

aim HIGH

issue 1 (68) 23/24

WIĘCEJ NIŻ SZKOŁA



Contents:

page 1 - front cover / page 2 - Too young to die - Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński / page 3 - The influence of cats on humans / page 4 - The trouble with brakes / page 6 - King Arthur - truth or myth / page 7 - Corruption in football / page 9 - History of swimming / page 10 - Can AI replace doctors? / page 11 - A tale about „Redhead Charles” - one of the best spies / page 12 - Psychological mechanisms of money management / page 14 - Being an Exchange Partner / page 15 - Socrates



TOO YOUNG TO DIE

THE STORY OF KRZYSZTOF KAMIL BACZYŃSKI

Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński was born on the 22 January 1921 in Warsaw. He was born into the family of a soldier and a literary critic Stanisław Baczyński and a school teacher Stefania Zieleńczyk. His mother had Jewish roots. As a child, Baczyński suffered from asthma. His heart was also very weak. He began education at the Stefan Batory Gymnasium in Warsaw in 1933. He was not such a good student but he was skilled at drawing and writing. He did not have a lot of friends and was terrible at every kind of sport. In 1936, he wrote the first known poem "Wypadek przy pracy" ("Accident at work"). After he graduated from school he wanted to start studying at Academy of Fine Art. Unfortunately, the death of his father and the outbreak of World War II ended his plans. Until the German occupation he had lived with his mother on Hołówki Street 3. It was very dangerous because they came from a Jewish family and could be shot at any time.



In 1941 he worked with the underground press, such as "Płomienie" ("Flames") and "Droga" ("Way") magazines. At the same time he started studying Polish language at the secret underground Warsaw University. During lectures he met Barbara Drapczyńska and he fell in love with her. Three days later they were engaged. In July they got married - it was six months after their first meeting. They were very happy together, but for a short time.

After the Warsaw Uprising broke out, Baczyński joined the "Parasol" battalion. He was killed in combat by a German sniper on the 4 August 1944 in the Blanka Palace in the Warsaw Old Town. He is buried in the Powązki Military Cemetery, together with his pregnant wife, who was killed on 1 September 1944.

Baczyński published four volumes of poetry during the German occupation: "Zamknięty echem" - "Closed with Echoes" (1940), "Dwie miłości" - "Two Loves" (1940), "Wiersze wybrane" - "Selected Poems" (1942) and "Arkusze poetycki Nr 1" - "Poetic Sheet No. 1" (1944).

His poetry expresses the emotions of the so-called Columbus Generation. The generation described in such a way includes young Poles who were born soon after Poland regained its independence in 1918, and who entered maturity during World War II. Baczyński wrote catastrophic poems - he wanted to describe the time of war, which in his poems is shown as a huge force, destroying the old systems of values.

He was only twenty three years old when he was killed. But during his short life, he was recognized as one of the best poets of his times. [Aniela Przystał]



THE INFLUENCE OF CATS ON HUMANS

Cats are considered one of the best animal friends. Cat lovers even think about them as members of the family. A research carried out for years by many foreign universities has shown that the advantage of having a cat is not only its magnificent relationship with its owners. It also has an impact on human health. Moreover, cats reduce stress, improve our well-being, upgrade our responsibility and, as a result of their presence, we feel less lonely. There are many benefits of having a pet of this kind that I would like to mention.

According to the scientists from the University of Minnesota who examined a group of men aged 30-75, having a cat increases our life expectancy. Cats reduce blood pressure, so their owners are less likely to suffer from heart disease, including stroke and heart attack. The risk of an illness among people who have a cat at home is 30% lower than people who do not have it. These animals decrease stress and anxiety, which are some of the main factors that cause disease. In addition, they strengthen the immune system of newborns and toddlers. Research has confirmed that children who had contact with cats in the first two years of their lives were less susceptible to allergies. These animals are good for us not only on the emotional level, but also on the health level.

I would now like to draw attention to the sound made by cats, which is purring. Just a few days after birth, kittens begin to purr to tell their mother that they are healthy and safe. Moreover, they show closeness to their owners. Few people know that it is not only a means of communication, it also has a therapeutic function. Animals calm down in this way, but they also have an impact on the human condition. According to an article written by The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America, the sound made by cats strengthens muscles, bones and joints, relieves pain, eliminates shortness of breath, and speeds up the healing of wounds. It also has a positive impact on the owners' mental health. Purring and petting them reduces anxiety, calms down, relaxes and improves well-being.

Scientists from the University of Missouri examined the impact of cats on children suffering from Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). That research lasted 18 weeks and showed that children suffering from autism, after spending some time with a purring animal, increased their empathy and decreased the level of aggression, anger and hyperactivity.

[Weronika Wojnowska]



THE TROUBLE WITH BRAKES

GREAT SKILLS, NOT A MIRACLE



Fot. Leszek Matula, XII 2004

It was 19 December 2005 at 14:17 when a train driver Czesław Gołuszka began his route from Sucha Beskidzka to Żywiec. It was a day like any other - the weather wasn't great Christmas was just around the corner, so the atmosphere was good. The distance to travel wasn't long - only 35 km but the route wasn't easy - especially the part after Hucisko was quite steep. Additionally, the fact that there was only one track meant that trains going in opposite directions had to wait to pass each other at the station in Jeleśnia.

