

Book Reviews

Recent stories of the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate the overwhelming requirements of healthcare under stressful conditions. The book discusses how we can be “jars of clay,” conduits of God’s grace despite our personal imperfections, but stops short of recommending more holistic care for health workers. Burnout was frequently cited as a consequence of neglecting prayer or Christian fellowship, but this could have been more comprehensively addressed.

Despite being written by academics with teaching credentials, the book is not written with research citations for an academic audience. *Scripture and Scrubs* is intentionally anecdotal with strong scriptural and theological support. Literature might have been cited highlighting the positive association between spiritual practices and resilience or the tangible benefits to organizations when their frontline healthcare workers are well cared for. Pairing scriptural truths with the conclusions of research studying the effectiveness of spiritual practices would have strengthened the book’s recommendations, particularly for students.

The theological discussions in the book are rich, but they go beyond entry-level doctrine. Challenging texts such as “Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated” might be off-putting even to experienced Christians, especially if they read the book individually rather than discussing it with other CHPs. There is good material here, but it is best suited for mature Christians.

I would recommend this book for group discussion. As an encouragement to Christian believers, either studying or working in healthcare, it can be an inspiration to deeper understanding of our calling. Jesus practiced a healing ministry as he spread news of the kingdom of God. We have the mandate and the privilege of continuing what he began.

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PHYSICS

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THE ESSENTIAL EINSTEIN: Scientific Writings by Diana Kormos Buchwald and Tilman Sauer, eds. Princeton University Press, 2025. 560 pages. Hardcover; \$35.00. ISBN: 9780691131078.

and
THE ESSENTIAL EINSTEIN: Public Writings by Diana Kormos Buchwald and Tilman Sauer, eds. Princeton University Press, 2025. 400 pages. Hardcover; \$35.00. ISBN: 9780691272191.

This two-volume collection of Einstein’s writings covers 38 of Einstein’s most important scientific papers and 96 selections written for non-specialists and the general

public, translated where necessary from German to English. These papers span over 50 years, from the four breakthrough publications of his *annus mirabilis* in 1905 all the way to his final ill-fated attempt to unify gravity and electrodynamics in 1955, the year of his death.

The thicker and more challenging book, *Scientific Writings*, has a cover picture of the less familiar young Einstein; the more accessible *Public Writings* has the familiar elderly Einstein of popular imagination, all wrinkles and wispy white hair. This is symbolically appropriate, in that 22 of the 38 scientific papers (including all of Einstein’s most famous and revolutionary ideas) have dates *before* 1919, while 89 of the 96 public writings were written *after* 1919. These book-end photographs tell the story of Einstein’s explosive transformation from an obscure patent clerk into a universally recognizable icon (and iconoclast) of the radical new world of modern physics.

From 1903 to 1919, Einstein is madly eclectic, firing off papers in a half-dozen different fields: kinematics, optics, gravitation, statistics, thermodynamics, and magnetism. Anyone with an undergraduate physics major (or an equivalent self-education) will wander this period like the visitor to a well-tended and well-labeled garden, recognizing familiar landmarks that appear in any modern textbook. Here are the Lorentz transformation equations, written with Einstein’s original convention of using Greek letters for the new coordinate system – and (confusingly) the name “beta” for what today we call the gamma factor! Around this corner, there is a discussion of radioactive decay that first mentions that it is “natural to consider any inertial mass as a reserve of energy” (*Scientific Writings*, p. 125), and derives that energy as mc^2 . A few steps further along the path, the first (and initially quantitatively incorrect) prediction of the slight deflection of rays of distant light passing close to the sun. Then the forest turns darker and thicker: 1915 leads into a mysterious thicket of differential geometry that expresses his new theory in notation radically unlike anything that had come before.

At this point, the *Public Writings* timeline begins to run in parallel with the *Scientific Writings*, creating a fuller story of Einstein’s travels, interests, and audiences. Cambridge’s Arthur Eddington, a Quaker inspired as much by Einstein’s pacifism and cosmopolitanism as by the novelty of relativity, now steps forward as a tireless public-relations agent for Einstein, scoring him numerous opportunities to give lectures, write magazine articles, and give press interviews. Here are several of the articles that laid the foundations of Einstein’s legend in England and America, culminating in Eddington’s Southern-Hemisphere expedition – originally proposed to extend Eddington’s conscientious objector status on the grounds of its indispensable importance.

