

A DANGEROUS HUMAN PROCLIVITY

Inundated by a glut of information, we typically pay less and less attention to individual messages, and media stories grow briefer and briefer. Eventually the shortening reaches its apogee and the message is reduced to individual phrases. Often, it's just a word or two that come across like curt snarls – such bad, exclusionary words as “outsider,” “LGBT ideology,” “not one of us.” Fortunately, other words have the power to carry good and uplifting content, winged words that ignite spiritual warmth, urge tenderness or warn against indifference. We devoted the first issue of *Academia* magazine in 2020 to tenderness, and this issue focuses instead on a notion that stands as its opposite: indifference, which Chekhov famously once described as “a paralysis of the soul, a premature death.”

Marian Turski (“Indifference Breeds Hate”), a former prisoner of Auschwitz, begins with a harrowing warning against being indifferent – not only to falsehoods, but also with respect to our fellow human beings, who with such frightening ease can be humiliated, dehumanized, and even murdered on a mass scale (see also Marcin Kula’s “Thou Shalt Not Be Indifferent”).

These days, in times of the declining authority of science, widespread prejudice, and fear of the future, we are witnessing ever-greater contempt for and rejection of people representing minority groups. We unfortunately often fail to react even when racist or homophobic violence occurs right next to us (Joanna Mizieleńska, “Indifference as Fuel for Violence”). It is also worrisome that people increasingly lack a hierarchy of values, generally fail to engage in reflection, and are engrossed instead in trivial everyday matters (Tomasz Mazur, “Goodness Does Not Fall From the Sky”).

Public distrust, consumerism, and modern technologies all deepen our indifference and ultimately result in loneliness. As one of today’s major social ills, such rampant callousness is actually an “illusory strategy” destructive to public life (so writes Joanna Mysona Byrska, “Indifference in Public Life”) and also conducive to environmental degradation, making us insensitive to climate change (Piotr Tryjanowski, “Climate Change and Indifferent Emotions”) and the natural world around us (Dorota Sumińska, “Indifference: Disorder or Norm?”).

Indifference ultimately stems from deep within us, from our own fears, suffering, or laziness (what Wojciech Eichelberger describes as “The ‘Keep Your Head Down’ Strategy”), from selfishness and a desire for convenience. As this issue strives hard to show, combatting it is up to each and every one of us.

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Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Landscape with the fall of Icarus*, 1557



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