

THE GREEK CONCEPT OF *PAIDEIA*—*PAIDEIA*

Definition of *PAIDEIA* (py-dee-a)

From the Greek *pais*, *paidos*. The upbringing of a child (related to pedagogy and pediatrics). In an extended sense, it is the equivalent of the Latin *humanitas* (from which we get the humanities), signifying the general learning that should be the possession of all human beings. It had to do with the shaping of the Greek character, and was a concept at the center of the Greek educational genius which is the secret of the undying influence of Greece upon all subsequent ages.

Paideia: “—the classical Greek system of education and training, which came to include gymnastics, grammar, rhetoric, poetry, music, mathematics, geography, natural history, astronomy and the physical sciences, history of society and ethics, and philosophy—the complete pedagogical course of study necessary to produce a well-rounded, fully educated citizen.”—Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, pp. 29-30.

Expressions like civilization, tradition, literature, culture, education are aspects of *paideia*, but all of these must be included and brought into a unity in the concept.

Paideia in the Greek sense aimed at the creation of a higher type of man. The Greeks alone made men. By discovering man, they didn't discover the subjective self, but realized the universal laws of human nature. The principle of the Greeks is not individualism but humanism--*humanitas*--in a noble and weighty sense. *Paideia* meant the process of educating man into his true form, the real and genuine human nature.

Paideia starts from an ideal, not from an individual. This ideal of MAN was the pattern and model toward which all Greek educators and poets, artists and philosophers always looked. It was this universal ideal, this model of humanity which all individuals were to imitate. As this ideal was to be embodied in the community, and the goal of education was to make each person in the image of the community.

Plato's primary directive for philosophy focused on the strenuous development of the intellect, the will, and the body, motivated by a ceaseless desire to regain the lost union with the eternal, for the recollection of the IDEALS is both the means and the goal of true knowledge. Education, therefore, for Plato is in the service of the soul and the divine. Under Plato,

the classical *paideia* assumed a deeper and metaphysical dimension in his Academy, holding forth the ideal of inner perfection realized through disciplined education. Tarnas, 42-3.

Later Christian teachers, esp. the early Fathers at the school of Alexandria, used the *paideia*, but now with theology as the highest and culminating science in the new curriculum. In this context, learning was a form of Christian discipline, a part of discipleship, even a means of worship. Such learning did not limit itself to the Judeo Christian tradition, but move beyond it to encompass a larger body of knowledge, to illuminate all knowledge with the light of the Christian LOGOS.

Christian *paideia* was “the system of education in the faith that the early Christians created through a combination of Biblical revelation and the cultural patterns suggested by Hellenistic literature and philosophy, that is, Greek *paideia*. It had as its objective the achieving of the wisdom of God, through spiritual formation under the divine Pedagogue, the Logos or Word of God. Christian *paideia* looked to the formation of character and appreciation of virtues as much as it did the acquisition of knowledge. Its final aim was the true knowledge—Christian philosophy or worldview— whose end was fellowship and imitation of Jesus Christ.

Contributors to the Christian *paideia* included:

Epistle of Clement

Shepherd of Hermas

Catechumenal Schools

Great Catechism of Gregory of Nyssa

Catecheses of Cyril of Jerusalem

St. Augustine, *De Catechizandis Rudibus*

Catechetical Schools (Alexandria)

Clement of Alexandria

Paidagogos: the first complete educational treatise that combines pagan learning and cultural patterns with Christian and theological thought and a sacramental way of life (all secular subjects were considered to be “ladders to the sky”).

Christian *Paideia* in the East—The Cappadocian Fathers:

- Gregory of Nazianzus, *Panegyric on Basil*
- Basil of Caesarea, *To Young Men On How They Might Profit From Pagan Literature*
- John Chrysostom, *De Inani Gloria et de Educandis Liberis*

Christian *Paideia* in the West:

- Lactantius
- Hilary of Poitiers
- Ambrose
- Jerome

- Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana; De Beata Vita* (renews *paideia* under Christian auspices)
- Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*
- Cassiodorus's *Institutes*

In the scholastic and medieval period, as the monastic schools and early universities arose, a fresh emphasis was placed on broad learning: Learn everything; later you will see that nothing is superfluous” said Hugh of St. Victor. The purpose of the seven liberal arts—the trivium and the quadrivium—was now “to restore God’s image in us.” Encyclopedic treatises aimed at comprehending the whole of reality became popular. The Greek notion of *paideia* was again springing forth in Christian dress in a new incarnation for Christian purposes.

Even in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Roman Catholic Jesuits and the Protestant leaders founded 100s of schools in Europe to educate the faithful. The classical humanistic tradition based on the Greek *paideia* was thereby broadly sustained during this era.

