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Hans S. Reinders, *Disability, Providence, and Ethics: Bridging Gaps, Transforming Lives* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), pp. 248. \$49.95.

This well-written and accessible book poses the question ‘what must a theology of providence look like if it is to sustain people existentially and spiritually in their experience of living with a disability?’ (p. 16). It addresses the question by taking four published accounts, two by parents of a child with Down’s syndrome, one by a man whose brainstem stroke left him with locked-in syndrome, and one by a woman whose husband sustained a major traumatic brain injury as the result of a boating accident. (It can be argued that the themes of these stories are not specific to disability; much is applicable to people affected by sudden unexpected poverty, homelessness or migrancy.)

The four stories are treated as sources for a theology of providence that aims to be persuasive in their light. A close reading of the book of Job provides a fifth source for this theology. There is an extensive consideration of Calvin’s thinking on providence, which finally rejects his emphasis on divine causation in favour of a concept of providence focused on the loving presence of God in the midst of suffering. It is argued that God’s felt presence is more than affectively comforting; it also shows God to have kept his eternal promises, to be reliable, coherent and purposeful.

I have been intimately involved in the care of people with neurological disability and psychological trauma for many years. Coming from this perspective I found Reinders’ book deeply strange. The first strange thing is that his account of neurological impairment and rehabilitation is superficial, full of errors of fact (for example, confusing traumatic brain injury with acquired brain injury), misunderstandings and misreadings, all of which is perhaps not so surprising in view of its total lack of engagement with the clinical literature in this area.

More surprising and significant is the analysis of the psychology of trauma that presents itself as novel reflection, yet simply reiterates well-established knowledge without referring to the field of trauma studies. We *already know* from the empirical literature in this field that dealing effectively with trauma depends on giving the trauma a central place in the life story, and that the presence of companions is vital in this process through the provision of solidarity and alternative narratives; that the questions ‘Why?’, ‘Why me?’, ‘Why her?’ are not philosophical or theological starting questions but rather signs that the healthy adaptive process of meaning-making is at work; of the key need for narratives to be teleological in form if they are to be persuasive and comforting. Secular therapy and rehabilitation for

acute onset conditions are based on the understanding that sudden adversity causes a deeply disorienting discontinuity in identity and purpose, and that people need help in negotiating the transition from the old to the new self. Furthermore within Christian pastoral theology there is *already an understanding* of an ‘incarnational’ ministry of presence, and that what is problematic about suffering is undergoing it in the felt absence of God. There is therefore nothing new in Reinders’ analysis of the psychological and spiritual issues at stake.

Interestingly, the book is itself a task of rehabilitation – a reframing of the theology of providence aimed at making it work better. Reinders describes a process of insight effected through the Spirit, making individuals affected by life-changing adversity alive to the presence of God in the gap between the old and new self, helping them to weave a new story in which God is seen always to have been lovingly present. This re-storying does indeed seem to be the way that faith works psychologically for people who undergo positive transformation in the face of adversity, but theism is only one of several possible frameworks that might support such a transformation. Any persuasive story and reliable human presence can do the job. A God of this gap is no less vulnerable to elimination by science than a God of any other gap.

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Kurt Flasch, *Meister Eckhart: Philosopher of Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. xv + 321. \$38.00.

Kurt Flasch is a major scholar with over sixty years of study of Meister Eckhart (c.1260–1328). His book *Meister Eckhart: Philosopher of Christianity* reappraises Eckhart and his wide variety of writings on the basis of recent textual advances and Flasch’s own rereading of Eckhart’s works. For Flasch, the best way into Eckhart’s thought lies in Eckhart’s own descriptions of his work. These statements, Flasch argues, show that Eckhart thought of himself as first and foremost a philosopher, rather than a mystic or theologian. In his Latin commentary on John, for instance, Eckhart says that he has three goals: to interpret and explain the Gospel by means of philosophical arguments; to show that the content of true philosophy is contained in scripture when properly interpreted; and to offer ethical teachings along the way. This is why Flasch calls Eckhart a ‘philosopher of Christianity’: he aims to interpret and prove Christian doctrines, including the Trinity and the incarnation, by means of philosophical reason.