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## **The Role and the Meaning of Antique Ethical Thought in Social Work**

A society, that would not have the poor and the ones in need would probably be poorer itself. The disabled, the poor, the ones disturbed by misfortune constitute the landscape of our society, but sometimes in such a manner, that they become it's invisible part. That's why it's important for a present-day man to give attention to those who have been pushed towards social margins. Those, who are not favored by fate, are incapable of changing their hard situation on their own. That's why the efforts of those, who despite of many obstacles, contribute to the change of the reality are indispensable. The condition of good, efficient help are the good organization skills, planning and the developed cognitive abilities; the right perceiving of reality, knowing the causes and predicting the effects. "The social work is a profession, that supports the social change, the resolving of problems arising in human interrelationships and also empowering and liberating people in order to ameliorate their welfare"<sup>1</sup>.

This work brings up the question of the need of ethics, being in fact the art of life, or the knowledge of ancient philosophers. The universal program sketched by Socrates, Plato, Epicureans or Stoics applied to social work can come out as it's fertile ground. The social work, as a domain, in which the virtues come true in action, I mean in the process of helping. should look for support of properly understood

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<sup>1</sup> "Praca socjalna" no 3, 2006, Aneks no I, p. 22n, transl. Kinga Wygnaniec.

axiology and knowledge. There is no more excelling proposition of combining mentioned spheres than in antique philosophy: the mind here provides the theory of morality, as a consequence of knowing the human nature. The intellectual practice, that implies work on self development, leading to the growth of sensitivity to the higher virtues can be named the school of rational thinking. Not all postulates of the ancient thinkers have sense in the modern world, that means they can't be realized in the domain of social work. Nevertheless the universal overall postulate of well preparing the worker to fulfill his mission of bringing help to the ones who need it seems justified. The practice of the mind that the ancient would strive for, alongside with the exercise in moral life is a timeless program, that gives possibilities of efficient and just behavior with respect to a man as a virtue.

### ***The Socratic care of the soul- more to be***

People use to treat antique philosophy with its ethical thinking as a way to improve thyself. That was a lonely journey in a seek for the highest virtues, that once rooted in a man could make him good and happy. The incorporation of ideal was an effect of years of efforts; intensive work on thyself, redeemed by suffer and close to heroism. It was believed, that this is the only condition for a man to muster up virtues, and that only few can aim it. The high status of wisdom back in the times of Pericles, didn't only avoid the loss of popularity, but became the popular want. The peak of the significance of wisdom was made by Socrates, who's made a virtue out of it. A moral life- a life according to the acts of mind- is a happy life. There is no other way for a happy man to take up than the one where the actions are preceded by reflection. Philosopher is the one that that desires and gains knowledge needed to shape thyself according to the requirements of mind. That is the sense of ethics envisioned by Socrates and Plato. The basis and the aim of this ethics is to shape thyself by the perfect model which is humanity, and discovering it is preceded by the internal reflection. Only

with a skilled eye one can see who he is, and who he should be. The wisdom has a practical aspect, because it considers what can be done to gain virtue. But first, one should ask about the virtue itself and thyself. Socrates believes, that human is an immortal soul, whose origins are in the world of ideas.<sup>2</sup> It's divine origin implies it the direction of metamorphoses and the goal it takes. In *Apology of Socrates* Socrates says that this is the most important undertaking in his life- to know thyself as a thinking, spiritual being and to care for own soul.<sup>3</sup>

Socrates, despite of his unawareness, in dialectic conversation revealed who a man is and what is his essence. His postulates and too demanding program didn't gain to many supporters. Nevertheless, we succeeded in building a on a basis of Socratic views philosophy focused on man. If nowadays we speak about dignity of a person, about its law to self-determination, then we need to know, that beyond this vision of a person there is tradition of antique thought of Socrates and other thinkers. A man as a most important being to itself is not only a part of cosmos, it is a micro-cosmos itself. Greek incentive: *Gnothi seauton* means for Socrates to recognize yourself as a precious being, which requires all the concentration and effort. To know thyself is to know the spiritual dimension of own humanity, non reducible to anything in the world of phenomena. Knowing thyself leads a man to recognize that the is a good himself.<sup>4</sup> *The care of the soul* expresses in shaping the moral virtues, not in satisfying the sensual needs. Socrates, when he develops this motif, he justifies it with a certain vision of man, rooted in a specified ontology. On the basis of orphic he develops the thesis about immortality, origins and destination of a man. Plato, who is combining the views of Socrates, Orphic and Pythagorean, believes in divine origin of the soul and it's possibility to get back to the divine world. The condition is purity of a soul, that is its moral perfection, that can be gained through asceticism and understood as a subordination of

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, 245d-246e.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Apology of Socrates*, 29d-31e.

