

The Third Generation

Assimilation is a problem for all minorities in all places, a point that needs no argument. It is especially problematic in a country as vast as the United States. Not only is it easy to assimilate in America, assimilation is an approved cultural goal. America proudly conceives itself as a "melting pot." The metaphor suggests an homogenizing of cultural, ethnic and personal differences. Diverse ethnic, lingual and historical groups are blended together to form a unified whole, a mass culture.

Assimilation is particularly attractive to Jews since they have been forcibly excluded from mainstream cultural life for so many centuries. It is particularly easy for Jews to assimilate in America for a number of reasons. Not least among these is the fact that there are no physical barriers to Jewish assimilation. There are no walled ghettos here and various quota systems -- designed to exclude Jews from schools, country clubs, residential districts, etc. -- have all but disappeared. Jews are physically indistinguishable from members of the dominant culture: our skin color does not betray our heritage, nor are there any other definable physical traits to identify Jews. So, whatever prejudice there may be against Jews cannot be attached to racial characteristics or to the neighborhoods

in which we live. In short, nothing prevents a Jew from simply melting into the surrounding populace and, to all intents and purposes, disappearing (qua Jew).

Assimilation, despite the re-emergence of interest in Judaism by many young Jews, is a fact. There is still much assimilation, enough to constitute a major problem for Jewish thinkers, for Rabbis and all concerned Jews. The problem is that Jews as a national entity have always believed -- rightly -- that Jews and Judaism were essential to human survival, that Jews had something critical to offer which the rest of the world needed. How, then, could Jews assimilate? How could they throw off their historical and national mission to be "a light unto the peoples"?

More importantly, we must face one obvious implication of assimilation. A person does not assimilate unless he feels, for whatever reason, that there is something more attractive in another life-style. That is, Jews who assimilate do so because they feel that the goyische way of life has something to offer them that the Jewish way does not.

How can this be? To those with a Jewish consciousness, or an insider's knowledge of Jewish ethico-religious philosophy, it is unthinkable that the goyim have enough to offer that a Jew would willingly forswear his heritage.

It is easy enough to understand why many immigrant Jews made accommodations. Not only were they under great cultural

pressure to blend in, America was wonderful to them. There were no Cossacks, scimitars in hand, seeking to split Jewish heads and bellies. There were no pogroms. There were no walled ghettos or anti-Jewish laws. Most of all, their children were not excluded from schools. Education was open to a degree without precedent in Jewish history. "Illlettered Jews had been held in check too long Now, in America, it was their turn still more, the turn of their sons and daughters."¹

America was rich in opportunities and these were extended "even" to Jews. For the sake of participation in American life, to take advantage to these opportunities, to provide their children with comfort and security impossible in eastern Europe, immigrant Jews made concessions in the rites, practices and beliefs which they had brought with them. Often they were unable to change, but encouraged their children to accommodate.

Their children struggled upward, taking full advantage of the opportunities of the land. They left the areas of dense Jewish settlement like the lower east side of Manhattan. They established themselves in the middle class and, eventually, were accepted. But, at the same time, they too conceded; they were not observant. Despite the large Jewish population of America, fewer and fewer seem to bear the yoke of Judaism, ever fewer perceive the vision of Judaism.

The children's children, the third generation², reap the "rewards" of accommodation. They are American-born and take

the land's opportunities for granted. They have known no other life and also take the ways of the land (derech ha'aretz) for granted. They have never seen the cossack's scimitars, but they do see the drug pushers. They do not suffer under anti-Jewish laws, but massive injustice in an often corrupt political system. They are not overwhelmed by America as were their grandparents. Their perceptions are altogether different and they do see much wrong here. Their problem is that because of the concessions of previous generations, they have, all too often, lost their Jewish identity and self-knowledge. There is a moral crisis in America which they, along with many others, feel. But, their confrontation with the crisis as well as their attempts at resolution differ in no substantial way from those of the goyim.

The feeling of crisis is intensified for many assimilated Jews by one Jew's desertion of the ancestral homeland. The moral and political sellout of the resurrected Israel³ stirs long-forgotten -- indeed, often denied -- feelings of kinship to am Yisroel. But, in the absence of knowledge about and commitment to Judaism, their feelings of crisis and inauthenticity are only made stronger; they do not, for example, know where to place their allegiance.

