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SPRING & SUMMER
2021

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COVER DESIGN: CHIN-YEE LAI
COVER IMAGES: (FRONT) DETAIL, ADDISON GALLERY OF AMERICAN ART, PHILLIPS ACADEMY, ANDOVER, MA / ART RESOURCE, NY; (BACK) PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG WOMAN, SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM
Years ago, cosmologist Stephon Alexander received life-changing advice: to discover real physics, he needed to stop memorizing and start taking risks. In Fear of a Black Universe, Alexander shows that great physics requires us to think outside the mainstream—to improvise and rely on intuition. His approach leads him to three principles that shape all theories of the universe: the principle of invariance, the quantum principle, and the principle of emergence. Alexander uses them to explore some of physics’ greatest mysteries, from what happened before the Big Bang to how the universe makes consciousness possible. Drawing on his experience as a Black physicist, he makes a powerful case for diversifying our scientific communities. Compelling and empowering, Fear of a Black Universe offers remarkable insight into the art of physics.

A cosmologist argues that physics must embrace the excluded, listen to the unheard, and be unafraid of being wrong.

NEW HARDCOVER • MAY
Physics • $28.00 / $35.00 CAN
6 x 9¼ • 272 pages
978-1-5416-9963-2
E-BOOK 978-1-5416-9961-8
Selling Territory: USC
Author photo © Heather Goodell

STEPHON ALEXANDER
is a professor of physics at Brown University and the 2020 president of the National Society of Black Physicists. He is also a jazz musician and released his first electronic jazz album with Erin Rioux. The author of The Jazz of Physics, Alexander lives in Providence, Rhode Island.
Hummingbirds are a glittering, sparkling collective of over three hundred wildly variable species. For centuries, they have been revered by indigenous Americans, coveted by European collectors, and admired worldwide for their unsurpassed metallic plumage and immense character. Yet they exist on a knife-edge, fighting for survival in boreal woodlands, dripping cloud forests, and subpolar islands. They are, perhaps, the ultimate embodiment of evolution’s power to carve a niche for a delicate creature in even the harshest of places.

Traveling the full length of the hummingbirds’ range, from the cusp of the Arctic Circle to near-Antarctic islands, acclaimed nature writer Jon Dunn encounters birders, scientists, and storytellers in his quest to find these beguiling creatures, immersing us in the world of one of Earth’s most charismatic bird families.

Jon Dunn is a natural history writer, photographer, and wildlife tour leader. His writing has appeared in a number of magazines, including BBC Wildlife. He is the author of three previous books, including Orchid Summer. He lives on his croft on the remote Shetland Islands.
A history of the American Constitution’s formative decades, from a preeminent legal scholar

When the US Constitution won popular approval in 1788, it was the culmination of thirty years of passionate argument over the nature of government. But ratification hardly ended the conversation. For the next half century, ordinary Americans and statesmen alike continued to wrestle with weighty questions in the halls of government and in the pages of newspapers. Should the nation’s borders be expanded? Should America allow slavery to spread westward? What rights should Indian nations hold? What was the proper role of the judicial branch?

In The Words that Made Us, Akhil Reed Amar unites history and law in a vivid narrative of the biggest constitutional questions early Americans confronted, and he expertly assesses the answers they offered. His account of the document’s origins and consolidation is a guide for anyone seeking to properly understand America’s Constitution today.

Akhil Reed Amar is the Sterling professor of law and political science at Yale University and the author of several books on constitutional law and history, including America’s Constitution: A Biography and America’s Unwritten Constitution. He lives in Woodbridge, Connecticut.

NEW HARDCOVER • MAY
Law / History • $35.00 / $44.00 CAN
6 x 9¼ • 656 pages
Forty black-and-white illustrations
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E-BOOK 978-0-465-09636-7
Selling Territory: W
Author photo © Harold Shapiro
Corporate boards are under great pressure. Scandals and malpractice at companies like Theranos, WeWork, Uber, and Wells Fargo have raised justified questions among regulators, shareholders, and the public about the quality of corporate governance. In *How Boards Work*, prize-winning economist and veteran board director Dambisa Moyo offers an insider’s view of corporate boards as they are buffeted by the turbulence of our times.

