

Book Reviews

David Lindberg and Ronald Numbers (eds.)

When Science and Christianity Meet

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. 357 pp. hb. \$29.00. ISBN 0-226-48214-6

When undergraduates first start out doing history of science they usually come equipped with a number of preconceptions picked up from popular culture, one of the most pervasive being that science and religion are in conflict. Lindberg and Numbers have taught generations of students and none of them could have continued to labour under this error once they had passed through the University of Wisconsin-Madison where both men work. In 1986, they edited a collection of essays called *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science* and the current collection, dubbed ‘Son of *God and Nature*’ by one wag, continues their successful collaboration.

If anything, *When Science and Christianity Meet*, is even more of a textbook than the previous collection and is clearly aimed at university students in the United States. This is reflected both in the subject matter (three of the twelve chapters are on American science) and the fact that readers are advised that Yorkshire is ‘a large county in north east England’ while the location of Tennessee is left unstated! Also, the conflict hypothesis is attacked in almost every chapter. Over and over again we are assured that it is an inadequate description of history and the only martyrs it produced were the trees that supplied the paper it was promulgated on. This almost becomes tedious for those of us fully aware of the fact. But these are minor criticisms of a book that is both very interesting and extremely useful.

There are twelve chapters, each of which contains a different case study.

These include the standard controversial episodes in science and religion’s relationship such as Galileo’s trial and that of John Scopes, the so-called Monkey Trial. Contributed by Lindberg and Edward Larson respectively, these two chapters are probably a little bit too simplistic as they are intent on debunking myths (the film *Inherit the Wind*, in Larson’s case) rather than producing new understanding. Still, both chapters are good fun and it is useful to have such succinct summaries of these events available. Many of the other chapters are excellent primers on issues such as the mechanistic universe or natural history, geology and Genesis but will be of less value to anyone who already has a basic grounding in history of science. Unfortunately, David N. Livingstone’s chapter on Darwinism is one of the poorest precisely because he tries to cram in a bit too much of his inestimable erudition on the subject.

Two chapters, however, stand out and are worth the price of admission alone. G. Blair Nelson has barely completed his PhD but, as Ronald Numbers was his supervisor, was drafted in to write up his research on the nineteenth century debate about whether man is one species or many. This is a fascinating topic which most readers will know nothing at all about. Nelson’s writing is clear and he tells his story with some flair for getting maximum impact out of the killer fact. In this case, contrary to the usual conflict scenario, there is also the historical irony that it was racist anti-Christians who were pushing the wrong science and Christians who insisted all men were the same species. Robert Bruce Mullin contributes a chapter on the little known but illuminating matter of the prayer gauge debate sparked off in 1872 by the suggestion of a test to see if prayer had any healing effects. It never took place (although something similar was attempted recently) but opens up all

sorts of interesting questions about the competences of science and theology.

Lindberg and Numbers' collection is a vital addition to the textbook armoury as well as containing enough meat to be an interesting read for those who already have a firm grasp of the history of science and religion. They and the other contributors are to be commended for their efforts.

James Hannam is a PhD student in the history of science at Pembroke College, Cambridge.

Celia E. Deane-Drummond

The Ethics of Nature

Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. 256 pp. pb.
£19.99. ISBN 0-631-22938-8

This book adds to the already impressive list of books on theology, biology/nature and ethics written by Professor Deane-Drummond. In it she shows how a modern virtue ethics, building on and re-interpreting ideas from St Thomas Aquinas can successfully illuminate a wide range of ethical issues in modern biotechnology and in our handling of nature. Central to this ethics is an insistence that prudence or practical wisdom is the primary of the cardinal virtues, and that the right use of wisdom can only take place within a realisation that the world is not contingent but created. The author calls this a 'Wisdom ethics'.

The most original and groundbreaking part of the book is probably the application of wisdom ethics to the environmental area. While an application of a virtue ethics approach to interpersonal ethics is relatively straightforward and has been explored by, for instance, Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse, a virtue ethics approach to the impersonal area of environmental concerns and ecology seems initially more problematic. The author, however, manages to show convincingly

that wisdom must be at the core of any adequate environmental ethics. Approaches denying the role of wisdom either rely on a false model of ecology, or on a problematic theology of nature.

Other parts of the book deal with animal ethics, biotechnology, cloning, Gaia and feminism and they all show the author's ability to weave together theology, philosophy and up to date biological knowledge. At the end of the book even the most ardent opponent of virtue ethics must have some niggling doubts whether there is not something to be said for the relevance of a wisdom ethics.

This is not an easy book to read. Not because it is badly written, but because it assumes that the reader possesses a vast amount of background knowledge in theology, philosophy and to a lesser extent biology. I can nevertheless recommend it wholeheartedly to anyone interested in a sophisticated and thoughtful rethinking of virtue ethics for the modern world.

Søren Holm is Professorial Fellow in Bioethics, Cardiff Law School & Professor of Medical Ethics, University of Oslo

Stephen Barr

Modern Physics and Ancient Faith

Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003. 312pp. hb. \$30.
ISBN 0-268-03471-0

This well-informed book, written by a physicist, aims to show that the clash between physics and biblical truth was a passing episode, and that recent advances in physics heal the rift by relating well to scriptural truth. I welcome the author's aim of reconciliation, believing that revealed and observed truth both reflect the intentions of God. Most of the battles were not really between physics and scripture, but between the Hebraic outlook of scripture and the