



Einstein and Oppenheimer: The Meaning of Genius,
by Silvan S Schweber
(Harvard, £14.95)

Despite his title, physicist and historian Silvan Schweber wants to banish the term “genius” from discussions of great scientists such as Einstein and Oppenheimer. Instead he emphasises their indebtedness to a scientific community. Oppenheimer believed in what he termed “the cooperative and inter-related character of scientific achievement”. He was, says Schweber, “a great conductor” and excelled as director of the Los Alamos laboratory, marshalling many scientific minds to build the atomic bomb. Einstein had a very different character and approach to science. After a meeting in 1935, Oppenheimer described him as “completely cuckoo”. Einstein prided himself on being an individualist or, in his own words, “a lone traveller”. Einstein was not a conductor but “the Mozart-like composer of scientific advances” in the 20th century, with general relativity being his most dazzlingly brilliant composition. But in six illuminating essays focusing on the later years of these fascinating figures, Schweber shows that no scientist - however great - is an island. **PDS**