out that the essence of education is to make each individual in the image of the community; the Greeks started by shaping human character on that communal model, became more and more conscious of the meaning of the process, and finally, entering more deeply into the problem of education, grasped its basic principles with a surer, more philosophical comprehension than any other nation at any other period in history.<sup>7</sup>

Jaeger puts the point still more succinctly in an Aquinas lecture delivered in 1943. Speaking of Plato as the inventor of theology, he writes:

In his last work, the Laws, where the philosopher appears as the legislator of a new human society founded on the unshakable rock of truth, we read a word which throws a bar of light back to the beginning of Socrates' strenuous path and over Plato's entire work: God is the measurement of all things. The word of Protagoras that man is the measurement is reversed and changed into its contrary. The true paideia, be it education or legislation, is founded on God as the supreme norm. It is-- to speak with Plato's Republic--"conversion" from the world of sensuous self-deception to the world of the one true being which is the absolute good and the one desireable. Or in the words of Plato's Theaetetus: true human virtue is assimilation to God.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>8</sup>Werner Jaeger, Humanism and Theology (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1943), p. 53.

Thus, for Jaeger, "humanism," originating with Greek paideia, begins with an anthropocentric view of man and culminates with a theocentric one.<sup>9</sup> He rejects as alien to the true concept of classical humanism all "naturalistic" attempts to account for Greek culture. Referring to several writers of a naturalistic persuasion, among them F. S. C. Schiller and William James, he, along with Jacques Maritain whom he quotes, declares "that if this be humanism, [one] must either abandon humanism or redefine it."<sup>10</sup> For Jaeger, humanism clearly includes "the great transcendental tradition of Western civilization."<sup>11</sup> In short, the great contribution of the Greeks to human culture is that, beginning with an exploration of human problems rooted in communal life, they advanced to an understanding of immutable laws which transcend all societies at all times and provide the models for human individuals as well as human societies. Humanism is the attempt to come to grips with these laws, and the Greek experience must be viewed with this end in mind. All true education must have this quality or fail as education. Short of this it is merely training, useful perhaps for

---

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

immediate short-range purposes, but useless for cultural purposes.

Now it is true that Jaeger insists that Greek ideals cannot be divorced from the historical context in which they arose; indeed he argues against an older scholarship which seemed to so divorce them. But it is important to note that he does not employ that historical context in order to account for the advent of Greek ideals. Quite the reverse: the history of Greece is seen as a result of Greek ideals. The Greeks are viewed as a naturally superior people, all of whom were participants in the creation of--or, perhaps more accurately for Jaeger's view--the discovery of Greek paideia. They are to be understood exclusively in terms of their literature.

The true representatives of paideia were . . . the poets and musicians, orators (which means statesmen) and philosophers. They felt that the legislator was in a certain respect more akin to the poet than was the plastic artist; for both the poet and the legislator had an educational mission. The legislator alone could claim the title of sculptor, for he alone shaped living men. Often as the Greeks compared the act of education with the work of the plastic artist, they themselves despite their artistic nature hardly ever thought that a man could be educated by looking at works of art . . . . They considered that the only genuine forces which could form the soul were words and sounds, and--so far as they work through words or sounds or both--rhythm and harmony . . . .

Thus the history of Greek culture coincides in all essentials with the history of Greek

literature: for Greek literature, in the sense intended by its original creators, was the expression of the process by which the Greek ideal shaped itself. Moreover, we have practically no literary evidence but poetry to help in understanding the centuries preceding the classical period, so that even for a history in the factual sense, the only subject which can really be discussed is that process as depicted in poetry and art. It was the life of the age.<sup>12</sup>

Jaeger is openly hostile to all attempts to apply sociological, psychological or anthropological concepts to the study of the ancients. The Greeks were interested in creating a "higher type of man," he argues. "At the summit of their development, that was how they interpreted their nature and their task. There is no reasonable ground for the assumption that we could understand them any better through some superior insight, psychological, historical, or social."<sup>13</sup> He is most adamantly opposed to modern anthropological conceptions of "culture." What we call culture today, he urges, is an "etiolate" thing; a pale version, a corruption perhaps, of what the Greeks had in mind. "In Greek terms, it is not so much *paideia*, as a vast disorganized external apparatus for living." Modern culture cannot add anything to Greek culture "but rather

---

<sup>12</sup>Jaeger, Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. xvi-xvii.