The ride began calmly and everything was going according to the plan, until the train reached the highest point of the route which was the station in Hucisko. Here Czesław was barely able to stop the train on time at the station. As a really experienced train driver, he immediately realized something was not right. To make matters worse, just moments earlier a train from Żywiec to Sucha Beskidzka had begun its run. Gołuszka knew how serious the situation was - the speed limit here was 40 km/h because of the bad state of the track. Going any faster than that meant risking a derailment.

After the departure from Hucisko Czesław made a braking test - he pulled the brake and... nothing happened. He immediately asked Zbigniew Piątkowski to run to the second cabin and use the emergency brake. Again - nothing happened. Gołuszka grabbed a radiotelephone and called the linewoman from Jeleśnia (the station where both trains were supposed to meet) and said in desperation: "Jeleśnia, do something, I don't have brakes!"

Danuta Gancarz in Jeleśnia knew right away that the quick action was needed. By the procedures she was supposed to re-direct the train onto the side track but in Jeleśnia it ended right before the road and the river - the train without brakes couldn't stop in time to avoid falling into the river, not to mention hitting the public road.

So, she closed all the rail crossings and called Ryszard Budziak – the driver of other train. She ordered him to stop the train and drive it in the other direction. He went to the now-front cabin but asked his helper to stay in the other one. Budziak started speeding up the train while Gołuszka's train was speeding through the station at Jeleśnia at around 80 km/h. The train from Żywiec had already reached the speed of 70 kilometres an hour when Ryszard finally heard from Maciej Polak (his helper) that he could see the other train. Gołuszka left his cabin and lay down on the floor amongst the passengers.

Meanwhile Polak kept informing Gołuszka about the distance between the trains: 300 meters... 200 metres... 100 metres... When they reached 50 meters, he ran away from his cabin and Ryszard pulled the brake.

The trains collided at the speed difference of only 20 km/h - the first wheels of the train with brakes failure had only slightly derailed and after 300 meters the collided vehicles stop. The radiotelephone remained silent. After the longest 6 minutes Danuta Gancarz heard: "On the train from Sucha there are minor injuries". Ryszard Budziak was injured in the face. Also the few passengers were slightly injured - they were taken care of at the place of crash. The Budziak's wound also turned out to be only skin deep.

All of the trains crew members and lineswoman were awarded by the president of Poland but then the story was forgotten. In the place of the accident there is no memorial, on the internet there are maybe 5 articles about what happened there. It really saddens that the heroic deeds of the people that are "just doing their job" but result in no casualties are can be completely forgotten. [Wiktor Smoliński]





King Arthur – truth or myth?

Probably every child heard a story about the legendary British king (he is one of the most well-known kings in the world). There are many histories about him and his adventures. But how many of them are true? Did he ever exist? Or is he only a figment of a human's mind, wanting to believe in someone/something?

One story has it that Arthur could be a leader of the post-Roman Britons in battles against Anglo-Saxon invaders in the late 5th and early 6th centuries. He appears for the first time in two early medieval historical sources, the *Annales Cambriae* and the *Historia Brittonum*, but these date to 300 years after he was supposed live and most historians who study the period do not consider him a historical figure.

The earliest literary references to Arthur come from the Welsh and Breton sources and he is very different from the modern character. There are three key strands to the portrayal of Arthur in this earliest material. The first is that he was a warrior who protected Britain from all internal and external threats, such as a Saxons, but also supernatural, like dragons and giant cat-monsters. In the second he is presented as the leader of a band of superhuman heroes who live in the wilds of the landscape. The third and final strand is that Arthur had a close connection with the Welsh Otherworld, *Annwn*. He attacks Otherworldly fortresses in search of treasure and frees their prisoners, but also his original warband includes former pagan gods. His wife and possessions come from Otherworld.

Arthurs as we know him first appeared in Geoffrey of Monmouth's pseudo-historical work *Historia Regum Britanniae* (History of the Kings of Britain), written in the 1130s. There Arthur is a son of Uther Pendragon who is dressed up as as his enemy Gorlis and sleeps with his wife Igrena. She conceives Arthur. After his father's death, 15-year- old Arthur succeeds as King of Britain. According to Geoff, his reign was a series of wars interrupted only twice, for short periods. Arthur defeats most of the European nations in the war, including the Saxons, Picts, Scots, Icelanders, Goths, Norwegians, Gauls, Romans and Orkney Islanders. After the Battle of the River Camblam he sails away to Avalon in 542. Goefffrey also mentions Arthur's messianic return when his people needed him the most.

Now, Geoffrey's chronicle is not considered a reliable historical source.

In every legend there is a grain of truth and king Arthur could really live. Even though we cannot know for sure, it is always nice to believe in something. And what do you think? Did king Arthur really live? [Ania Ciszelska]





CORRUPTION IN FOOTBALL



It is commonly known that football is one of the most popular sports around the world. Undoubtedly, it brings lots of emotions, tears, happiness but also some controversies involving global corporations. People know that world revolves around money and so it is with football. Today we will take a closer look at the dark side of this sport.

