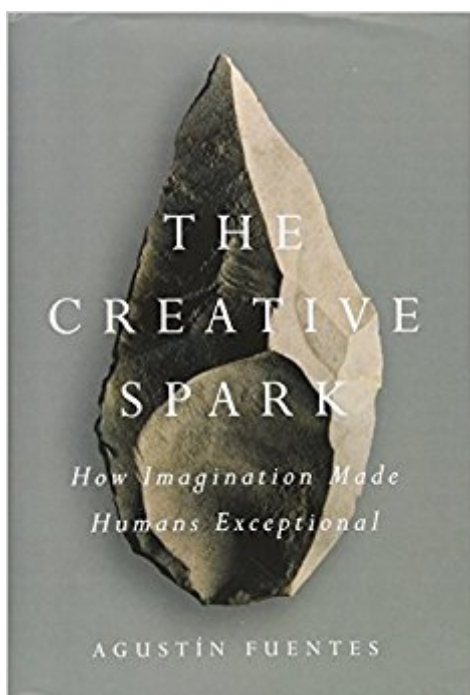


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# The Creative Spark: How Imagination Made Humans Exceptional



## Synopsis

A bold new synthesis of paleontology, archaeology, genetics, and anthropology that overturns misconceptions about race, war and peace, and human nature itself, answering an age-old question: What made humans so exceptional among all the species on Earth? **Creativity**. It is the secret of what makes humans special, hiding in plain sight. Agustín Fuentes argues that your child's finger painting comes essentially from the same place as creativity in hunting and gathering millions of years ago, and throughout history in making war and peace, in intimate relationships, in shaping the planet, in our communities, and in all of art, religion, and even science. It requires imagination and collaboration. Every poet has her muse; every engineer, an architect; every politician, a constituency. The manner of the collaborations varies widely, but successful collaboration is inseparable from imagination, and it brought us everything from knives and hot meals to iPhones and interstellar spacecraft. Weaving fascinating stories of our ancient ancestors' creativity, Fuentes finds the patterns that match modern behavior in humans and animals. This key quality has propelled the evolutionary development of our bodies, minds, and cultures, both for good and for bad. It's not the drive to reproduce; nor competition for mates, or resources, or power; nor our propensity for caring for one another that have separated us out from all other creatures. As Fuentes concludes, to make something lasting and useful today you need to understand the nature of your collaboration with others, what imagination can and can't accomplish, and, finally, just how completely our creativity is responsible for the world we live in. Agustín Fuentes's resounding multimillion-year perspective will inspire readers and spark all kinds of creativity.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 352 pages

Publisher: Dutton (March 21, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1101983949

ISBN-13: 978-1101983942

Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 1.1 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 13 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #121,119 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #184 in Books > History >

Historical Study & Educational Resources > Archaeology #387 in Books > History > World >

Civilization & Culture #456 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Anthropology > General

## Customer Reviews

PRAISE FOR THE CREATIVE SPARKâ œPersuasive, entertaining, informative... Fuentes has done a fine job of summarizing recent research in anthropology and primatology... pointing to numerous examples in which problems such as the finding of food, the avoidance of predators, the transfer of information and the manipulation of the physical environment are solved by way of imaginative collaboration.â •â ”Wall Street Journalâ œThe Creative Spark is strong on manâ™s imaginative accomplishments and offers an important corrective to the skewed debate on human nature. A species that, uniquely, ponders its own exceptionality will surely be fascinated by it.â •â ”The Economistâ œFuentes presents his theories in a captivating narrative that feels like an intriguing mystery... To look up from The Creative Spark after finishing the last page is to see the world in new, complex ways. Fuentes’s work adds depth to our reality and fosters a deep respect and appreciation for the many forms creativity takes.â •â ”Shelf Awarenessâ œHarnessing the latest findings in evolution, biology, and archaeology [Fuentes] creates a new synthesis to show that the great drivers of human progress have been creativity and cooperation, and that many of the things we believe about ourselves, from religion to race, are wrong.â •â ”NationalGeographic.com, Book Talkâ œCondensing a great deal of anthropological research,â Fuentes shows how imaginative resourcefulness enabled a vulnerable species lacking fangs and claws to survive in a world of fierce predatorsâ | whether facing the current threat of armed conflict or pondering contemporary controversies surrounding gender and religion, Fuentes draws one imperative lesson from humankindâ™s deep past: we survive as a species only so long as we continue to creatively innovate.â •â ”Booklistâ œThe diverse studies in creativity are good onesâ | encompassing everything from conflict resolution to learning how to use fire to cookâ ”not just red meat, but fish and vegetables as wellâ | an informative, readable introduction to recent scholarship on the anthropology of creativity.â •â ”Kirkus Reviewsâ œCreativity is an essential reason why Homo sapiens have progressed to the point we have: dominating an entire planet and eagerly searching the universe, argues anthropologist Fuentesâ | His thesis is an intriguing and insightful one.â •â ”Library Journalâ œA revolutionary perspective on what it means to be human. Fuentes breathes new life into one of our oldest questions. So much of what we think of as uniquely human has stagnated around a linear version of intelligence. Fuentes introduces imagination as a powerful force that has shaped who we are, and how we have become so successful. Thoughtfully researched and beautifully written, The Creative Spark is destined to become a classic.â •â ”Brian Hare and Vanessa Woods, authors of New York Times bestseller The Genius of Dogs â œInâ The Creative Spark,â everything old and familiar â “ from livestock and tools, to marriage

and war, and everything in between “ is made fresh and new in this fascinating retelling of the story of humans’ unique evolutionary journey. Grand in scope, but packed with detailed research and intimate prose, Fuentes once again gives us the precious gift of an accessible demolition of long-held assumptions, and a compelling, important, and revelatory understanding of ourselves.