Thus, accommodation -- even among the orthodox, to the degree that they have accommodated -- has meant the surrender of Jewish values. It has meant adopting not only the superficial

behavior patterns of the dominant culture, but also the underlying values of that culture. More, it means the adoption of the metaphysic which supports those values.

The hypothesis of this study is that the metaphysic of America is radically dualistic. It is predicated on viewing the world through diametrically opposed concepts: black-white, friend-enemy, good-bad, us-them, democratic-totalitarian and so on. No middle ground, no "shades of grey" are allowed by the conceptual set through which westerners understand events taking place around them. No third concepts are permitted to interfere with the neat and precise categories for understanding experience.

Indeed, such dualisms are essential to understanding the value patterns of American society. I will argue that American values rest on just such a radical distinction, a distinction between the form and content of behavior. Behavior is bifurcated into form and content, and form -- i.e., style, flair, élan, class -- is exalted above content (i.e., morals). I will argue that this is the bequest of ancient Greece, the Greece of Plato and Aristotle, of Aristophanes and Sophocles; the Greece which valued aesthetics over morals, bravado over justice and slavery over dignity. The same Greece which invented crucifixion, head down -- and practiced it with gusto -- is the ethical model of modern western civilization, as many history texts are proud to point out.

Needless to say, distinctions like these are incompatible

with Judaism. The emphasis on style -- form -- contradicts a fundamental Jewish thesis that proper behavior is defined by its moral content. Yet, I claim that such values typify America's ideals and that assimilation must be understood in light of them.

I do not wish to claim that Jews cannot or ought not live in America. But, I do sense profound conceptual and moral difficulties with which all Jews must -- but usually have not -- come to grips. It is not that Jewish thinkers and writers have not discussed America and Jews in America; it is that they have not dug deeply enough into the bedrock of American cultural ideals, into the foundations of America's values. The first step in this confrontation must be an understanding of the dualistic metaphysic and the "appearance ethic" of America. At the same time, the American Jew needs a knowledge and appreciation of Judaism's metaphysics and ethics. Thus, what I am claiming is that we must deal with life in America from a position of knowledge and from a Jewish perspective -- for history has all too often shown that in the end we can do no other.

The Glory That Was Greece

America is the heir to the Greek tradition and so Americans are taught. For example, high school and college students are tutored in the glory that was Greece. They are regaled with the marvels of Greek architecture, politics and literature.

Then they are shown that we in America follow in the footsteps of Greece, that America is the heir to the legacy.

The Greeks invented democracy, or so the young are taught. The wonders of Greek architecture -- the doric and ionic columns, the magnificent temples and statuary -- are more than mere objects of study. Pictures, slides and photographs, even travel posters, are often prominently displayed. Greek myths and literature -- carefully interpreted to reflect the democratic spirit and the "love of truth" -- are required reading in many if not most schools.

As youngsters are instilled with a love of Greece, so too are adults. Movies and television programs glorify and romanticize life in ancient Greece and our relations, distant though they may be, with her.⁴ Feature articles in newspapers and magazines frequently allude to the greatness of Greece and its immediate offspring, Rome.

Ancient Greece is lauded, celebrated. One never hears a bad word about Greece, though there are innumerable that could be said and said with justice. Perhaps this is because America is the heir and to slander the father is to slander the son.⁵ The depth of the celebration of Greece is almost pathological; for, in order to celebrate, facts are alternately ignored and distorted. The mythology of Greece is a case in point.

Myths in which the "gods" rape women with alacrity, fight among themselves or take opposing sides in mortal wars are read by almost every child in the United States during their

schooling. But the sexuality of Zeus et. al., their immorality, greed and bickering are studiously ignored. Such stories are never interpreted as reflecting values of Greek society. Never are they taken as embodiments of cultural ideals. I need not stress the point that myth and folklore do function to embody ideals, ideals meant to be emulated -- our own aggadah is a classic illustration. Yet, fundamental Greek values, like those found in Greek lore, are never brought out for explicit examination during the education of American children, in movies or even in magazine articles. The reason must be the esteem in which ancient Greece is held and the desire to celebrate her accomplishments.