<sup>4</sup> H.G. Gadamer *idea dobra w dyskusji między Platonem i Arystotelesem*, transl. Z. Nerczuk, Antyk, Kety 2002, p. 31n.

sensual desire to the rule of mind, and, in consequence, the constitution of borders for pleasure. In Plato's image of the continuous soul's life we can see the motif of its self-determination; possibility to sculpt in the material of a soul. The known myth from Plato's *Phaedrus* best explains this problem. A man-soul under the reign of mind, disciplines its desires that could be an obstacle in gaining knowledge. All that Greek associate with sensible life: moderation, setting yourself borders makes a man happy because he perfects according to his possibilities. I'd like to underscore one more time that the moral intellectualism leads to shaping a soul according to its needs, and in consequence brings a moderate, harmonic life. The requirements made by philosophy didn't only concern the abilities of mind but also the specific way of life.<sup>5</sup> The wisdom is the basis of self-determination and self-shaping, self-bringing up. The knowledge about virtues brings moral life, and so the one, that requires control and reflection of a man in every situation of recognizing good and heading towards it: a sensible and creative life. Concentration on gaining knowledge shall broaden the mind, bring new possibilities. To be moral means to get a habit of doing good (realizing virtues), because it means, first of all, to be responsive for virtues. Creativity, adjusted habit and eyesight pointed towards the good gives as a result a wider spectrum of freedom. Plato proposes a radical change of one's attitude to become a moral man, to reach perfection according to one's possibilities. It's meaningful that Plato has seen in giving up one's old life the only proper way of living.<sup>6</sup> Moral life based on knowledge is recasting yourself, that starts with knowing thyself as a virtue. The basic way of living proper life is nothing other but seeing yourself as a human: a being worth care, the most precious "ore", that you have nothing better apart. The conversion concerns transformation of a self according to the knowledge about the world and thyself, it is facing inside, to know one's dignity. The process of shaping self is taking up

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<sup>5</sup> J. Gwiazdecka, *Etyka Platona. O formie platońskiej refleksji moralnej*, Antyk, Kęty 2002, s. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Plato *Republic*, 514a- 516c.

responsibility for yourself and for your fate. Plato gives the power to create yourself and your life to a human, actually to his mind. In contrast to poets and playwrights he gives a human possibility to control his own fate unconditionally. No necessity (Ananke), nor destination (Moira) nor gods, or people or own desires and emotions stand in human's way to reach perfection. Philosopher believes hard in the power of mind, he believes no external powers can't fight *the one, who knows* and, thanks to power of knowledge he can pursue his aim. In is worth noticing, that this reasoning didn't much a popular those times conception of a world full of gods or deconstructive powers. Moreover, Plato convinces, that not only man can follow the way of good to live by its order, but he also can overcome death by dying alive. This program is dedicated to those, who aren't discouraged by the challenges of everyday struggle with yourself. Those *exercises in dying* make out of a man not as much a sage as they make out a strongman- hero (one of whom Socrates was). A hero that will not be forged by any obstacles, even by the fear of death.<sup>7</sup> Intellectual and moral shaping self to fully be a human is a duty of all who have a mind and are able to live by its principles. In effect a mind shapes a non conformist attitude, prepared to fight any pressure and manipulation.

