

Some of the key points in *Ebola's Message* echo those of Richards' book, such as the need to go beyond classic epidemiological and biomedical approaches. I was inspired by the editors' stated ethos of striving to understand and value the work of others. The contributors, however, are largely American, as are the perspectives on the politics of Ebola, the media response and the absurdity of US quarantine. Richards, by contrast, shows that local quarantine was not new to the villages he studied, which have used it for goat plague and historically for smallpox. In 1976, my colleagues and I saw this in the first known outbreak of Ebola, in Yambuku in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo).

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has been the main non-governmental responder in all Ebola outbreaks in DR Congo since 1995. In *Ebola's Message*, MSF public-health specialist Armand Sprecher offers a candid, sobering essay that reflects on the group's failure to partner with locals to control epidemics. He stresses the importance of skilled managers over doctors, who may have managerial skills only "by chance". Indeed, epidemic control is about logistics and coordination.

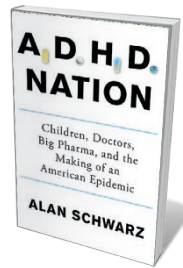
The final essays deal with challenging ethical issues. They are particularly relevant for clinical research in highly lethal epidemics. They provide balanced perspectives for deep disagreements on the ethics of trial design; the tension between trials, outbreak control and patient care; and the use of experimental interventions in epidemic times.

To fight the next epidemic, as Sprecher writes, it will be crucial to apply these lessons, capitalize on partnerships and hold institutions to their promises of funding and cooperation. And, as Richards mentions, it will also be key to consolidate ways of working effectively with local communities, and to recognize their work. This advice demands a major shift in the mindset of epidemiologists.

A similarly devastating Ebola epidemic is unlikely to develop. But others will. The 'big one' will hit, potentially causing a crisis on the scale of the 1918–19 Spanish influenza pandemic, which killed more than 50 million people. Some will argue that HIV/AIDS is that pandemic: albeit slowly, it has felled more than 30 million people since the early 1980s and is ongoing. Growing mobility, demographic pressure, economic and agricultural development, climate change and environmental degradation increase the risk from such zoonotic diseases. As these two books demonstrate, we need to learn from history to avoid repeating our mistakes. ■

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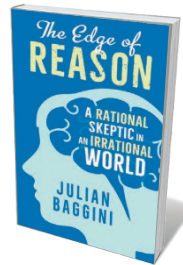
Books in brief



ADHD Nation

Alan Schwarz SCRIBNER (2016)

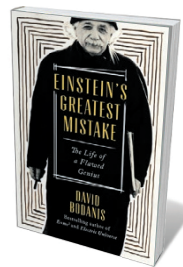
Some 15% of US children have been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Journalist Alan Schwarz is sceptical about that incidence and the powerful pharmaceuticals prescribed for the condition, calling ADHD "the most misdiagnosed condition in American medicine". His nimble investigation interweaves the narratives of pharmaceutical companies with those of child psychologist Keith Conners, who led ADHD's 'Manhattan Project', and young people grappling with the medical fallout. An intriguing sidelight is the misuse of ADHD drugs as performance enhancers.



The Edge of Reason: A Rational Skeptic in an Irrational World

Julian Baggini YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS (2016)

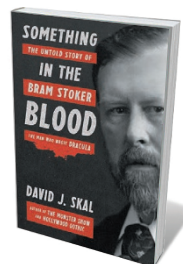
Humanity has lost its reason, asserts philosopher Julian Baggini: many trust gut feelings and received wisdom, decrying rationality as "a cold tool of desiccating logic". Baggini reveals it as anything but. Debunking myths such as the idea that reason is purely objective, he reminds us how reason actually functions in diverse arenas. Thus science, although hyper-rational and data-ruled, integrates the mess of guesswork and inspiration. And a rational stance in politics demands that we embrace complexities — in debate, difference and diversity. A thoughtful analysis for hyper-emotional times.



Einstein's Greatest Mistake: The Life of a Flawed Genius

David Bodanis LITTLE, BROWN (2016)

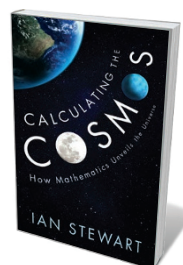
In 1915, Albert Einstein created a masterpiece: the equation at the core of his general theory of relativity. Its profound implications for many aspects of physics are assured. But, argues science writer David Bodanis, Einstein's confidence and intuitive brilliance tipped over into hubris in the quantum debate, when he found himself ranged against the likes of Niels Bohr. This is a sympathetic appraisal of Einstein's intellectual development. But however wrong the old revolutionary was about the new thinking, hanging a full biography off such a weighted title seems a little tendentious.



Something in the Blood

David J. Skal LIVERIGHT (2016)

The vampire, a cultural trope that crept bloodily along for centuries, has finally achieved ubiquity in film, television and fiction. Yet the man who embedded the archetype remains an enigma. Cultural historian David Skal reveals Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula* (1897), as a figure marked by childhood paralysis (which may have involved blood-letting) and maturation in an era of epidemics, famine and a titanic tug-of-war between science and spiritualism. Stoker's opus emerges as a psychological reading of the age — a "veritable Rosetta Stone of Victorian anxieties", as Skal puts it.



Calculating the Cosmos: How Mathematics Unveils the Universe

Ian Stewart PROFILE (2016)

Mathematician and prolific writer Ian Stewart turns a lens on how maths has helped us to decipher the celestial. As space probes explore new ground from asteroids to regions beyond the heliopause, Earth-based number-crunching informs everything from Jupiter's asteroid-pitching tendencies, the behaviour of planetary rings and the stubborn shyness of dark matter to the 'interplanetary superhighway' that provides efficient routes between planets. A fascinating tour, seamlessly spliced and historically contextualized. [Barbara Kiser](#)