Greece is not, moreover cannot be examined because America lauds Greece and celebrates her; indeed, Greece is held as an ideal for emulation. And, I must point out that this sort of ritual celebration lends official sanction and approval (if only implicitly) to the values underlying the stories, myths and "histories." That is, the absence of critical, objective analysis is a vehicle for the message that Greek values are not merely valid but correct; they are to be taken into advisement by today's Americans.

The relevance of such celebration for Jews in America is twofold. First, the other source of western culture, the source all but ignored, is our Torah.⁶ Many of the ideals held up as the legacy of Greece -- e.g., education -- are not Greek at all, but Jewish. I see no point in arguing that here;

rather, I wonder "Why are Jews denied credit for their contributions to civilization?" Moreover, in indoctrinating young Jews with the values of ancient Greece and helping them accommodate, are Jews being conditioned to a set of beliefs and values consonant with those of Judaism and viable Jewish life-styles? Second, as any Jew who has ever lit a channukah menorah should know, the Greeks were hardly the benign, enlightened people found in books and drama. For, enlightened people do not desecrate the shrines of others, as Antiochus did in Hasmonean times (an event and an epoch about which the "histories" are curiously silent).

What, then, was hellenic culture really like? What was Alexander and the hellenizing faction of ancient Judea so intent on having the rest of us adopt?

Among the primary objects of Greek though if not the dominant theme was physical beauty. It is perhaps the most noticable theme in Greek literature. Throughout Homer, Sophocles, the myths and, even, Plutarch there are constant approving references to physical beauty.

So highly prized was physical beauty that Plato explicitly equates it with "the Good." Plato flatly asserts that what is beautiful is ipso facto good and vice versa.⁷ Though this might seem uncharacteristic of Plato, nothing could be further from the truth. For, Plato holds that each of the Forms is identical to each of the other Forms.⁸ And, among the Forms are "the

Beautiful" and "the Good." So, it is fundamental to Platonic thought that "the Good" and "the Beautiful" -- "beauty" understood as physical beauty -- be identical.

Likewise throughout Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, there are constant references to beauty in the physical sense. Homer speaks of "beautiful Ilium," "beautiful Hector" and the like. This form of language and its constant repetition reveals the value placed on physical beauty. The range of things of which beauty is predicated and its repetition conspire to expose the depth with which physical beauty was regaled by both Homer and his audiences.

Beauty was of fundamental importance to ancient Greeks. For example, I heard a legend of one Alcibiades. "Alcibiades, the most gorgeous Greek" was guilty of desertion and high treason. But despite this, he was allowed to return to Athens and live there because they "could not bear to destroy such beauty." Legend even alleges that he was Socrates' lover, after his treason.⁹ The legend as I heard it may seem a bit much, but Plutarch, in the opening of his biography of Alcibiades, confirms the gist of the account I heard. Athens apparently indulged and even encouraged him in all sorts of excess on account of his beauty.¹⁰

One further example may be helpful in showing just how far Greeks would go in the name of beauty. In Oedipus Rex, we learn of the widespread custom of murdering imperfect infants. Though Oedipus is not left on the mountainside because of imperfection, the play teaches us that this was a common occurrence. A baby,

if physically marred in some way, was left to die by exposure. That is, upper-class Greeks not only sanctioned, but seemed to approve of murder in the name of beauty.

Thus, of paramount importance in hellenic life was aesthetics. "Aesthetics," for the hellene, meant physical beauty. Even art, which in Greece meant sculpture, was to imitate physical nature.¹¹ Aristotle goes so far as to argue that statuary must reflect physical perfection -- even if the subject was not himself physically perfect.¹²

Related to Greek aesthetics is Greek "ethics." By modern standards the agathos -- good man -- is a strange creature indeed. Largely this is because we conceive goodness in terms of morality; Greeks did not. For instance, the concept of the agathos is closely related to the socio-economic structure of the polis. The term literally means "a member of the ruling class."