The place where we need to start our investigation is the main organization in the football world, FIFA. The topic was discussed in detail in 2006 by Andrew Jennings, who published a book called „Foul! The secret of FIFA: Bribes, Vote-Rigging and Ticket Scandals“. That work sparked significant controversy and caused many shockwaves in football circles. It describes, for example, a scandal called cash-for-contracts, which led to the collapse of FIFA's marketing partner ISL and many more alleged crimes. He also produced an episode of Panorama with the BBC, in which the former chairman of English Football Association, Lord Triesman, describes FIFA as „A mafia family“.

A man with probably the shadiest reputation in modern football, is Joseph Blatter. „Sepp“ became General Secretary in 1981 and ended up getting promoted to the position of the President of the organization in 1998. After his nomination more and more allegations of corruption started to appear.

Blatter was head of the institution for four more terms. Nevertheless, his elections were also linked to many alleged felonies. Not long after his arrival, there were rumours that some of his fellows were involved in taking bribes or even money laundering. The president himself was also instrumental in the abandonment of the investigations into organization he was running.

In 2015 he was removed from FIFA because of the accusations of corruption. His 8-year suspension was later shortened to 6. However, he wasn't the only one who was banned from any FIFA related activity. With him was also the head of another huge institution, UEFA, Michel Platini.

The European organization's activities resembled those of Blatter. They were also involved in dodgy operations in the football environment. Michel Platini was said to have been paid 1.35 million pounds. He claimed that it was a legitimate consultancy work, however, there was a problem with his explanation. He received the payment in 2011 – a full nine years after his initial payment for work with FIFA and three months before Blatter was re-elected.

Platini was considered to be promoted for the president of FIFA after Blatter, however, his participation in suspicious payments led to his abandonment for 6 years.

Another very controversial situation that occurred in the football world, was more recent. To understand that, we need to take the clock back to 2010. An alleged secret meeting took place in Paris, which included French president Nicolas Sarkozy, Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani – Qatar's Crown Prince and Michel Platini, who at that time was the president of UEFA and vice-president of FIFA.

In December 2010 Qatar was nominated to be the host for 2022 World Cup. They won 14 out of the 22 executive committee votes – including Platini's. This announcement was met with surprise, but mostly with suspicion and disapproval. After one year, allegations saying that Qatari representatives had paid money to the FIFA executive committee to buy votes came to light. However, they denied being involved in this kind of frauds.

Qatar is not a country where football is as popular as, for instance, in Europe. Hence there were no football stadiums there. To address the problem, they had to come up with a solution, which they found in cheap labourers from poorer Asian and African countries. In 2013 Amnesty International revealed what was happening on the building sites. Many people were dying because of the overwork causing exhaustion and disease. This cruel treatment showed how money became more important than human life.

These are only some examples of what happened over the years in the football world, which is sadly becoming more and more money-oriented and plagued by frauds and corruption. All we are left with is hope that something will change in the future, leading to equality for all the countries and that we will forget all the crime and bribery that occurred in the past. [Krzysiek Mielcarek]



HISTORY OF SWIMMING



Swimming is the ability to move in or on the water's surface and is a very valuable skill which every person should learn. People have been swimming practically forever, and the first documented cases of swimmers date back to ancient times. Evidence of developing this skill by people in ancient times are drawings from the areas of ancient Assyria, Egypt and Libya, which were created about four thousand years ago. Ancient people learned how to swim in order to survive. Swimming gave them the opportunity to collect food from water. A lot of valuable food could be found in rivers or water tanks and crossing watercourses could mean expanding hunting territories. In ancient Greece, swimming was a compulsory skill for an experienced person. However, the Olympic Games did not have such a discipline on their list, it was not treated as a sport.

In 36 or 35 BC (it is hard to define) The world's first official swimming competition took place in Japan but the first swimming club was set up in 1796 in Uppsala in Sweden. This club still exists today and is considered the oldest swimming club in the world. Several decades later, in 1869, the first swimming society was established in London, England, called the Amateur Swimming Association. In the same year, swimming became an Olympic sport. It is also the beginning of competitive swimming. The official world swimming championships have been organized since 1873. Another important date is July 19, 1908. On this day, the Fédération Internationale de Natation (FINA), the International Swimming Federation, was founded. This federation is still responsible for setting the regulations, organizing international competitions and determining the types of competitions and distances. It is also responsible for open water swimming, synchronized swimming, water polo and diving.

At a time when Europeans had already been taking part in various swimming competitions, Poland was under the partition, split into three parts. Despite the situation, Poles under the Austrian partition could take part in the sports competitions organized in these areas. In 1910, the first swimming competition with the Polish swimmers took place in Krakow (The Grunwald Rally). In 1922, the Polish Swimming Association, or PZP, was established. A year later, the organization became a member of FINA, and in 1926 also the Ligue Européenne de Natation, or LEN for short, the European Swimming Federation. The first official Polish swimming championships took place in 1929 in Warsaw. In 1935, the Polish swimming team took part in the Olympic Games in Berlin.

Currently, the art of swimming is appreciated both by numerous swimming competitors and amateur swimmers. Moreover, the benefits of practicing this physical activity are noticed by doctors and physiotherapists. Swimming is a sport that has a great impact on the body's performance, circulatory system, respiratory system and musculoskeletal system. It helps in the fight against obesity, spine defects and stress. The advantages of practicing this sport are incalculable. [Oliwia Zielińska]





Can Artificial Intelligence replace doctors?

