

## Specialization (Pros & Cons)

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The extremes of both specialization and generalization leave out the benefits of individual thinking and understanding the big picture. Wendell Berry dislikes specialization for its narrowness of perception and skill. From the other side of the spectrum, Wendell dislikes generalization for its inability to make proper management decisions for areas of land on an individual basis. The happy medium in between, where there is a healthy balance between specialization and generalization, reconciles Berry's dislike of specialization and his desire to have people act individually. A person not acting individually is susceptible to the ideas of mass culture. They will be following over generalized ideas that are not necessarily the best for their individual situation. Specialization is a problem because it leads to decisions that do not take into account all consequences of the action.

In the natural progression of capitalistic specialization, an individual is trained to do one thing. That person is then paid for completing that specific task over and over. This expands into a system where everyone is focused on his or her one thing. "From a public point of view, the specialist system is a failure because, though everything is done by an expert, very little is done well. Our typical industrial or professional product is both ingenious and shoddy." (Berry: 21) Their actions are a small part of the greater process. That person is disconnected from the outcome of the greater process. Thus no one really cares about the combined results, except for the immediate profit that they obtain. When they are so narrowly focused, they cannot see the bigger picture. Their individual actions are based on perceptions and skills that are not taking everything into consideration. There is a societal separation from consequences. The society's, the public's, character is eroded. In the end too much specialization is leading to a loss for ethics and integrity.

Not even the individual is fulfilled by this system. "The fact is, however, that this is probably the most unhappy average citizen in the history of the world. He has not the power to provide himself with anything but money....For all of his leisure and recreation, he feels bad, he looks bad, he is overweight, his health is poor. He does not know what he would do if he lost his job, if the economy failed..." (Berry: 20-21) We can see the discontentment of this society by the appearance of such self-help books as *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Three of the seven habits are categorized as "The Habits of Interdependence" (Covey: 203). They are advice for the emptiness one feels when one is too independent or specialized. "Because by definition they lack any sense of mutuality or wholeness, our specializations subsist on conflict with one another." (Berry: 22) The conflicts are not necessarily leading to a greater good. The isolation that results is psychologically having a negative effect on people. If people sought individual achievement or skill, but in respect to their interaction with their environment, not only would their decisions be better, they would feel better about themselves.

This is the essence of the economic system we work in. “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest. We address ourselves, not to the humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.” (Smith: 14) The same thing that makes our economic production self-managing and productive is what makes it blind. Specialization as such is a narrowness of perception.

If the problem is then with the individual specialization, then the solution must effect the problem. Then there cannot be a solution in generalized decision making. What is good for one is usually not good for the many. The responsible land use for one area may be very different than what is responsible for another. Indeed, even in some single square that we have designated a field, it could be that parts could be used for crop while other parts should be left as buffers to the waterways. This same map shouldn't then be applied to another section, but on an individual basis be assessed on principles of husbandry and care for the land. Acting individually for these types of situations is what is needed in order to make the decisions that are truly appropriate.

“One reason that an organization cannot properly enact our relationship to the world is that organization cannot define that relationship except in general terms, and no matter how general may be a person's attitude toward the world, his impact upon it must become specific and tangible at some point.”(Berry: 27) That tangible point would need to be a part of land management if it is going to be proper for that individual land. An individuals thinking will be the one that has the greatest effect. Organizational definitions could not make proper management decisions for areas of land on an individual basis.

Generalization is inheritantly a distancing from the specific case. In dealings with components of nature there is a relationship involved. If there is a distancing between parties, where one party can use the other without guilt, their will ultimately be a breakdown. Psychologists recognize this problem in human relationships. In healthy relationships, there must be a partnership. A healthy partnership is when neither partner is using the other or completely dependent on the other. Instead there is interdependence. Cultures who have personified the land have by default entered into a healthy relationship with the land. Once the land is seen as a resource to be used, it is no longer a healthy relationship. “There can be no friendship without confidence, and no confidence without integrity.” (Samuel Johnson) A sustainable use of the land has to be one where a relationship is understood. Generalized decision-making has no relationship with any individual area of land.

The reconciliation of Berry's dislike of specialization with his desire to have people act individually is the space that is left in between. Somewhere in the middle is a balance, where the individual is connected to the consequences of his/her actions. Then they will also need to take actions that are specialized for that situation. This applies to all decision-making and is the distinction between a totalitarian society and a democracy with integrity. Only when actions are based on individual thoughts and supported by a liberal understanding of the factors involved will they lead to an overall good policy.

## Bibliography

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