

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL  
Economics as if People Mattered  
E. F. Schumacher  
Hartley & Marks, Publishers, Vancouver, BC, 1999  
286 pages index \$24.95 sc  
Reviewed by PEG TITLE

It's usually considered a good thing when a book 'stands the test of time,' when it doesn't become outdated. However, as an analysis of what's wrong with our world and as a prescription for making it right, it's sad, very sad, that this book, originally published in 1973, is still 'right on the money' (rather literally, since the analysis focuses on our economic system).

For those who have never heard of Schumacher's masterpiece, do not be afraid of the word 'economics' in the subtitle: his work is completely comprehensible to non-economists. (That economics is usually incomprehensible to the rational and healthy mind is a point to consider.)

Quite simply, I can't quote enough from the four sections, titled The Modern World, Resources, The Third World, and Organisation and Ownership: "...the economist who pursues 'economic growth' as the highest of all values, and therefore has no concept of 'enough'" (p.12) and later, "The idea that there could be pathological growth, unhealthy growth, disruptive or destructive growth is to him a perverse idea which must not be allowed to surface" (p.33); "...it is inherent in the methodology of economics to \_ignore man's dependence on the natural world\_" (p.29) and earlier, "...we are treating [natural resources] as income items although they are undeniably capital items" (p.5); "...if economic thinking pervades the whole of society, even simple non-economic values like beauty, health, or cleanliness can survive only if they prove to be 'economic'" (p.31); "The denial of freedom, of course, is a denial of responsibility: there are

no acts, but only events; everything simply happens; no one is responsible" (p.192)

This re-release, twenty-five years later, features marginal commentaries from notable people (our readers might recognize Robert Bateman, Jane Jacobs, Amory Lovins, and David Brower, among others). I think that's an excellent idea, but I found the commentaries rather disappointing: somehow there wasn't the impact I think there could have been (perhaps I was expecting strident 'I told you so!' vindications of facts and figures, but there wasn't much developmental enrichment of his ideas either).

Some may be turned off by Schumacher's references to religion; rest assured they are not required for his arguments. And some may be surprised by his attitude toward women, but the insult occurs only once.

Quite simply, this book should be mandatory reading. Certainly not only, but certainly especially, for economists.