

Small Is Beautiful Main Text

Hi, this is AJ again. Welcome to the next lesson. This lesson is called “Small is Beautiful.” Small is Beautiful is the name of a book by E.F. Schumacher. It’s a very interesting book. It’s a little bit difficult to read. The level of English is actually fairly difficult, but I do recommend it. If you have an advanced level of English, go ahead, try to read Small is Beautiful. It’s an excellent book. E.F. Schumacher was an economist, still is an economist. And he wrote Small is Beautiful to talk about the economic problems we have in the world. Now this book was published back in the late ‘70s, I believe, and it has been updated more recently. But the basic idea of Small is Beautiful is that our economies in the world are big, big businesses, have become too big. And they are not sustainable anymore.

Too big, in other words, we’re destroying the planet Earth because we are consuming too much. Our economies are too big; our population, too big; our companies, too big. Everything has grown too large and his solution, as you might guess, is that we need smaller economies, more local economies, more green economies. So he was writing about this long before Al Gore and An Inconvenient Truth and a lot of other things which are quite common right now. But he was writing about these things way back in the ‘70s.

He realized that we’re going to have to make some changes. Our planet is being destroyed, we have to do something. And we need to start at the economic level. We have to change our economic system so that it is more human, so that it serves human beings not just super large companies. And, of course, he talks about these economies and his solutions in a lot of detail. Like I said, he was an economist, he is an economist. So he has a lot of very detailed economic arguments and he analyzes things from an economic viewpoint. It’s very interesting.

Today I want to read to you just a short passage from his book and this book and this passage really talk about the key, central core problem in his opinion. What is the most basic problem? What is causing all these economic problems we see in the world, all the environmental destruction, the wars we see constantly, what’s the root cause? And let me read from the book right now.

“Economically our wrong living consists primarily in systematically cultivating greed and envy and thus building up a vast array of totally unnecessary wants. It is the sin of greed that has delivered us over into the power of the machine. If greed were not the master of modern man how could it be that the frenzy of consumerism does not abate at higher standards of living and that

it is precisely the richest societies which pursue their economic advantage with the greatest ruthlessness? How could we explain the almost universal refusal on the part of the rulers of the rich societies to work towards the humanization of work, soul destroying, meaningless, mechanical, monotonous, moronic work that is an insult to human nature. These are the facts which are neither denied nor acknowledged but are met with an unbreakable silence. Because to deny them would be too obviously absurd and to acknowledge them would condemn the central preoccupation of modern society as a crime against humanity.“

Okay, I told you it would be difficult and it is a little difficult so let me explain a little of what this section means. What is he talking about? So he's saying that our problem, our modern problem, economically in life, comes from greed and envy. Greed and envy are the problems. That our societies now cultivate greed and envy, of course, cultivate means grow. So our societies, our cultures, are now growing greed and envy. They encourage greed and envy in people. People getting more greedy, greedy, greedy... more envious, more envious, more envious.

And as people become more greedy and envious, they develop a lot of unnecessary wants. They start wanting more, more, more, more, more, more, more, more...always wanting more, more, more. So he said it's this sin, it's greed, this problem of greed that has made us slaves to machines. That's what he's saying, delivered us into the power of the machine. He's talking about it's made us slaves to our big companies, it's made us slaves to computers, to machines, to this modern life, that we're not free anymore because of this greed and envy.

And then he talks about, he says that you see that it's true because the richest countries, the places where people have the most, such as the United States, they are the most ruthless about wanting more and more and more. So, in other words, there is never enough. The richest countries are the most brutal, the most tough, the most ruthless, trying to get even more and more and more. So he's saying it never ends, right? If someone's very rich then they want even more money. It never stops. And he says the other problem is that people who aren't rich, they are stuck in soul-destroying jobs, that work is mostly meaningless, mechanical, monotonous and moronic. Moronic means stupid.

In most of the world, most jobs, most work is just horrible. Now you may like your job but, of course, he's thinking about all the thousands of people, for example, in China working in terrible factories...well millions, not thousands, millions and millions. All over the world poor people working horrible jobs, terrible jobs, soul-destroying jobs, jobs that destroy their health and their life and their happiness. So he's saying these are facts. Everybody knows they're true. But there's an unbreakable silence about them. So he's saying people don't talk about it. You don't hear about this on the news. People don't talk about all the horrible job and work conditions for most people in most countries. There is silence about it. Nobody talks about it. They don't condemn it because that's

absurd, that's crazy. They can't condemn it. They can't say it's not true because everybody knows it is true. But they can't talk about it because then they would condemn the central preoccupation of our society.

Preoccupation means what we think about, our goal. So he's saying that everybody just ignores it. We pretend it's not happening. So he's saying this is the problem. The central problem, that we are creating so much greed and envy everywhere that our whole economic system is driven by greed and envy, that our whole culture, global culture, is based upon greed and envy. And that's what most advertising is about. That's what most of our whole economic systems and even our governments encourage it: greed and envy, greed and envy, greed and envy, in all our societies. And that is destroying the planet. It's destroying our culture. It's destroying the people and their jobs. It's destroying everything.

So that's not a very happy thought but I think he's probably right. I think we can all see that he's right. Now luckily the book is actually very positive. So he's talking about the problem here and we all can see the problem and it is a very terrible problem. And we all know that people are suffering everywhere in the world, working these horrible jobs. And we all know that greed and envy are controlling most of our governments, most of our countries, most of our societies. But the good news is that in this book, *Small is Beautiful*, he has a lot of great solutions about creating local economies that are not based upon greed and envy. And creating sustainable economies, meaning that they can keep going year after year, decade after decade, century after century; without destroying the earth, without destroying people. So this book is a very practical book. And he has a lot of very, very practical suggestions on how we can change.

So I do highly recommend reading *Small is Beautiful* by E.F. Schumacher. And if you don't read that then I hope you will at least start learning more about ecology and the green movement and sustainable economics because these are very, very important issues to our planet, to everybody living on it. So I hope you enjoyed this, *Small is Beautiful*. Next is, of course, the vocabulary lesson so I'll see you next time.