

**PRINCIPLES OF COMPREHENSIVE SELF-RENEWAL
BY STEPHEN R. COVEY IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF ANCIENT
GREEK ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑ AND THE IDEAL OF ΚΑΛΟΚΑΓΑΘΙΑ**

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Abstract: Taking into account the ideals of ancient areata ethics (παιδεία and καλοκάγαθία), the article describes the concept of a comprehensive self-renewal of Stephen R. Covey in four dimensions/spheres of renewal. The first dimension of renewal is related to the physical sphere; the second dimension involves spiritual qualities; the third dimension is of mental/intellectual characteristics; and the fourth dimension addresses community qualities, i.e. socio-emotional values. This contemporary concept is described on the background of the philosophical values of ancient Greece: character development, concern of ἀρετή and μετάνοια; also broadly understood care for own ψυχή.

Keywords: ancient philosophy, παιδεία, καλοκάγαθία, self-development, Covey.

1. Introduction

Stephen Richards Covey (1932-2012) was a remarkable figure in the American world of Leadership Coaching and an excellent trainer of self-development. In 1998 he was awarded the Thomas Moore College Medallion and the prestigious International Man of Peace Award. He has gained popularity with numerous publications on the analysis of leadership and the idea of holistic autodidacticism (see: Covey, 2015; Covey, Merrill, 2009, pp. 219-227). He devoted his life to teaching principally focused on the release of human potential. Living according to the motto: „Let life be like a crescendo”¹ (Covey, 2017, p. 8) believed that „»every person is an invaluable [unity – A.M.]; a being equipped with a huge, almost infinite potential and abilities«” (Covey, 2017, p. 8; Covey, 2014, p. 5.), which can discover, amplify and improve itself.

¹ Crescendo means gradual amplification, ascending, growing, also increasing dynamics. It is a musical term derived from the Italian language.

The aim of the article is to familiarize the reader with this contemporary idea of complex self-development of the human being in the approach proposed by Covey. Characteristics of Covey's concept are preceded with a concise description of ancient, aristocratic forms of comprehensive human shaping. However, in the last part of the article, using the method of comparative analysis and summarizing deliberations, is made an attempt to show common features of the distinguished programs of taking care of oneself in various aspects of life; also care for one's own humanity through its systematic and coherent emablation².

2. *Παιδεία* and *καλοκάγαθία* as ancient forms of shaping humanity

The traditional pre-Socratic values of ancient Greece focus on the attributes/values of the body: physical vigour, physical health, physical beauty and vitality. External goods related to power, fame and the desire to get rich are also important. Socrates (5th century BC), an ancient Athenian philosopher, slightly changes this perspective by discovering the essence of man and introducing a particularly valuable value: knowledge (cf. Reale, 2000; cf. Jaeger, 1962, pp. 177-208). This knowledge, according to the postulates of this exceptional thinker, should not concern the phenomena of nature, nor should it focus exclusively on the physical beauty of the body or external goods, but should concentrate on man and exclusively on human matters. Here man should know itself and take care of itself in order to realize the pattern of the ancient *ἐνκράτεια* (encrathy) as the control over itself in states of agitation, experiencing various difficulties, physical impulses and all kinds of impulses or disturbing tensions (cf. Reale, 2000, p. 319). Through its ability to control itself, man equips itself with *ελευθέριος* (eleuthery) as human freedom and *αυταρκεια* (autarky) as the autonomy of virtue and the virtuous man (cf. Reale, 2000, p. 335). Undoubtedly, the emphasis in ancient Athenian philosophy on the importance of man and moral values is a shift towards philosophical anthropology and ethics.

