

In order to Create a Better, Wiser World we need a Revolution in Academic Inquiry

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We are heading towards disaster. Population growth, destruction of natural habitats and rapid extinction of species, vast inequalities of wealth and power around the globe, the lethal character of modern war, pollution of earth, sea and air, and above all the impending disasters of climate change: all these looming global problems indicate we face a grim future. In order to tackle these problems intelligently, effectively and humanely, we need to learn how to do it. That in turn requires that our institutions of learning, our universities and schools, are rationally designed and devoted to the task. At present, they are not. We have inherited from the past a kind of academic inquiry so grossly irrational that it has actually contributed to the genesis of these problems. The great intellectual success of modern science and technological research has made possible, even caused, all these global crises. As a matter of supreme urgency we need to bring about a revolution in academia so that humanity may acquire what it so desperately needs: a kind of inquiry rationally designed and devoted to helping us make progress towards as good a world as possible. The kind of academic inquiry we need would put problems of living at the heart of the enterprise; the pursuit of knowledge and technology would emerge out of and would feed back into, the central and fundamental activities of improving our understanding of what our problems of living are (including global problems), and proposing and critically assessing possible solutions – possible actions, policies, political programmes, ways of living. The fundamental task would be to help people everywhere come to have a better understanding of what our problems are, and what we need to do about them.