

Book Reviews

development, tutoring systems, and iterative writing). These are among the most immediately helpful for the educator who is daily navigating AI in the classroom. Rather than promoting uncritical adoption, each example highlights both possibilities and pitfalls. The question at the heart of these use cases is ethical and theological: Does this use of AI help students do the “right work,” or does it tempt them (and us) to outsource the very practices that form wisdom, perseverance, and integrity? The author’s concern about an educational technology arms race is particularly apt. In a competitive environment, schools may feel pressure to adopt tools quickly, but this book urges educators to measure success in terms of faithfulness to their formative mission.

One of the book’s major strengths is its tone. Discussions of AI often oscillate between utopian hype and apocalyptic dread. Here, however, the mood is hopeful without being glib, and critical without being alarmist. Humor and warmth surface regularly, reflecting the author’s conviction that joy is not peripheral but central to Christian teaching. At the same time, the book has limitations. Readers looking for sustained engagement with broader philosophical debates about consciousness, personhood, or the long-term future of artificial general intelligence will not find it here, as the author’s focus is on the present-day classroom. In addition, while the biblical-theological framework is clear and pastorally rich, some arguments are asserted more than rigorously defended. Scholars seeking extensive interaction with contemporary science-and-religion literature on AI may wish for more explicit dialogue with that field. Nevertheless, these are less flaws than signs of the book’s chosen focus. It is not a technical monograph or a work of speculative theology; it is a guide for working educators who need practical wisdom and immediate discernment. In this, it succeeds admirably.

Teach Like a Human offers a grounded example of how science-faith reflection can shape everyday practice. It takes seriously both the technical realities of AI and the theological claims of the Christian story, and refuses to let either float free of the other. By insisting that the deepest questions about AI are questions about what it means to be human before God, the book reminds Christian educators that their calling is not to compete with machines, but to cultivate distinctly human forms of teaching and learning.

Reviewed by Lynn Swaner (EdD in organizational leadership, MS in counseling), president of Cardus, US, non-residential scholar at Baylor University’s Center for School Leadership, and senior fellow at the Center for the Advancement of Christian Education (CACE) at Dordt University.

THEOLOGY

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GOD, PANDEMICS, AND THE HOLOCAUST by Clifford Chalmers Cain. Wipf & Stock, 2025. 125 pages. Paperback; \$23.00. ISBN: 9798385222896.

No one is immune to the question of suffering. It is perhaps the oldest question in the book: we wrestle with suffering in the creation stories of Genesis and find the struggle ubiquitous amid the visions of Revelation. We remain tempted to think that modern life possesses a unique claim to mass suffering, with the advent of mass communication and rate of information across the globe. A violent death in Cape Town can be live-streamed to New York City, a shooting of a protestor in Minnesota can be protested in Denmark by the next day. Throughout these accounts of suffering the question of God remains ever-present. Why? Why the child? Why the innocent? Why the intensity? Why the diagnosis? These questions reveal the one thing that, as humans, we both share intimately and find difficult to discuss.

Into this deep well of theological wisdom wades Clifford Chalmers Cain—holder of doctorates in both science and religion, professor emeritus at Westminster College of Missouri, theologian-in-residence at First Presbyterian Church (Greenwood, SC), and clergyman—who deftly stakes his footing early in the short volume. The book is written in a post-covid society where mass suffering marked nearly every global community. No one emerged unscathed from the pandemic, and plenty came away with more urgent theological questions. People that may have accepted personal injuries as a part of God’s plan still found it difficult to justify the vast expanse of suffering and death in light of an omnipotent, benevolent God.

To address such questions in his short volume, Cain retells theological narratives of four significant times of mass suffering and death: the Bubonic plague, the Spanish flu, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Holocaust. In each chapter, he discusses how different religious figures interpreted such experiences of suffering. In each historical event, readers can find people that blamed the suffering on the actions of humanity, and in each event, other interpreters appear determined to fit the suffering into God’s greater plan.