Old Greek philosophical reflection combines philosophical anthropology with ethics. While the anthropologist attempts to answer the question of who man is, the ethicist reflects mainly on its moral and intellectual perfection. This perfection is formed in the process of extracting truth from an interlocutor: a student with a burden of truth. This is what Socrates does. In the conducted dialogue he comes into the succour of his interlocutor, causing a change in the system of his thinking and feeling. The aim of Socrates' actions is *μετάνοια* as a kind of conversion: a spiritual transformation or a spiritual-intellectual transformation of the interlocutor. Socrates acts, as it were, out of concern for his interior, and so for his soul. As he claims himself, „one should strive for the education of the soul, the discovery of the »dormant good – virtue« in it”. (Krasnodębski, 2011, p. 31).

² I use the word emablation in the sense of caring, looking after and cherishing.

Thus, an ancient Socrates-ranking thinker becomes a peculiar therapist, a doctor of souls treating conversation as a peculiarly understood thought gymnastics (see: Krasnodębski, 2011, p. 29). Such an activity hides the educational and at the same time cleansing task of *paideia*. Socrates' dialogue is a clash of two consciousnesses, two systems of evaluation, two evaluative personalities who, in a binding conversation, free themselves from their hitherto restrictive beliefs in order to discover in themselves true knowledge not based on belief (cf. Jaeger, 1962, pp. 63-125). This dialogue, therefore, has a *pajdeutic* function.

At this point, however, it should be noted that the significance of *παιδεία* is not unambiguous. *Παιδεία* is a multidimensional concept and in ancient times it developed in many perspectives. This notion is interpreted, in their own way, by schools: of cynics who, while contesting culture, define *παιδεία* as a way of freeing themselves from the realization of illusory goals imposed on individuals by society, while at the same time postulating simple life; of the hedonistic school of cynics; of the megarean school calling for a specific catharsis of the soul; of the therapeutic school in Elida, which identifies education with spiritual transformation; and of the sophists (see: Krasnodębski, 2011, p. 40).

Ancient sophists lay the foundations for the Greek *paideia* (cf. Jaeger, 1962, pp. 302-309). By charging appropriate fees for educational services, they educate various social groups (including burghers and merchants) (cf. Plato, 1993, p. 185; cf. Krasnodębski 2011, p. 28). For example, the sophistication of Protagoras expresses a *pajdeutical* ideal in an anthropological formulation: „man is the measure of all things” (*πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπος*) (see: Krasnodębski, 2011, p. 28). *Premia* of Protagoras places man at the center of reflection and is therefore profoundly anthropological and relating to the values of humanism (cf. Jaeger, 1962, pp. 314-327; cf. Wasilewski, 2013, pp. 235-237).

Ancient „*παιδεία* is humanism, which is not only the knowledge about man, but also the »method« of reaching humanity and achieving it. And man achieves its humanity through updating, rational shaping of its ability according to its nature” (cf. Krasnodębski, 2011, p. 12). The essence of ancient *παιδεία* is to consciously build one's life in the internal, spiritual dimension; it is care and concern for the development of the culture of the spirit in accordance with the rational principles of the antique *λόγος* (cf. Krasnodębski, 2011, p. 34-36). „*Παιδεία* deals with the education of the *arete*, i.e. the nobility of the soul, becoming accessible to all” (Krasnodębski, 2011, p. 16). There is no doubt that *paideia* understood in this way is one of the „pillars of the Greek mentality: the desire to shape and educate, the care for what they themselves called *παιδεία*” (Hadot, 2000, p. 35). It is also a model, ancient example of a program of self-development and self-improvement.

Improving oneself requires effort, perseverance, outstanding self-denial, exceptional tirelessness and willingness to work hard and multidimensionally on oneself. This multidimensionality in designing oneself and one's humanity is clearly expressed in the drawing of a Vitruvian man (*homo quadratus*) by a Roman mathematician, architect and engineer Mark Vitruvius Pollio. This artistic sketch shows, in a way, the place of man in the

world. A peculiar ideal geometry, faultless symmetry of this drawing presents a mature, naked man as a being standing in the centre of the world. His silhouette, inscribed in a circle and a square, is an expression of human perfection, geometric proportions, mathematical order, balance, harmony, and at the same time individualism. This antique and renaissance sketch of a human figure becomes an expression of the full artistic mandala of Western culture: the extraction of full humanity in the spirit of *ἀρετή* (*aretai*) (cf. Krasnodębski, 2011, pp. 13, 52-53; cf. Frimark 2011). A similar tone of fullness, balance and harmony is also expressed by the ancient preachers of the *καλοκάγαθία* programme.