This Socratic-Plato ethics however, despite its ambitious guidelines, seems to be a proposition for those, who will be stick in a social isolation in their perfection. This ethics doesn't assume the need of relations with others. Loneliness of a perfect philosopher- hero, having only his mind as a guide, succeeding in a field of fight with his weaknesses, appears as a problem. The only relation that is taken into consideration is a relation towards yourself and the world in its essence. Relation towards yourself is a relation based on reflection about who I am and who can I be; a reflection faced towards future, to become free from one's weaknesses and limits, that come from sensual needs and lust for

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<sup>7</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 67c-68d, Philosophy frees soul from sensual illusion, and in this sense it realizes the education in death; it is, in essence, an exercise in living, in the inner sphere of life. *Exercise in dying* in an attempt to free from a particular, emotional, and so partial view on things, to lift to a level of universal, normative and objective point of view.

fame and recognition. This relation is knowing yourself as limited to overcome it. A suffering that comes from the outside has no influence on a person provided with virtues and knowledge. To strike a balance, worst man's misery is *hybris*, man's worst enemy is himself- those are old lessons of sages. Wisdom becomes a light that lights man's way of life and allows him to be happy. Reward for a good life is a good life. Punishment for bad acts is degradation of yourself, because it pushes man into confusion. So one can easily see, that in this philosophy everything that's important takes place in a man's inside, and a world narrows down to stimuluses, that can be used in human psycho- intellectual structure development.

### **Stoic and epicurean proposition of developing happiness on a basis of spiritual exercises**

Stoic declared outright that for them philosophical wisdom is an exercise of soul.<sup>8</sup> For philosophy is not a far from life theory, but a way of life, a certain attitude towards it. That's why philosophical reflection was for them a therapy; a thing that frees from temporal concerns once you get a precise look at world, inner peace and freedom. This therapy frees from chaotic desires and inflated worries.

According to stoic any misery comes from human aspire to gain, what cannot be gained and avoid the unavoidable. In other words, they judge the situation wrongly and can't accept their fate, often marked with suffering. They are passive, where they could act, and active where actions don't bring expected results. That's why first of all a man should exercise in looking at reality to have a possibly wide perspective. This therapy requires ability to match to certain rules and tasks. As Pierre Hadot passes, one of the stoic lists: seeking, deepened study, reading and listening, focus, composure, and indifference for indifferent things.

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<sup>8</sup> Vide Pierre Hadot, *Filozofia jako ćwiczenie duchowe*, transl. P. Domański, Aletheia, Warszawa 2003, p. 24.

On the second we'll find hints like: reading, meditation, healing the lust, memories of the good, composure, filling the duties. The basis is a constant vigilance of spirit - focus (*prosoche*), that is concentrated on the current moment.<sup>9</sup> The focus allows to respond to the occurrence of fate immediately and properly. Thanks to the latter rules a man raises his ability of reflexive thinking and vigilance. Reading, study of spiritual masters wisdom, meditation on their sentences to remind them when needed are just few of the spiritual exercises helpful in dealing with tough fate occurrences. Concern can hide from us the simple joy of own being. So that a man should live the current moment, even if it's harmful. The exercise in focus on the current moment is a fight against emotions that interrupt in time of a sad moment.

In the learning of epicurean an important place is held by friendship.<sup>10</sup> It is a spiritual exercise itself in the full meaning of this word.<sup>11</sup> The aim of all philosophical schools is ameliorating yourself. All of them say that a man before internal change- conversion, lives in uncertainty. He is a victim of worries and desires. He can't live authentic life, what means he's not himself in this state of mind. Spiritual exercises are made to shape yourself, not to live according to social convention, but according to yourself- which is according to human nature. Any spiritual exercise is a return to yourself, return freeing *self* from alienation made by worries and desires. Thanks to those exercises it should obtain wisdom, that means a state of total freedom from lust, state of perfect clarity of sense, view on yourself and world. Living by sense is a conversion, a total change of point of view, lifestyle and behavior. Doing spiritual exercises caused a total revolt in system of virtues. It was because a man would throw off false virtues: richness, honor, pleasantries, and face the true ones: virtue, contemplation, simplicity of

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<sup>9</sup> Vide *ibid.* p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Giovanni Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej* t.III, transl. E. I. Zieliński, wyd. KUL, Lublin 1999, p. 272-274.

<sup>11</sup> Epicure [in] Pierre Hadot, *Filozofia jako ćwiczenie duchowe* p. 30, transl. Kinga Wygnanniec.

life. To be happy meant to be joyful, and not forgetting about creating social bonds based on good atmosphere, positive feelings and trust.