Recently a group of Polish scientists have created an algorithm for Artificial Intelligence to recognize breast cancer. Their algorithm can tell the probability of getting breast cancer by only examining women's MRI photos. That means no need for the usual steps, like taking scans every year or undergoing a biopsy procedure. AI can also detect cancer at its earlier stage and when it is more treatable. If cancer is detected at the early stage, it is more possible for a patient to heal completely. It has also an economic benefit - if cancers are detected early, patients don't have to pay for operations, treatments or doctor appointments. AI can also state if the cancer is aggressive or not. Doctors, specialists and programists are working on developing algorithms for other types of cancers.

One of above mentioned Polish scientists is Jan Witowski, a well known scientist. In a conversation with Tomasz Rożek, a well known scientist and science promotor, he stated that AI diagnosis is better than the one done by radiologists.

Such interesting results have been achieved by others too. Swedish research proved that artificial intelligence is able to accurately detect 20 percent more breast cancers from mammograms than traditional screening readings by radiologists. AI is something that is going to be important in the future. It is already being developed in many medical centres.

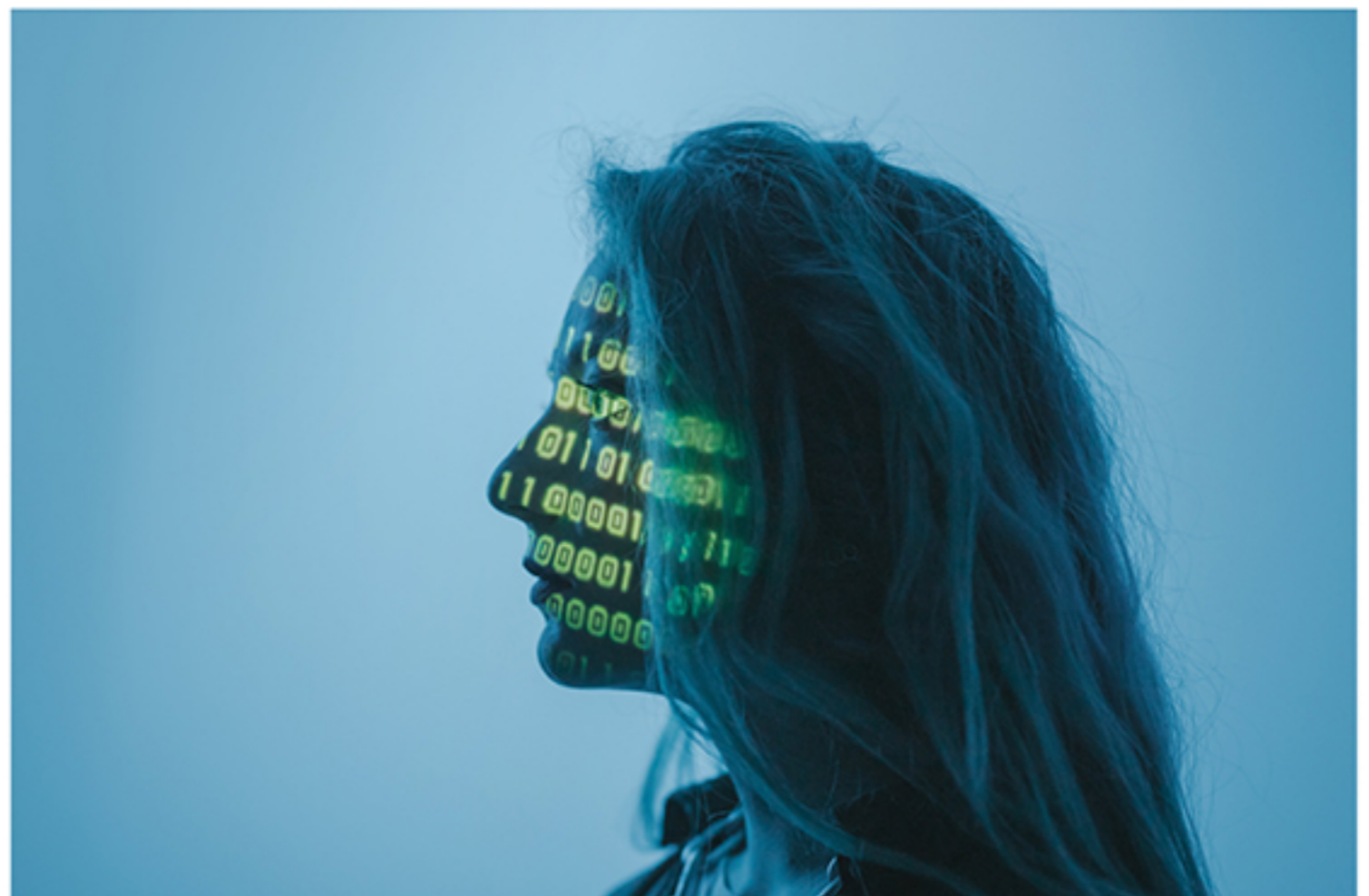
So...

Is it at all possible for Artificial Intelligence to replace doctors?

In my opinion, AI won't replace them, but definitely will help them a lot. It can also help with the shortage of physicians and burnouts among doctors. Some countries can't afford radiologists in every hospital and that's where AI comes into action - it is much cheaper. In some hospitals AI works as an assistant and helps doctors by reducing stress and paperwork. AI is also used to communicate with patients.

