

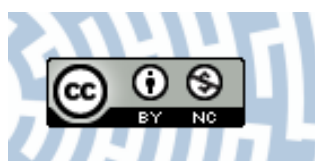


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## **Life is a Mystery, on Discovery of What is of Utmost Importance in the Optics of Janusz Gajda**

**a review of a book entitled *Values in the Life and Education of Man*,  
by Janusz Gajda, published by Adam Marszałek Publishing House,  
Toruń 2013**

I adopted the title of the hereby text from P. Pellegrino to whom the author also refers in his work entitled *Values in the Life and Education of Man* (published by Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2013). It was done so because mystery, and especially the imperative to unravel the mystery, perfectly fits the idea communicated by Janusz Gajda.

Is, in fact, the world of axiology – although it touches upon issues which are universally deliberated upon and function as the basis for ever-going discourses – not a mystery in which we grope constantly losing track or choose paths leading to nowhere?

Are the triads singled out in the publication acting as the axis of the narration, namely, truth – good – beauty, honor – dignity – humanity, and finally love – freedom – loneliness, not notions we commonly refer to? Yet, can we really find their sense and discover their meaning for ourselves? There are no straightforward rules as each category is a challenge, therefore it is a mystery we should unravel using the perspectives presented by the author.

Janusz Gajda has accustomed his readers to not easy deliberations, to taking up issues which are of key importance for human identity, to posing questions the answers to which are to be found in the vast output of the generations' consciousness. The following publications serve as the best examples of the aforementioned statement: *Samotność i kultura* (Loneliness and Culture) (1987), *Oblicza miłości* (Faces of Love) (1993), or finally, *Honor, godność, człowieczeństwo* (Honour – Dignity – Humanity) (2000). He continuously presents the importance of going back to values understood as guidelines which arrange social

actions and interactions. This time it is not different. We are given a book which will undoubtedly be of interest to those for whom pondering upon existential matters is compelling reading necessary for individual references which result from identity dilemmas.

Two of the categories discussed by the Professor are particularly intriguing for me, the first is truth and the second loneliness. Truth is one of the values which undergo the deepest depreciation in the postmodern relativism and falsification conveyed by media reports. Though perhaps veracity is merely a lack of the ability to create alternative solutions – as was provocatively posted in one of the social networks? Nonetheless, the author's narration does not present unambiguous conclusions. The book contains numerous approaches and aspects concerning analysis of particular categories as the author leads us through the thick of ideas and concepts of literary, philosophical and sociological nature. Thanks to daring peregrination through the European axiological thought, the author allows his reader to follow manifold connotations regarding the understanding of universal values yet he allows for something more – to discover the reader's own findings, as mentioned by Paul Ricoeur. Delivering prerequisites which inspire the reader's activity is a great pedagogical skill as it triggers an inclination to negotiate meanings. The part devoted to truth contains a basic question regarding the boundaries of veracity (p. 45). It concerns the boundary of other persons' intimacy trespassing of which has nothing to do with the trivially understood predilection to telling 'the truth'.

It is similar when we look into deliberations on freedom (chapter VII, p. 256) especially when, as Gajda suggests, it is juxtaposed with responsibility. The author asks if responsibility for unfortunate decisions is not a paralyzing element which limits our freedom. We will not find simple, straightforward ascertainment. Nonetheless, we will not be left without an attempt to find a solution of this dilemma as we are presented with a plan to collate features of man who is free and responsible at the same time. These features are: rational and humanistic attitude, moral sensibility, and strong and balanced personality. Education issues become transparent in these deliberations as, no doubt, educating man to possess such features is a challenge for modern pedagogy.

Loneliness is the second category which attracted my attention. Yet it may appear questionable whether such a notion should be placed in the value canon. However, its face, as in the case of truth, is not unambiguous, its character can be situated both in alienation which is generated by one's own choice, but also in rejection, ostracism to which we do not aspire. The narrator presents us with Rousseau's idea, where loneliness is a choice based on severance with the necessity of 'being

liked by others' thus protesting against social pressure (p. 260). Apart from the aforementioned idea, the author refers to existentialist thinking inclusive of the ideas so dear to agnostics, namely, alienation and hostile existence (Heidegger, Sartre) and, contrary, theistic existentialism which brings hope to man (Gabriel Marcel and his choice 'to be' in order to cease loneliness). Further juxtaposition of philosophical trends perfectly exemplifies such a strategy of discovering the meaning of the notion of *loneliness*: Mounier confronted with Marx, Durkheim or finally Freud, who understood loneliness as an escape from fear and distress. These are followed by references to Horney, Maslow – therefore a smooth turn towards psychology and finally the author ends with Łukaszewski and his distinction of objective and subjective loneliness. Professor Gajda presents to us three planes in which loneliness exists; the first one appears when loneliness is a nightmare, the second one is related to perception of loneliness as a reality to which we agree and, finally, the third being affirmation coming from self-fulfillment. In the last one we can place creativity understood as execution of one's own plan, as Kepiński puts it. A rough summary of the angles from which the author has analyzed loneliness is sufficient to show how in-depth the presentations of the key axiological notions are and how well they exemplify the erudition and fine sensitivity of the explorer of reality, who takes on utterly humanistic poetics. Literary and especially lyrical references (an excellent example of a poem by Żurkowski, entitled *Koncert ciszy* /Concert of Silence/, p. 287) allow us to get to know the guide in the thick of terminology yet from another angle, as a eulogist of aesthetics and companionship with culture and literature. As literature indeed – like nothing else in the whole world – becomes the lens focusing on the images of reality perceived by us. We treat it as 'a mirror in which we look at ourselves also when it comes to our present axiological attitude, our sensitivity and imagination, including the moral one, but also the existential one with regard to the sense of life and the presence of values in it!' These words by Lech Witkowski perfectly match the idea of Janusz Gajda.

Reading professor Gajda's book we can associate ourselves with rudimental categories which are part of the identity functioning of man; the manner in which issues are presented requires effort from the reader as the entire text is a sublime polemic with axiological rules. There are no ready-made solutions, though traps for those who read cultural messages in a cursory way are clearly shown. Philosophical references motivate the reader to take up intellectual thinking and threads with literary exemplifications make him/her experience the text more emotionally, very often triggering more in-depth explorations and discoveries of the mystery of life.