Moyo argues that corporations need boards that are more transparent, more knowledgeable, more diverse, and more deeply involved in setting the strategic course of the companies they lead. *How Boards Work* offers a road map for how boards can steer companies through tomorrow’s challenges and ensure they thrive to benefit their employees, shareholders, and society at large.

*DAMBISA MOYO* is a prize-winning author of the *New York Times* bestsellers *Edge of Chaos*, *Winner Take All*, and *Dead Aid*, and she was named one of the “100 Most Influential People in the World” by *Time* magazine. Moyo regularly contributes to the *Wall Street Journal* and *Financial Times*. She lives in New York City and London.
We remember World War II as a struggle between good and evil, with Hitler propelling events and the Allied powers saving the day. But Hitler’s armies did not fight in multiple theaters, his empire did not span the Eurasian continent, and he did not inherit the spoils of war. That role belonged to Joseph Stalin. Hitler’s genocidal ambition may have unleashed Armageddon, but as celebrated historian Sean McMeekin shows, the conflicts that emerged were the result of Stalin’s maneuvers, orchestrated to unleash a war between capitalist powers in Europe and between Japan and the Anglo-American forces in the Pacific. Meanwhile, the United States and Britain’s self-defeating strategy of supporting Stalin and his armies at all costs allowed the Soviets to conquer most of Eurasia, from Berlin to Beijing, for Communism.

A groundbreaking reassessment, Stalin’s War is essential reading for anyone looking to understand the roots of the current world order.

SEAN McMEEKIN is a professor of history at Bard College. The award-winning author of several books, including The Russian Revolution, July 1914, and The Ottoman Endgame, McMeekin lives in Clermont, New York.
Spite seems utterly useless. You don’t gain anything by hurting yourself just so you can hurt someone else. So why hasn’t evolution weeded out all the spiteful people?

As psychologist Simon McCarthy-Jones argues, spite seems pointless because we’re looking at it wrong. Spite isn’t just what we feel when a car cuts us off or when a partner cheats. It’s what we feel when we want to punish a bad act simply because it was bad. Spite is our fairness instinct, an innate resistance to exploitation, and it is one of the building blocks of human civilization. As McCarthy-Jones explains, some of history’s most important developments—the rise of religions, governments, and even moral codes—were actually redirections of spiteful impulses.

A provocative, engaging read, *Spite* shows that if you really want to understand what makes us human, you can’t just look at noble ideas like altruism and cooperation. You need to understand our darker impulses as well.

**SIMON McCARthy-JONES**

is associate professor of psychology at Trinity College Dublin. His research has appeared in *Nature Communications*, *Clinical Psychology Review*, and elsewhere. He has been featured in *Newsweek* and *New Scientist* and on BBC News, ABC Radio, and the BBC World Service. He lives in Dublin, Ireland.
Conventional wisdom holds that Africans are only a recent presence in Europe. But in African Europeans, renowned historian Olivette Otele debunks this and uncovers a long history of Europeans of African descent. From the third century, when the Egyptian Saint Maurice became the leader of a Roman legion, all the way up to the present, Otele explores encounters between those defined as “Africans” and those called “Europeans.” She gives equal attention to the most prominent figures—like Alessandro de Medici, the first duke of Florence thought to have been born to a free African woman in a Roman village—and the untold stories—like the lives of dual-heritage families in Europe’s coastal trading towns.

African Europeans is a landmark celebration of this integral, vibrantly complex slice of European history, and will redefine the field for years to come.