E. B. Castle, *Ancient Education and Today*, Penguin, 1961.

“So long as the young generation is, and continues to be, well brought up, our ship of state will have a fair voyage; otherwise the consequences are better left unspoken.” —Plato, *Laws*

Paideia has as its goal political man “both beautiful and good,” the servant of the polis. It denoted the culture of the mind, the civilized life, and the influences, processes, and techniques for the making of a man. Later it referred to the goal of such processes.

The developed mind in a superb body was the goal, the union of moral perfection, intellectual excellence, artistic harmony, and physical beauty.

Despite emphasis on Greek art and sculpture, it was not the artist or the architect but the poet, the musician, the statesman, and the philosopher to whom the Greeks offered their highest allegiance. These were the men who represented and taught what the true *arete* or virtue was.

For the Greeks, the greatest work of art was a man or woman, and education was the means of moulding human nature in accordance with an ideal (the ideals). They sought for and discovered the principles governing human life and a person’s body, mind, soul, spirit, and then prescribed a form of education which they hoped and believed would lead a student to a life in conformity with those ideals.

For the Greeks, then, education had to do with the making of men, not training men to make things. Though technical instruction for vocational purposes reigns today, and is necessary, for the Greeks, Plato and Aristotle especially, this was not education!

The reason? Because vo-tech training, since it becomes an end in itself, is not the cultivation of the true nature of the whole person.

The Greek conception of education for the sake of wholeness was encapsulated in the term *PAIDEIA*, the education in virtue from youth up for the sake of citizenship, knowing how to rule and be ruled on the basis of justice (*Republic*).

Paideia originally referred to a *process* of education, the *means* to an educational end. Later in Hellenistic times, it came to refer to the *end itself* and the word came to signify “culture,” the very end to be achieved.

The personal culture thus obtained was a man or woman’s *paideia*, the very thing, according to the Greeks for which he was born, the sum of intellectual, moral, and aesthetic as well as physical qualities that make one a complete and whole human being.

To use a biblical phrase, it was the treasure hidden in a field, it was the pearl of great price, one's most valuable possession, worth sacrificing everything to obtain.

For example, when Stilpo, a student of the Socratic school at Megara, was burglarized and a reparation was offered to him, he refused, saying: "No one carried off my *paideia*, no one took what makes me a man."

H. I. Marrou describes this process of the cultivation of *paideia* as the aim of life:

"To make oneself; to produce from the original childish material, and from the imperfectly formed creature one may so easily remain, the man who is fully a man, whose ideal proportions one can just perceive: such is every man's life-work, the one task worthy of a life time's devotion."

Varro and Cicero later on in Rome, which capitalized upon but didn't alter the Greek educational vision of *paideia*, called the same ambition "humanitas," that which makes one truly human.

Indeed, Hellenistic civilization can be defined as the civilization of the *Paideia*, and on this score, see the famous three volume work by Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*. *Paideia*, (Oxford UP) was the sole aim of human existence, the most precious boon ever granted to humanity (so Plato). It was this theme that provided unity to Greek culture in their devotion to a single ideal of human perfection.

As a Christian critique, while the cultivation of the whole person as God's image is a Christian concern, this emphasis of the Greeks sounds idolatrous, and, in fact, impossible, for it makes a god out of a man, and apart from the power provided by faith, character development cannot be fully attained (though God's common grace does allow for some human development among non-believers).

The cultured mind, so highly prized by the Greeks, indeed falls short of the very mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2). Indeed, the idolatry of *paideia* is conveyed well in the following quote by Marrou:

Paideia—a divine thing—a heavenly game, a nobility of soul, was invested with a kind of sacred radiance that gave it a special dignity of a genuine religious kind. In the deep confusion caused by the sudden collapse of ancient beliefs, it was the one true unshakable value to which the mind of man could cling; and Hellenistic culture, thus erected into an absolute, eventually became for many the equivalent of a religion." —H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. George Lamb, Sheed and Ward, 1956, 101.

The ideal spread throughout the Mediterranean world, such that all who accepted *paideia* as their ideal of human perfection were considered “Greeks” (so Shelly’s wag that “we are all Greeks”). And thus was born that classical humanism that was embraced in a modified form by the Christian Church which is called Christian *paideia* (see St. Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*), glorified by Renaissance man, and it even penetrated the early English and American schools and universities where becoming a gentleman or woman of “virtue” was prized (so J. H. Newman) Now, this vision of *paideia*, Christian, secular, or otherwise, has largely been lost from sight in a vocational-technological and secular age.

Christopher J. Lucas, *Our Western Educational Heritage*, New York, Macmillan, 1972.

