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Shumacher: *Small is Beautiful*

Originally written in 1973, Shumacher's thoughts on how the world's economic, social, and political dynamics should evolve are presented in the still-relevant publication, *Small is Beautiful*. The book functions as a sort of owner's manual for global citizens seeking solutions to poverty and inequality, but it reads like a textbook in its explanations of why these problems originated and continue to persist in a number of global regions. By taking a comprehensive approach to the biggest problems in the world, Shumacher successfully simplifies their causes and outlines productive ways to alleviate their symptoms.

The author begins with a section on economics, illustrating why large companies are economically counter-productive and wholly destructive. Large-scale business, he explains, feels unrestrained by the limits of nature (which it has conquered with technology) and therefore has no reason to nurture the resources it uses. He uses a chapter on Buddhist economics to contrast our consumerist way of life; these ideas conclude that "since consumption is merely a means to human well-being, the aim should be to obtain the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption" (Shumacher 41). Although we consistently argue that enormous, all-powerful businesses are the most efficient way to manage a resource (I'm looking at you, factory farms), systems like these allow for overconsumption, fail to connect people with fulfilling jobs, and put us out of touch with the natural capital we should treasure above all else.

Shumacher continues by outlining fundamental social and political faults that hinder the developing world. Education, he argues, should serve to teach us why we do things rather than how we should do them; metropolitan life isolates us from life-giving land and healthy interpersonal connections. Energy scarcity is an impending threat that doesn't seem to curb our need for growth and excessive consumerism. Technologies attempting to improve everyone's lives are proving unsuccessful no matter the budget of the project. What, then, is the solution to all of this chaos? How can we establish healthy development with a strong forward momentum?

Shumacher's answer is complete yet concise: "Development does not start with goods; it starts with people and their education, organization, and discipline. Without these three, all resources remain latent, untapped, potential" (139). He explains that this is an evolutionary process; improvement cannot happen overnight because it requires the use of all three of these elements. Education must exist to connect people with work, teach them the priceless value of natural resources, and show them how to properly care for this nonrenewable capital that no human can truly own for himself. Organization must emphasize locality, bringing appropriate solutions and technologies to the areas where they would be most efficient—all on a small,

community-based scale. Discipline must be powerful in limiting greed or corruption, which would threaten the jobs and paychecks of those who do honest and satisfying work.

What is most fascinating to me about Shumacher's ideas is how simple they are; this quality makes them timeless. I frequently found myself wondering, "Why didn't I think of that?" whenever he presented a particularly elegant solution. His thoughts on appropriate technology could act as a summary for this entire class, and it astonishes me that he comes to such poignant conclusions and is able to fully explain his reasoning. I highly recommend reading his chapters on Buddhist economics and appropriate technologies—they provide invaluable insights that will refocus our perspectives on economies, work, and how to truly aid foreign cultures.