OLIVETTE OTELE is professor of the history of slavery at the University of Bristol and vice president of the Royal Historical Society. She is the first Black woman to be appointed to a professorial chair in history in the UK, and her writing has appeared in the Guardian, BBC Extra, and Times Higher Education. She lives in the UK.
Parents naturally worry about the future. They want to prepare their children to compete in an uncertain world. But often, argues political philosopher and father of three Matt Feeney, today’s worried parents surrender their family’s autonomy to gain a leg up in this competition.

In the American ideal, family, life is a sacred and private sphere, distinct from the outside world. But in our hypercompetitive times, Feeney shows, parents have become increasingly willing to let the inner life of the family be colonized by outside forces that promise better futures for their kids: prestigious preschools, “educational” technologies, youth sports leagues, a multitude of enrichment activities, and—most of all—college. A provocative, eye-opening book for any parent who suspects their kids’ stuffed schedules are not serving their best interests, Little Platoons calls us to rediscover the distinctive, profound solidarity of family life.

Matt Feeney holds a PhD in political philosophy from Duke University, and he has written for the National Review, New Yorker, Slate, Pacific Standard, and Weekly Standard. He lives with his wife and three children in Oakland, California.

A brilliant analysis of the true roots of over-parenting, and a case for the vital importance of family life.

**NEW HARDCOVER • MARCH**

Parenting • $28.00 / $35.00 CAN

6 x 9¼ • 288 pages

978-1-5416-4559-2

E-BOOK 978-1-5416-4558-5

Selling Territory: USC

Author photo © Laura Arechiga
It happens to everyone: You are asked a question—even something you know well, such as the name of a longtime colleague—and can’t answer. The information is stuck on the tip of your tongue. It’s an experience so frustrating that it seems like it must be a brain malfunction. In fact, it’s actually a hallmark of our greatest power: self-awareness.

As cognitive neuroscientist Stephen M. Fleming shows in *Know Thyself*, self-awareness shapes our intelligence, memory, and conscious experience. It’s integral to how we teach and learn. We use it every time we weigh difficult questions, such as assessing how we’d respond in a crisis. Drawing on psychology and neuroscience, Fleming provides deep insight into how self-awareness works, and how we can enhance our ability to know our strengths and weaknesses. In the end, this book isn’t just about psychology: it’s about the science of human excellence.

*Stephen M. Fleming* is a Sir Henry Dale Wellcome Trust/Royal Society fellow at the department of experimental psychology and principal investigator at the Wellcome Centre for Human Neuroimaging, University College London, where he leads the Metacognition Group. He lives in London.
What can we learn about our senses from people who were born without them?

SUSAN R. BARRY

COMING TO OUR SENSES
A Boy Who Learned to See, a Girl Who Learned to Hear, and How We All Discover the World

We think of perception as a passive, mechanical process, as if our eyes are cameras and our ears microphones. But as neurobiologist Susan R. Barry argues, perception is a deeply personal act. Our environments, our relationships, and our actions shape and reshape our senses throughout our lives.

This idea is no more apparent than in the cases of people who gain senses as adults. Barry tells the stories of Liam McCoy, practically blind from birth, and Zohra Damji, born deaf, in the decade following surgeries that restored their senses. As Liam and Zohra learned entirely new ways of being, Barry discovered an entirely new model of the nature of perception. Coming to Our Senses is a celebration of human resilience and a powerful reminder that, before you can really understand other people, you must first recognize that their worlds are fundamentally different from your own.

SUSAN R. BARRY is professor emeritus of biology and neuroscience at Mount Holyoke College, where she researched neuroplasticity and stereovision, and the author of Fixing My Gaze: A Scientist’s Journey into Seeing in Three Dimensions. She lives in Massachusetts.
MAVERICK
A Biography of Thomas Sowell

Thomas Sowell is one of the great social theorists of our age. In a career spanning more than half a century, he has written over thirty books, covering topics from economic history and social inequality to political theory, race, and culture. His bold and unsentimental assaults on liberal orthodoxy have endeared him to many readers but have also enraged fellow intellectuals, the civil-rights establishment, and much of the mainstream media. The result has been a lack of acknowledgment of his scholarship among critics who prioritize political correctness.