needs illumination and transformation by that ideal, in order to realize its true meaning and direction." At the end of historical epochs, when thought has become petrified "and when the elaborate machinery of civilization opposes and represses man's heroic qualities . . . a deep-seated historical instinct drives men not only to go back to the resources of their own national culture, but also to live once more in that earlier age when the spirit of Greece . . . was still fervently alive . . . ." <sup>14</sup>

Finally, the modern conception of culture is trivial. ". . . the word has sunk to mean a simple anthropological concept, not a concept of value, a consciously pursued ideal." For all other ancient "cultures" together with their educational systems "are in their whole intellectual structure fundamentally and essentially different from the Greek ideal of culture. And ultimately the habit of speaking of a number of pre-Hellenic 'cultures' was created by the positivist passion for reducing everything to the same terms . . . ." <sup>15</sup> And thus Jaeger, having eliminated psychology, anthropology, sociology, and even, in a sense, history from the scene--so that we have no tools by which to assess the development of Greek culture

---

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. xviii.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. xvii.



except literary ones--accounts for the development of Greek culture rather freely:

The variety, spontaneity, versatility, and freedom of individual character, which seem to have been the necessary conditions that allowed the Greek people to develop so rapidly in so many different ways, and which strike us with amazement in every Greek author from the earliest to the latest times, were not deliberately cultivated subjective qualities in the modern sense. They were natural, inborn.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout his three-volume work, then, Jaeger speaks often and freely of the Greek "instinct" for beauty, their "innate" sense of the natural, their "instinct" for philosophy, et cetera.

Clearly, then, the classical humanist stance, as spelled out by Jaeger and Marrou, involves an intimate connection between education and culture; but, more than that, it assigns particular honorific status to Greek culture. The ordinary sense of the word culture, in their view, stands in opposition to "Culture-with-a-capital-C" which is always associated with the study of classical works. And their opposition to modern scientific technology seems to correlate with their general reluctance to allow Greek culture to be appraised by standards and techniques that are applied to other cultures. For the

---

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. xix-xx.

classical humanist, Greece is clearly in a special category; the Greeks are a special people.

There are unquestionably many versions of classical humanism. But the features we have pointed to, namely, the assignment of honorific status to Greek culture so that the word culture itself is reserved for classical studies, the identification of education with the experiences of the Greeks and Romans, the notion that the Greeks themselves were somehow a superior people, and the general aversion for technology seem to be characteristic of the classical humanist stance in most of its variations.

But treated this way, classical culture remains something of an enigma. We have nothing but the tradition of classical humanism itself, in addition to remaining literary and artistic artifacts, to assure us that ancient classical culture was indeed worthy of the honorific status assigned to it. Classical humanists are fond of making invidious comparisons between classical and modern cultures, to the obvious disadvantage of the latter; and the former is held to be a model for all subsequent cultures, which are viewed, to the extent that they deviate from the classical model, as so many examples of deterioration. But given the mysterious character of classical culture itself, it is hard to see precisely how we are to model

our own culture after it; indeed, we cannot even validate the credentials of the Greeks to be models for us. The question of what is worthy of being treated as a model for cultures is not raised. We are left instead to admire the beauty of Greek ideals and to denigrate those who cannot appreciate them. We are not told how to translate whatever we find admirable in the Greeks into our own cultural setting; we are not even clear about why the Greeks were admirable.

The classical humanist's case rests, finally, upon his treatment of the ancients and involves a rather wholesale endorsement of ancient culture. We do not propose to argue in this study that his position is logically fallacious, nor that it can be "disproven." Instead we urge that his position, insofar as it maintains the mysterious character of Greek culture, is, if not altogether futile, at least not very useful to us in our efforts to extract lessons from the experience of the ancients: the classical humanist cannot help us to respond selectively to the Greeks nor to translate Greek experience into our own cultural setting. As long as he maintains that Greek culture was something approaching the sublime, explicable only on the grounds that the Greeks were themselves a specially endowed people, the classical humanist leaves us with no

response but impotent awe, if not idolatry.