• “Cordelia Fine, Prof. of History & Philosophy of Science, University of Melbourne, author of *Delusions of Gender* “ a magisterial tour of what makes us human, and how we got that way. Large and complex controversies are judiciously evaluated in a clearly written, fascinating way, and coherently assembled into a persuasive alternative to the simplistic biologisms that dominate contemporary discourse. This is the best guide I know on how the human world evolved, and a solid foundation for creative optimism.

• “R. Brian Ferguson, Prof. of Anthropology, Rutgers University-Newark “ a perfect example of our humanness. It combines individual creativity with a synthesis of the works of others to describe how the lives of humans and our ancestors were changed, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse, by harnessing and expanding creative abilities. Anyone who is curious about how we arrived at our present condition will want to read this book.

• “Lynne Isbell, Prof. and Chair of Anthropology, U.C., Davis, author of *The Fruit, the Tree, and the Serpent*

Agustín Fuentes, during more than two decades of research, has published more than one hundred academic articles and book chapters. He has chased monkeys, apes, and humans in the jungles and cities of Asia, the mountains of Morocco, and the streets of Gibraltar. He’s explored the lives of our evolutionary ancestors and examined people’s daily routines across the globe. He is a professor and the chair of the University of Notre Dame’s Department of Anthropology and a National Geographic Explorer. His perspectives and research have been covered in *The Atlantic*, *Scientific American*, *The Huffington Post*, and on NPR. He lives in Indiana.

Starting with our pre-human ancestors, this book traces the roots and development of characteristics that are quintessentially human. Remarkably, the author hits the sweet spot of making it accessible to general readers (I include myself there) while being evidence based and noting where evidence is not clear and possibilities are being discussed. I very much liked that he did not add a moral valence to what he described: that the same or related behaviors (or creativity) can and have led to incredible innovation and, especially as there are more of us living at close quarters, some pretty awful outcomes. It makes the discussion of what it means to be human, when looked at starting early and looking forward rather than starting now and looking backward, much

more nuanced and inclusive. I especially appreciated the discussion of science as a manifestation of human creativity. The fundamental concept of drawing conclusions from the observable world that might be confirmable seems so critical to all of us, especially now. As we navigate the current state of the world, the perspective of this book gives hope that we can survive it.

As a physical anthropology student, I've long been reading about human evolution and the many modern explanations we've managed to evoke for our pre-historic past. As a result, I picked up *The Creative Spark* with the intention of simply reading the next book to circumnavigate the carousel of evolutionary narratives. Mere pages into it, however, I realized that this novel will surely blow all its predecessors out of the water. I say this because of two things. First, Fuentes has successfully mastered the fluid writing style prerequisite for any bestseller. As a slow reader, I was shocked to see how rapidly I flew through *The Creative Spark*, building momentum with each page-turn. Put another way, reading this book felt like handling a long sheet of soft silk. The pages flipped through my fingers effortlessly and left me feeling utterly satisfied and yearning for more. Second, the information and argumentation presented in this book is largely novel, and when it is not, Fuentes manages to present it with such breadth and finesse that it still feels new. Calling upon archaeology, primatology, neuroscience, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and more, Fuentes deconstructs many of the tales we've been told about our evolutionary past, and in their place, erects a truly multidimensional account of human pre-history that will surely prove difficult to challenge. In my opinion, these traits combine in *The Creative Spark* to produce a truly spectacular narrative of humankind's past. It is extremely satisfying to read, and whether you have a strong interest in evolution, or just a subtle curiosity about how remarkably strange our species sometimes seems to be, this is a book that you will love to read.

Professor Agustin Fuentes wrote a wonderful book. It is full with fascinating insights such as the observation that inequality and warfare emerged at the same time in history. This ought to give the reader pause as we are currently drifting to some very unequal societies. (It is an irony of a more recent history that the legacy of communism resulted the largest differences in wealth on the planet). This book places our current society in context using an unique and informed vantage point on our human roots.

There are lots of books about some aspect of "the human condition." I've tried many but have often given up part way through. So many were speculative, or pedantic, or filled with factual errors, or

just plain poorly-written. I have to admit I got this one at first because the author is a friend and I know he writes well. I didn't know he wrote THIS well. The Creative Spark is authoritative (and should be; Fuentes is an expert in the field) but friendly. It is easy to read but doesn't at all talk down to the reader. Most of all it brings to its subject so many aspects of human evolution, psychology, behavior, culture, and history—all woven together into a seamless exposition of the central topic: How human imagination and creativity have made our species what it is. (For anthropologists and those interested in anthropology, this is the epitome of what that field is about—the "holistic" study of humans.) I highly recommend this. You'll enjoy it and, most importantly, you will learn a great deal.

Excellent presentation of the subject.

Go Irish!

A great read and well written!

The title uses the word 'creative', yet a formal or even informal definition is nowhere to be found. The subtitle uses 'imagination', and the same criticism applies. As an exercise in Anthropology, the book gets an A-. As an exercise in Cognitive Psychology or Philosophy, the book gets an F.

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