

Berry (to whom *Deep Economy* is dedicated) who wrote, "As soon as the generals and the politicians / can predict the motions of your mind, / lose it. Leave it as a sign / to mark the false trail, the way you didn't go." Instead, McKibben's only recourse is to the stale status-quo of social-science data purporting to assign "happiness scores" to various socio-economic groupings.

Again, the question of community is not a question of happy feelings but one of social power, as Robert Nisbet so forcefully argued. This truth is illustrated clearly by a group of villagers McKibben visited in Bangladesh. An international expert was selling genetically enhanced grain, allegedly to resolve vitamin deficiencies in local diets. McKibben notes that rather than object on the more decadent, happiness-oriented, Western grounds that genetically modified food is "icky" and "not organic," the Bengali wisely understood that the true stakes were much higher. They "instantly realized that the new rice would require fertilizer and pesticide, meaning both illness and debt." In fact, they recognized rather easily what we Americans seem so slow to grasp—that giving up access and control over their own food supply meant giving up real power over their own lives.

The primary characteristic of the disease McKibben describes so well is only hinted at in *Deep Economy*, but never adequately named. That characteristic is not too much freedom but rather the loss of the freedom of communities to exercise real social power and authority due to oppressive and totalitarian systems of centralized political and economic control by bureaucrats, experts, and functionaries. To start a recovery project with a "new utilitarianism" of "happiness scores" is to fit the wolves with tailor-made wool. Lord spare us both the blowhards from the Department of Commerce and the busybodies from the Ministry of Happiness! ■

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[*The Atomic Bazaar: The Rise of the Nuclear Poor*, William Langewiesche, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 192 pages]

How I Learned to Stop Worrying...

By Justin Logan

IN 1963, President John F. Kennedy described his alarm over one possible course of world politics. "I am haunted," Kennedy admitted, "by the feeling that by 1970, unless we are successful, there may be 10 nuclear powers instead of four, and by 1975, 15 or 20."

To the relief of many, Kennedy was overly pessimistic. By 1970, only China had joined the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, and France as the fifth member of the nuclear club, and by 1975, there were only six nuclear states, India having tested in 1974. Even today the nuclear club has only nine members. Still, nuclear technology is more than 60 years old, and its proliferation is governed by an agreement that will turn 40 next year. It is unlikely that the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty will constrain the spread of nuclear weapons indefinitely, and with North Korea having attained nuclear status and Iran apparently trying determinedly to do the same, the stresses on the NPT are severe and growing.

The accepted view on all of this is that the NPT will hold because it must. The uncertain world that lies beyond its reach is so frightening to many, including much of the arms-control community, that we dare not countenance it.

Not so for William Langewiesche. In his new book, *The Atomic Bazaar: The Rise of the Nuclear Poor*, Langewiesche concludes starkly, "Diplomacy may help to slow the spread [of nuclear weapons], but it can no more stop the process than it can reverse the progression of time. The nuclearization of the world has become the human condition, and it cannot be changed."

This revelation comes early on, and it sums up the sense of fatalism that

pervades the book. Langewiesche opens with an icy discussion of the American use of nuclear weapons against civilian populations in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, followed by a similarly antiseptic description of the physics of nuclear weapons. A national correspondent for *The Atlantic Monthly*, Langewiesche is a skillful writer, and both treatments induce awe and queasiness, reflecting our deep ambivalence about our nation's relationship with nuclear technology. Langewiesche cannot resist pointing out that by any fair definition of the word "terrorism," the American attacks on Hiroshima—and certainly on Nagasaki—constituted the gravest acts of terrorism the world has ever seen.

This discussion sets up an explanation of how revulsion over Hiroshima led the founding fathers of the nuclear bomb to create the Federation of American Scientists, a group that to this day attempts to educate policymakers and the American public on the implications and dangers of nuclear weapons. The book also offers a brief explanation of the logic of the NPT—it was intended not to constrain, let alone reduce, the number of nuclear weapons in the world but rather to limit membership in the club of nuclear nations—before moving swiftly on to Langewiesche's bread and butter, investigative reporting.

He frames this section by putting the reader in the position of the head of a non-state group attempting to acquire nuclear weapons for first-use against the United States. Recounting the many obstacles to achieving this goal, Langewiesche takes readers on a tour of the southern Caucasus, Kurdistan, and other locales in which he has investigated the nuclear trade. Langewiesche has a deep-seated cynicism about the U.S. government's efforts to constrain the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and he highlights numerous instances of American fecklessness and lack of seriousness.

