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## Kenneth W. Kemp, THE WAR THAT NEVER WAS: EVOLUTION AND CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

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determinist will. . . have to affirm that the goodness of God is stranger to our eyes than one might naively think" (337), I don't think that anyone who has spent any time thinking about these things can say, with any confidence, that this won't ultimately be true of their own position.

I've barely scratched the surface of this rich book. It's clearly written and organized, fairly and accurately presenting opposing positions (including my own), provocatively challenging libertarian presumptions. Despite my many disagreements with White—better, *because* of those disagreements—I think it is essential reading for anyone interested in the problem of how best to harmonize providence, evil, and free will.

*The War that Never Was: Evolution and Christian Theology*, by Kenneth W. Kemp. Cascade Books, 2020. Pp. 228. \$28.00 (paperback).

CHERYL KAYAHARA-BASS, Independent Scholar

When I received this book for review, it was with some trepidation that *The War That Never Was* would be another conventional effort to reconcile the biblical account of creation with one or more of the various evolutionary theories that have followed Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859). Such efforts, on both sides of this historical dialogue, are frequently rife with partially understood ideas, disingenuous and twisted quotations of the literature from both sides, and conclusions that often bear far too close a resemblance to their initial hypotheses. However, what I found was a unique project that crossed the lines of several disciplines, in the following manner.

Dr. Kenneth Kemp is a Roman Catholic philosopher, and within the introduction of *The War That Never Was*, he makes clear his own position on the twofold matters at hand, as he identifies with the view expressed by Thomas Dobzhansky, a synthesizer of Darwinism and Mendelism, that he is "a creationist and an evolutionist" (23), and holds that, "Like Dobzansky, I believe that God created out of nothing a world that slowly changes over the course of time in accordance with the laws of nature which he established. I believe that scientists have given a generally accurate account of the age of the world and of the processes which have effected its change over time" (23).

However, it is not as a philosopher that Dr. Kemp sets up his present project. He makes clear from the beginning that his intention is to



approach the subject matter as a historian of the apparent battle of ideas between science and theology in the Western world, from the 1800's until the present. His historical and scientific focus is narrow, inasmuch as the scientific efforts of that period presented a three-pronged set of new theories of origin in the areas of cosmology, geological evolution, and the evolution of life on earth. The author concentrates on the latter, due to the very public manner in which the struggle played out specifically on the teaching of biological evolution—particularly with respect to humans—on every level of American education.

The author defines his project in terms of a historical, *perceived* conflict, which is framed as an open, cultural dialogue regarding the claims about the origin of the universe, the earth, biological life and, especially, human life. The two theses in dialogue are the literal biblical account as found in the book of Genesis and developed theologically by the Church Fathers and subsequent theological and dogmatic tradition, and those scientific speculations and conclusions drawn in the modern age through empirical experimentation and speculation, independently of religious and dogmatic restraints. He opens by presenting the problem itself from a philosophic and theological perspective, and then develops his subject through a historical narrative of how this perceived war between science and theology on the theory of evolution proceeded.

It must be noted that Dr. Kemp makes no effort to reconcile the actual points and counterpoints of the evolution debate as one set of propositions about origins against another, such as competing interpretations that have been made, even by the Church Fathers, of the meaning of the word "day" as an actual time period in the first two chapters of Genesis. His approach in this book is to historically chronicle the manner in which the issues unfolded *in the public arena*, in literature, the courts, and in the educational system. He seems to presume that because this is where such a war was fought, that it is also where the theological issues themselves, such as any literal incongruities between the two accounts of origin, were effectively decided, and *not* in the minds or laboratories of those actually wrestling with the problems themselves. The "real" conflict is largely presented as, not a contradiction between revelation (idea) and the latest science (also idea), but "what theologians said and when" (persons) and "what scientists said and when" (also persons).

No matter that the conflict between the two sets of propositions was *conceived* in intellectual communities on both sides of the debate, it is not reported by the author as an authentic ideological clash, but one generated by the politics and prejudices of two rather more public parties, namely, lawyers and pedagogues. *The War That Never Was* is indeed told as an exciting tale of two ideas, as revealed by an eloquent storyteller and laden with well annotated anecdotes, conveyed from the actual battleground. The story unfolds through the frank bias of the author toward a variety of theistic evolutionism (83, 84). The battle plays out almost exclusively outside of his own Roman Catholic sphere, and I might also surmise that

given the timing, the work may be a response to the recent call to scholars by Pope Francis to “prove” the hypothesis that theology and science are in fact without real conflict.