*Friendship is the biggest of all goods, that wisdom greets us for ensuring happiness throughout all the life.*<sup>12</sup>

A bond that links friends isn't and cannot be a relation of subordination. Only a man free inside can start relations that will develop him, not limit. Slavery attitude is unaccepted both by stoic and epicurean. Exercises are made to live authentic life with other people, and follow the border given by nature saves a man from dangers and adversities of fate.<sup>13</sup> Modern philosophical reflection - ethics of the Other concerns the essence of relation between people. On the basis of Judaic tradition of thought philosophers created stance beyond ontology, and so beyond philosophy of ancient Greeks. Nevertheless in later schools of the Hellenes one can see estimating interpersonal relation. For Greeks the process of internal change is necessary condition to enter mature and lasting relations. The should give happiness- the biggest pleasure and the biggest benefit in life.

## **The need of ethics understood as an art of living**

Only a man having a mature personality, sensitive for the world of higher virtues, can responsibly realize the idea of helping. Seeing the dignity rooted in a man he can act for the good of the other. Under this condition a true help that a social worker offers his client possible. As Beata Szluz well defines: [...] *help means work in the interest of other man (unit., social group, institution), that has found himself in tough, problematic, crucial, stressful situation and he cannot prevent and overcome it on his own; finds himself in normal situation, but he wants to change , ameliorate it.*<sup>14</sup> Social worker is wrongly perceived

<sup>12</sup> *Główne myśli*, 27, Diogenes Laertios, X, 148.

<sup>13</sup> P. Hadot, *Filozofia jako ćwiczenie duchowe*, p. 56.

<sup>14</sup> B. Szluz, *Wokół pojęcia pomocy i wsparcia społecznego [w:] Koncepcje pomocy człowiekowi* red. Z. Frączek, B. Szluz, wyd. UR, Rzeszów 2006, p. 125, vide Mikołaj

as someone, whose role is to represent the institution of temporary help tighten with government for those who have found themselves in a tough life situation. As J. Młyński stands: *profession of social worker is not only to satisfy the basic needs of a man, but rather to give it back social functionality, which is, of course, a process, not a singular act.*<sup>15</sup> The regulation in the Law of Social Help Defines social work as a professional activity, which aim is to help a unit, family, society to recover to social functionality, so it is needed to create conditions favorable this aim and change of up to now situation of unit, family or social group. From this point you can postulate, that the profession of social worker is one of servant professions and you should link it with care for another person and so a kind of vocation for. So the work of social worker concerns the good which is most importantly a man himself. In this case it seems necessary to distinguish the personal traits, that somehow favorable good service for neighbor. They relate both to the relation with another person and acts to change his situation. Service demands taking up responsibility<sup>16</sup>, but also good perceiving of reality and ability of its judging, and most importantly seeing the good that is a second person. E. Conradi describes the process of helping as “the ethics of care”. In his opinion this ethics should consider such problems as experience, which becomes a source of reflection and dealing with problems to head in the direction of renovation of social relations.<sup>17</sup> Only this perceiving of good allows effective actions, that will not deprive subjectivity of the other person in the process of helping. J. Młyński claims that in the profession of social worker there happens an unselfish gift of yourself in aid of the ones in need.<sup>18</sup> It seem that this idea is very

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Winiarski, *Pedagogika społeczna. Dokonania- aktualność- perspektywy*, red. S.Kawula, toruń 2002, p. 71, transl. Kinga Wygnaniec.

<sup>15</sup> Vide Józef Młyński, *Perspektywy a etos zawodowy pracowników socjalnych “pro futuro”*, “Studia nad rodziną” 14/1-2 (26-27), 2010, p. 212, transl. Kinga Wygnaniec.

<sup>16</sup> Vide ibid. p. 213.

