

Book Review

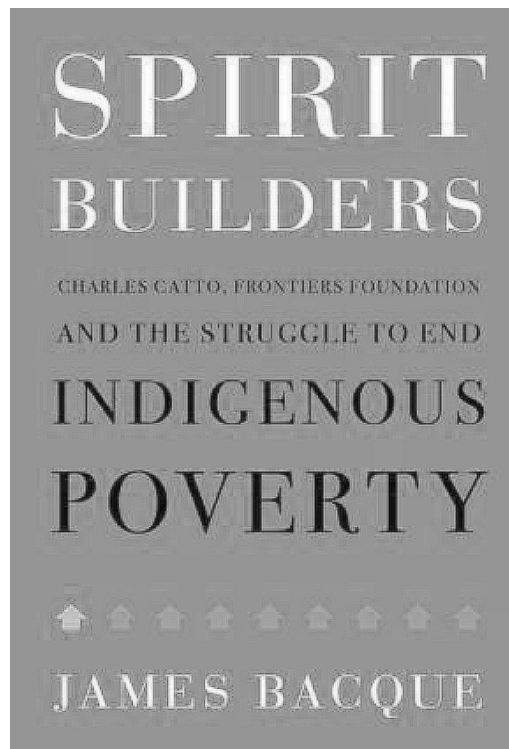
Spirit Builders:

Charles Catto, Frontiers Foundation, and the Struggle to End Indigenous Poverty

by James Bacque

This review of James Bacque's book Spirit Builders was published by Publishers' Weekly on July 3rd, 2017.

Bacque (*Other Losses*) has produced a fascinating biography of his lifelong friend Charles Catto, an unheralded United Church minister who created a Canadian organization [Frontiers Foundation] that brought together volunteers from around the globe to build thousands of homes, community centers, schools, and other facilities intended to improve life for indigenous communities at home and abroad. This generously illustrated title is a loving tribute to the oft-forgotten postwar social engagement by many men and women of the cloth. It is also an angry indictment of the stomach-turning mistreatment of indigenous peoples, whose wounds from colonial abuse and rural poverty Catto sought to address in a respectful and just manner. Combining fully rounded character studies of program participants and beneficiaries with entertaining anecdotes about battles with church and government bureaucracies, Bacque writes with a real flair and passion for his subject, though he can veer into metaphorical overkill. At a



time when non-indigenous Canadians struggle to build new and more just relationships with First Nations people, this title is a valuable contribution that celebrates a success story whose template—though created over half a century ago—holds valuable lessons for the future.

Rocky Mountain Books
(www.rmbooks.com)
or **Heritage Group Distribution** (Canada)
(www.hgdistribution.com)
Paperback \$25.00 (CAD)
ISBN 978-1-77160-136-8
328 pages

James Bacque (left), Charles Catto, Winnipeg, 2009.



Book Review

The Death of Expertise

The Campaign Against Established Knowledge And Why It Matters

by Tom Nichols

Reviewed by Sophie Dulesh

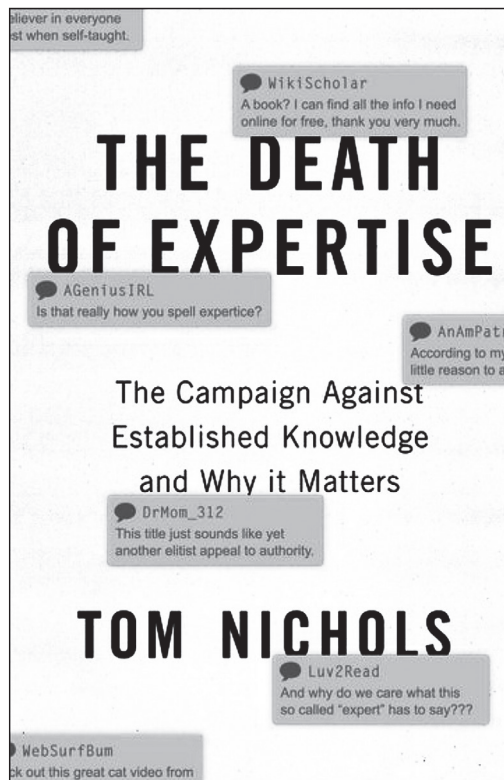
2017, Oxford University Press

Hardcover \$24.95 Published: 1 March 2017

272 Pages ISBN: 9780190469412

This new book, written by a professor of National Security Affairs at the US Naval War College and an adjunct professor at the Harvard Extension School, is **must read**. Tom Nichols, a self-identified “public intellectual,” is a professional educator, an expert who is profoundly and by no means groundlessly concerned with the deteriorating state of American education for a reason: it creates a direct and grave threat to the state of the republic and democracy.