During the war years, Einstein describes patriotism, nationalism, and militarism as a malign spirit gripping the German nation. Within the first year of WWI, he calls for a union of all European nations that will put an end to “fratricidal war,” with a prescient warning that “the terms of peace must not become the wellspring of future wars” (*Public Writings*, p. 9). When the war ends, we see his reputation in Germany begin to suffer as reactionary rivals and agitators start to question relativity as a degenerate and outlandish project to undermine traditional scientific virtue. At first, Einstein is good-humored, writing a tongue-in-cheek dialogue in 1918 to refute various objections in invented conversation with an imagined friendly critic. Within a few years, he has lost all patience with speakers “unworthy of an answer from [his] pen,” who have “motives other than a search for truth,” and who would give him a better reception if he were “a German nationalist, with or without the swastika, instead of a Jew with liberal, international persuasion” (*Public Writings*, p. 60). This Einstein is a savage, withering polemicist with a tone far removed from his popular image as a kindly eccentric.

As Einstein’s scientific papers become more mathematically impenetrable, there are fewer familiar landmarks to orient the reader. By 1917, we have stumbled upon Einstein’s first controversial philosophical commitment, one he would later himself disavow, the idea that an additional term (the “cosmological constant”) ought to be incorporated in the general relativistic field equations to uphold “Mach’s principle,” the idea that space-time itself must be *created* by mass in all cases and cannot exist without it. In the mid-1920s, we get the famous pair of papers that lay out Bose-Einstein statistics (and imply the existence of an associated form of exotic matter, the Bose-Einstein condensate). From this point onward, our once-familiar garden of flowers and monuments becomes a twilight labyrinth of twisted vines and cyclopean architecture, with so many maddening dead ends as to be scarcely worth the effort to hunt for the few rare fruits hidden among them.

But by this time, Einstein’s ever more prolific popular writing has given him a new name to replace his initial identity as a “German man of science”: Zionist. Einstein’s attitude toward the political prospects for German Jews takes a tough-love tone. He chastises them for a “servile mentality” (*Public Writings*, p. 45), for their boundary policing of non-religious Jews, and for exclusion of lower-status Eastern Europeans displaced by war. His most common recommendations are for self-reliance, a greater sense of cultural pride, a vigorous resistance to materialism and hedonism, and deep investment in science and the arts. For Einstein, the ideal project to unify these concerns (and awaken European Jewry from its complacency) is the settlement and ecological restoration of Palestine. His vision for “Israel” is an enlight-

ened localism: agrarian communes on land purchased fairly from the “Arabs” and supported by a world-class Hebrew University. Repatriation to Palestine offers a sense of cultural unity (to recapture the loyalty of assimilated upper-class Jews) and hope (for the downtrodden lower classes).

Einstein’s Zionism stands in constant tension with his distaste for nationalism. At times, he praises nationalism as a temporarily useful force in Jewish culture until it reaches greater maturity; at other times, he decries it as a sully of his ideal of universalist international humanitarianism. By the late 1930s, Einstein has turned from youthful utopianism to an increasing anxiety that his idealistic vision for Israel will be replaced by “a Jewish state with borders, an army, and a measure of temporal power” (*Public Writings*, p. 246), recreating all the ugly pathologies of the Europe it sought to escape. He calls on his people, in hindsight perhaps naively, to resist becoming “a nation in the political sense” rather than a voluntary spiritual community.

In a review of this length, it is nearly impossible to communicate the breadth of topics that concerned Einstein late in his life. However, of interest to this readership are the half-dozen or so articles on science and religion. Various endnotes in these articles reveal instances in which Einstein edited harsh criticism of faith (“the God idea seems to be childish simplicity”; *Public Writings*, p. 215) in favor of more diplomatic language. Einstein consistently advocates for the replacement of supernatural religion with a sense of cosmic wonder and confidence in the knowability of natural laws. One might be forgiven for seeing his identification of the highest of three stages of religious development with imagination-driven science as a gambit shrewdly designed to deflect him from the criticism of being an atheist. But no reader can deny that Einstein is entirely sincere in his conviction that only this mystical and spiritual devotion to the order of the cosmos (whether labeled as “religion” or “philosophy”) can adequately stir the hearts of history’s greatest scientists. Later in life, in some autobiographical notes, Einstein touchingly remarks on his maturation out of “the religious paradise of youth” and into the maturity of skepticism, with the pathos-laden comment that scientists (unlike the heroes in his discarded childhood Bible stories) were “the friends who could not be lost” (*Public Writings*, p. 314).