<sup>17</sup> Vide Elisabeth Conradi *Take Care: Grundlageneiner Ethic der Achtsmkeit*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt/New York 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Vide Józef Młyński, *Perspektywy a etos zawodowy pracowników socjalnych “pro futuro”*, “Studia nad rodziną” 14/1-2 (26-27), 2010, p. 215, transl. Kinga Wygnaniec.

hard to realize, social workers without get remuneration for their work. They can only attempt to ignore the sphere of axiology, they can create a situation in which a person in need is a pawn in a game of certain actions. That's why not unattainable ideas, but the virtues that demand realization in a meeting with a person are extremely important. One should consider the fact that the other side of the process of helping- the clients- can have the improper vision of reality or difficulties in contact with others. Citing A. Żukiewicz, J. Młyński lists among other things: being nervous, demanding, negative towards clerk, emotional closure, egocentrism, aggression and intoxication.<sup>19</sup> We can see an image of social work: on one side we have a client in tough situation, on the other we have a social worker who helps to change this situation. The client himself can be (although the doesn't have to) an immature person, and in effect hard to have a relation with. It is often suffer that makes a person close up by creating defensive mechanisms, that make good communication harder. So it appears necessary to develop traits that will serve helping another person. In process of help it is about proper interpretation of human existence, sensitivity for virtues and ability to judge people's actions.<sup>20</sup> An obstacle in the actions of social worker can be: lack of reflexive ability, cause- effect thinking, taking up decisions without proper recognition of situation, instrumental treating of client, the inability of proper planning and organization, lack of ability to contact a client. Those and similar lacks can have undesirable effects. And that's why it seems justified to have ethics, that proposes not only the common rules of coexistence but also "something more": shaping yourself to be more, more to be, more to be for others.

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<sup>19</sup> Vide A. Żukiewicz, *Praca Socjalna Ośrodków Pomocy Społecznej*, Wrocław 2002, [w:] Józef Młyński, *Perspektywy a etos zawodowy pracowników socjalnych "pro futuro"*, "Studia nad rodziną" 14/1-2 (26-27), 2010, p.216, transl. Kinga Wygnaniec.

<sup>20</sup> J. Młyński, *Perspektywy a etos zawodowy pracowników socjalnych "pro futuro"*, "Studia nad rodziną" 14/1-2 (26-27), 2010, p.217, transl. Kinga Wygnaniec.

## Desired traits and abilities of social workers

Ethics proposed by ancient thinkers shapes those traits which are needed in the profession of social worker. In my opinion they correlate with the ones numbered by J. Młyński in his article. Traits and abilities are effect of spiritual exercises having source in reflexive thinking. Analyzing ethics of ancient thinkers we can claim that it leads to shaping following traits: ability of recognition of situation, proper communication, reflexive thinking. A man led by hints of ancient thinkers is brave, vigilant, persistent in gaining his goal, emphatic, , he can recognize what depends on him on what does not, he can predict the effects of his decisions. Furthermore doing spiritual exercises a man can distance himself from different situations, support others, stimulate them to develop, he is sensitive for the higher virtues.

For comparison it is worth to have a look at a list made by J. Młyński, who gives responsibility first place, then he lists thoroughness, politeness for the superiors and coworkers, objectivity, resoluteness, sensitivity for people's needs. Social worker should be impartial, altruistic, fair, he should respect dignity of every human, control his behavior, he should be communicative, self-affirming. A social worker should have pro social attitude.

A similar list of desired abilities was made by Dariusz Szejda. He claims that for a social worker professional abilities are important (like knowledge), habits, professional talents and social-professional attitude.<sup>21</sup>

Krystyna Faliszek and Kazimiera Wódz bring attention to the need of professionalism in work, that manifests in ability to solve problems and ethical dilemmas.<sup>22</sup> Paweł S. Czarnecki can see in social worker

<sup>21</sup> Vide Dariusz Szejda, *Pracownik socjalny w teorii i praktyce. Z życia wzięte*, [w:] *Praca socjalna- Jej dyskursy, ustanowienia i profile*, red. Nauk. Anna Kotlarska-Michalska, Krzysztof Piątek, wyd. Akapit, Toruń-Bydgoszcz 2013, p. 220.