In the first-ever biography of Sowell, Jason L. Riley gives this iconic thinker his due and responds to the detractors. Maverick showcases Sowell’s most significant writings and traces the life events that shaped his ideas and resulted in a Black orphan from the Jim Crow South becoming one of our foremost public intellectuals.

JASON L. RILEY is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute and a columnist for the Wall Street Journal. He is the author of several previous books, including Please Stop Helping Us: How Liberals Make It Harder for Blacks to Succeed.
The great debate over the Big Bang and the quest to understand the fate of the universe

NEW HARDCOVER • AUGUST
Science • $30.00 / $38.00 CAN
6 x 9¼ • 320 pages
978-1-5416-7359-5
E-BOOK 978-1-5416-7361-8
Selling Territory: W
Author photo © University of the Sciences

Today, the Big Bang is so entrenched in our understanding of the cosmos that to doubt it would seem crazy. But as Paul Halpern shows in Flashes of Creation, just decades ago its mere mention caused sparks to fly. At the center of the debate were Russian American physicist George Gamow and British astrophysicist Fred Hoyle. Gamow insisted that a fiery explosion explained how the elements of the universe were created. Attacking the idea as half-baked, Hoyle countered that the universe was engaged in a never-ending process of creation. The battle was fierce. In the end, Gamow turned out to be right—mostly—and Hoyle, along with his many achievements, is remembered for giving the theory the silliest possible name: “The Big Bang.” Halpern captures the brilliance of both thinkers and reminds us that even those proved wrong have much to teach us about boldness, imagination, and the universe itself.

PAUL HALPERN is a professor of physics at the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia and the author of seventeen popular science books, including The Quantum Labyrinth, Einstein’s Dice and Schrödinger’s Cat, and Synchronicity. He is the recipient of a Guggenheim fellowship and is a fellow of the American Physical Society. He lives near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
When Stephen Hawking died, he was widely recognized as the world’s best physicist, and even its smartest person.

He was neither.

In *Hawking Hawking*, science journalist Charles Seife explores how Stephen Hawking came to be thought of as humanity’s greatest genius. Hawking spent his career grappling with deep questions in physics, but his renown didn’t rest on his science. He was a master of self-promotion, hosting parties for time travelers, declaring victory over problems he had not solved, and wooing billionaires. Confined to a wheelchair and physically dependent on a cadre of devotees, Hawking still managed to captivate the people around him—and use them for his own purposes.

A brilliant exposé and powerful biography, *Hawking Hawking* uncovers the authentic Hawking buried underneath the fake. It is the story of a man whose brilliance in physics was matched by his genius for building his own myth.

**CHARLES SEIFE** is a professor of journalism at NYU’s Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute and has been writing about science and mathematics for nearly three decades. The author of numerous books, including the bestselling *Zero*, he lives in New York City.
Marcos Aurelius Antoninus (121–180 CE) was the sixteenth emperor of Rome—and by far the most powerful man in the world. Yet he was also an intensely private person, with a rich interior life, and one of the wisest minds of his generation. He collected his thoughts in notebooks, gems that have come to be called his Meditations. Never intended for publication, the work has proved an inexhaustible source of wisdom and one of the most important Stoic texts of all time. In often passionate language, the entries range from one-line aphorisms to essays, from profundity to bitterness.

This annotated edition offers the definitive translation of this classic and much beloved text, with copious notes from world-renowned classics expert Robin Waterfield. It illuminates one of the greatest works of popular philosophy for new readers and enriches the understanding of even the most devoted Stoic.

Robin Waterfield is a British classical scholar, translator, and editor, specializing in Ancient Greek philosophy. He lives in Greece.
JEFF HAWKINS

A THOUSAND BRAINS
* A New Theory of Intelligence

WITH A FOREWORD BY RICHARD DAWKINS

For all of neuroscience’s advances, we’ve made little progress on its biggest question: How do simple cells in the brain create intelligence?