Καλοκάγαθία (*kalós kagathós*) is the ideal of aristocratic upbringing in ancient Greece. It means a harmonious, moderate man (*sophrosyne*), full of the advantages of soul and body, acting according to the principles of Greek *arete* (cf. Kopaliński, 2000, p. 248; cf. Jaeger, 1962, p. 135-154). *Καλοκάγαθία*, meaning spiritual and bodily perfection, often also expresses itself in a noble attitude towards the world (cf. Lam, 1994, p. 924); this is a characteristic feature of free people. It is the intellectual and moral educational ideal of the classical Hellada, equipping man in the feature of generosity. According to the ancient Greeks, the improvement into *καλοκάγαθία* – meaning beautiful man (*kalós*) and good man (*agahtós*) – awakens a sense of freedom. This, in turn, becomes the source of eudaimony: happiness, fullness, sense of autonomy and contemplative life (cf. Krasnodębski, 2011, pp. 89-92; cf. Jaeger, 1962, p. 133).

The ancient *παιδεία* and *καλοκάγαθία* projects described above teach man a culture of caring for himself and his multifaceted development, and thus – in a broader, non-individual dimension – they also foster the formation of a healthy and mature society: a community as a set of interdependent individuals. Even nowadays, many self-development programs converge with ancient concepts and draw inspiration from them. These concepts do not lose their relevance, being a special form of mobilization for man of the 21st century, allowing to draw attention to important aspects of human life and constituting a specific incentive for multilevel development (cf. Murzyn, 2011). A contemporary example of such a concept of multi-level development is the set of principles of comprehensive self-renewal of the aforementioned Stephen R. Covey.

3. Principles of comprehensive self-renewal by Stephen R. Covey

Familiarizing with the principles of comprehensive self-regeneration by Stephen R. Covey, requires first to specify seven habits of effective action. Covey distinguishes the habit: ‘be proactive’. It’s an invitation to proactivity, a call to take responsibility for one’s own life, decisions and actions, and a belief that whatever we want to do, all initiative is on our side and

it stems from the inner cortical values of our hearts. This is because, being proactive, we act from inside (cf. Covey 2018, pp. 69-71; cf. Covey 2017, p. 359)³.

Defining proactivity, Covey draws on the thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi and Anna Eleanor Roosevelt. While the Indian philosopher of freedom and respect convinces Covey that: „Others cannot take our self-respect away from us unless we give it to them ourselves” (Covey, 2018, p. 71; cf. Lazari-Pawłowska, 1967; cf. Clément, 1994), yet the American diplomat convinces with her sentence: „No one can hurt you without your consent” (Covey, 2018, p. 71; cf. Roosevelt, 1958). Both declarations are an important self-forming expression of the principle of proactivity.

The second habit: ‘start with a vision of the end’ makes us aware of our finiteness. Its beginning, just like in the habit of proactivity, is also the realization of the central value of the heart, and thus the discovery of its inner conduction system. This inclination teaches us to devote ourselves to what is extremely important to each of us and, as Covey directly writes, „really matters” (Covey, 2018, pp. 96-97).

The completion of both the first and second habit is, in a way, the third habit: ‘do what is most important first’ guided by free will. This habit is connected with the stage of creation and transformation of thought into action (cf. Covey 2018, pp. 147-150; cf. Covey, 2005).