<sup>22</sup> Vide Krystyna Faliszek, Kazimiera Wódz, *Dylematy, wyzwania i perspektywy rozwoju w kształceniu pracowników socjalnych w Polsce*, w: *Praca socjalna – Jej dyskursy, usytuowania i profile*, p. 177n.

someone who has good communication skills, understanding of the needs of the other.<sup>23</sup>

So one can see that most of the desired traits concern social interactions: creating relations, sensitivity for the needs of the other and solving life problems. Ethics made out by the ancient thinkers underscores the role of intellect. In the ethics of ancient Greeks one should constantly exercise in knowing because standard of our life depends on our knowledge. In other words to live good you need to know how to do it. In the light of the thought of ancient thinkers you can see the depths of life: situation in which we stay and a goal we should aim. Proper vision of reality is a condition of proper acting. Today's reflection on the good estimates also other levels but ethical sense, like communication, sensitivity and empathy. To speak of efficient actions leading to change of situation you need to start a good relation with somebody in need, and antique ethics highlights development of cognitive skills. It is justified with the influence of knowing oneself and the world on the ability to help oneself or another person. As K. DuBois and K. K. Miley write, self knowledge has a key meaning to effective professional life and it's gaining is a long and risky process.<sup>24</sup> Socratic *care of the soul* is in fact a journey into one's mind, affirmation of self to accept other person. Such work is a life journey to self cognition and self acceptance. It is also crucial for the helper to be able to use his only tool- himself- wisely and effectively.<sup>25</sup> Cognition and proper judgement seems to be a critical point in tough situation. First you need to find the causes of the situation. It is often extremely hard for a client. That's why distance and objective judgement of social worker are necessary. On the beginning part of helping process being open for the other person and ability to create a relation have a crucial role. In the process of communication social

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<sup>23</sup> Vide Paweł Stanisław Czarnecki, *Praca socjalna*, Difin SA, Warszawa 2013, p. 195.

<sup>24</sup> Vide Brende DuBois, Karla K. Miley, *Praca socjalna. Zawód, który dodaje sił*, tłum. K. Czekaj, Warszawa 1996, p. 65.

<sup>25</sup> Vide Luise C. Johnson, *Social Work Practice. A Generalist Approach*, Allyn and Bacon, Ohio 1992, p. 122.

worker should be wary of manipulation and cognitive mistakes of client. Focusing on a particular subject and a client can be priceless condition of catching the origin of a tough situation, the essence of the situation of client. This meaningful stoic attitude- “here and now” brings visible effects in problems. Ch. Beckett clearly expresses the need of realism in the work of social worker. If social work has a prominent role in the needing lives, then one of ethical duties of a social worker is dealing with reality, not fantasy. In other words, social workers should spend their time on real actions improving clients lives, not creating illusions making them or their directors feel better, politics seem do something, and hush society’s conscience.<sup>26</sup> So it is needed to educate oneself in ability to see things as they are in a particular moment throwing off the illusion, that often accompanies our feelings, stereotypes, common knowledge. Social worker, from whom solving a problem largely depends, should have a level-headed judgement of the situation. Thorough knowledge based on theory, sometimes research, rules and procedure of acting give a basis to act.<sup>27</sup> Social workers should be fluent both in gaining and understanding data and using them in practice<sup>28</sup>. In this point it is convergent with the spirit of ancient ethical thought, where theory isn’t a collection of opinions made by observation. The ancient thinkers recommended reading, attentive listening, exercise of mind so as to make a knowledge possibly wide, objective and adjusted to living good life. Nowadays the extent of our knowledge in society question is quite big. Image of societies and cultures worked out by sociologists, political science, culture studies, philosophers in a large part serves building social work theory. Paradigms concerning the universal level oftentimes are used to solve particular problems. Dialogue, that is a basis of close relationship with proper distance, needs to light the issue of the one in need. It is called the heart of social work practice. Relation of help is developed through self consciousness and interpersonal ef-

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<sup>26</sup> Vide Chris Beckett, *Podstawy teorii dla praktyków*, przekł. M. Jasiński, B. Maliszewska, wyd. Akademii Pedagogiki Specjalnej, Warszawa 2010, p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 44.