The agathos, as seen in Greek literature and lore, was supposed to be able to defend himself and to enforce his will on others. He was expected to be brave, competitive and war-like. (An interesting aside is that the olympics were just a sort of war-games for the events were but the skills of the warrior.) His virtues were strength, cunning, magnanimity, unquestioning loyalty to his companions, etc. In short, he was a warrior, possessed of the "Homeric virtues."¹³ These "virtues" -- known in 18th century English thought as the "natural virtues," referring to the brutish "state of nature" -- were just those that permitted him to enforce his will with little or no concern for

the rights of others.¹⁴

It is imperative to note that the concept of "action" lays behind the concept of the agathos. It is not merely that the agathos is a warrior, but that he acts as a warrior that counts. That is, it is not his disposition to aggression, but his actually aggressing that is valued. The point is that motives, intentions, reasons, etc. are irrelevant in the Greek value scheme; action and action alone is the basis on which men are evaluated. Achilles fights and fights well; he is good. Agamemnon avenges the alleged abduction of his wife; he is good. But neither considers the motives, rights or intentions of others. Achilles follows Agamemnon because Agamemnon is the king. And Agamemnon never bothers to consider why Helen left him. Similarly, Zeus never wonders if young ladies would enjoy having his attentions forced on them.

In each case it is the act that counts. Intentions, motives, causes -- indeed anything that could be considered "content of behavior" -- are utterly beside the point. Also notice the sorts of behaviors presented for approval. Universally, they are aggressive and self-serving. They are also superficial insofar as nothing beyond what was observably done is taken into account.

Historians suggest a reason for the action basis of hellenic ethical evaluations. In the transition from rural to urban social organization, the polis was substituted for the clan. Thus, the polis became an extended form of the clan group. Solon's constitutional reforms, keystones of this transitional period,

directly aided in extending the kinship relation. Solon empowered all members of the polis to initiate legal proceedings and appeals against alleged criminals. It was not relevant whether the citizen initiating legal action had been the object of the alleged offense. Enfranchisement was universal and the allegation of wrongdoing was sufficient. In this way, wrongdoing ceased to be a wrong against an injured party. Wrongdoing ceased to be wrong done to a neighbor; it was transformed into "crime," a wrong against the entire populace. Thus, crime was a public offense, an offense against the polis (not the victim). Adjudication of grievances became public, not merely a rectification of wrongs. Consequently, public feeling was involved in the arbitration of claims and community solidarity became the cardinal feature of Greek "jurisprudence."¹⁵ Notice, there is no conception of justice -- distributive or otherwise -- in this; indeed the first mention of the desirability of justice by a Greek is found in Plato, centuries after Solon.

The result of these historical developments is that Greece evolved a "shame ethic,"¹⁶ which might also be called an "appearance ethic." Basic to such an ethic is the fact that evaluation is based on others' opinions of your behavior. That is, the standard of judgement is what others believe about your behavior. When people believe that your behavior is bad, it is bad; if they feel that it is good, then ipso facto it is. It is a "shame ethic" because one acts in such a way that he will not be ashamed when others become aware of what he has done. It is a

radical "appearance ethic" for it is predicated upon appearances, how you look in the eyes of your fellows and how they will respond to what they observe.

Under such an ethic, it becomes possible to be a villain without being bad. First, since "good" and "bad" are terms of social evaluation -- the opinions of others -- it is possible to commit a crime but be "good" as long as no one knows what you've done. Second, and more important, it is entirely possible to do evil, but give proper appearances and, hence, be adjudged good. In short, the sin is not in the act itself, but in the way it is done; sin is in getting caught. Conversely, merit is not in the act, but in the mere appearance of doing good.

Witness, for example, the "Myth of Gyges."¹⁷ In the myth, Gyges discovers a ring which enables him to become invisible. Suitably protected from discovery, he seduces the queen, murders the king, takes the throne and so on. In the story Gyges is not condemned for a murderer. His rape and usurpation are not mentioned. He is not held up as an evil man, but as a hero. He is cunning, deceitful and more; but he is successful and no one knows of his deeds.