This pattern holds until Cain’s discussion of the Holocaust, where few interpreters can fathom the depth of suffering (p. 63ff). He points to Elie Wiesel’s reflections on anger amid belief: “I never divorced God. It is because I believed in God that I was angry with God, and still am ... Whatever I say, it’s always from inside faith” (p. 66). Cain moves from this observation to Charles Darwin’s account of the brutality of nature,

arguing that Darwin's move from a formal faith into a loose deism occurred due to there being "no other viable theological model to which to turn" (p. 78).

After these—at times harrowing—accounts, Cain embarks on an extended discussion of what he considers to be a more suitable philosophical and theological response to suffering (chap. 6). He generally follows the arguments of theologian Thomas Jay Oord, walking the reader through various theological approaches to the question of divine action and suffering, settling on the ways in which a deeper understanding of love can not only define God's person, but also help us to define the ways in which God is present and powerful (or not) in the world.

Throughout the text, Cain does an admirable job of dealing with a challenging and ever-present conflict. Indeed, in the tradition of process theology from which Cain writes, the question of suffering contributes both a driving and a troubling factor. Since process theology appears well suited to critically engage modern science, some interpreters in this tradition employ an evolutionary approach to human and nonhuman suffering, leaning into the co-created and co-evolutionary nature of the world. Such approaches tend to minimize the suffering of the present for the promises of the future, linking temporal perfection with divine perfection, the challenge of "suffering on the way." For example, people born with disabilities can be too easily cast off as biological and theological imperfections, and questions of eugenics—the intentional selection of healthier and smarter people over others—can too easily be supported. If theological growth is linked to time and biology, then suffering often becomes a bump in the road to perfection.

However, following tightly in Oord's and fellow theologian Catherine Keller's footsteps, Cain does not fall victim to the same mistake; instead, he faces the question of suffering head-on. He does not offer a new theological argument, but the writing provides a well-argued and well-contextualized treatment in our postpandemic global situation. Even if the reader does not necessarily subscribe to Cain's theological approach by the end of the book, all readers can appreciate the clarity of thought and the straightforward approach to challenging and controversial questions.

When it comes to deep theological questions for scientists and ministers, there remains no shortage of answers. However, a book that addresses a modern context, while presenting clear arguments, is always a welcome find. I recommend the book to all who wish to study the question of suffering and the nature of God in this postpandemic world.

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Letters

Against Undefined Naturalism

Joshua Lee Harris's article "Against Restricted Methodological Naturalism" (*PSCF* 78, no. 1 [2026]: 27–37) points out problematic aspects of an understanding of science sometimes adopted by Christians to help resolve tensions between science and faith. He addresses the intelligibility and truth-seeking of restricted methodological naturalism (RMN), but unfortunately neglects two more-pernicious and influential problems, namely the meaning of "nature" and of "science." To define "natural" circularly as "not supernatural" (in Harris's words) alerts us to the first of these problems.

The scientific revolution was undergirded by a decision to regard the nature in "natural philosophy" as "the established order or settled course of things," as Robert Boyle put it,¹ and not the seven other varied meanings of nature that he cited. This decision is a commitment that natural philosophy (as science was then called) studies the reproducible aspects of the world, revealed by experiment and repeated observation. They are what enable technology, the practical "relief of man's estate" that Francis Bacon had advocated. Since the world has many other aspects that are not reproducible or settled, attributing to science epistemological commitments such as methodological naturalism (of any type) is unnecessary. And doing so confuses the topical concerns of science with an ontological commitment that there is nothing beyond nature: this is the common implication of naturalism.

The meaning of the word "science," which replaced the expression "natural philosophy" in the early nineteenth century, is even more vexed today because it is routinely confused with what was once called (in Latin) *scientia*, which meant, roughly speaking, any rigorous systematic study. That confusion feeds scientism: the belief that science is all the real knowledge there is, which not only certainly problematizes Christian faith, but also misrepresents and pollutes all the other nonscientific disciplines.²

That the meanings of "nature" and of "science" are problematic seems to me a more fundamental critique of invoking methodological naturalism than those Harris addresses. But he and I agree on opposing that invocation.

Notes

¹Robert Boyle, *A Free Enquiry into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature*, ed. Edward B. Davis and Michael Hunter (1686; Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²These, and many related considerations are explored in my book *Monopolizing Knowledge* (Fias Publishing, 2011), <http://monopolizingknowledge.net>.

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