Given the author’s undeniable literary flair, Dr. Kemp nevertheless begins by setting up the project as a philosopher would, aptly defining the universe of discourse, the historical players, and the potential conflicts between theology and science as they pertain to their subject, an evolutionary account of origins. He defines their potential incompatibilities as concerning both the *methodology* and the *content* of the matters of the origin of the universe and life on earth, as either entirely natural, a supernatural act of God, or some combination of the two. The potential conflicts between science and theology are framed as two distinct problems: a conflict between Christian and non-Christian *ontological naturalism*, and Christian and non-Christian *methodological naturalism*. He leans, rather brilliantly I think, on Alan Lacey’s *Naturalism*, detailing four alternative understandings of the term, from 01 to 04, and the ways in which each may or may not be considered inconsistent with the Christian religion. The potential conflict is presented as a problem of the varying degrees to which nature proceeds *either* as an unthinking and unwilling progression, *or* this notion of nature as purely autonomous is repudiated by the inclusion of the creative act of a living, willing God, who brings the natural world into being from nothing and maintains it. This initial contrast is elaborated into a number of alternative combinations of these two polar explanations of what exists and how it came to be.

These alternatives range from, first, a *purely natural* causal account for the existence of natural beings and the processes that generate and change them, to the inclusion of non-natural beings that have *no* causal effect on the natural world, and then to a broader causality granted to *non-natural causation* in the natural world. This ontological menu is followed by a study of the methodology that any science must then generate to accommodate these various causal hypotheses. The scale of accompanying ontologies would, of course, have an effect on the validity of accepted scientific method, which usually relies on observably regular phenomena that may indicate a reasonable conclusion about a given hypothesis. Kemp asserts as much: in order to do conventional science, we need to presume that the vast majority of causality in our universe of experience *is* natural, and any greater leaning toward a non-natural causality will tend to make natural science more difficult. He *presumes* that such a leaning would lead to an unacceptable conclusion, stating his guiding question, “How much naturalism does science require?” (7)

Stipulating, then, that natural science is defined by observable and supernaturally unaided interactions in the natural world, and that the author is correct that theistic religion entails non-natural acts such as creation out of nothing, Kemp’s solution is nevertheless not explicitly stated in this book, but at that point he abandons his role as a philosopher and chooses to assert the validity of the scientific enterprise in an

almost positivist sense as he becomes the storytelling historian. He cites the First Vatican Council to substantiate his presumption that the “truths” of revelation and science are both to be viewed as reliable, whatever may finally be meant by science; “On a Christian view of God and revelation, of course, there will be no contradiction between an accurate account of the evolution of the world and the contents of revelation. Truth cannot contradict truth, as the fathers of the First Vatican Council had put it. (45 Vatican Council 1, *Constitutio Dogmatica de Fide Catholica, etc.*) Non-Christians, of course, thinking that Scripture and Tradition are at best fallible sources of knowledge, would not rule out the possibility of such a conflict” (19).

Naive presumptions behind this quotation from the Vatican document aside, there is no circumventing the fact that Dr. Kemp holds the “truths” of science, insofar as they are true, in extremely high esteem, even aside from the methodological axiom of any science that the “truths of science” are only standing hypotheses until they are supplanted by succeeding revisions. The set of contingent propositions called science is very unlike, as most Christians will hopefully allow, the truths of revelation, which *remain* true and infallible, *whether or not* we fully admit or understand them. Galileo would doubtless have been horrified to have his observation-based claim of the truth of the Copernican theory of a heliocentric solar system therefore elevated to the same epistemological status as divine doctrine. The author’s apparent near-equivalence is thankfully followed by an affirmation of the possible imperfections in assertions made by both scientists *and* theologians, contemporaneously to each other.

The ideological stage thus set, Kemp proceeds to defend the compatibility of the propositions of revelation, and those held as true by the scientific community. This defense largely departs from the realm of rational argument, but unfolds as a fascinating historical account of how the appearance of Darwin’s theory played out in real time, beginning with responses from such figures as the biologist Thomas Huxley, the chemist/photographer John Draper, and the American historian, Andrew White.

The next five chapters chronicle the legal and political story of how the theological and educational world, especially in the United States, sought to either control or unfetter various aspects of the major theoretical and pedagogical shift involving the new three-fold theories of the origins of the universe. The greatest portion of the text is dedicated to two large chapters (5 and 6) that detail how the battle to normalize the theory of evolution in the American educational system was fought, and with mixed results, won. Professor Kemp draws on a multitude of legal and pedagogical sources to document his well-formed tale, unfolding the whole saga in the largest portion of the book, chapters 2 through 6, as follows: Ch. 2, The Historical Origins of the Warfare Thesis; Ch. 3, Christianity, Geology & Cosmology before 1859; Ch. 4, Christianity & Evolution in the Nineteenth Century; Ch. 5, Williams Jennings Bryan, John T. Scopes, & the First Curriculum War; and Ch. 6, Creation Science, Intelligent-Design Theory, & the Second Curriculum War. These are followed by his conclusion, in which he reiterates his original thesis that the alleged conflict