In the Iliad is another instructive illustration. Achilles, one of the greatest of Greek heroes, tries to avoid Agamemnon's service. When the recruiters come to his town, he dresses up as a woman to avoid them. He thus becomes one of history's earliest draft dodgers. Remembering that Greeks had little regard for womankind -- women were believed to be but little above slaves

and slaves were not considered human -- we would expect a scathing condemnation of his behavior. Yet, the finger is never pointed at him for this ruse. He is condemned for choosing a sword to examine and getting caught!

The moral of these stories? Gyges is a murderer, rapist and usurper. But to the storytellers and their listeners, his accomplishments are more important than his villainy. His bravado is valued over what he did. His flair in stealing and maintaining power count more heavily than his viciousness. He gave no one cause to question his behavior; therefore, he is not a vile man. Achilles, on the other hand, failed to maintain appearances. He carried a stigma which, as Homer tells it, he had to work very hard to overcome. In both cases the lesson is clear: bravado, flair, style are weighed more heavily than what you do. It would not be snide to say that the ancient Greek could do exactly as he wished so long as he did not "get caught with his hand in the cookie jar."

In sum: the heritage of Greece, which receives official sanction in schools and unofficial sanction in the media, is twofold. In the first place, we inherit from Greece an exaltation of physical beauty. In the second, Greece has bequeathed an ethic based on élan and style -- public appearance -- rather than personal morality and uprightness. The question is, "To what degree are we still faithful to the Greek ideal?"

Synthesis and Centuries

The American heritage does not derive directly from Greece

and Israel. America's cultural heritage comes from a synthesis of Greek and Hebrew cultures: Christianity. That is, Greek and Hebrew beliefs were synthesized into the new religion and transmitted through the centuries. But, the Greek elements of the conglomerate were and still are dominant in both Christianity and secular Christianity (which is the dominant cultural ethos in America today).

The reasons why Greek thought dominates Christianity -- secular American Protestantism particularly -- are complex; too complex to go into here. However, two important features deserve mention in this regard. First, although Saul was born a Jew, he was born in a Greek province and educated in Rome. Moreover, his followers were Greek pagans, as indeed were the overwhelming majority of early Christians. Thus, Christianity began its career as a Greek phenomenon. Paul put his ideas into Greek and Greek into his ideas. The result was a radical reinterpretation of the original Jewish ideas, reinterpretations of a distinctively Greek cast.¹⁸ These Greek pagan elements have never been expunged (and many modern Christian thinkers are aware of them).¹⁹ Second, and more involved, is the Protestant Reformation and industrial revolution. In the post-Renaissance period, the implicit moral content of Catholicism has been systematically stripped away. Protestantism, following in the Renaissance "humanist" tradition, elevated faith to heights it had never known in standard Catholicism before. The "faith alone is enough" doctrine had always been accompanied, at least implicitly even though not in practice,

by a social justice doctrine. Early Protestant leaders, notably Luther and Calvin, sheared away the remnants of any supposed relation between faith and works. Likewise, the intense secularization of the industrial era has "spiritualized" religion right out of this world.²⁰

In any case, Christianity started with Jewish roots, but utterly abandoned them. The two faiths shared concepts, terms, sources and (allegedly) histories. But the meanings attached to the concepts, terms and sources are radically different. The faiths became like concentric circles sharing a common center but never touching. Jews and Christians speak what appears to be the same language and refer to the same sources, but fail to understand each other because they share none of the meanings.²¹ Indeed, so radical was Paul's reinterpretation of Judaism's concepts that few of Judaism's ideals have survived in Christianity.

For example, the Judaic ideal of moral perfection could not be comfortably incorporated into Christian theology. The ideal is ultimately antithetical to Christian thought. First, the ideal presupposes the possibility of substantial moral accomplishment by men. Christianity holds that men cannot be moral. The ideal is held up, but Christians are immediately told that it is unattainable in even the slightest degree. This is because, second, man is tainted by original sin. Man is innately depraved, genetically sinful; man cannot help but sin. Thus, moral behavior is impossible for him.

The idea that man was hopelessly evil is necessary in

Christian theology. It is necessary to motivate the need for someone to "redeem" (another classic reinterpretation!) man from his depravity and to help him overcome his inherent wickedness. Of course, this is just the role filled by the person of Jesus in Paul's theology.

