

Academic Book Week 2017 at LSE Library

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23-28 January 2017 is **Academic Book Week**, celebrating the value, variety and transformations of the academic book. To mark the occasion, **Lucy Lambe** outlines how LSE Library is celebrating the week and talks to LSE academics about their favourite scholarly works and how they envisage the future of the academic book.

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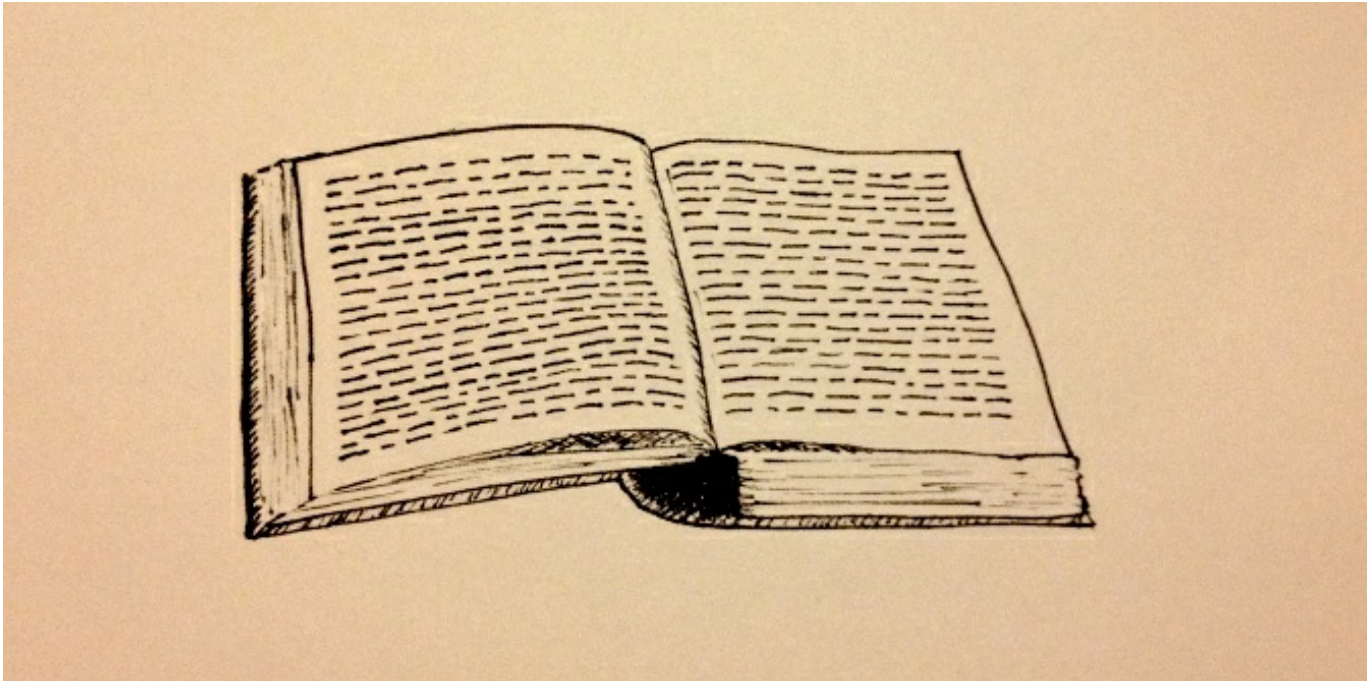


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Academic Book Week 2017 at LSE Library

Academic Book Week (23-28 January 2017) is a national festival celebrating the diversity, innovation and influence of academic books throughout history. The academic book is in a period of transformation as digital technologies change how we discover, read and use scholarly publications. It is now possible to read original research papers as soon as they have been submitted to a journal through pre-print servers such as [SocArXiv](#), and authors are experimenting with new forms of publishing like personal or institutional blogs. The open access movement has also changed the economics of publishing: for example, you can read an increasing proportion of research from LSE for free through our institutional repository, [LSE Research Online](#).

So what does the future hold for the academic book? This year LSE Library is joining the festivities of Academic Book Week by discovering what staff and students at the London School of Economics think the academic book of the future will look like and what some of their favourite academic books are.