The publication of C. P. Snow's *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* solidified for denizens of the twentieth century the polarization, going as far back as the Greeks, between proponents of liberal education and the humanities with its focus on human excellence, and the advocates of the sciences and technology with its focus on physical nature and the need for specialized vocational-technical training for occupational and economic purposes.

The decisive event creating this great divide was the industrial revolution in the early 19th century, and it has created a "gulf of mutual incomprehension" between these two groups of humanists and scientists.

Even in the days of Plato and Aristotle, there was a similar divide between a liberal education for free men of the leisure class, and a vo-tech education for a lesser breed of men, the slaves.

There was the further division between Plato and Aristotle who valued contemplative learning for its own sake (*trivium and quadrivium*), and Isocrates and the Sophists who insisted on a kind of knowledge that could be usefully applied (I've called this the *ministerium*).

From the mid-nineteenth century on, the battle has been raging between advocates of an intrinsically valuable liberal, humanistic education, and those promoting a brand of education that is practical and relevant to the market place (hence, there is a need not only to make a connection between student services and liberal education, but liberal education and professional education). Examples of those promoting the liberal arts agenda include the following:

John Henry Cardinal Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 1852. In his advocacy of liberal education as an end in itself, he stood directly in the tradition of the Athenian philosophers (Plato and Aristotle, esp.).

Gordon Keith Chambers, *The Republic and the Person*, 1952. To achieve a Newmanesque purpose, he advocated a fixed curriculum including history, math, biology, language, literature, philosophy, and religion.

General Education in a Free Society, The Harvard University Committee, 1945. This effort advocated general education in Newman's vein, but shifted the emphasis from content to method, and was concerned to help students become proficient in a particular vocation as well as the generally educated person.

Major Point: this debate, and the shift of emphasis away from content to consequences signals an even deeper underlying crisis: FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY, MODERN MAN LACKS ANY VIABLE CONCEPTION OF AN INTELLECTUAL CULTURE, A PAIDEIA!

There has been a tragic loss of a unifying intellectual ideal. There is no certainty regarding what it means to be an educated person in terms of its means or its ends. This loss constitutes a crisis of severe proportions because human cultures, like organisms, require integration as an aspect necessary for survival. This can largely be explained by the baneful influence of modern science and technology.

1. All disciplines in the humanities and social sciences strive to emulate the natural sciences in terms of method and certainty of outcome, resulting in a humanities that is less human and social sciences that are less social.

2. There has been the total divorce between knowledge and values, the latter being opinion and preference, the former rendered certain by science. All that is left is subjective preferences, emotions, private sensations, but no shareable moral knowledge.

3. There is almost a complete focus on means rather than ends, methods rather than objectives, for in a scientific and secular culture, there is no recognition of an overall telos in the universe. All is empirical and quantifiable.

In the university, this results in exclusive concentration on pedagogical and administrative emphases, and in the student with a focus on the utilitarian end of acquiring marketable skills and competencies. After, it seems the university is now an appendage to the world of business, industry and the various professions. Students become manipulated to become nothing more than “instruments of production.”

4. The enormous amount of scientific knowledge (growing exponentially) and computer generated information militates against the establishment of a commonly shared culture or knowledge base, aided and abetted by an ever increasing specialization.

Notions like the “past” or “tradition” have evaporated.

The only shared culture or tradition is found in commercial advertising.

5. The older goal of universities to gather up the surrounding culture in all its breadth and complexity, to organize, systematize, and render it coherent to a group of students was called “paideia.” This is now virtually impossible. Now coherent view of life seems possible in today’s complex society.

6. These former university goals of imparting virtues and providing coherence in life is now a pipe-dream of by-gone days. Not only that, but the fact of pluralism makes

it even more difficult, for the question is raised: whose culture, which values, and what knowledge shall be imparted? Hence, it is no longer known what form of liberal education and culture might be imparted. Paideia is no longer an option!

7. Hence, in the average undergraduate's experience, several things might occur: (1) the process of specialization is intensified with focus on one's major to the denigration of general education; (2) general education becomes just a smorgasbord board of courses that suffer from (a) lack of infra-structure or coherent design, (b) loss of significant content, and (c) loss of rigor, where the itinerant student wanders from class to class amid intellectual fragmentation, superficial understanding, and loss or moral meaning.

8. Given this present crisis, the search for that intellectual touchstone to unify the curriculum, produce a relevant intellectual culture, provide the foundation for liberal education and professional training is perhaps the major issues facing educators today.

IT IS ONE THESIS OF THIS CLASS THAT CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP AND CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CAN PROVIDE A CRUCIAL ALTERNATIVE AND MAKE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE PRESENT CRISIS.