

Small Is Beautiful *by Cortellini*

Change, it is generally agreed, has now become a matter of necessity. Peak Oil, the worsening Ecological Crises, the collapse of the Economy, and the steady decline of Community, have converged, in this the first decade of the third Millennium, to make large scale change of our society inevitable. What course shall we, as a culture, chart in the second decade of this new Millennium? Can we step outside of ourselves in order to see our situation clearly and objectively? Do we have the capacity to deliberately change our circumstances towards a new intended direction? Can we intentionally change ourselves?

We have entered the Post Industrial Era. The difficulties we are now experiencing are the result of unintended consequences of an age that brought more change, in 100 years, than the world had seen in all of prior human history. Technology, the product and the "change agent" of the Industrial Age, has given us enormous power to affect change through the ability to engineer outcomes. We have come to learn however that most engineered systems, while producing intended results, also produce unpredicted and unintended consequences. This trait is difficult to overcome because it is ingrained in the nature of systems and the larger, more complex, and more powerful the system, the larger the potential for and effect of its unintended outcomes.

Technology is a system made up of an interconnected web of systems which are webs of smaller systems which are... and so on. Control is asserted all along this complex web at various points in all dimensions yet overall control of this amalgam - this huge, complex, powerful machine - is asserted by the system of economics. The science and technology that comprise economics, an invention of the Industrial Age, have only been around a relatively short time yet economics has come to shape and to rule our lives. It would serve us to understand more about it if we intend to better manage our affairs from this time on.

"Small is Beautiful - Economics as if People Mattered" was written by E. F. Schumacher in 1973. A Rhodes Scholar in economics, an economic advisor to the British Control Commission in postwar Germany, and the top economist and head of planning at the British Coal Board for 20 years, Schumacher is well acquainted with big system economics. In "Small is Beautiful", he offers a treatise of the prevailing economic theory in 1973 which has changed little in the intervening 35 years. He also describes an alternative economic model which, if adopted, would revolutionize our culture - a model that has apparently been ignored by mainstream economists and political leaders. "The great majority of economists," Schumacher laments, "are still pursuing the absurd idea of making their 'science' as scientific and precise as physics, as if there were no qualitative difference between mindless atoms and men made in the image of God." He points out that the cold statistics; the current basis of our



*The Eiffel Tower, 1905
symbol of the Modern Age*



*E.F. Schumacher -from cover
of Small Is Beautiful 1973*

economics, are based on sweeping hidden preconceptions about our human needs and motivations.

"What, then, if those preconceptions are obsolete?" writes Theodore Roszak in his 1973 introduction to the book, "What if they were never correct? What if there stir, in all those expertly quantified millions of living souls beneath the statistical surface, aspirations for creativity, generosity, brotherly and sisterly cooperation, natural harmony, and self-transcendence which conventional economics, by virtue of banal misanthropy it mistakes for "being realistic," only works to destroy? If that is so (and there is no doubt in my mind that it is), then it is no wonder the policies which stem from that economics must so often be made to work, must be forced down against resistance upon a confused and recalcitrant human material which none dare ever consult except by way of the phony plebiscite of the marketplace, which always turns out as predicted because it is rigged up by cynics, voted by demoralized masses, and tabulated by opportunists. And what sort of science is it that must, for the sake of its predictive success, hope and pray that people will never be their better selves, but always be greedy social idiots with nothing finer to do than getting and spending, getting and spending? It is as Schumacher tells us: "when the available 'spiritual space' is not filled by some higher motivations, then it will necessarily be filled by something lower - by the small, mean, calculating attitude to life which is rationalized in the economic calculus." If that is so, then we need a nobler economics that is not afraid to discuss spirit and conscience, moral purpose and the meaning of life, an economics that aims to educate and elevate people, not merely to measure their low grade behavior. Here it is."

Here it is indeed. This work is powerful, penetrating, disturbing, and hopeful. Even as Schumacher's concepts are imminently reasonable, it is not likely that the changes suggested by "Small is Beautiful" will be initiated by those at the top of the current power structure. Schumacher's gift of a "nobler economics" is made to us the citizens. It is as it always has been. If it is time for profound change, "We the People" must make it happen.