

## SERIES FOREWORD

The MIT Press Essential Knowledge series presents short, accessible books on need-to-know subjects in a variety of fields. Written by leading thinkers, Essential Knowledge volumes deliver concise, expert overviews of topics ranging from the cultural and historical to the scientific and technical. In our information age, opinion, rationalization, and superficial descriptions are readily available. Much harder to come by are the principled understanding and foundational knowledge needed to inform our opinions and decisions. This series of beautifully produced, pocket-sized, soft-cover books provides in-depth, authoritative material on topics of current interest in a form accessible to non-experts. Instead of condensed versions of specialist texts, these books synthesize anew important subjects for a knowledgeable audience. For those who seek to enter a subject via its fundamentals, Essential Knowledge volumes deliver the understanding and insight needed to navigate a complex world.

*Bruce Tidor*

*Professor of Biological Engineering and Computer Science  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