Neither could the Hebrew ideal of universal brotherhood be subsumed into Christian dogma. Jews never interpreted their "chosen-ness" as implying God's distain for other people, that is as God's gracing one group so as to exclude others. Christians did. Good, salvation, life, hope, heaven, etc. were only for the initiated Christian, i.e., he who was baptized. Jews never reserved special priviledges or rights for congregants, only extra responsibilities. Their "community of the faithful" extended only to the baptized; ours includes anyone who shows kindness, mercy, justice. "The righteous of all nations ..." could never have been a Christian teaching.

The point here is that in the synthesis of Judaism and Greek paganism which became Christianity, the Hebrew elements were never valued heavily enough to balance -- much less overcome -- the Greek pagan features. Those few Hebrew ideals that were appropriated, were so changed that they quickly ceased to resemble the originals.

For example, Christian communities have never bothered with the second commandment. The strict injunction against "any manner of likeness," particularly representational statuary and painting, was simply ignored. Thus, the existing Greek emphasis

on physical beauty found no value to oppose it. Unopposed, it was never replaced.

"No doubt this law hindered the free development of plastic arts in ancient Israel; but it was of incalculable importance for the purity of the conception of God." ²² The god of the gentile Greeks, like the pagan gods before him, had had a human form. Like previous gentile dieties, this made images of Jesus not only possible but logical. The values implicit in the second commandment were never adopted by the Greek converts; thus, no values were set in opposition to the traditional Greek value of physical beauty. America's forefathers were people with established values concerning physical beauty and their religion provided them with no concepts, beliefs or values requiring them to direct their attention elsewhere -- for example, to moral conduct or character.

Just as the traditional Greek emphasis on the physical was not dispatched, the appearance ethic was also unopposed by a new vision. Actually, one would have expected just the opposite, for Jesus himself set "the law" -- i.e., Torah -- in marked opposition to Greek ethics. ²³ But, Paul had fastened on Greek fatalism and stoicism, philosophies inimical to moral efforts (his aceticism alone could make the case for his fatalism).

Paul and the Apostolic Fathers after him taught that man was essentially corrupt and sin-ridden. They taught that it was man's nature to sin and that the good was out of man's reach even should he try to be moral. They concluded that it was man's lot, his nature, to sin; man could not but sin. There was no reason

to try to motivate moral ideals, much less moral behavior, for inevitably man could not be moral. More, man inevitably would be wicked. Thus, virtually insurmountable theological barriers were erected to the incorporation of moral ideals in the new religion.

Moreover, Christians were provided with the miracle of confession. Confession granted instant relief from sin -- no matter that the wrong done had not been redressed. The situation developed that one could virtually sin as much as one wished, confess and be expiated. The barriers to the promulgation of morality via religion were formidable indeed; so formidable that there was no reason to supplant previous ethical systems. While there was always the latent potentiality for bringing Jewish ethics to the gentile, the church failed to do so. The old ethic was never challenged; never challenged, it was never replaced.

The Appearance Ethic in America Today

Skipping centuries of social evolution, which are not our concern here, we find ourselves in modern America. America is a Christian country, granted a secular Christian country, but for our purposes this distinction is not of great importance. What is important is the survival, today, of values and beliefs which originated and developed in ancient Greece, and which were incorporated and transmitted -- as I have argued -- more or less intact through the centuries.

The appearance ethic, an ethic under which it is more important to appear than to be, is the ethical legacy of Greece, Rome and Christendom. Hebrews valued proper behavior, Greece valued aesthetics and Paul synthesized the two. Today we have an aesthetic of behavior; what you do is less important than what people see. The style of your behavior, its technique²⁴, is the basis of evaluation, not what it accomplishes or is intended to accomplish. Thus, it is entirely possible to rob people blind, but doing so with "class" remain (or, better, be) socially approved.