Nichols says, “The US is now a country obsessed with the worship of its own ignorance... we are proud of not knowing things... It isn’t the same thing as the traditional American distaste for intellectuals and know-it-alls... People dismiss expertise... with anger...” He quotes Isaac Asimov: “There is a cult of ignorance in the US and always has been... nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that ‘my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge.’” Nichols submits that “The result has...been the growth of an irrational conviction among Americans that everyone is as smart as everyone else.”



Secular humanists may recall much other alarming evidence of mounting North American ignorance, from the well-quoted Pat Duffy Hutcheon about irresolvable troubles with ignorant voters (think Trump) to Susan Jacoby’s book, *The Age of American Unreason*.

Nichols explains why this state of affairs is so dangerous: “...if citizens do not bother to gain basic literacy in the issues that affect their lives, they abdicate control over those issues whether they like it or not. And when voters lose control of these important decisions, they risk hijacking of their democracy by ignorant demagogues, or the more quiet and gradual

decay of their democratic institutions into authoritarian technocracy... Reasoned skepticism is essential not only to science but also to a healthy democracy.”

Nichols clarifies why this is happening, “Campuses in the US are increasingly surrendering their intellectual authority not only to children, but also to activists who are directly attacking the traditions of free inquiry that scholarly communities are supposed to defend... A study of two

hundred colleges and universities up through 2009 found that A was the most commonly given grade, an increase of nearly 30% since 1960 and over 10% just since 1988. Grades in the A and B range together now account for more than 80% of all grades in all subjects, a trend that continued unabated. The problem is endemic to American universities and has recurred, in waves of varying strength, since the early 1960s... The protective, swaddling environment of the modern university infantilizes students and thus dissolves their ability to conduct a logical and informed argument. When feelings matter more than rationality or facts, education is a doomed enterprise. Emotion is an unassailable defence against expertise, a moat of anger and resentment in which reason and knowledge quickly drown... Students are learning that emotion and volume can always defeat reason and substance...”

And more: “The Internet creates a false sense that the opinions of many people are tantamount to a fact... When a group of experimental psychologists at Yale investigated how people use the Internet, they found that “...people who search for information on the Web emerge from the process with an inflated sense of how much they know – even regarding topics that are unrelated to the ones they googled.” And what about the quality of their research? As a 2013 article in the MIT Technology Review noted, the size of the volunteer force that built Wikipedia and “must defend it against vandalism, hoaxes, and manipulation [has] shrunk by more than a third since 2007 and is still shrinking.” Nichols quotes an article in *The Federalist*: “In 2015, Public Policy Polling, a liberal polling group, asked both Republicans and Democrats whether they would support bombing the country Agrabah. Nearly a third of Republican respondents said they would support such action... Agrabah doesn’t exist. It’s

a fictional country in the 1992 animated Disney film *Aladdin*... 43% of Republicans and 55% of Democrats had an actual, defined view on bombing a place in a cartoon.” (Nick Saffran, “Wipe that grin off your smug faces, progressive pollsters.” *TheFederalist.com*, December 29, 2015.)

Nichols analyses further: “One reason claims of expertise grate on people in a democracy is that specialization is necessarily exclusive... The relationship between experts and citizens is not ‘democratic.’ All people are not, and can never be, equally talented or intelligent. Democratic societies, however, are always tempted to this resentful insistence on equality, which becomes oppressive ignorance if given its head. And this, sadly, is the state of modern America. Citizens no longer understand democracy to mean a condition of political equality, in which one person gets one vote, and every individual is no more or less equal in the eyes of the law. Rather, Americans now think of democracy as a state of actual equality, in which every opinion is as good as any other on almost any subject under the sun. Feelings are more important than facts.”

