

people of war-torn Europe. “The future life of Europe was not their concern; its means of livelihood was not their anxiety,” he wrote. Keynes, however, was concerned for Europe’s future. His book’s significance lies in his revolutionary plan for financing recovery not just in Europe, but across the world.

Keynes called for a new international economic order to replace the gold standard, which had held from the 1870s until the start of the war. That system had led to a form of globalization that benefited the wealthy, but impoverished the majority and ultimately destabilized both the financial and political systems. Keynes’s plan (the Scheme for the Rehabilitation of European Credit and for Financing Relief and Reconstruction) is outlined briefly in a single chapter of the book.

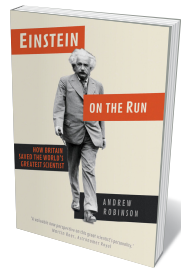
The phenomenal power of *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* is thus very much down to the prescience and originality of Keynes’s economic commentary, statistical analysis and radical monetary theory. But character assassination is also part of the mix. The bitterness so evident on the page stems in part from US president Woodrow Wilson’s airy dismissal of Keynes’s proposals at the conference. The deliberations at Versailles had also inflamed Keynes’s animosity towards the British prime minister, David Lloyd George, and French premier Georges Clemenceau. Keynes wrote of Clemenceau, for instance, that he was “dry in soul and empty of hope”. Inclined to judge people by their hands and fingernails, Keynes several times hinted darkly that throughout the negotiations, Clemenceau’s “grey-gloved hands” were “never uncovered”. These personal attacks give the book a vindictive tone, which some say he came to regret.

PRESCIENT OUTLOOK

For a book published 100 years ago, the contemporary resonance is unsettling. Keynes writes: “England still stands outside Europe. Europe’s voiceless tremors do not reach her ... But Europe is solid with herself.” In another passage, he notes that the “principle of accumulation based on inequality was a vital part of the pre-war order of society”. And in an era innocent of Amazon and containerized shipping, Keynes wrote that wealthy Londoners could order by telephone “the various products of the whole earth” and expect “their early delivery” to their doorstep. The globalized pre-First World War economy was the template for the modern one.

Driven as it was by the international financial sector, the consequences of this economic system were predictable: rising inequality, economic instability, political volatility and war. Thus, a bankrupt Germany and its allies (the Central Powers) — all heavily indebted sovereign governments — were to endure increasingly frequent economic crises after 1919. Their creditors, the victorious Allied Powers, made no effort towards a

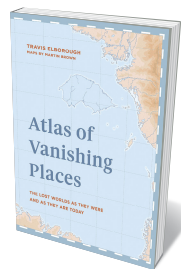
Books in brief



Einstein on the Run

Andrew Robinson YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS (2019)

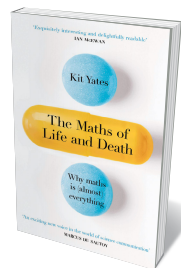
Albert Einstein’s life and work in Germany, Switzerland and the United States are exhaustively documented. The physics luminary, however, deeply admired Britain; and it’s this “entanglement” that science writer (and frequent *Nature* contributor) Andrew Robinson explores in his sparkling study. Robinson delves into astronomer Arthur Eddington’s 1919 confirmation of the general theory of relativity, Einstein’s speeches and lectures in London and Oxford — and the scientist’s unlikely sojourn in a Norfolk holiday hut in 1933, when on the run from a rumoured Nazi assassination attempt.



Atlas of Vanishing Places

Travis Elborough and Martin Brown WHITE LION (2019)

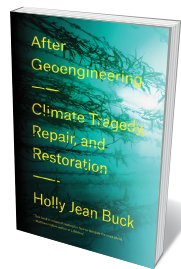
Some are shrinking; others, half-forgotten. But the vanishing places featured in this atlas, from archaeological sites to encroached ecosystems, all compel. Writer Travis Elborough and cartographer Martin Brown play tour guides to nearly 40 recovered marvels and ecological tragedies. Among them are Xanadu, the Mongolian metropolis of Kublai Khan; the evocative, abandoned ‘mosque city’ of Bagerhat in Bangladesh; and the drying river basin of Mexico’s biodiverse Chihuahuan Desert. A reminder of earthly evanescence — and of the urgency to preserve what we can of what remains.



The Maths of Life and Death

Kit Yates QUERCUS (2019)

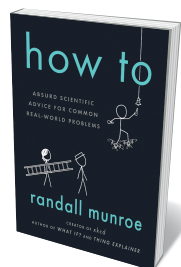
From miscarriages of justice to political referendums, mathematics permeates life. Biological mathematician Kit Yates goes further, claiming it offers the key to solving “the mysteries of our own species”. Whether you agree or not, this is a wonderfully assured study. Discussing exponential behaviour, he ranges from the charity ice-bucket challenge that went viral in 2014 to the ‘acceleration’ of time as we age. He tears into statistics on the link between bacon-sandwich consumption and colorectal cancer. And he offers a fascinating glimpse of mathematical epidemiology. A dizzying, dazzling debut.



After Geoengineering

Holly Jean Buck VERSO (2019)

As a solution to the climate crisis, geoengineering is largely viewed as dystopian. Thus, notes sociologist Holly Buck, discussions about it are stalled by “rigid binaries”. Her original, thought-provoking book aims to break the impasse. Accounts of cutting-edge technologies — from direct carbon capture to regenerating seagrass meadows for effective sequestration — are shot through with interludes of speculative fiction, which inject human nuance into risk-laden scenarios. Ultimately, she argues, we need to look at climate restoration as a society-wide process involving myriad methods.



How To

Randall Munroe RIVERHEAD (2019)

Got a problem? Author, cartoonist and former NASA roboticist Randall Munroe has a solution. The hitch is that it’s maddeningly complex and unutterably absurd — and thus, as a scientific thought experiment about bad ideas, completely delightful. Learn how to beat the high-jump record by leaping off a mountain wearing a “sailplane suit”; create a swimming pool walled with cheese; keep a lava moat (every house needs one) molten; and arrive at a job interview promptly by altering the flow of time. A brilliant provocation of a book: clamber in for a wild ride. [Barbara Kiser](#)