The Little Book of Big Ideas
For my father
Foreword

Contrary to expectations a ‘big idea’ rarely if ever springs pure and fully-formed from the mind of one inspired genius. Even the most original thinkers, to paraphrase Isaac Newton, have ‘seen further ahead by standing on the shoulders’ of their predecessors.

Ideas are such live, sparkling, dynamic entities. Most are born not in solitude but as a result of exchanges between people – conversation, reading, experimentation, or just swapping daydreams.

This is true in all fields, from astrophysics to feminism. But there are certain individuals
who concentrate the ideas they assimilate and take them that bit further.

The result is theories, insights, and discoveries that may appear entirely new and full of energy.

These are the people whose names tend to appear at the bottom of the ‘big ideas’ featured in this book. Many are familiar household names – Gandhi, Einstein, Greer and Marx; others less so.

But all have something to say that is relevant to our times – which may perhaps spark off some ‘big ideas’ in readers too!

Vanessa Baird
Small is Beautiful

Small-scale operations, no matter how numerous, are always less likely to be harmful to the natural environment than large-scale ones, simply because their individual force is small in relation to the recuperative forces of nature. There is wisdom in smallness if only on account of the smallness and patchiness of human knowledge, which relies on experiment far more than on understanding. The greatest danger invariably arises from the ruthless application, on a vast scale, of practical knowledge such as we are currently witnessing in the application of nuclear energy, of the new chemistry in agriculture, of transportation technology, and countless other things.

EF Schumacher (1911-1977) German-born radical economist and author of the groundbreaking Small is Beautiful.

Women
One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature... If, well before puberty and sometimes even from early infancy, she seems to us to be already sexually determined, this is not because mysterious instincts directly doom her to passivity, coquetry, maternity; it is because the influence of others upon the child is a factor almost from the start, and thus she is indoctrinated with her vocation from her earliest years.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), French philosopher, feminist and author of the groundbreaking *The Second Sex*. 
Passive Resistance

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cassive resistance is an all-sided sword; it can be used anyhow; it blesses [one] who uses it and [one] against whom it is used without drawing a drop of blood; it produces far-reaching results. It never rusts and cannot be stolen. Competition between passive resisters does not exhaust them. The sword of passive resistance does not require a scabbard and one cannot be forcibly dispossessed of it.

Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatama) Gandhi (1869-1948), Indian political leader and social reformer.
Racial Equality

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit together at the table of brotherhood... that one day even the State of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice ... that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.

Martin Luther King (1929-1968), US Civil Rights leader.
Land

None ought to be the lords or landlords over another, but the earth is free to every son and daughter of mankind to live free upon.

Gerard Winstanley, seventeenth century leader of the English revolutionary movement, the Diggers.

We Indian people are not supposed to say, this land is mine. We only use it. It is the white man who buys it and puts a fence around it. Indians are not supposed to do that, because the land belongs to all Indians, it belongs to God, as you call it. The land is a part of our body, and we are a part of the land.

Buffalo Tiger, contemporary, representative of the Miccosukee people of North America.
Class Struggle

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1818-1883 and 1820-1895), German political theorists, economists and authors of *The Communist Manifesto.*