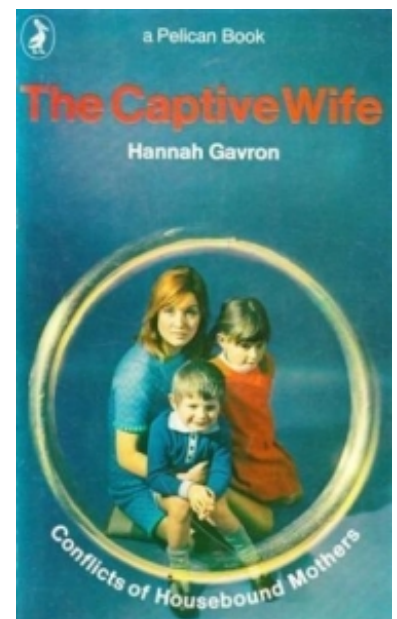
What are some of LSE's favourite academic books?



Inspired by the list of [twenty academic books that shaped modern Britain](#), we put a question to staff at the London School of Economics: what is your favourite academic book and why? We really enjoyed reading the responses featuring a range of titles from those firmly established on university reading lists to recently published popular social science books. If your favourite is missing from the list, let us know what academic books you have found most influential for your studies or research using our online [form](#).

Professor Mary Evans (Gender Institute): There are various books which have delighted and impressed me in the past 50 years of reading social science literature. But two in particular stand out because of their associations with my own interests, ambitions and understanding of both academic and wider politics. The two books are *The Captive Wife*, by Hannah Gavron, first published in 1966, and *Marienthal: The Sociography of an Unemployed Community*, by Marie Jahoda, Paul Lazarsfeld and Hans Zeisel, first published in English in 1971.

The book by Hannah Gavron is often cited by women of my generation as the first non-fiction evocation of the subjective world of a wife and mother. It is true that Betty Friedan had published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, but that still seems to me a considerable missile aimed in the wrong direction. A wake up call about the delusions and consequences of heterosexual romances about marriage and parenthood but somehow, on this side of the Atlantic, nothing as powerful as the reality, the invocation of the everyday and the ambiguities of the 'ties to others' that Gavron achieved. Gavron has always remained with me as an author whose work could cross time and place in its understanding of the way in which the worlds we love can also be the worlds that constrain. *Marienthal* has that same sense of the necessary recognition of circumstances upon people's lives. In this case, the effect of long-term unemployment in producing apathy and depression. The book does the quantitative work of sociology but it also gives a voice, and not an interpreted voice, to the people behind those figures.



Professor Eric Neumayer (Geography and Environment): Due to my academic background I'm much more of an articles than an academic books person (although I do love novels!). Most books in my office are from past political theorists or philosophers or are textbooks or methods books. The two academic books that don't fall into these categories and that have impressed me are William Easterly's *The White Man's Burden* (OUP, 2007), which argues that

Western aid has done significantly more harm than good; and Jack Goldsmith and Eric Posner's [The Limits of International Law](#) (OUP, 2007), arguing that International Law has no beneficial causal effect on anything really. I chose these two books principally because they argue strongly against what I want to be true and, to some extent at least, believe to be true. These books put forward a more elaborate argument and more comprehensive set of evidence than what could be done in an article. But it is no coincidence that they are at the borderline between an academic book and a book aimed at policymakers and the general public.

Professor Paul Kelly (Government): My favourite academic book is Quentin Skinner's [Foundations of Modern Political Thought](#) (CUP, 1978). It is a serious research monograph that has virtually become a textbook. I first read it at the recommendation of a sixth-form history teacher as part of preparation for university interviews and A Level history – these used to be common across the sector, not just Oxbridge. I have come back to it in different ways and at different times throughout my student studies and academic career. The book is a fantastic narrative of early modern political thinking, but it also exemplifies Skinner's method of reading and understanding political language and concept formation; as such, it brings history to the heart of political philosophy. It is a profoundly philosophical history. At different times in my career I have been inspired and influenced by this method, and at others I have criticised and rejected it: the book works for me because I continue to learn from it nearly 40 years after first engaging with it.

What does the future hold for the academic book?

At a time when information can be searched for and found quickly online, and when the speed of scholarly publishing is called out for being too slow, is there still a place for the academic book or even long form publishing in general? In the last year, LSE Library has had a glimpse into the future of the academic book. For the first time we funded an [open access book](#), written by Professor Rodney Barker from the Department of Government. We also became aware of an ebook developed by Dr Bryan W. Roberts (Department of Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method), who is taking advantage of the digital format of the book and regularly updating and adding to its content. UCL Press have also developed this idea into a more formal publication type by [launching the BOOC](#) (Book as Open Online Content) format as part of the AHRC-funded [Academic Book of the Future](#) project.

