


# Register for our roundtable: are fast books the future of academic publishing?

 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2020/10/30/register-for-our-roundtable-event-are-fast-books-the-future-of-academic-publishing/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2020/10/30/register-for-our-roundtable-event-are-fast-books-the-future-of-academic-publishing/)

October 30, 2020

This is the fifth post in a six-week series: **Rapid or Rushed?** exploring rapid response publishing in covid times.

Read the rest of the series [here](#).

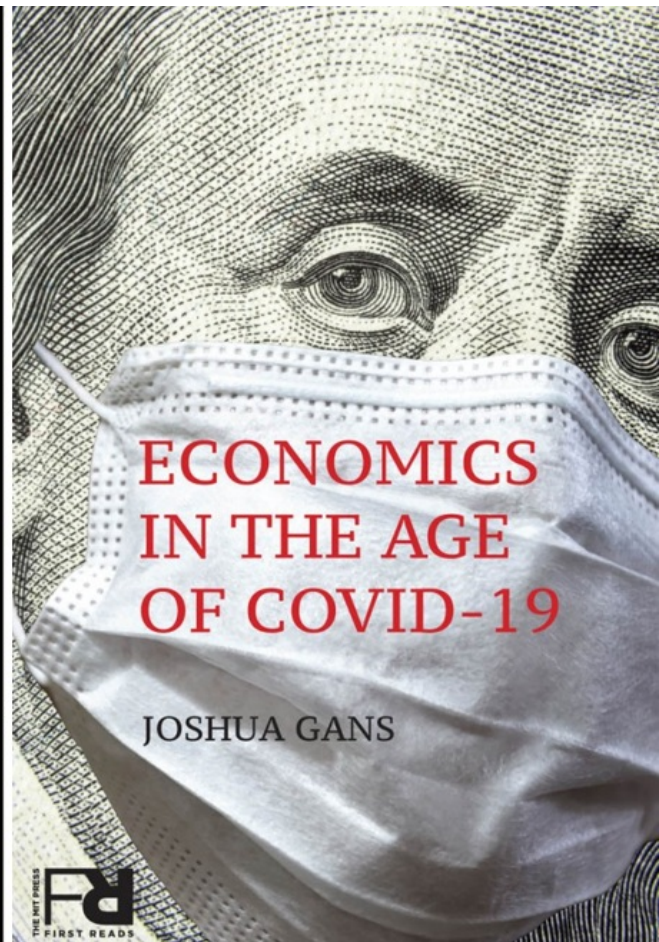
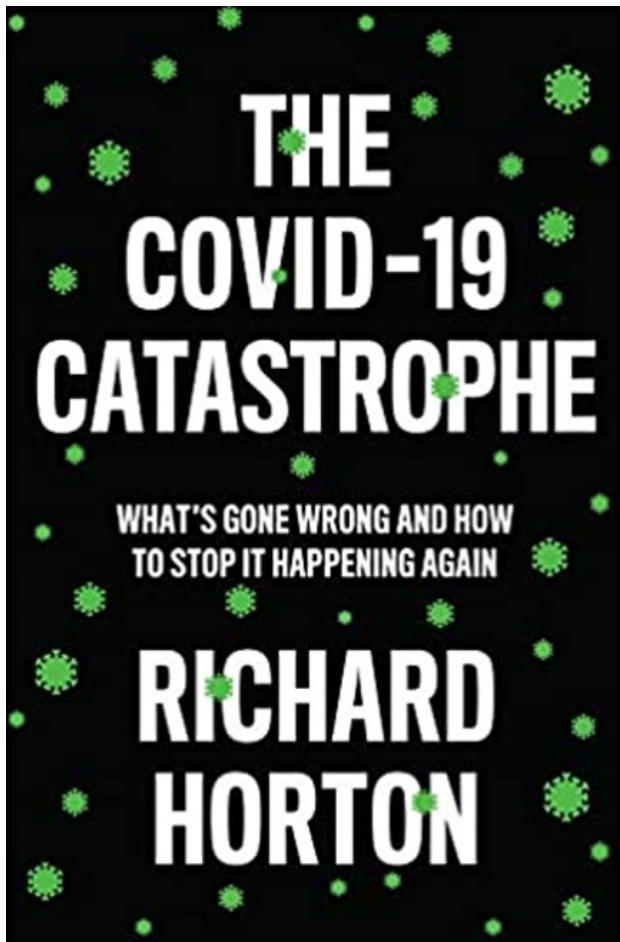
As part of the series, there was a [virtual roundtable](#) featuring Professor Joshua Gans (Economics in the Age of COVID-19, MIT Press), in conversation with Richard Horton (The COVID-19 Catastrophe, Polity Press and Editor of The Lancet), Victoria Pittman (Bristol University Press) and Qudsiya Ahmed (Cambridge University Press, India)



Are short, fast books the future of academic publishing? According to respondents to a poll on our Twitter account, the answer is, decisively, yes.