On the other hand, Artificial Intelligence can't offer empathy and trust. Programs and algorithms don't have feelings which are necessary for helping ill people. Cancer patients need not only information but they need also emotional support and paying attention to their feelings, for example listening to their fears and being compassionate.

If AI took over some easier tasks, doctors could see more patients and give them help of better quality. What it cannot do is to guide us through therapy and emotions, and that's where we need doctors.



A tale about „Redhead Charles” - one of the best spies



Charles Schulmeister who was called “Redhead Charles” was a son of Lutheran preacher born in Alsace in 1770. His story did not start from the French palaces but from the French eastern border and contraband. In 1795 he decided to join the police and left the contraband. At the beginning of 18th century, the chairman of the French military intelligence, Rene Savary uncovered the spy talent of Schulmeister. The first big case in which he was involved was the abduction of Louis Antoine which was regarded as a threat to the French Republic because he was a part of Bourbon dynasty. Schulmeister was one of Savary’s spies which had been collecting information about that monarch.

Another breathtaking trick made by French spy was misinforming Austrian general Mack. In October of 1805 French army was approaching Ulm, a German city located in Baden-Wuerttemberg. Then, Schulmeister, who was pretending to be Hungarian lord eager to give Austria information about French army, joined Austrian’s ranks and started to inform the French about Austrian army. Additionally, he convinced Mack that France was being attacked by her enemies from the other sides (which of course was not true), so Austrians didn’t do anything what allowed Napoleon to siege Ulm. Mack was forced to surrender. More than 30 thousands of Austrian soldiers were taken prisoner without a single shot, thanks to Schulmeister’s efforts.

After that deed French spy became also an Austrian spy and Russian spy until some officers started regarding him as disloyal. He had to flee from Wien. After being taken prisoner he was lucky and a special French group released him from the Austrian captivity.

The situation regarding Ulm wasn’t an exception of his skills. The information which he had gained in Austria was crucial during Napoleon’s campaign in 1805. It made him famous both in Paris and whole Europe.

Schulmeister received a lot of money and land for his work. However, his dream was to receive one thing - Legion of Honour - which is the highest order of merit in France. But he was a spy and, as Napoleon said, “medals are only for the army, for spies what’s left is gold”. So he decided to join the army. Despite it, the Emperor did not reward him with this order of merit.

After a campaign in 1809 “Redhead Charles” started to focus more on his enterprises in Alsace and after the outbreak of rheumatism in 1814 he was no longer able to be a spy for Napoleon. When the wars ended and Napoleon was finally sent to St. Helen island, Schulmeister was arrested by Coalition and while he was let free, he had to give away a lot of his money and property. He spent last years of his life by running a tobacco shop.

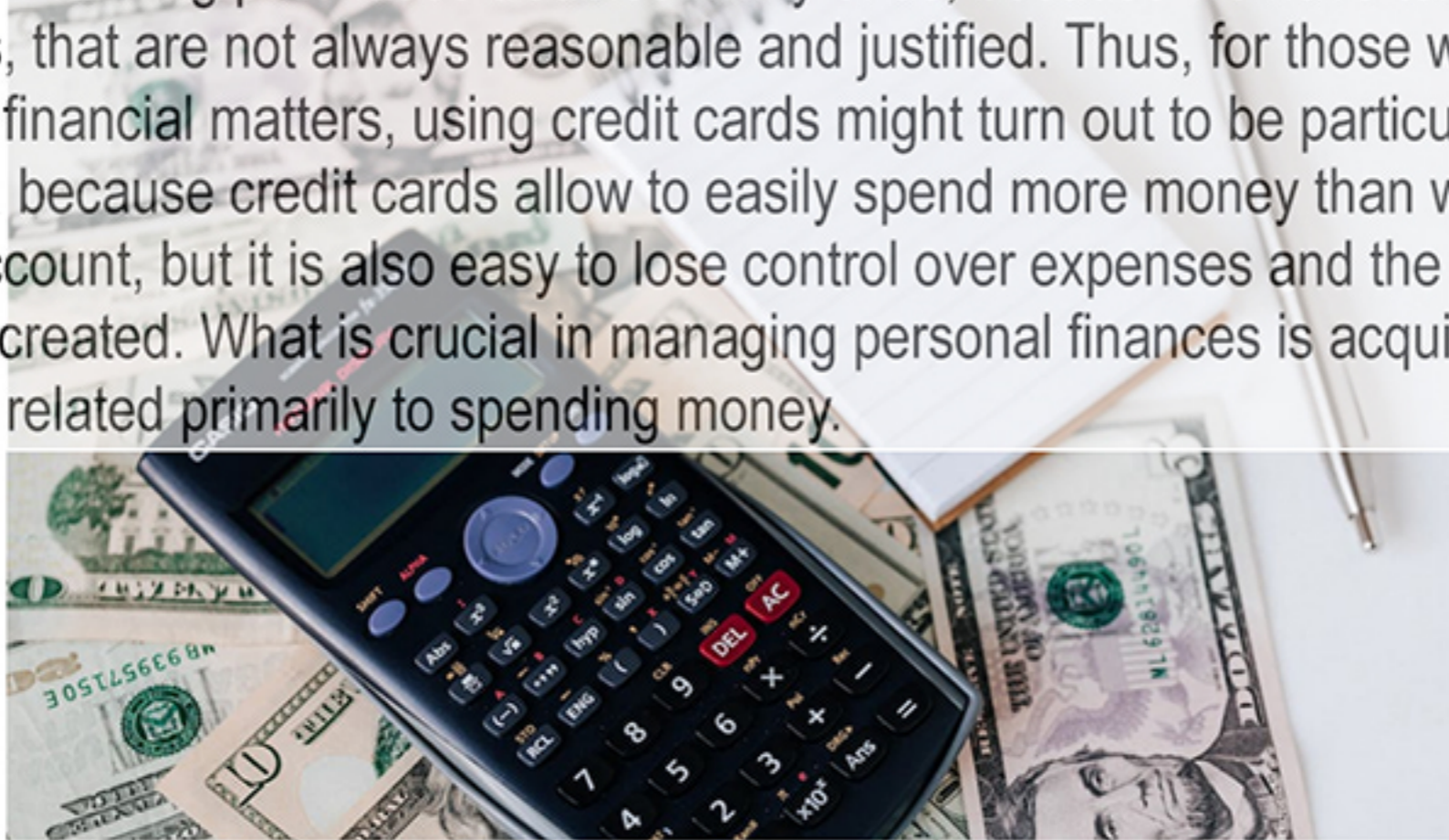
[Wiktor Lewczuk]

PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS OF MONEY MANAGEMENT



The ability to skilfully manage your finances is crucial for those who want to lead a responsible lifestyle. However, the way they are dealt with varies. It is the case because of different attitudes people have towards money and their approach to managing it. The matter is complicated because of the fact that money management often concerns psychology more than mathematics.

The truth is that we all have the ability to count, but we do not always use it to manage our finances. Money management does not require advanced mathematical knowledge. One's character traits, their habits and general attitude towards money are what usually causes problems with personal finances management. They are the reason why some people cannot cope even with simple issues, such as controlling your income and expenses. While everyone knows the value of their monthly income, tracking one's expenses might turn out to be more difficult. Planning purchases troubles many of us, because we have tendencies to make purchases, that are not always reasonable and justified. Thus, for those who lack self-discipline in financial matters, using credit cards might turn out to be particularly risky. That is the case, because credit cards allow to easily spend more money than were originally placed on the account, but it is also easy to lose control over expenses and the amount of debt that will be created. What is crucial in managing personal finances is acquiring reasoned habits related primarily to spending money.



The basic principle in money management is to maintain a balance between income and expenses. Although it seems obvious, in practice it is often not followed. Planning and control of expenses should be the rule. The basic way to comply with it is to monitor expenses and analyze them systematically. In this way, you can determine the structure of expenses and optimize them. By recording expenses and dividing them into individual categories, we obtain valuable information about our finances and can control them. Generally, it is important to properly manage your expenses and adjust the amounts spent to the amount of income you earn. Balancing your income and expenses is the minimum plan for money management.

Another extremely important thing related to proper management of your finances is savings. Rational financial management should lead to a permanent surplus of income over expenses. For most people, having savings is a natural need that gives a sense of security and comfort, as well as prestige. The savings should allow you to survive unfavorable circumstances related to job loss or salary reduction, and cover unforeseen expenses. It is assumed that the cash reserve should be able to cover expenses for a minimum period of three months. Having savings also opens the way to the possibility of multiplying them, becoming a source of additional income. Saving is also associated with appropriate habits, which should be started as early as possible.

Another issue is the threats and errors that appear in running our budget. One of the most common threats in financial management is excessive optimism about achieving income. Many people overestimate their capabilities in this area. Unjustified hope for an improvement in the financial situation most often leads to excessive debt, which, combined with a lack of discipline, may result in insolvency. The ability to repay debt should be strictly respected and monitored. At best, excessive optimism leads to irrational money management and financial instability. Excessive optimism is often accompanied by excessive self-confidence, which, in the absence of appropriate knowledge, may lead to making irrational decisions in the field of personal finance management.

The most common mistakes include lack of interest in one's finances. As strange as it may sound, many people don't think about managing their money until something bad happens to it. A derivative of this approach is the lack of willingness to make changes in one's approach to finances, because it involves some effort or giving up habits. The sources of problems are often misguided purchases and falling for advertising and promotional offers. Lack of planning expenses and giving up on setting priorities in this area leads to us buying things we could do without and making purchases impulsively. We often make them under the influence of fashion, advertising messages, imitation, or traps set for customers, of which the most popular are occasional price reductions.

There is one more issue that is worth stopping for a moment. You can see that usually, both in the case of spending and saving, people focus on large amounts of money, while marginalizing the importance of small amounts of money. Meanwhile, their sum can be quite impressive and could allow for considerable savings. It is also worth taking advantage of the importance of small amounts in saving by saving the rest of the total amount or keeping a small percentage of the amount spent. Some banks offer this type of service as part of a personal account or credit card.

