

*This thinksheet is a furrowed-brow (quizzical), God-praising reflection on the fact that Jews, who have never been more than a minuscule fraction of the human race, have had--for their numbers--the most astonishing influence on the global question WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A HUMAN BEING?*

1. My most-admired Israeli is Abba Eban, who (as a Labor Party notable) was bumped out of power by Menchem Begin, who (with his Likud Party) has been a mitigated diaster in Israeli politics (the mitigation being, that despite the hybris of pushing the invasion all the way to Beirut, it's perpetually necessary to make, for Israel, sufficient psychogeographical space in the Middle East).
2. Eban's upcoming TV series, HERITAGE (DIAL, Feb/84, 10ff), will refreshingly concentrate not on the Jew as history's victim (which we've all be hit with ad nauseam) but with the Jew as history's most astonishing (considering numbers) contributor--an affirmation I consider inarguable, and a (if not the primary) root of antisemitism, (Parallel: Just today, 29Jan84, we had in our home the paperless mother of an astonishingly beautiful Guatemalan who didn't make it in our highschool. Said I to Loree, "She probably would have made it were she less beautiful." Loree: "Probably so.")
3. About this far along in a thinksheet, I begin to wonder how to conclude. (I can see Russell Baker stuck with this problem about this far, proportionately, along in a column.) Chances are the thinksheet, from here on to the end, will wander around trying to bump into something important, maybe even solemn. But not to worry: The thinksheet's point is entirely made in the opening italics.
4. "Misery loves company," but (I add) company hates misery. Jesus says "Rejoice with rejoicers and weep with weepers," and everybody knows there're more folks ready to obey the former than the latter instruction. The lamenting type of weeper is especially unattractive no matter how important, for our humanity, it is to listen to Jeremiads. The pits is "Ain't it awful what they did to us?" heard as "Just look what you did to us!" Even Elie Wiesel, noble as he is, does not entirely escape this whining tone of voice that dominates so much of the Holocaust literature. I can take it much better when it's half of full-remembering, the other half being what the Eban TV series emphasizes. What a relief to direct attention to the (Eban says) inexplicable phenomenon of Jewish contributions, historically and presently, to human culture and civilization!
5. Of course cultural contribution from any group cannot entirely avoid counter-influence on the group. If influence ON becomes stronger than influence FROM, the group is absorbed and disappears--the "assimilation" which Judaism has striven against throughout its history. Today, increasingly, both Christian and Jewish identities are problematic; and this fact (1) is beginning to make Jewish/Christian dialog more fruitful in this common-problem overlap, while (2) promoting, largely as a byproduct, the emergence of a common (I call it "biblical") identity-in-diversity. An hour ago (30Jan84) a phonecall from Greenwich Village, a Jew read me Ps.150 and said "I know nowhere else we Jews and Christians can go (than the Bible) to learn how to have hearts singing to God." I thought of Oxyrhunchus Hymn, the oldest notated Christian hymn, which, because of Jewish influence, breaks with the pagan (Hellenistic) tradition of 1 word / 1 tone--the Jewish psalmodic chant (much more like our "singing") being incorporated: a revolutionary musical event in the Greek-Roman world (and a small instance of this thinksheet's point; in this case, Jewish influence through Christianity).