Our purpose in this study is to offer the outlines of an alternative approach to the experience of the Greeks, one that does not rest upon the assumption that Greek ideals existed somehow prior to inquiry, merely awaiting discovery by specially endowed Greek thinkers, nor the assumption that Werner Jaeger apparently takes to be its only alternative, namely, that Greek ideals are or were directly derivable from the physical, historical, or social circumstances of the ancients. It is granted that Greek inquiry and Greek idealizations were indeed new things under the sun; but we need not posit the transcendental insights of a superior people nor some mechanical, inevitable, or automatic process in order to account for them, understand them, and appraise them. Instead Greek culture is viewed in this study as the product of man's first attempt at an imaginative, creative reintegration of the elements of a traditional, primitive culture under the stress of an increasing pressure for cultural change. Thus Greek culture is seen as a particular kind of response to historical, physical, and social conditions--but not as a necessary or inevitable one. The response of the Greeks to the situation in which they found themselves was not therefore dictated by nor implicit in their

antecedent cultural situations. By viewing Greek ideals, then, not as "discoveries" of pre-existent transcendental forms, nor as simple mechanical responses to new situations, but as imaginative re-workings of traditional cultural elements to accommodate new experiences in an attempt to weave a harmonious cultural fabric that would enhance the carrying on of life's activities, we open up the possibility of raising questions about the Greek experience in relation to the tasks confronting them. (See the discussion of John Dewey and David Bidney in Chapter VI, pp. 181-84.) For the real novelty of the Greek experience--as the classical humanist will no doubt agree--was the more or less deliberate attempt to introduce deviations from traditional cultural arrangements--or as the classical humanist such as Jaeger might put it, the Greeks attempted to direct their own destiny under the guidance of ideals. In a sense, it may be fairly said that they were the first to question their own traditions, to attempt to liberate themselves from the tyranny of customary culture.

Classical humanists indeed make much of this latter point. But deviations from established cultural patterns, however remarkable they may be, cannot in and of themselves constitute sufficient grounds for assigning

honorific status either to the deviations or to the culture in which they occur. We must notice the conditions under which the deviations occur, the problems to which they are a response, and, most important, the consequences of their adoption. When we take such factors into careful account, we are in a better position to evaluate the deviations by comparing them to other possible deviations or to the possibility of simply remaining bound by traditions and allowing changes to occur in a random, unplanned fashion. In other words, we are in a position to establish grounds for the assignment of honorific status to particular kinds of cultural transformations as well as in a position to develop criteria of constructive criticism of such transformations. Assignment of honorific status prior to such considerations is premature.

In the treatment of the Greeks suggested in this study, then, classical culture is reviewed as a response to certain fundamental cultural problems. The Greeks themselves, more than any prior culture, saw the possibility of controlling the process of cultural change. Under pressure for readaptation, they began to raise questions that challenged traditional cultural assumptions; they began to envision new modes of cultural transformation; they began thinking about what kinds of cultures were

possible and desirable. Their artists represented and rework the materials of traditional culture into novel literary and plastic forms--in some instances seeking reconciliation of new experience with old cultural patterns, in some attempting to justify the retention of the old, in some urging abandonment. Greek thinkers employed aesthetically powerful models, especially literary ones, in their efforts to develop cultural ideals capable of winning the assent of men and of guiding cultural as well as individual development.

The Greek tragic poets, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, dealt with the developing problems of the culture in which they lived in dramatic terms: their works emphasized the interplay of individuals in conflict with one another, with traditional cultural strictures, with an increasingly complex array of unassimilated new experiences, and, at last, with a growing sense of the futility of human effort. Their aesthetic achievements are to be discerned in the novel and imaginative ways in which they assembled disparate elements into harmonious wholes; the sense of "inevitability" characteristic of Greek drama is well known. But in Greek tragic drama it is the persons who hold our attention; the ideas are basic, but the people confronting them are the objects of our concern.

Philosophers also dealt with the basic cultural materials of their time; they dealt with the same array of ideas as did the poets. Perhaps philosophy, as it became exemplified in Plato, represented a mere shift in emphasis: now the characters (though still, in Plato, of great importance) moved into the background, and the ideas themselves took center stage. For, as Professor Randall<sup>17</sup> pointed out, Plato was essentially a "dramatist of ideas." Plato too featured conflicting elements, in the form of ideas, which were played off against one another. He displayed the art of dialectical reasoning--of making disparate ideas, often inconsistent with one another, harmonize to form reasonable concepts--at work in the process of idealization. The Greek conception of rationality was basically aesthetic in character. But however highly we may prize the Greek accomplishments in the process of idealization, it must finally be noticed that even here their achievement was something less than adequate. For it seems that one of the features of an adequate ideal must be that it contain some directive as to how it can serve as a guide to or a control of human

---

<sup>17</sup>John Herman Randall, Jr., Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).