Jeff Hawkins and his team discovered that the brain uses maplike structures to build a model of the world—not just one model, but hundreds of thousands of models of everything we know. This discovery allows Hawkins to answer important questions about how we perceive the world, why we have a sense of self, and the origin of high-level thought.

*A Thousand Brains* heralds a revolution in the understanding of intelligence. It is a big-think book, in every sense of the word.

JEFF HAWKINS is the cofounder of Numenta, a neuroscience research company; founder of the Redwood Neuroscience Institute; and one of the founders of the field of handheld computing. He is a member of the National Academy of Engineering and author of *On Intelligence.*

A bestselling author, neuroscientist, and computer engineer unveils a theory of intelligence that will revolutionize our understanding of the brain and the future of AI

NEW HARDCOVER • MARCH
Science • $28.00 / $35.00 CAN
6 x 9¼ • 272 pages
Eight black-and-white illustrations
978-1-5416-7581-0
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Selling Territory: W
Author photo © Tri Nguyen / Tri Nguyen Photography
From an award-winning scholar, the extraordinary sixty-thousand-year history of how the Pacific islands were settled

NEW HARDCOVER • JUNE
Science • $25.00 / $31.00 CAN
5 x 7½ • 224 pages
Fifteen black-and-white illustrations
978-1-5416-1983-8
E-BOOK 978-1-5416-2005-6
Selling Territory: USC
Author photo © Annie Coombes

NICHOLAS THOMAS
VOYAGERS
The Settlement of the Pacific

The islands of Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia stretch across a huge expanse of ocean and encompass a multitude of different peoples. Starting with Captain James Cook, the earliest European explorers to visit the Pacific were astounded and perplexed to find populations thriving thousands of miles from continents. Who were these people? From where did they come? And how were they able to reach islands dispersed over such vast tracts of ocean?

In Voyagers, the distinguished anthropologist Nicholas Thomas charts the course of the seaborne migrations that populated the islands between Asia and the Americas from late prehistory onward. Drawing on the latest research, including insights gained from genetics, linguistics, and archaeology, Thomas provides a dazzling account of these long-distance migrations, the seagoing technologies that enabled them, and the societies they left in their wake.

NICHOLAS THOMAS is professor of historical anthropology at the University of Cambridge and director of the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Originally from Australia, he has written and edited numerous books, including Islanders: The Pacific in the Age of Empire, for which he was awarded the Wolfson History Prize in 2011. He lives in London.
Slave traders are peripheral figures in most histories of American slavery. But these men—who trafficked and sold over half a million enslaved people from the Upper South to the Deep South—were essential to slavery’s expansion and fueled the growth and prosperity of the United States.

In *The Ledger and the Chain*, acclaimed historian Joshua D. Rothman recounts the shocking story of the domestic slave trade by tracing the lives and careers of Isaac Franklin, John Armfield, and Rice Ballard, who built the largest and most powerful slave-trading operation in American history. Far from social outcasts, they were rich and widely respected businessmen, and their company sat at the center of capital flows connecting southern fields to northeastern banks. Bringing together entrepreneurial ambition and remorseless violence toward enslaved people, domestic slave traders produced an atrocity that forever transformed the nation.

Joshua D. Rothman is professor of history and chair of the department of history at the University of Alabama. He is the author of two prize-winning books, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams* and *Notorious in the Neighborhood*. He lives in Birmingham and Tuscaloosa, Alabama.
Almost all of us have sat in a math class, wondering when we’d ever need to know how to find the roots of a polynomial or graph imaginary numbers. And in one sense, we were right: if we needed to, we’d use a computer. But as Ian Stewart argues in *What’s the Use?*, math isn’t just about boring computations. Rather, it offers us new and profound insights into our world, allowing us to accomplish feats as significant as space exploration and organ donation. From the trigonometry that keeps a satellite in orbit to the prime numbers used by the world’s most advanced security systems to the imaginary numbers that enable augmented reality, math isn’t just relevant to our lives. It is the very fabric of our existence.

