

## Book Review

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*The World's Greatest Ideas: An Encyclopedia of Social Inventions.*  
Edited by Nicholas Albery, Retta Bowen, Nick Temple, and Stephanie  
Wienrich. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2001, 289 pp.

Review by Annie L. Booth

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I had heard of the late Nicholas Albery and his foundation, The Institute for Social Invention, but had never followed up on what is an intriguing idea. Albery and his compatriots had the concern that everyday, ordinary people came up with extraordinary ideas but, without a place to share them, these ideas were lost. Thus, the Institute for Social Invention, with a website and an address where people could both share and find ideas to deal with the challenges we face today. This book is a compilation of some of the niftier ideas developed by or shared with the Institute.

This isn't a book one reads cover to cover (although I did for this review). Instead, this is a book one leafs through, stopping to read more closely when an idea (arranged alphabetically) catches the eye. Not all will appeal to everyone and some may seem trivial, but there is a wealth of creativity and potentially useful solutions, many of which can be easily implemented at the local level. Many encourage by the example of ordinary people taking action to fix problems that they see.

Ideas range from "Adopt-a-Planet," a program in the UK where school classes take responsibility for a piece of land, to how to practice public speaking, to Smart Cars, to signing to babies (they understand signals well before they can form words). All ideas revolve around improving communities, enhancing social welfare, and working to protect ecosystems. I liked The Institute's Hippocratic Oath for Scientists, Engineers and Executives, which encourages those that can create most harm to pledge to first "do no harm." Such ideas are useful, easily explained and implemented, and have the potential, if taken seriously,

to fundamentally change how we view the products of society and their impacts.

Included in most ideas are opportunities to contact the inventor or organizer, or the Institute, so that readers can pursue or elaborate ideas that catch their fancy. Unlike most books, this one's not an ending, but a beginning and invites readers to become participants and creators themselves. A good idea in itself, the authors use the book and their website ([www.globalideasbank.org](http://www.globalideasbank.org)) to ensure that ideas travel, to generate creativity through creativity, and to help those of us with weird and wonderful ideas realize we are not alone. A great book for odd moments.