Since the start of the pandemic there have been over 150 signatories to a [Wellcome Trust statement](#) pledging to make relevant research available for the duration of the outbreak. This has led to thousands of articles being made available without paywalls. Not only does the pandemic demand [fast and open science](#), it has also accelerated the demand for (and production of) fast social science, fast comment and rapid responses of a more reflective kind.

Whilst the question of fast science has been subject to intense debate within the scholarly community, little has been said about fast publishing. Next Friday at 1.30pm, the LSE Impact Blog will ask authors and publishers from across the globe to consider the impact of the pandemic on social science publishing.



Is fast always better? What happens to peer review in the process? And do rapid responses risk scholarly integrity?

Our online roundtable event will bring together authors Joshua Gans and Richard Horton in dialogue with Victoria Pittman, Head of Commissioning at Bristol University Press, and Qudsiya Ahmed, Head of Academic Publishing at Cambridge University Press, India. The event will offer a moment to take stock of the current situation and think about some of the changes that are happening in academic publishing – and to ask if these changes are here to stay.

What are the changes?

According to Bristol University Press, the typical turnaround time for a standard single authored monograph of c.70 – 80,000 words is around 24 months. This includes writing, copyediting, typesetting, proofreading as well as sales and marketing. When I asked Twitter in another poll (fast science?) how long it takes to write and publish a book on COVID-19, the consensus was that it takes no time at all. But the jury was out on just how fast is fast, with one week and one month gaining an equal number of votes.

One month is the correct answer. Panellist Joshua Gans' book, *Economics in the Age of COVID-19*, was written, peer-reviewed, edited and released as an eBook by MIT Press in a month. The book is an assessment of the economic policy choices that were made in response to COVID-19. His plan, he explains, was to write 10 chapters – one a day – and then publish. Not only is the pace of his output remarkable, the peer review process was

novel too. Alongside following the traditional process, his book was posted open access for community review by members of the public. The printed version of the book will be released in November, and since its publication online in April, Gans has been updating the book in light of the constantly evolving COVID-19 climate.

Two months later, another short book assessing and critiquing government policy – this time in the arena of science policy – was released. Richard Horton, editor of medical journal *The Lancet* and one of our panellists, published *The COVID-19 Catastrophe: What's Gone Wrong and How to Stop It Happening Again* in June. Describing the delayed response to the pandemic in the United Kingdom as “the greatest science policy failure for a generation” and Trump’s decision to withdraw WHO funding as meeting “the criteria for the act of violence the international community calls a crime against humanity”, Horton explores how the United States and the United Kingdom, two of the richest and most scientifically advanced countries in the world, got it so wrong?

Both Gans and Horton’s rapid responses are intended as quick yet measured, authoritative and informed responses amidst the abundance of opinion and misinformation that COVID-19 has unleashed. Yet they also seem to present a whole new approach to social science books. Gans guesses that 80% of the citations in the book were from two months in one year – March and April 2020. Meanwhile, Horton presents not only a history and diagnosis, but also a prescription. In different ways, both books close the gap between academic book and journal article and raise the question of the status of the book in an era of fake news.

So, what questions do we need to ask?

As publishers in the United Kingdom and the United States launch series that cater to short, fast responses, can everyone publish this fast? Panellist Qudsiya Ahmed will outline the barriers to fast publishing in India, posing the question of whether this acceleration in publishing might be exacerbating already existing global inequalities in the production and distribution of knowledge.

Short, fast books then pose questions, not only with regard to the quality of evidence and research included. If academic books are becoming more like journal articles, will academic publishers become more like journal publishers. Will power become increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few? Will mass appeal become part of the decision to commission?

Ahmed and our other panellist will question what happens to social science when it is sped up and how fast responses are suited to crises. And most importantly, are they here to stay?

I’ll end with the results of one more recent Twitter poll. When we asked “why publish faster?”, we were told “don’t, science is slow.”



**LSE Impact Blog** @LSEImpactBlog · Oct 27



Why publish faster?

Register now to discuss : [eventbrite.co.uk/e/how-fast-is-...](https://eventbrite.co.uk/e/how-fast-is-...)

It's a pandemic

18.5%

Faster is better

14.8%

**Don't: Science is slow**

**66.7%**

54 votes · Final results

Please join us next Friday to discuss roles and risks of rapid responses in pandemic publishing. Questions can be submitted on the day, or in advance by emailing [impactofsocialsciences@lse.ac.uk](mailto:impactofsocialsciences@lse.ac.uk). Contributions to the debate in the form of blog submissions are also warmly invited.

## Registration details

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1.30-2.30pm Friday 6th November. (Free) [Register here](#)