Simply on the basis of the diversity of topics covered—and the intimacy that the editors offer with Einstein’s original text through introductory commentary and end notes—I can highly recommend this pair of books to anyone in search of an extended primary-source encounter with Einstein’s work. The editing and layout are excellent and the translation is consistently readable. I would warn that anyone interested in reading

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the *Scientific Writings* collection should be prepared to tackle some lengthy and equation-heavy papers with minimal handholding. Given that every paper is written by the most famous theoretical physicist in all of history, this warning hardly seems necessary!

Readers daunted by the length of these two volumes should be certain not to miss the final paper of the *Public Writings*, Einstein's "Recollections." Here, uniquely, Einstein drops his formal tone and his focus on external issues and allows himself to become a character in his own scientific narrative. We see the sole brief mention of his youthful, but troubled, marriage to Mileva described as a natural outgrowth of the social environment of his early self-education. Einstein, writing just three weeks before his death, also takes special care to credit his good friend Marcel Grossmann, the Swiss mathematician whose meticulous class notes carried the scatterbrained Einstein successfully through university and whose training in differential geometry provided Einstein with the crucial mathematical insights to properly formulate general relativity. Einstein's final words of the essay express growing pessimism that his unpopular approach toward a unified field theory would ever replace quantum mechanics, but the weight of this failure is eased by his closing quote from the Enlightenment philosopher Gotthold Lessing: "The striving for truth is more delicious than its assured possession" (*Public Writings*, p. 400).

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SOCIAL SCIENCE

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THE PURSUIT OF SAFETY: A Theology of Danger, Risk, and Security by Jeremy Lundgren. IVP Academic, 2024. 312 pages. Paperback; \$41.99. ISBN: 9781514008010.

Lundgren, professor of theology at Wheaton College, has written a beautiful and accessible book on a subject that has received surprisingly little attention from Christian authors. It frames a theology of danger, risk, and security around the idea of safety and its tokens, which have become central facets of modern society.

The book starts with a series of vignettes to demonstrate to the reader the pervasiveness of a culture of safety in modern (Western, Global North) life. It then defines and distinguishes some of the key terms around safety—harm, danger, risk, security, and others—and establishes the terms of reference for the work. An interesting question that emerges early on is why the author focusses on safety rather than risk as the central topic of the book. Risk is a far more nuanced concept than safety but, arguably, safety is a more tangible object for

a theological study. It also raises interesting and important questions about the nature of a safety that should be pursued under God and in fulfilment of his promises.

The second part of the book moves on to consider the historical emergence of risk and safety as it is now understood. Initially, it considers the premodern period, giving examples of how likelihood has long been assessed in a variety of mathematical and non-mathematical ways. Here, premodernity is characterized as a universe in which natural and supernatural are intertwined in a "porous cosmos." Charting the historical development of modern risk discourses is a challenging endeavor, because humanity has always faced threats, been multicultural in its interpretations of these, and possessed widely diverging capacities to counter any threats. As Lundgren notes, there are different philosophical traditions that significantly influence the interpretation of relationships between humanity, nature, and God at different times and in different places. Although he uses the terms premodern, modern, and late-modern, he also acknowledges the problems with such divisions, such as simplicity and generalization.

The third part of the book, *Avoiding Harm in a Fallen World*, seeks to provide some pointers for Christians seeking to place the pursuit of safety within a wider biblical life—acknowledging that the Bible itself regards safety as a good thing. The issue is the idolization of that pursuit. However, there are certain discussions in this section that perhaps say more about the author's own priorities and experience than about risk and theology. For example, he describes a study showing that children's chances of dying while crossing the road decrease as the child ages. Lundgren argues against the use of this for public guidance on allowing small children to cross the road unaccompanied (on the grounds that this is "societally burdensome," a phrase that arises many times). Yet, while his points about the limitations of the statistical analysis are valid, there are other good reasons for restricting what children may and may not do—not least, the pace of brain development and abilities to make judgments of different kinds. Furthermore, he appears to suggest that accompanying children across the road somehow precludes simultaneously training them to do so by themselves. Like other examples in the book, this seemed decidedly arguable and culturally narrow.

The section goes on to provide a detailed theological discussion of the links between the pursuit of safety and Jesus's commands about not worrying. It acknowledges the subjectivity and complexity involved in individual decisions about risk—whether crossing roads or taking medications that have side effects—suggesting that what matters is not the decision made, but the attitude of the heart that makes it. Similarly, the life-enhancing