Another, fourth habit distinguished by Covey: ‘Think in terms of win-win’, has the status of a habit of interdependence, because it relates the individual to others. Thinking according to value/relationship of win-win assumes mutual benefits in conducted interactions or mutual interactions (cf. Covey, 2018, p. 213).

The fifth habit: ‘try to understand first, then be understood’, is related to the ability to communicate and listen empathically as listening with the intention of understanding (cf. Covey 2018, p. 245-250; cf. Covey 2014, p. 61-62; cf. Covey 2009, p. 255-262).

The sixth habit: synergy, is a reference to the previously mentioned win-win attitude and empathic communication skills. Covey calls synergy the essence of leadership and appreciation of differences (cf. Covey 2018, p. 290). Synergy „catalyzes, releases, and unites the greatest human forces, meaning that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. It also means that the relationship between the individual parts of the whole itself is a part of the whole, and the most catalytic, strengthening and unifying part, the most excitatory” (Covey 2018, p. 275; cf. Covey 2018, p. 185-189; cf. Covey 2017, p. 257-263).

The six habits of Covey’s effectiveness are complemented by the seventh habit of ‘sharpening the saw’. Covey’s principles of comprehensive self-renewal belong to the level of the seventh habit. This level includes four dimensions of renewal. These include the physical dimension of renewal, the spiritual dimension of renewal, the mental dimension of renewal and the social-emotional dimension of renewal (see: Covey 2017, pp. 359-365).

³ At this point it is worth to mention, that the pole opposite to the described proactivity is held by reactivity. Reactive people are subject to external circumstances, social environment and "social weather"; they are controlled by outside.

The physical dimension is expressed in the proper care of the body, proper nutrition, rest and relaxation, as well as an appropriate, systematic form of gymnastics, in which a person undertakes to shape his or her endurance and flexibility of the body. Both of these characteristics are related to cardiovascular fitness and toning calisthenic exercises (cf. Covey, 2018, p. 303-304)⁴.

Covey writes solemnly about the second dimension (spiritual dimension): „The spiritual dimension is your core, the center of yourself, your guarantee in relation to your own system of values”. (see: Covey, 2018, p. 306). It is precisely because of the strong dependence of human spirituality on axiological connotations that the restoration of this dimension is carried out individually, because each of us concentrates its own, individual system of values; moreover, the values we profess are defined differently by each of us. This is how David O. McKay's (1873-1970) postulate that the greatest battles of life are fought daily in the quiet corners of one's soul is realized, because with one's own interior one gives meaning to what is happening (cf. Covey 2018, p. 308; cf. Covey 2018).

Covey's mental dimension is associated with the need to learn and to constantly broaden our horizons, for example through a simple activity of reading and understanding; reading texts that broaden our cultural awareness as a consequence of noticing new paradigms that sharpen our mental saw. Working in the mental dimension is a journey to a deeper level of our own thoughts and feelings in order to efficiently influence the clarity of thinking, analysis, inference or clarification of our own statements (cf. Covey, 2018, p. 310).

Taking care of the physical, spiritual and mental sphere or, as Covey metaphorically writes, sharpening a saw in the physical, spiritual and mental dimension is a work on one's own private sphere (see: Covey, 2018, p. 301). It is a long-term process of shaping one's own character. Sharpening the saw blade in this private sphere is called by Covey as practicing daily private victory (cf. Covey, 2018, p. 311). However, victory in the private sphere requires complementing the social-emotional dimension.

The social-emotional dimension includes the principles of interpersonal management, empathic communication and creative cooperation, which are applied to the emotional life of an individual. In the social-emotional dimension, we offer ourselves with the lever of serving others. According to Covey, the social and emotional dimensions of our lives „are closely related to each other, because emotional life is mainly, but not exclusively, a manifestation of our relationships with others” (cf. Covey, 2018, p. 311; see: Covey, 2018, p. 139-179).