An example from fiction immediately springs to mind. In the television series "It Takes a Thief," Robert Wagner played Alexander Mundi. Al Mundi is a professional thief -- and proud of it -- a spy and an adventurer. He is seductive and smooth. He is utterly without scruple or conscience. In short, he is a classic case of moral emptiness. Is he the villain of the series? Not at all, he is the hero, the model presented for approval and emulation. His moral shallowness is more than offset by his style and his "class." He is unprincipled, but no matter, he is "cool."

The message of "It Takes a Thief" is clear. Stealing is acceptable, if you have style. Seduction is all right, if you're cool. Stealing, deceiving and cheating are sanctioned in the presence of style. Al Mundi has technique, but little else; he is a modern day Gyges (indeed, his expertize at second story work is a modern and more realistic analog of Gyges' invisibility).

Like Gyges, Al Mundi does not behave properly -- in the sense of intending worthwhile ends by worthwhile means -- but he gives the proper appearances. "Proper appearances" entails following a set of rules which regulate not means and ends, but the forms (styles) of those behaviors. When socially sanctioned forms are displayed, means and ends are not brought into question: "proper behavior" is redefined as behavior that appears proper. Style "is not merely regulative of social behavior; it is an order of 'appearance' constitutive of that behavior."²⁵

"It Takes a Thief" is not the only example of the survival of the appearance ethic; but it is one of the clearest examples one could hope for. What is important about this show and others -- like "Switch," "Police Woman," "On The Rocks," "Happy Days" and the like -- are the ideals they project. Their message is that if your behavior fulfills the requisite social forms, your inner feelings, intentions, desires are beside the point; if your behavior has style -- in Fonzi's words ("Happy Days"), if it's cool -- what you intend to do or what you actually do is irrelevant (even if what you do is steal or cheat). What is worse, this message is projected for the audience to approve and to emulate.

Examples from real life are as abundant as those from fiction. They show that judgement is passed on style. Nixon, for example, didn't have it, so he is condemned. John Kennedy had style and he became a folk hero for it. Kennedy's youthful exuberance, his flair, his charm and charisma are the basis on which he is judged.

His escalation of the Viet-Nam conflict -- which is universally ignored -- his abuse of the C.I.A. (as at the Bay of Pigs), his often inept and inadequate grasp of economic and political theory never enter into evaluations of Kennedy.

The point is that style, flair, élan, the obedience to informally promulgated social forms have replaced ethics as the standard of judgement. People are judged, promoted, applauded, sought after not because of their learning, their wisdom or their sagacity. The rightness or wrongness of conduct is irrelevant. The only consideration is "Does the person have 'class'?", "Does he play by the rules?" And "the rules" are the do's and don't's of social gratuities and ritual chit-chat. If one obeys socially sanctioned conventions, one is good; it does not matter what you do as long as you do it with style.²⁶

And Now?

America is a culture founded on the primacy of Greek values, beliefs and perceptions. We have dealt with but a small aspect of the Greek weltanschauung. Yet, the degree to which Greek values have survived in the cultural ethos of America is startling. The implications are bound to be far-reaching.

I do not think I need to argue that America's appearance ethic and the values underlying and supporting it are inimical to Jewish authenticity. The kind of values, the nature of "ethical" reasoning, the focus of attention -- while, on the surface, not contradictory to or even inconsistent with halacha -- are sufficiently

different, even on the surface, to raise significant problems. Can one master both conceptual sets? The problem is that the foci of halachic and American values are so far apart that despite the surface compatibility -- it is, after all, possible to both do good and appear proper simultaneously -- it is questionable that one can master the art of doing good, fashionably.

At a deeper and more significant level, the two world views are diametrically opposed. One gives ascendance to good deeds; the other, fashionable appearances. One values personal piety and morality, the other dispenses with these and values physical superficialities. This conflict is beyond resolution; for, one cannot put unique emphasis on morals and style simultaneously. One cannot both value and devalue one and the same thing at one and the same time. The upshot is that one cannot simultaneously have an American heart and a Jewish heart. Just like oil and water, American and Hebrew thinking do not mix -- the best that can be anticipated is an unsteady suspension (the all too appropriate chemical term for an oil-water mixture).