<sup>28</sup> Vide B. DuBois, K. K. Miley, *Praca socjalna. Zawód, który dodaje sił*, p. 70.

iciency Social workers should skillfully build this relation in order to engage client in effort to solve the problems<sup>29</sup>. Helping worker should be convinced that other people are more friendly than enemy, and that they have possibilities they can use.<sup>30</sup>

### **The need of ethics in direct relation: social worker - client**

Communication between client and social worker comes in two directions: explaining situation, and the one, who the situation concerns. We come here to very important moment- the change of perspective of the one in need. In contact with the one who helps he should see and experience himself as a subject having value and dignity. It is fundamental not only for a temporal change in client's life but first of all, in all his life as an active participant. Knowing yourself as a valuable being creates space, in which social worker's activity can be limited to support and accompany on the way of change. Communication should activate client's abilities and possibilities but, first of all, it should prompt him to make a change. Social worker should only have a participation in bringing help. This act is always initiated by a person in need.<sup>31</sup> Client has always right and need to act freely,, and social worker should respect this law and help to make positive use of it.<sup>32</sup> So in this case person helping comes from active to passive, where care of a client is in supporting him in reaching his goal. This is one of the rules of professional social work: empower the people individually and collectively using their own mechanisms of solving the problems.<sup>33</sup> Social work requires partnership between one helping and the one in need, that's why one

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 70.

<sup>30</sup> L. C. Johnson, *Social Work Practice*, p. 93 transl. From polish Kinga Wygnaniec.

<sup>31</sup> Vide B. Szluz, *Wokół pojęcia pomocy i wsparcia społecznego*, w: *Koncepcje pomocy człowiekowi*, p. 124n.

<sup>32</sup> Broader on this subject: Feliks P. Biesek, *The Work Relationship*, Loyola University Press, Chicago 1957.

<sup>33</sup> Vide DuBois, K. K. Miley, *Praca socjalna. Zawód, który dodaje sił*, p. 71n.

shall support client in his activity. Furthermore, one needs to keep the integrity of profession in all aspects of social work.

Another of the rules of social work is: *establish connections (feedback loops) between people and human resources for better social functioning and life standard.*<sup>34</sup> Role of social worker is not only to create good relation with a client, but also to create a web of connections with systems of service givers and social institutions to serve better a client. Subjective treating of a client creates space to better use the social resources. Well survived or even overcame critical situation can bear fruits: sensitivity for higher virtues. Proper attitude towards suffer can be an occasion to self- development and opening up for other people. Work with client should be emphatic accompanying in his struggles and readiness to engage more if needed. Understanding of situation should lead to judgement and taking up decision. The biggest doubts raises the decision: is it just or not? How can we predict the effect of the decision? Isn't it only a lesser evil for a client? Social worker should take client to the moment of decision. The decision itself should be responsibly and consciously taken by a client. After the judgement of situation and outlining the goal, moment of decision becomes the most important. Not only the one who brings help but also the one in need has to analyze carefully situation to choose best to minimize or even to eliminate the improper consequences of a choice. So the learning of ancient sages, who exercise mind in recognition of a particular situation, "being here and now", objective view on reality is in fact a collection of hints on how to live a better life. Often taking up another perspective comes true in a way of communication, with a mutual effort of helping and needing help. In social work we don't have one strictly understood theory, as a system of ideas and a paradigm. This is more like an informal theory or a part of "common knowledge" concerning persons life or the one of a group. For you cannot simply say what caused a particular situation, or with certainty what will happen.<sup>35</sup> We have limited scope of

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* p. 72.

<sup>35</sup> Vide Ch. Beckett, *Podstawy teorii dla praktyków*, p. 46.

vision of things and events, oftentimes their description is partial and subjective. According to Ch. Beckett *cite original*.<sup>36</sup> Concentration on problematic reality should lead to finding way out of it. Stoic in this situation would recommend good recognition: what depends on me, what does not. In other words: what can be done what would bring expected effects. This is very important element of helping process because change of situation depends on it. Process of change implies internal transformation. Another attitude towards oneself and the world. Here opens a world of higher and more solid virtues, on which you can build a life and relations with others.

Clients of social workers are often limited by problematic situation and suffer conducted to it. Suffer itself is a pseudo activity, which in real consists in sustaining, passivity, and making suffering subject an object of suffer. What suffer becomes depend on ourselves: weather we make a tool out of it or become its victims.<sup>37</sup> It seems reasonable for a social worker to indicate a possible solution and show possible realization to a client. Client should recognize what depends on him and can be realized, from the things which do not, so that he doesn't take up actions towards it. Failures come from bad recognition, being guided by emotions or improper desires. Often choosing what is independent from us causes frustration and failures-as ancient thinkers warn. Decision must connect with a goal and owned means of a client. In this case knowing oneself: one weaknesses and advantages, abilities, fears, desires seemingly influences choice and change. First of all it increases feeling of responsibility for decision. Actions should be based on a proper and coherent theoretical knowledge. In social work we have eclecticism: mixture and matching of ideas from different sources.<sup>38</sup> Social worker should take client to decision and support and help him in realization. Intellectual work is as important as good will and perseverance in decision taken. Recognition is nothing more but a collection of facts and

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 46.

