

Book Reviews

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).

Reviewed by Edward Hamilton, professor of physics, LeTourneau University, Longview, TX 75602.

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

role that technology has taken in modern society has to be recognized as being under Christ. Finally, in this section, the author covers the challenges that arise from a safety culture that renders accidents immoral—and therefore requires the taking of any and all actions to prevent them, potentially at great cost in other ways. In general, the discussion is balanced here, but there are a few exaggerations. Most risk management literature focusses on minimizing risk, not eliminating it; this is widely acknowledged as impossible even where desirable. The discussion then turns to the importance of forgiveness as a principle when accidents do happen, and the points at which procedural management of risk becomes idolatrous. Finally, this section examines the role of wisdom in navigating the “pursuit of safety,” using a detailed and useful discussion of Ecclesiastes 10, highlighting again that the problem is not the pursuit itself, but the idolatry of making it total and absolute.

Part Four, the final two chapters of the book, discusses living under the Lordship of Christ. These chapters are pastoral, considering the call to discipleship to understand the role of safety under Christ in the Christian life. This section balances the pursuit of safety with the pursuit of life in Christ, and leads into the final chapter, “Putting Safety in Its Place,” which returns to earlier critiques of how modern safety discourse excludes God and religion. It then discusses the dangers in the denial of the fallen human condition that have sometimes emerged in future-anticipating dialogues and attempts to control risk. Ultimately, the gospel has great explanatory power for the failure of risk management to bring about safety: the world is in need of redemption.

There are some elements that I would add to this discussion; I will outline three. The first concerns the locus of responsibility. Part of the rationale for “tokens of safety,” such as warnings, is that they protect public services—for example, healthcare—from being overwhelmed. Thus, while failing to observe a safety notice may enhance individual freedom in some respects, any harm that results not only affects the individual but has consequences for other people too. Relatedly, some people carry more risk than others because of circumstances not only beyond their control but also imposed upon them. For example, the actions of those in rich countries, in failing to curb carbon emissions, inflict additional threats on those in poorer countries. They also, therefore, critically enable identification of injustice in the distribution of risk and in the protection of the vulnerable—which itself is a biblical activity. There is an irony for me as a geographer that “putting safety in its place” might also be interpreted as pointing to the nuances of (geographical) “place” in the generation or removal of safety for particular groups, with or without their own voices being heard.

Secondly, there is relatively little acknowledgement here of the importance of stewarding knowledge—though there are strong hints of this in the chapter on technology. Indeed, Lundgren accuses Bacon (in a footnote) of putting us on a path to secularization in his call for humanity to increase its knowledge of the universe. That this call was itself driven by an interpretation of Scripture in which we are called to know about God’s world—to better understand God himself through it—is sadly not discussed in detail. Knowing creation and having faith are surely not opposed; indeed, there are instances in Scripture in which God’s people are criticized for failing to heed warnings or knowledge. The focus on safety, rather than risk, allows the author to spend a lot of time arguing against a “zero-risk” culture, but this is a rarity. Most procedural and calculative risk assessments are intended to reduce, not eliminate, risk.

Finally, there is a relative paucity of references to the role of economics in the generation of safety culture—particularly, the extensive role that the insurance industry has played and continues to play in the definition, calculation, and management of risk. Indeed, litigation and selfish accumulation of wealth has driven a considerable industry around risk that is worthy of consideration and evaluation in a book like this.

Overall, this is a rich and detailed discussion, particularly strong when it is closely reading the biblical texts; like the secular “all-inclusive” theories of risk, it struggles to contain the topic effectively where the discussion is more sociological. In part, of course, this is caused by the author writing from a particular place with particular experiences and particular politics. However, it is a compelling, well-researched and scholarly book that will provide non-specialists with an interesting and thorough overview of this important topic.

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TECHNOLOGY

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MORE EVERYTHING FOREVER: AI Overlords, Space Empires, and Silicon Valley’s Crusade to Control the Fate of Humanity by Adam Becker. Basic Books, 2025. 367 pages, index. Hardcover; \$32.00. ISBN: 9781541619593.

As I sit down to write this review using Microsoft tools, a temptation beckons: shall I go to that emergent oracle, Copilot? After all, my editor has stressed the importance of a snappy first sentence—and Clippy-on-steroids promises snappy! Hardly a day goes by when my online news feed does not suggest, alongside the latest adventures of the British royal family and culture war performances of American politicians, the antics