Our lives become effective by entering into relationships with others. Then, looking beyond the alternative either-or, we begin to think in terms of a synergistic solution: I win – you win. This paradigm determines a beneficial solution for both sides of the relationship. Both parties then feel satisfaction with the decisions made and, being aware of the fact that they have obtained valuable benefits, they are more willing to put their obligations into practice;

⁴ Calisthenics (pol. Kalistenika) is a form of strength training connected with active work on the body and its mass.

they willingly implement their ideas (Covey, 2018, p. 213). As active individuals, we also base our actions on work in which input, creative attitude and influence matter. In this way we also build our individual value.

Covey uses Viktor Frankel, Dr. Hans Selye, Bernard Shaw and Nathan Eldon Tanner as the intellectual nourishment for his ideas. Frankel's psychiatrist-logo-therapist, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, is appreciated for focusing attention on the problem of the meaning of life and effective searching for and finding in life a special element that elevates us/man over mundane (Covey, 2018, p. 313; cf. Covey, 2014, p. 58-67). Hans Selye, a Canadian doctor, professor at the Institute of Medicine and Experimental Surgery of the University of Montreal, author of the book *From Dream to Discovery: On Being a Scientist*, convinces Covey with his reference to the domain of philosophy of life, which results in non-exhaustive reflections on the illness of the century: the stress whose coping conditions a happy and fulfilled life, triggering a constructive reflection on „the effects of the contribution of significant and exciting work [as a special form of introductory effort – A.M.] good in the life of others” (Covey, 2018, p. 313; see: Covey, 2014, p. 58-67; see: Selye, 1978; see: Selye, 1963). In turn, prose writer and philosopher George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), referring to the concept of Life Force and Creative Evolution, is interesting for Covey in paradoxical-sounding message: „It's a real joy in life – serving a cause that you yourself consider great. It's being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish, little lump of ailments and wrongs, complaining that the world has not sacrificed enough to make you happy [...] my life belongs to the whole community [...] Before I die, I want to be fully exploited. The harder I work, the more I live. I enjoy life in itself. For me, it is not a fast-burning light. It is a kind of a magnificent torch that I have been given for a moment to hold and that I want to light with the brightest flame before passing it on to future generations” (cf. Covey, 2018, p. 313).

The voice of the Canadian politician Nathan Eldon Tanner (1898-1982) converges with this conviction. By emphasizing the value of serving others, referring to the attribute of gratitude and unconditional love, he calls service „the rent we pay for the privilege of life on Earth” (cf. Covey, 2018, p. 313). In the act of opening up to the other, man as an individual strengthens its own individual value in the dimension of social life.

Covey proclaims the necessity of increasing the value of oneself by shaping internal cohesion as a *sine qua non* condition of the process of building a personal axiological horizon. Its role is to strengthen the sense of personal value. This position is reflected by words in which Covey concludes that „inner peace is the result of living according to true principles and values” (cf. Covey, 2018, p. 313). Man creates this proper value of itself only in the dimension of social life, opening itself to others in a way that is interdependent. This opening to others should assume pointing out to others their proactive nature, fullness, responsibility, and at the same time independence in writing positive life scenarios.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, both Covey's contemporary project and the recognized ancient *παιδεία* and *kalokagathia* projects aim at a common holistic, comprehensive concern for the human being. This versatility includes taking care of the physical sphere, caring for the body, health, well-being and vitality; it also includes the spiritual aspect of life expressed in discovering, building and cultivating one's own value system, taking care of one's axiological core; it also includes intellectual and mental values that apply not only to individual life, but also extend to the social-emotional level, related to community life and the aspect of building relationships with others. The included projects, both ancient and contemporary, strengthen the process of self-cognition: the greater the knowledge about oneself, the more developed the calobiotics (the art of beautiful life); the greater the awareness of the advantages of the soul and body; the more durable the foundation for a harmonious life, in which eurhythmia prevails (proper rhythm) and which is commanded by proportion and order, reflected in the words and deeds of man of the culture of spirit and body.

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