One particularly galling example is the case of the formerly closed Russian town of Ozersk, a place that now houses tons of highly enriched uranium and plutonium in shakily secured facilities. The Russians—paranoid but not without real

enemies—only reluctantly agreed to cooperate with the U.S. National Nuclear Security Administration in enhancing their security measures in Ozersk. But as Langewiesche observes, the Russians are “concerned less about thieves or terrorists than about American spies.” In 2004, the Russians turned skittish when an NGO called “Planet of Hopes” began investigating ecological and social problems around Ozersk. Russian authorities responded by lashing out against the group and accusing it of having been funded by the CIA, a charge that was disproved only once it was revealed that the National Endowment for Democracy was financing the group’s investigations.

The episode is but one example of how Washington’s policies abroad jeopardize American national security. A rational foreign policy would recognize that quietly funding groups to investigate the Russian government could cause already suspicious Moscow to close off further, endangering more important American objectives such as improving security at Russian nuclear facilities. But urged on by men like Sen. John McCain, the National Endowment for Democracy and other democracy-promotion vehicles continue to foster suspicion of those who are responsible for important American security initiatives abroad.

Langewiesche’s investigation leads him to conclude, “regions beyond government control are rarely as chaotic as they seem to be to Western officials.” The implication of this is that “Western agencies that could find a way to lay traplines in [these areas] would have a better chance of stopping a terrorist attack than any port-inspection program, bureaucratic reshuffling, or military maneuvering can provide,” but he finds scarce evidence that American policymakers have interest in such initiatives.

One of the most neglected topics in the post-9/11 world—and of discussions of weapons of mass destruction—is risk assessment. Langewiesche has a derisive view of our tendency to respond with panic to dangers that, as John Mueller has pointed out in his book *Overblown*, are less than the risk of drowning in a bathtub

or dying from anaphylactic shock after being stung by bees. Langewiesche notes that the actual threat posed by “dirty bombs” is largely chimerical and that they “would be mere nuisance bombs if people would keep their calm. But of course people will not.” Such rationality is unrealistic “in societies where even outdoor tobacco smoke is called a threat.”

Though it is beyond the purview of *The Atomic Bazaar*, this line of thinking points to the absurdity of the idea that a people that cowers in fear of any variety of bogeymen from Hugo Chavez to trans-fats should set out to transform the Islamic world at gunpoint. Sniffers and HDL-watchers make bad imperialists, and the American populace at large seems bent on withdrawing into a cocoon of effete worry-mongering. Although this backdrop of risk aversion makes irrational policy lash-outs more likely, it simultaneously makes the public unwilling to sustain the very high costs of such policies over the longer term.

Langewiesche concludes the book with a short history of the proliferation network led by Abdul Qadeer Khan, the father of the Pakistani atomic bomb and the most successful proliferator of the nuclear age. His investigation in Pakistan leaves Langewiesche oozing with contempt for the country, a “morally bankrupt and corrupt nation, where cowardly and illegitimate rulers, propped up by massive infusions of American dollars and dependent on their soldiers’ guns, suppress genuine inquiries because they would be implicated themselves and, in the embarrassment that would follow, would be cut off from foreign aid, and driven from power by their own people, who almost universally now detest them.” Those with a particular interest in the Khan network will find a much deeper and more thorough treatment of the topic in Gordon Corera’s *Shopping for Bombs*, but Langewiesche covers the basics.

After informing readers up front that proliferation is inevitable and then cataloging the ineptitude of the American government’s efforts to stop proliferation, what is Langewiesche’s conclusion? Is the world destined for destruction, a

future in which proliferation leads to nuclear holocaust? Langewiesche’s fatalism is somewhat softened by his claim that “the spread of nuclear weapons, even to such countries as North Korea and Iran, may not be as catastrophic as is generally believed and certainly does not meet the category of threat that can justify the suppression of civil liberties or the pursuit of preemptive wars.”

But perhaps the most salient observation of *The Atomic Bazaar* is that of a Pakistani analyst whom Langewiesche quotes at length:

You cannot have a world order in which you have five or eight nuclear-weapons states on the one hand, and the rest of the international community on the other. There are many places ... which have legitimate security concerns—every bit as legitimate as yours. And yet you ask them to address those concerns without nuclear weapons, while you have nuclear weapons *and* you have everything else? It is not a question of what is fair, or right or wrong. It is simply not going to work.

Nuclear American exceptionalism is not a sustainable approach to the question of nuclear proliferation.