As we can see, psychological considerations and character traits play a very important role in money management. They most often determine material success. Qualities such as discipline, systematicity, prudence, and controlling emotions are very useful in these matters. Therefore, it is worth trying to manage them and, above all, develop appropriate habits as early as possible that will help in managing finances. [Dominik Szarecki]



BEING AN EXCHANGE PARTNER



In December 2023, a group of 15 people flew from Spain to Poland for an exchange programme. I was one of the students whose job was to host one person in their home and spend a whole week with them. I would like to explain what this type of exchange looks like and what experience it brings.

Of course, we were all very excited about the whole situation but also very stressed at the same time. For many of us it was a new experience because it was the first time we had had the opportunity to take part in such a programme.

Me and my parents were stressed, as we didn't know if my exchange partner would like our food or if she would feel comfortable in our home. However, it turned out that there was nothing to stress about. The Spanish are very open and sociable, so there were no problems with communication. They did not like most of the Polish food and preferred to go to McDonald, but they were open to try everything they got. Especially they didn't like the tea, because they don't drink it in Spain.

What mattered to me was the fact that during the whole week I was able to improve my English and Spanish. Although the language we were supposed to speak was English, thanks to many conversations I managed to learn a bit of the Spanish slang. But, of course, I can see a big difference in the level of my English and I can see that it is higher, thanks to the constant conversations and communication only in this language I have no problem talking in English and most importantly I am not afraid to use it anymore.

We spent a lot of time with each other on various excursions that we had organized earlier. We showed our friend from Spain the most beautiful places in Wroclaw, so they could get to know a little about the history of the city.

The most interesting were the differences I noticed between the Poles and the Spaniards. People from Spain are very energetic and happy almost all the time. However, even though they don't lack energy, they do many things very slowly, for example, to go to eat we always had to take at least one hour because they are never in a hurry.

Finally, I want to say how much this adventure has brought to my life; meeting new people and culture is a great experience that I will remember for the rest of my life, so I cannot wait until February when we fly to La Union and get to know even more how my exchange friends live.

[Julia Drohobycka]



SOCRATES



The foggy figure of Athen's perennial philosopher

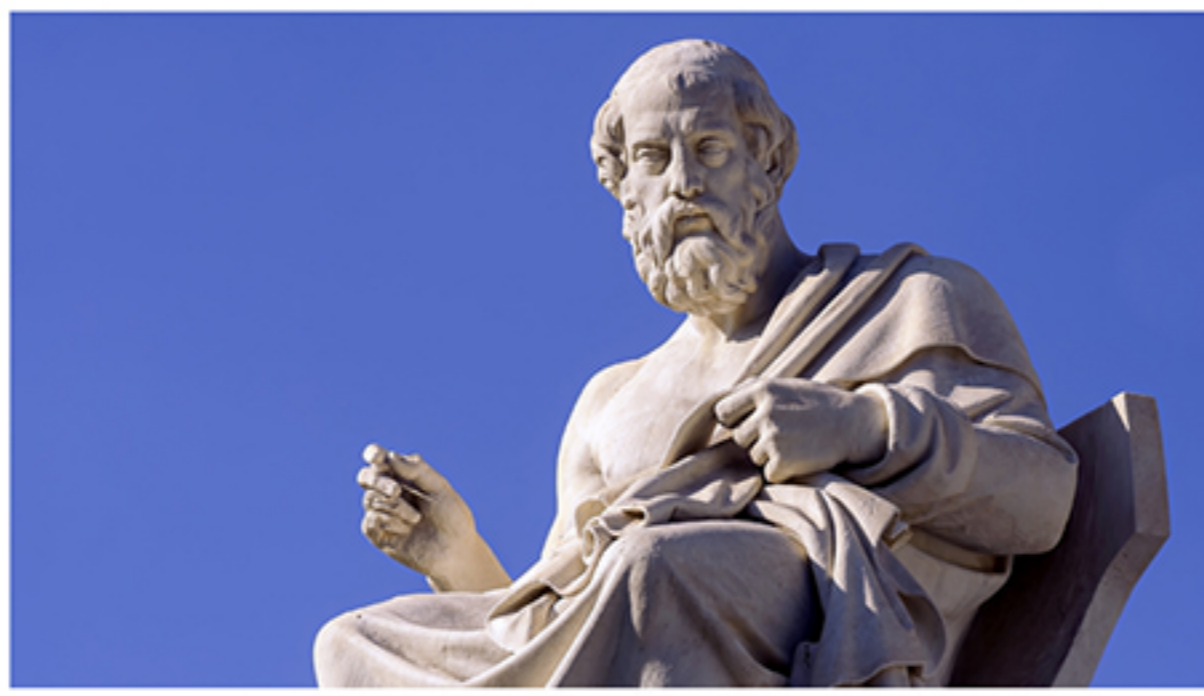
"I know that I know nothing" is the famous quote, presumably once spoken by the well-known ancient Greek philosopher – Socrates. During his lifetime, this eccentric man gained quite a popularity among his fellow residents of the city of Athens. Despite this fact, it's really difficult to fully elaborate on certain details of his life. The main reason for this conundrum is that Socrates himself never wrote anything regarding both his teachings and personal opinions on various topics. Luckily, there were quite a few of young fellows eager to scribble down every word that their so-called master had uttered. Because of that we currently have a decent amount of information about him. The only issue being – it might be troublesome to check the credibility of certain sources. Each of them states a number of things, some of which are contradictory with the works of the other followers. On the other hand, even the most reliable reference – the Plato's body of work – has to be approached and interpreted carefully, since he often used to either idolise the figure of Socrates or attribute him his own views, making it difficult to distinguish the truth from fiction. In spite of those issues, there are still aspects that we can be almost sure of. Now, let's leave it aside and take a closer look at the philosopher's life, shall we?

