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Book Review

Kenneth W. Kemp, *The War that Never Was: Evolution and Christian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), 228pp., £21.00 (pbk), ISBN: 9781532694981.

That there isn't a war between science and religion is a trope that has run for decades (alongside its polar opposite). So, at first sight, a book with this core message, titled *The War that Never Was*, might be thought to add little to the literature. However, that is not the case. This is a valuable book for two main reasons: first, it is particularly well-written; secondly, the author's main academic specialism is in philosophy, and the benefits of this are evident both in the rigour and clarity of his arguments and in the way he not infrequently succeeds in shining new light on familiar issues.

The War that Never Was focuses on aspects of the history of the relationship between Christian theology and science. Its introductory chapter has a valuable explication, building on Colin Russell's work, of the sorts of conflict that one could envisage—moral, institutional, and epistemic. Kemp's interest is on the historical relations between what he terms the paleoetiological sciences (the science of 'ancient causes') and the theology of nature (creation, providence, and anthropology), so his particular focus is on epistemic conflict, or its absence. Kemp's introductory chapter also deals with the issue of how much naturalism science requires and how much non-naturalism religion requires. For any academics with knowledge of science-theology debates, this is something of a 101 introduction to the issues—but I wish I had read it when I was an undergraduate, studying natural sciences and developing a Christian faith! It would have helped clear up a lot of my somewhat muddled thinking.

After this initial chapter, Kemp provides a short chapter on the historical origins of the warfare thesis. The focus here is on the well-known nineteenth century US authors John William Draper and Andrew Dickson White, Draper being the author of the 1874 *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (there is a clue as to the book's thesis in its title) and White the author of the 1896 *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*. This chapter lays out the historical warfare thesis and allows Kemp in the rest of his book to examine supposed instances of it in some depth.

In his third chapter, Kemp looks at the relationship between Christianity and geology (and to a lesser extent cosmology) from the middle of the seventeenth century to 1859, the year in which Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* was published. He considers such questions as the age of the Earth, how one should understand the six days of Creation in *Genesis* 1, and Noah's Flood. Kemp concludes that the historical evidence does not support the simple warfare thesis. Rather than finding conflict between scientists, on the one hand, and theologians, on the other, we find 'savants, deeply interested in both God and nature,

despite differences in their approaches to the integration of scientific and theological ideas into a larger, comprehensive world picture' (pp. 60–1).

Kemp's fourth chapter examines Christianity and evolution in the nineteenth century. After a clear account of Darwin's central arguments, and the role that natural selection and evolution played in his thinking compared to that of Wallace, T.H. Huxley and Weismann, the focus shifts to a number of purported instances of the conflict between science and theology, especially to the 1860 Oxford debate between Wilberforce and Huxley. In much that I read about this debate, indeed the science-religion debate more generally, one finds either a strident articulation of the conflict thesis or a somewhat defensive rebuttal of it. It is to the credit of Kemp's writing that what he does instead is to calmly assess the historical evidence as he finds it. His most important point is that the debates surrounding the *Origin* (both the 1860 Oxford one and more generally) were primarily scientific debates—something that Wilberforce himself stressed in a 17,000 word review he wrote of Darwin's book for the *Quarterly Review*:

> Our reader will not have failed to notice that we have objected to the views with which we have been dealing solely on scientific grounds. We have done so from our fixed conviction that it is thus that the truth or falsehood of such arguments should be tried. We have no sympathy with those who object to any facts or alleged facts in nature, or to any inference logically deduced from them, because they believe them to contradict what it appears to them is taught by Revelation. We think that all such objections savour of a timidity which is really inconsistent with a firm and well-instructed faith. (p. 78)

In his next chapter, Kemp moves on to the Scopes Trial, generously acknowledging that Ed Larson's *Summer for the Gods*, which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1998, provides the best history of the case. Much of this chapter treads familiar ground but Kemp's philosophical expertise manifests itself in a careful analysis of the different ways that we might logically imagine that natural processes and divine action might play their parts in human evolution. Kemp concludes that there was certainly a battle in the 1920s between evolutionists and non-evolutionists. This took place at the same time as there was a three-way conflict between fundamentalism, modernism, and scepticism, but does not provide support for the general war thesis.

Kemp's final chapter, before his conclusion, shifts to creation science and intelligent design. Once more, Kemp's expertise in logic is put to good effect as he dissects the arguments of William Dembski and Michael Behe. What Kemp terms 'The Second Curriculum War', the first being that at the time of the Scopes Trial, he sees as 'the continuation of another long-running war, that waged by militant atheists against religion' (p. 186). However, he concludes that characterising it as part of a larger war between science and religion would be a mistake.

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