Because the two value schemes -- and the metaphysic which accompanies each -- do not mix, Judaism if it is to survive must constitute a counter-culture. This, in a very real sense, is nothing new; Judaism is the world's oldest counter-culture. But in America particularly, Jews have stopped thinking of themselves as members of a counter-culture. Perhaps it is time we reacquaint ourselves with the meaning and significance of being revolutionary, of being a counter-culture. It is then that

our historical mission can reassert itself and we can deal with America without the risk of being seduced by -- assimilating to -- Greek beliefs.

S.H. Parker

Notes

¹ Irving Howe, "Yiddish Humor -- The Adventures of the Fabuluous Shlemiel," New York Times, 4 January, 1976.

² Claims regarding the three generations are really metaphoric. The phenomena I am describing as taking three generations often occurred in one or two generations, or even three or four and sometimes they did not occur at all. The metaphor is meant to suggest three phases of social and psychological development.

The metaphor of the three generations is Rabbi Gedalyah Engel's. Dr. Engel's work on Israeli aliyah, from which this idea is taken, will appear in Analysis.

³ The idea that Israel is to be seen as resurrected is Franklin Littell's (The Crucifixion of the Jews, Harper & Row, New York, 1975). Littell's analysis of Israel as crucified and resurrected is both novel and enlightening. Littell succeeds as few others in bringing the printed page alive with his passion. It is unfortunate that his account will probably not be as widely read among the Christians for whom it is intended, than among Jews.

⁴ So deeply cherished is the parentage of Greece that it is taken for granted and proudly proclaimed. I have before me an advertisement from the New York Times (4 January, 1976) for an ABC-TV special entitled "ABC News Directions: The Will To Be Free." The ad declares, in large bold-faced type, "Moses, Socrates, Jesus and Thomas Aquinas were [America's] great-great-grandfathers" (emphasis added).

⁵ The ideas of being the "heir" to the true spirit of Greece and the believed father-son relationship are too important to pass without comment. The strange similarity between the way in which America conceives itself as related to Greece and certain concepts from Christian theology (viz., the myth of supercedence) borders on the absurd. Has Greece come to function for secular Americans in the way in which "Christ" once did? I leave that point to the reader.

⁶ See note 3 above; Moses is mentioned, but not Judea or Israel and certainly not "the Jews." Thus, Moses is appropriated by Americans and torn from his historical context.

⁷ Symposium, 202a.

⁸ He argues this in Protagoras.

⁹ Plato's presentation of him in Symposium tends to confirm this conjecture.

¹⁰ In his Lives.

¹¹ See for example, Republic, Bk. II.

¹² Nicomachean Ethics.

¹³ A.W.H. Adkins, Moral Values and Political Behavior in Ancient Greece, Chatto & Windus, London, 1972; ch. I.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ George Thomson, The First Philosophers, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1972; p. 228 ff.

¹⁶ Adkins, op. cit.

¹⁷ Republic 358b.

¹⁸ See the appropriate sections of Rev. A. Powell Davis' recently reissued The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Signet, New York, 1975) and Littell, op. cit., p. 24 ff.

¹⁹ For example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, Harper & Row, New York, 1966; p. 79. Also Davis, op. cit.

²⁰ See Richard Rubenstein's The Cunning of History (Harper & Row, New York, 1975) whose discussions of secularization are particularly enlightening. On "spiritualization" see Littell, op. cit., e.g. p. 90.

²¹ I am indebted to Rabbi Joseph Radinsky, Congregation Sons of Abraham, for the notion of "concentric circles" and the analysis which follows.

²² J.H. Hertz, Pentateuch and Haftorahs, Soncino Press, London, 1972; p. 295.

²³ Mathew 5, 17-20.

²⁴ See Robert Merton's introduction to Jacques Ellul's The Technological Society, John Wilkinson (trans.), Vintage Books, New York, 1964; esp. pp. vi-vii.

²⁵ John Murray Cuddihy, The Ordeal of Civility, Basic Books, New York, 1974; p. 14.

²⁶ Indeed, it is plausible to argue that all of American foreign policy must be understood in these terms: the raw exercise of power burnished to a "respectable" appearance by social forms. National interest, together with justice, seems to have been thrown by the boards under our policy of "detente."