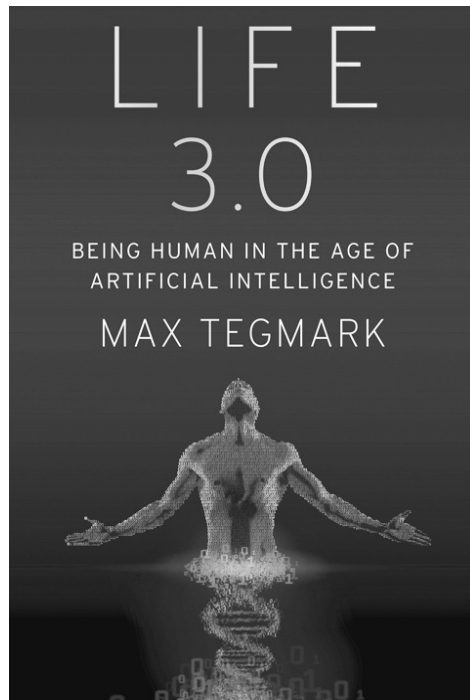
And Nichols concludes, “To ignore expert advice is simply not a realistic option, not only due to the complexity of policymaking, but because to do so is to absolve citizens of their responsibilities to learn about issues that matter directly to their own well-being... Politicians will never stop relying on experts; they will, however, move to relying on experts who will tell them – and the angry laypeople... – whatever it is they want to hear. This is the worst of all worlds, in which both democracy and expertise are corrupted because neither democratic leaders nor their expert advisers want to tangle with an ignorant electorate. At this point, expertise no longer serves the public interest, but the interest of whatever political clique is taking the temperature of the public at any given moment. We are already perilously close to this outcome in modern America.”

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LIFE 3.0: Being Human in the Age Of Artificial Intelligence

by **Max Tegmark**

Knopf, August 29, 2017

384 pages

ISBN-10: 1101946598

ISBN-13: 978-1101946596

How can we grow our prosperity through automation without leaving people lacking income or purpose? What career advice should we give today's kids? How can we make future AI systems more robust, so that they do what we want without crashing, malfunctioning or getting hacked? Should we fear an arms race in lethal autonomous weapons? Will machines eventually outsmart us at all tasks, replacing humans on the job market and perhaps altogether? Will AI help life flourish like never before or give us more power than we can handle?

What sort of future do *you* want? This book empowers you to join what may be the most important conversation of our time. It doesn't shy away from the full range of viewpoints or from the most controversial issues—from superintelligence to meaning, consciousness and the ultimate physical limits on life in the cosmos.

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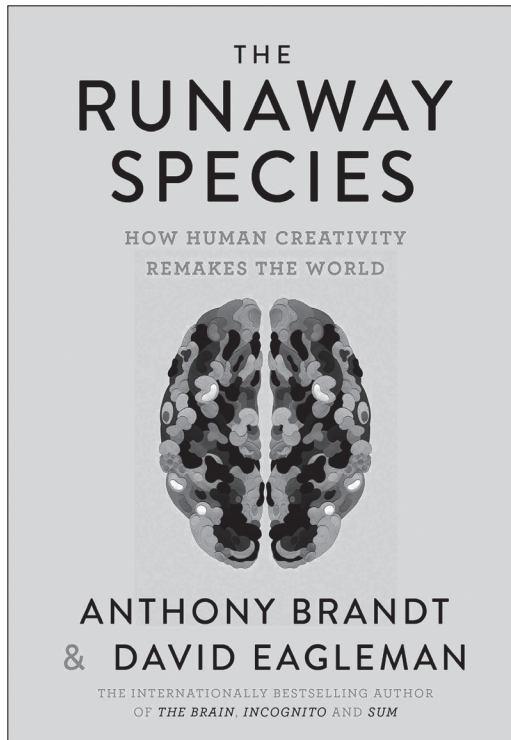
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Books Available for Review



THE RUNAWAY SPECIES: ***How Human Creativity*** ***Remakes the World***

Anthony Brandt and David Eagleman

Catapult, October 1, 2017

251 pages

ISBN: 978-1-936787-52-4

T*he Runaway Species* is a deep-dive into the creative mind, a celebration of the human spirit, and a vision of how we can improve our future by understanding and embracing our ability to innovate. Anthony Brandt and David Eagleman seek to answer the question: what lies at the heart of humanity's ability—and drive—to create?

Our ability to remake our world is unique among all living things. But where does our creativity come from, how does it work, and how can we harness it to improve our lives, schools, businesses, and institutions?

Brandt and Eagleman examine hundreds of examples

of human creativity through dramatic storytelling and stunning images in this beautiful, full-color volume. By drawing out what creative acts have in common and viewing them through the lens of cutting-edge neuroscience, they uncover the essential elements of this critical human ability, and encourage a more creative future for all of us.

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