

# ECONOMICS IS BEAUTIFUL?



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“**Ekonomia jest piękna?**” (Economics Is Beautiful?) is the title of a book recently published by the Scholar publishing house. It is a collection of 38 articles dedicated to Prof. Jerzy Wilkin to mark the 45th anniversary of his scientific work. The title of the book and the question it contains provoke reflection, being at the same time an excellent reference to theses which run through Jerzy Wilkin’s numerous publications. The question formulated in the book’s title puzzles not only economists, but also other specialists. First of all, it refers to Jerzy Wilkin’s paper entitled “Ekonomia wolności i ekonomia zniewolenia” (Economics of Freedom and Economics of Enslavement) presented at the 9th Congress of Polish Economists. When does economy further human freedom and when does it constrain it? ([www.pte.pl/kongres/referaty/Wilkin%20Jerzy/Wilkin%20Jerzy%20-%20EKONOMIA%20WOLNOŚCI%20I%20EKONOMIA%20ZNIEWOLENIA.pdf](http://www.pte.pl/kongres/referaty/Wilkin%20Jerzy/Wilkin%20Jerzy%20-%20EKONOMIA%20WOLNOŚCI%20I%20EKONOMIA%20ZNIEWOLENIA.pdf) 2013).

Wilkin wonders: “Why Has Economics Lost Its Soul?” The lost soul of economics is reflected among others in its chrematistic deformations. Equating economics with chrematistics, the science of earning money, means that any activity is permissible and desirable if it leads to gains, profit and money. This is manifested by the tendency to explain and shape economic life, and also social life, exclusively through the prism of profitability and financial benefit, with no regard for social consequences. This is so despite the fact that economics is by definition a social science, a science dealing with relations between economy and social life. The chrematistic approach to economics and translating it into economic practice results in the paradoxical phenomenon of the enslaved consumer on a free market – a consumer enslaved by persistent advertisements and the asymmetric power of large corporations in shaping the structure and quality of what is supplied on the market. Consequently, Jerzy Wilkin says that “The free market can enslave people: take freedom away from private individuals. On the other hand, the absence of a free market can also lead to enslavement. Economists like to talk about the free market, but are less eager to talk about free people.” This enslavement and the dilemmas associated with it are reflected in the increasingly widespread phenomenon of product adulteration. One of those who have pointed to this problem is American sociologist Richard Sennett. This

is ironically called in literature as the gold plating of products, or antifeatures, meaning the practice of intentionally limiting the efficiency and durability of products of daily use to create demand for new products. The development of systemic solutions oriented at distributing responsibility is conducive to this practice. In his book with the meaningful title “Antifragile: How to Live in a World We Don’t Understand?”, Nassim Taleb presents an unconventional approach to assessing these negative phenomena. The author argues that economy and society lose their natural resistance because of the introduction of numerous tools and methods of insurance against risk, but mainly because the burden of risk is offloaded onto other entities. Taleb illustrates his arguments with numerous convincing examples and references to history. He reminds us, for example, that in antiquity building control offices did not exist, but the builders of aqueducts were required to sleep under them for some time after completing the project. And the aqueducts function excellently to this day.

The enslavement of consumers, which is a distinctive feature of the present time, is considered by the authors of “Economics Is Beautiful?” from the point of view of their scientific disciplines. The authors analyse the consequences of such deformations for social and economic development, and make an attempt to identify the possible ways to counteract the abnormalities. One of the most dangerous abnormalities is the expansion of the methodology used in economics onto other social sciences. As Jerzy Wilkin observes: “Economists have quite insolently recognized that they hold research tools enabling them to explain the functioning of the social world in its various aspects much better than other social scientists.” Jerzy Wilkin calls this direction of change “a new economic imperialism,” which manifests itself in economists’ forcing on others “values and dreams” and patterns of not only economic life, but also social relations subordinated to commercialism and consumerism. But Wilkin argues that the situation does not have and should not have to be like that. And economics can be beautiful. This opinion also finds confirmation in a book published recently by the Polish Economic Society as part of its Nobel Prize in Economics series. It is Robert Shiller’s book “Finance and the Good Society.”

I would like to encourage you to read all the publications presented above.