<sup>37</sup> Vide Jacek Filek, *Filozofia jako etyka. Eseje filozoficzno-etyczne*, Kraków 2001, p. 141-144.

<sup>38</sup> Vide Ch. Beckett, *Podstawy teorii dla praktyków*, p. 52.

observations imbedded in a certain explaining theory.<sup>39</sup> This process reminds Greek *therapeia*, where success will depend on educating oneself in traits like perseverance, positive attitude, acceptance of fate, consent to the reality in order to be able to change its shape or oneself, insightful analysis of reality, reflexivity, discipline, composure. Also social worker improves his traits during the process of helping: candor, empathy, sensibility, communication skills, perseverance, reflexivity. H. Bartlett claims that connection to the virtues constitutes specificity of social work. It is noticed by referring to aims, knowledge, virtues and abilities.<sup>40</sup> Process of helping is an occasion for realization of higher virtues, among others for self-development and creating relations. Act of help is a virtue itself. It allows and initiates realization of other virtues, that change up to now situation and shape (perfect) both of the process participants. Socratic *care of a soul* manifests not only in care for oneself, but also for others. Minding the other person is first of all realizing a virtue that a human is. Process of helping aims to make another person be fully human, to muster up best out of him, to muster up what consists humanism. In this sense process of helping has double role: solves tough situation and develops participants to become perfect according to their possibilities.

## Recapitulation

Ethics is a basis of conscious realization of one's duties for oneself and other people. Proper understanding of own being is a condition to be for the others. One should take the effort of shaping oneself according to his needs and possibilities. Desired in social work traits like communication skills, empathy, responsibility, perseverance, objectivity serve in very important mission of bringing help. Ethics proposed by antique

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 48.

<sup>40</sup> Vide Harriett Bartlett, *Working Definition of Social Work: Research on Social Work Practice*, Vol. 13 No. 3, May 2003, p. 268n.

thinkers isn't a grandiloquent program for elites, but universal theory connected to practice of everyday life, concrete hints and reflection about life. From this fount of knowledge we could carry away advices on self-knowledge and self-judgement, ability to focus, being "here and now", analysis and reflection skills, ability to listen and make use of theoretical knowledge, choosing goals, feeling of responsibility, empathy and perseverance. Such a way came together makes participants of the helping process enrich each other by realizing virtues. Greek *therapeia* learns readiness for new, sometimes dangerous, challenges, it learns how to live in tough times, how to deal with suffer. Ability to throw off illusion for hard and demanding reality is necessary here. The wisdom of ancient thinkers is not a souvenir from the times passed by but a real hint on how to live a better life and how to be fully a human for oneself and for another person. That's why it may be useful for shaping the posture of social worker. Socratic *care of a soul* is in fact discovering higher virtues, that you cannot go past when creating a relation with someone, who often doesn't have any.

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## **The Role and the Meaning of Antique Ethical Thought in Social Work**

### Summary

The thesis I present touches the issue of the need of ethics. I understand this need as an essential art of life, the wisdom of an ancient philosophers. The universal program proposed by Socrates, Plato, Epicureans and Stoics can become, if applied to social work, a good moral basis of it. Social work: an area that implements values in the process of helping, is in need of well grounded axiology and good reasoning. There is no greater proposal of conjoining these two spheres: the reason and the morality than in ancient philosophy. Spiritual exercises, which I would also call a good school of rational reasoning, implicates self-development and leads to entailing man with values. Obviously, it is not every demand of ancient philosophers that can be useful in contemporary world, but the core message is legitimate. The philosophical exercises, that the ancient used to live by, is a timeless program which gives a chance of effective and appropriate actions in social work practice, due to concerning man as a value.

Key words: morality, ethics, self-development, philosophical exercises, social work, client, support