

Books & arts

with incredulity and disapproval that some guidance on COVID-19 from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was influenced by politics – yet a deep social-science literature has long explored the contours of political power in all health policymaking.

Gates urges the WHO to work with member states to secure better implementation of international health regulations and to strengthen norms on sharing outbreak information. The agency is already doing exactly this. Yet, as international-relations scholars have shown, it clearly lacks the political power, when acting alone, to compel states to act against their short-term interest (by imposing travel bans, for example). Political analysts suggest that changes in global governance – such as boosting the WHO's power to release emergency funding, or to convene governments and other international organizations beyond the health sector – might prove more important than many technological changes.

Gates calls for free vaccines around the world, but opposes a World Trade Organization waiver that would allow governments to choose which COVID-19 patents to enforce during the pandemic, partly on the grounds that it would be better if companies voluntarily shared their know-how. Yet companies have few incentives to do so without the political intervention of governments: such intervention was key to why prices of AIDS medicines fell by 99% in the first decade of this century.

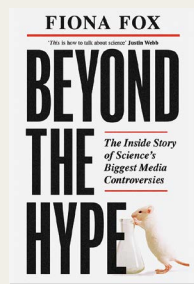
The study of international relations has a great deal to tell us about governments' behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic, and about what might change it. The COVAX initiative, for example, failed to reach its goals because countries and companies reneged on their pledges and engaged in vaccine nationalism – acting exactly as studies at the intersection of domestic and international politics would have predicted. Such analysis might have helped COVAX, which aims for equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines worldwide, to avoid assumptions that undermined its efforts to reach 2 billion people in 2021.

With this book, Gates makes a strong, evidence-based argument that the world is not yet thinking about pandemics effectively – but, rather, is missing key innovations and refusing to fund efforts that could save lives and money. A political lens could reveal how to fix that in the world we have today.

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Books in brief



Beyond the Hype

Fiona Fox *Elliott & Thompson* (2022)

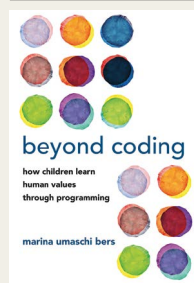
It is 20 years since journalist Fiona Fox set up the influential Science Media Centre in London, to persuade more scientists to engage with the media. This absorbing, detailed book is her memoir of that period – not, as she makes clear, an “objective record”. Separate chapters deal with controversies such as “Climategate”, “Frankenfoods”, the politicization of science, sexism in research and how the current pandemic epitomizes an “age-old dichotomy” between the need for simple public messaging and the messy complexity of science.



Bitch

Lucy Cooke *Doubleday* (2022)

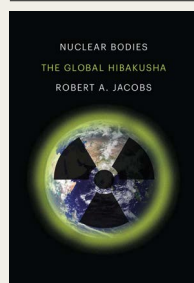
“Try explaining the need to be passive” to a female spotted hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*), writes zoologist and author Lucy Cooke, “and she’ll laugh in your face, after she’s bitten it off”. She is dominant in rough play, scent-marking and territorial defence. By analysing numerous animals, this sparkling attack on scientific sexism draws on many scientists – of multiple genders – to correct stereotypes of the active male versus passive female. Many such concepts were initiated by Charles Darwin, who is nevertheless Cooke’s “scientific idol”.



Beyond Coding

Marina Umaschi Bers *MIT Press* (2022)

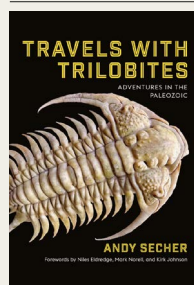
Early-childhood technologist Marina Bers developed the KIBO robot, which young children can program with coloured, barcoded wooden blocks to learn computer coding. It is the chief character in her engaging book, which presents four key ways to consider coding for kids: as a “playground”; “another language”; a “palette of virtues”; and a “bridge”. The palette includes infusing ethics and moral education into programming. The bridge involves finding points of connection between diverse cultural, ethnic and religious groups.



Nuclear Bodies

Robert A. Jacobs *Yale Univ. Press* (2022)

The Japanese word *hibakusha* originally described the victims of the atomic bombs dropped on Japan in 1945. Since the 2011 Fukushima nuclear power-plant disaster, the term has been widely extended to denote worldwide victims of radiation exposure. Yet it does not appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: evidence that “these ‘global hibakusha’ have been largely invisible to us”, because of their relative political insignificance, notes Hiroshima-based historian Robert Jacobs in this grimly important analysis of the cold war.



Travels with Trilobites

Andy Secher *Columbia Univ. Press* (2022)

The fascinating marine invertebrate known as a trilobite belongs to the beginning of complex animal life. It appeared some 521 million years ago, and endured for more than 250 million years, evolving more than 25,000 recognized species. Palaeontologist Andy Secher co-edits the trilobite website for the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. He owns more than 4,000 trilobite fossils, many of which are pictured in this paean to “the omnipresent monarchs of the world’s ancient seas”. **Andrew Robinson**