between the theory of evolution and the biblical account of creation is an inauthentic fiction generated in the public arena of theology, law, and pedagogy. He cites Pope John Paul 2's repudiation of the Church's former alleged antipathy toward the innovations of Galileo, and the evangelical biblical commentator, Rev. C. I. Scofield, D.D., (*Old Scofield Bible* KJV 1909), whom he frequently cites to affirm his thesis that there is no actual contradiction between the biblical account, recent scientific discoveries, and current beliefs about the true age of the earth and the origin of human beings, particularly as held by contemporary Roman Catholics, liberal Protestants, and fundamentalist Christians. His conclusion suggests a solution of psychological fine-tuning, that "Tension between science and religion generally arise as a result of the necessity of rethinking and adjusting the frontier between science and theology. The attempt to make some kind of synthesis of what we learn from the scientific method and what we learn from revelation (and from philosophical theology) is right and proper" (190), and so the real goal for all parties should then be to open the forum to further study and reconciliation.

It is easy to find much that is laudatory in this book, especially as a history of how a new idea becomes integrated into the public, and particularly in the educational arena. Dr. Kemp manages to compile the unfolding theories of evolution in the scientific community, and the subsequent effect of that theory on the theological and pedagogical world, into a thoroughly engaging, even gripping, manner. *The War That Never Was* is a well documented history that offers a unique take, not only on the events, but on the ideas themselves, as players on the stage of an intensely incarnated intellectual drama. A history by an excellent writer is always a great pleasure, and this book will inevitably become an essential volume on the subject.

The difficulties arise when evaluating anything but this book's purpose beyond as a history. Speaking now as a "philosopher with a telescope," I found *The War That Never Was* to be problematic in two important ways. First, it is nearly impossible to avoid the fact that Dr. Kemp *presumes* his conclusion, that God and the universe exist in such a way that western science is *at least* epistemologically legitimate and does not inherently contradict fundamental theological truths. This follows from his *choice* of O3 (referring to his four Lacey-derived ontological alternatives), he selects O3a; "Nonnatural beings exist, but they only occasionally act as direct causes of what happens in the natural world," and O3b; "The effects of non-natural causes will generally be identifiable as due to such causes" (7). He intends to imply that because these alternatives afford clear observation of the difference between natural and nonnatural causes, natural science can then proceed unimpeded, *without* actually stating any logical or dogmatic criterion for having chosen them beyond an epistemological pragmatism. Second, it is also clear that Dr. Kemp has much more faith in scientific theory than do scientists themselves, especially contemporary scientists. The "scientific community," to put it bluntly, does not even remotely consist of the uniform front as presented by the educational community, but

is presently and perhaps always, a fractured shambles on the theoretical front, constantly in danger of losing even their fundamental tenets. This is probably the necessary course of how *scientific* theories rise and fall, but the upshot of this uncomfortable disarray is for the educational community to then hold in place outdated standbys, such as Darwinian evolution, string theory, and even the so-called Big Bang Theory, to prevent any *pedagogical* vacuum. This asynchronous relationship between theoretical science the educational arena is portrayed by the author as possessing a symmetry they do not hold, nor should they.

As well, Dr. Lee Smolin, one of the leading founders of String Theory and of the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics, addresses what he observes as an unfortunate effect of an effort within much of the academic world to produce a state of “enforced consensus” between pure science and the educational front (Lee Smolin, *The Trouble With Physics* (Mariner Books, 2007), 337). Such standing theories as Darwinian Evolution and String Theory become, not tentative *explanations*, formed from a body of data, but educational *policies*, including in the way new scientists are trained. This imprisons the direction that science is allowed to proceed, at least with funding, in the dungeon of a dangerous “theoretical correctness.” This may prevent the abandoning of theories that have actually failed, such as in his case, String Theory:

. . . for a long time, I fought the conclusion that this period in physics—the period of my own career—has been an unusually fallow one. For me and many of my friends who entered science with the hope of making important contributions to what then was a rapidly moving field, there is a shocking fact. . . Unlike any previous generation, we have not achieved anything that we can be confident will outlive us. This has given rise to personal crises. But, more important, it has produced a crisis in physics. . . It is a trend with tragic consequences if. . . the truth lies in a direction that requires a radical rethinking of our basic ideas about space, time, and the quantum world” (xii, xiii).

While I still disagree with the book’s “crossover” conclusion that the issues were actually generated and therefore indeed resolved in the public arena rather than on the battleground of the ideas themselves, I found *The War That Never Was* to be an enthralling and informative read. This work contributes an indispensable history of how a new scientific idea may gain ground in the wider world. *The War that Never Was* is not primarily philosophy, but an account of a specific conflict between the propositions of science and revelation during a specific period in history, and this purpose is admirably accomplished. As I said, I didn’t know whether I would like this book, but despite disagreements with the author’s conclusions, I nevertheless recommend *The War That Never Was* as beautifully written, undeniably paradoxical, and as presenting a vital chronicling of the unfolding of Darwinian theory in the Western educational system and the public mind.