

**Book Review: Wendell Wallach's *A Dangerous Master:
How to Keep Technology from Slipping Beyond Our Control****

By Carl Mitcham**

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** Liberal Arts and International Studies, Colorado School of Mines and School of Philosophy, Renmin University of China, cmitcham@mines.edu

This book addresses the most fundamental challenge of the contemporary world: How to live with advancing science and technology. What follows is an initial, brief appreciation of a volume that will no doubt be returned to on other occasions — for both positive and negative reasons. It tells many interesting stories and is full of useful information. Yet despite such virtues, it fails to deal in the deepest ways with its fundamental challenge. An alternative title for this book review could have been “A Responsible, All Too Responsible, Criticism of Technology.”

According to the author's acknowledgments, his original title for the book itself was “Navigating the Future.” It remains the title of chapter one, which presents the theme: examining “the challenges of predicting and managing the potential harms that result from the adoption of emerging technologies, and [weighing] those against the anticipated benefits.... Navigating the future of technological possibilities is a hazardous venture. It begins with learning to ask the right questions — questions that reveal the pitfalls of inaction, and more importantly, the passageways available for plotting a course to a safe harbor” (p. 7). The navigation theme is reprised in the concluding chapter 15 “Guild Navigators,” which builds on an idea from Frank Herbert's *Dune* science fiction universe.

Chapter two reinforces the navigation theme by reviewing a prediction from a previous book co-authored with Colin Allen on *Moral Machines: Teaching Robots Right from Wrong* (2009). Wallach and Allen had postulated possible catastrophic events caused by semi-autonomous computer systems. The 2010 “flash crash” of the stock market as a result of automated high-speed trading programs confirmed this possibility (although a techno-positivist could respond that other trading programs limited the damage). Wallach further argues the benefits of cautionary fictions such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931) and *The Terminator* movie (1984). The discussion in this chapter might have been deepened by considering Hans Jonas's more extended argument for the “heuristics of fear” (1984) and Jean-Pierre Dupuy's for “enlightened doomsaying” (2004). Wallach, by contrast, seems to want to eschew fear as a primary motivator in favor of a measured effort to map “a framework for the broad interdisciplinary