**IAN STEWART** is emeritus professor of mathematics at the University of Warwick. His recent books include *Calculating the Cosmos*, *Significant Figures*, *In Pursuit of the Unknown*, *Professor Stewart’s Hoard of Mathematical Treasures*, and *Do Dice Play God?* He is a fellow of the Royal Society. He lives in Coventry, UK.
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PUBLISHER
p: 212-364-0669
e: lara.heimert@hbgusa.com

Lara Heimert joined Basic Books in 2005. Previously, she was publisher of the trade division at Yale University Press. She has published numerous prize-winning and New York Times bestselling titles. Highlights include Edward Baptist’s *The Half Has Never Been Told*, Eugene Rogan’s *The Fall of the Ottomans*, Timothy Snyder’s *Bloodlands*, Nicholas Stargardt’s *The German War*, Bee Wilson’s *Consider the Fork*, and Victor Davis Hanson’s *The Second World Wars*. A graduate of Princeton University, Lara acquires primarily in the field of history, broadly conceived—from world wars to marginalia, from culinary history to political theory, from diaspora to doodles.

THOMAS KELLEHER
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER & EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, SCIENCES
p: 212-364-0657
e: thomas.kelleher@hbgusa.com


BRIAN J. DISTELBERG
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, HISTORY & SOCIAL SCIENCES
p: 212-364-0655
e: brian.distelberg@hbgusa.com

Brian J. Distelberg joined Basic Books in 2015 and acquires primarily in history. Books he has edited and published include Edward Watts’s *Mortal Republic*, Erika Lee’s *America for Americans*, Peniel Joseph’s *The Sword and the Shield*, Walter Johnson’s *The Broken Heart of America*, Martyn Rady’s *The Habsburgs*, and Martha Jones’s *Vanguard*. He also publishes a select number of books in politics and law; highlights include Jonathan Metzl’s *Dying of Whiteness* and Laurence Tribe and Joshua Matz’s *To End a Presidency*. Brian worked previously at Harvard University Press and holds a PhD in US history from Yale University.
MEET THE EDITORS

CLAIRE POTTER
S E N I O R   E D I T O R
p: 212-364-0656
e: claire.potter@hbgusa.com

Claire Potter joined Basic Books in 2019 and primarily acquires history and biography. Her forthcoming titles include works by Dan Berger, Ellen Carol DuBois, Andrew Arsan, Catherine McNeur, Kate Cooper, Bettany Hughes, and Elizabeth Currid-Halkett. Previously, she was at Crown Publishers, an imprint of Penguin Random House, which she joined in 2013. She has also worked at the Feminist Press, Guernica, and Words Without Borders, and is currently an editor at American Chordata.

ERIC HENNEY
E D I T O R
p: 212-364-0569
e: eric.henney@hbgusa.com

Eric Henney joined Basic Books in 2018 and acquires primarily in science, including medicine, technology, and psychology. He also acquires selectively in philosophy and education. Eric has acquired and edited books by Marcia Bjornerud, Jeremy England, Sue Barry, Kevin Hand, Kerry Emanuel, Phillip Rogaway, Susan Schneider, George Bonanno, and James Lang, among others. Before joining Basic, Eric was the editor for physical, earth, and computer sciences at Princeton University Press.

CONNOR GUY
E D I T O R
p: 212-364-0659
e: connor.guy@hbgusa.com

Connor Guy joined Basic Books in 2019 and acquires in politics, history, sociology, law, and cultural criticism, among other categories. His recent and forthcoming titles include books by Jane Dailey, Robert Elder, Cara Fitzpatrick, Dan Canon, Nicholas Thomas, Sam Lebovic, and Maurice Isserman. Before coming to Basic, he worked at the Metropolitan Books imprint of Henry Holt and Company.
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978-1-5416-2040-7