The tale of the despised thinker

Long, long ago in ancient Greece, in the city of Athens, to be more precise, lived a certain bizarre man called Socrates. He was known for being a master at asking very probing and peculiar questions to many people simply passing through the streets, some of which were thought to be the most intelligent and knowledgeable among the folk. His questions would concern a wide category of topics. For example, the reckoned wisdom of the interlocutor. The more confident the person in-question was of their own beliefs and righteousness, the more eager and curious he was to question its claims. The purpose of his inquiries was to get to the bottom of the other person's statement, pick it apart piece by piece, so that he could understand it fully. His famous quote "I know that I know nothing" refers to this

unique approach. Each time he began to challenge somebody's logic he did so in order to learn, to become smarter, and if it coincidentally happened that the other person wasn't as marvellous at the society perceived them to be - to make them realize the inconsistency in their reasoning.





Another thing worth mentioning is that the only response he would give during the conversations were questions. The old man never consented directly or bluntly objected. Instead, he led the query in such a way, so that by the end of the discourse both of them would arrive at the objectively correct conclusion, together. Socrates's unusual behaviour made him well-known among his fellow citizens, not necessarily in a positive way. A great number of youngsters adored his intellectual wits and desired to become one of his pupils. However, neither establishing a brand-new philosophy school nor conducting private paid classes didn't pique the philosopher's interest. Nevertheless, the adoration of the youth was only a small percentage of the total population of Athens, there were many who had deeply rooted hatred for this humble deep thinker that were about to bring dire consequences very soon. As he became known to more and more people, the demands to do something about this outrageous man became louder and louder. In their eyes, many of his questions were seen as morally dubious. For instance, the fact that he dared to occasionally challenge the existence of the gods, the core of their culture and civilization, was especially negatively received. His enemies decided to cite him with the charges of the acts of profanity and depravity of the young folk in the city's people's court. Soon enough, the trial was in session...

The dreadful verdict of the majority

The trial was held in the year 399 B.C. The legal process was supposed to proceed according to a number of strictly set regulations that honoured the glorious Athenian democracy. 500 men picked out randomly from the cities' people were to observe the course of the trial and vote accordingly to their judgment to either let go of or sentence the accused. If at least half of them considered him not guilty, the man would be freed. Moreover, the prosecution would also be obliged to pay the defendant a compensation for insulting his dignity in the shadow of allegations. Nonetheless, if he were to be found guilty, the call of the accusers would be fulfilled, and so, the accused would receive the highest form of possible punishment – death. Ready to accept whatever possible outcome may occur, and certain of his innocence, the philosopher decided not to hire a defence attorney that would represent him in court and try to convince the jury of the falsehood of the accusations. In lieu, he decided to undertake the role himself. The old man spoke to the gathered public once again, this time gathered not in the streets, but the very courtroom, ready to fight back against the grave pleas. Socrates used the same, simple yet vibrant words that he always did during the local disputes.

Contrary to the masses, he chose not to indulge himself in the lowly tricks such as the emotional manipulation in order to gain the sympathy of the judges. He did not yell, weep nor beg for mercy of the arbiters, but carefully pointed out the flaws of the evidence brought by the prosecution with his usual characteristic charm. The trial proceeded smoothly without any interruptions. It lasted for only one day, and the so-called justice delivered its sentence. Socrates almost evaded death were 30 people more voted for his innocence, he would be spared, Unfortunately, 280 wanted him dead while the remaining 220, to save his life. To the student's despair, their teacher's demise was near. After the verdict was given, the deep thinker was transported to prison, where he spend about 30 days waiting for the looming fate, since there was a custom that forbid carrying out death sentences during the celebration of the ceremonial procession of Apollo's ship to the island of Delos, which was currently taking place. His followers and friends visited him often for the whole period of anticipation, desperate to save the masters life at any cost. They even managed to bribe the guards to let them break him out of prison. However, their struggle was futile, because the victim himself refused to leave its imprisonment. He even listed out a long list of convincing arguments as to why it's the most rational solution. Every foreseeable future he could imagine led to continuous despair. At the end of the disquisition, even the students themselves were almost persuaded. Nonetheless, when the day finally came, he decided to die on his own terms before the official judgment could be carried out. In the company of the people closest to him, he drank a chalice filled with poison, and so, the journey of this extraordinary man came to an end...

The legacy of the inquirer

Despite the tragic end of the man's life, his time spent on the earthly realm wasn't in vain. Socrates's wisdom and legacy continued to live on thanks to the pupil's work. The most famous one among them, Plato, established the first-ever philosophy school in the history of West. After Plato's passing, there was yet another brave soul that followed in the footsteps of his ancestors – Aristoteles. Educated in the newly founded academia, he made a major contribution to the philosophy's development. Regardless of Socrates's bad reputation, his unique way of thinking and living bore fruits in the form of his wonderful students that continued to spread the knowledge they gained from him, and the one they acquired later-on, for their lifetimes.

[Paweł Paroboczy]