Perhaps the best we can do is take our shots as they come, placing obstacles in front of would-be proliferators to make their jobs more difficult. All is not lost on this front; an aspiring A.Q. Khan starting out today would have a much tougher time than Khan did while getting his start in the 1970s. But one huge step the U.S. government could take would be to work to reduce or eliminate the “legitimate security concerns” for countries such as Iran that are examining nuclear weapons as a defense strategy. Whether a course correction on this front would now come too late to affect the spread of nuclear weapons remains to be seen, but it would be folly to continue blindly on our current path and refuse, at the very least, to try. ■

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[*The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture*, Andrew Keen, Currency, 240 pages]

Bloggers at the Gates

By Clark Stooksbury

ALMOST OVERNIGHT, the World Wide Web has been transformed, as millions of people have become not just consumers and viewers but participants. This phenomenon, called "Web 2.0" in the peculiar argot of the computer nerd, is exemplified by sites such as YouTube, where anyone can post videos, and MySpace, a social-networking site that allows millions to post pictures, video, and diaries.

Andrew Keen's jeremiad against the rise of Web 2.0, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture*, makes some valid arguments, but his few nuggets of wisdom get lost in an avalanche of overheated rhetoric. Keen, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur, is worried that the burgeoning online do-it-yourself culture is killing off the top-down model of professional news gathering, the artistic creations of professional musicians and writers, and the criticism and direction of cultural mandarins.

Should Keen's nightmare vision actually materialize—a world in which blogs replace newspapers and TV news and all entertainment is reduced to the work of teenagers with digital camcorders—I will happily join him on the barricades in defense of the professionals against the "noble amateurs" he denounces. Fortunately, we are not at that juncture, and Keen doesn't make a convincing case that we will be in the near future.

When his concerns are legitimate, Keen often ignores the extent to which these problems predate the growth of the Web. He laments at length the decline of newspapers, but they have been losing circulation and downsizing for decades due to competition from

radio and television. The *Washington Star* and the *New York Herald Tribune*—not to mention the *New York Herald* and the *New York Tribune*—didn't die by blog. The gravest threats facing print media today are not just blogs but sites like Craigslist.org, which offer free online classifieds and thus cost newspapers revenue even when they don't lose subscribers.

The barriers-to-entry to the blogosphere are virtually nonexistent. One can set up a free blog (as I did) in just a few minutes. This promotes new talent, but it also gives voice to an endless array of witless cranks. Some bloggers, such as Hugh Hewitt, think of the blogosphere as a replacement for the news media, but sensible people don't.

Keen flails wildly when he accuses bloggers on the scene during Hurricane Katrina of inflating the body count and making erroneous reports of activities at the Superdome. He doesn't cite specific examples, and it is hard to credit his version of events, since New Orleans was without power and bloggers would have had great difficulties filing firsthand reports. In those early days after New Orleans was flooded, elements of the mainstream media were all too often the ones responsible for spreading wild rumors.

He also makes the occasional howler in defense of the "old media," such as when he states that in "professionally edited newspapers and magazines ... political slant ... is restricted to the op-ed page," but "the majority of blogs make radical, sweeping statements without evidence or substantiation." At the very least, he should acknowledge that the neutrality of newspapers and magazines is a hotly debated topic. Ironically, the second claim is a radical, sweeping statement made without evidence or substantiation.

One doesn't learn from Keen that numerous blogs are maintained by professional journalists such as Matthew Yglesias and Andrew Sullivan, both of *The Atlantic Monthly*. He cites polling data indicating that 34 percent of bloggers consider themselves journalists.

That seems a bit high, but the far more significant statistic would be the number of readers who consider blogs their primary source for news. The most ambitious attempt at blog journalism to date is PajamasMedia.com. It is unfortunate that Keen only briefly mentions this site because it cries out for more attention. It launched in late 2005, under the leadership of mystery writer/blogger Roger L. Simon, as a blog alternative to the old-guard media. As an actual news site, it isn't very good. Taken for what it is—a collection of neocon blogs and links—it is, however, useful.

The blog threat to journalism isn't the only concern that animates Andrew Keen. It seems that every type of cultural authority is under attack from Web 2.0. Part of his problem is that he has spent too much time in the company of techno-utopians and has given their wild predictions excessive credence. He frets at length over the ravings of Kevin Kelly, a founder of *Wired* magazine who wants to "digitaliz[e] all books into a single universal, open-source, and free hypertext."

In a May 2006 *New York Times Magazine* 'manifesto,' Kelly describes this as the 'liquid version' of the book, a universal library in which 'each book is cross-linked, clustered, cited, extracted, indexed, analyzed, annotated, remixed, reassembled, and woven deeper into the culture than ever before.' And Kelly couldn't care less whether the contributor to this hypertextual utopia is Dostoyevsky or one of the seven Dwarfs.

What horrifies Keen merely bores me. Even if Kelly achieves his dream and groovy "liquid books" come into existence, the rest of us can still have real books—bound clumps of paper in a form that Gutenberg would still recognize. Dostoevsky will still be read and remembered when Kevin Kelly is long forgotten.

Keen's book is elitist in the superficial sense of the word as he takes the side of professionals against amateurs. The elitism doesn't go much beyond that, since