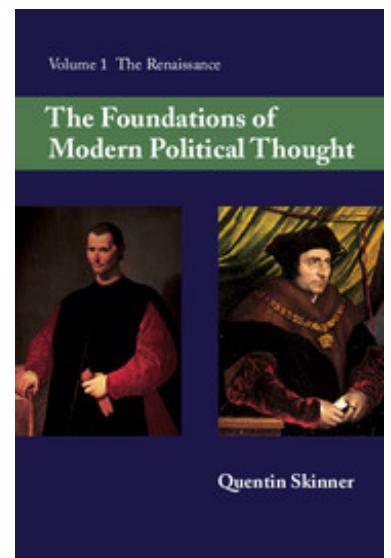
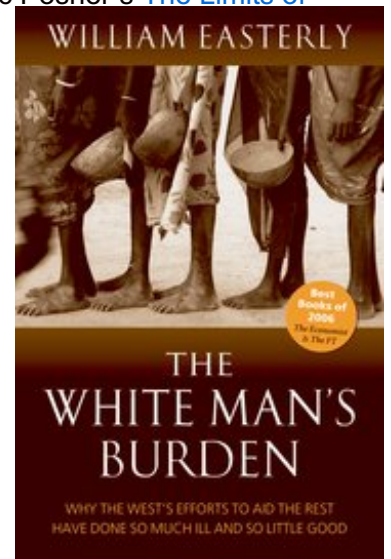




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We asked our academics for their vision of the future of the academic book – or if there is a future at all.

Professor Eric Neumayer: In the future I think the academic book – defined as a research monograph based on rigorous methods – will retreat further. There will always be disciplines (like anthropology and history) or sub-fields where monographs will remain very important, but I think the trend is very much toward articles. Articles are faster and more concise, and most of what is of interest to academics and students can be said and argued in the space of an article or a series of articles.

Professor Paul Kelly: I like books! Consequently I think the monograph has a long life. I read articles but there are times when the deep and sustained engagement with a problem that the monograph allows is the only way of disseminating knowledge, increasing understanding and inspiring future scholarship. Many scholars also like the materiality of books. Handling and smelling a book is something to treasure. Buying and owning my first expensive academic book as an undergraduate was something I remember and treasure (it was G.E. Moore's *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, and it cost me £20 in 1982; my grant for that term after rent was £197). The book is a simple, portable, cheap and remarkably resilient technology, but it can also be a beautiful thing.

Many of the best US University Presses such as Princeton and Belknap/Harvard, as well as Clarendon and CUP at their best, know that a well-produced book is a beautiful thing to hold. As years pass and memory begins to fade, the materiality of the monograph on an office shelf or in a particular place in a library is an aid to recall. I have no doubt that other technologies for knowledge transfer will develop, but I suspect the monograph will outlive the journal article certainly in the humanities and social sciences.

I am delighted to see many of my students retain this fascination with monographs as things as well as ways of disseminating knowledge, so these reasons are not just the prejudices of a generation that will eventually pass. Just look at the resilience of vinyl records in the music industry.

Professor Mary Evans: Both of my chosen books are short. Which takes me to the question of the future of academic publishing. Given that so much rapidly changing information on the world is now available electronically the future of the academic book today is perhaps more than ever in the text which provides a critical reading of that material; of how to understand and assess the tsunami of material that is ours so easily. Only the truly absurd can

question data about increased material inequality; the still relevant consequences for individuals of various forms of inequality are the subject of the books named above. But what the authors of the books do is engage readers (certainly this one) in more than collecting information. Something is demanded of us that goes beyond agreement or disagreement with a hypothesis: we are asked to engage our empathy with the worlds set out before us in a way which makes us ask what it might be like to live in those worlds. It is not all, in the social world, about us.

You can join in with your predictions for the academic book of the future by visiting one of many flip-charts set up around LSE Life and the PhD Academy. You can also enter your ideas in our online [form](#). We'll be collecting your ideas at the end of the week and hope to share them on [LSE Library's Twitter feed](#).

Note: This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [comments policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

About the author

***Lucy Lambe** is Scholarly Communications Officer at the LSE, working in the Research Support Services (RSS) team in the Library. The RSS team aims to support academics throughout the research life cycle, and specialises in advice on publishing, open access and tracking research impact.*

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