

drive behind certain sexual acts. Therefore, in all likelihood, I can see both sides of the debate citing the book as evidence in support of their position.

Despite those weaknesses, I still strongly encourage all Christian believers, especially leaders and pastors, to study and engage with Black's contribution. *The Courage to Speak* is a qualitatively strong piece of work and a well-written book. The scholarly-yet-pastoral approach is very relevant in this current church climate as many self-labelling 'evangelical' churches are trying increasingly to work out if it is possible to be welcoming without affirming sexual behaviours and lifestyles outside of their understanding of the parameters of scripture. Black has contributed a nuanced, dialectical offering which needs to be engaged with.

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John Perry and Joanna Leidenhag, *Science-engaged Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 79, ISBN 978-1009094054. £18.00; available online at <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009091350>

John Perry and Joanna Leidenhag attempt to carve a new path in the science and theology discourse, with this little volume entitled *Science-engaged Theology*. In their first move they engage in some myth busting directed at the history of the discourse; specifically at some widely accepted caricatures of how the Christianity and science story has been told. In the second move they seek to offer a new alternative framework for Christian theologians to engage with science: science-engaged theology. It is presented as a winsome alternative to more static forms of engagement. This edition represents a helpful guide to an often-debated question which may appeal to lay readers as well as academic readers who are new to the topic.



Myth busting

The myth busting focusses on two key narratives: (1) science and theology have come to a fragile truce after decades of sparring; (2) typological approaches to Christian belief and science are helpful. On the first myth, the authors cast doubt on the reality of conflict and on the conflict narratives themselves. The conflict model, they argue, is not supported by historical evidence and the so-called popularisers of the narrative (John William Draper and Andrew Dixon White) never believed it in the first place. They state:

Not only is the conflict model unsupported by historical evidence, but *Draper and White never advocated the conflict model themselves*, if by conflict we mean that science and religion are inevitably at war. Instead, both Draper and White claimed only that *some* theologians – some well-meaning but confused, others seeking political power – *created* conflict where there should have been none. (p. 8)

Draper authored *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science* (1875), which was followed by White's two-volume *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896). Now they may well be correct that the myths of conflict have been exaggerated, but it may also be helpful to note that certain trends towards removing the miraculous from Christian theology, or recasting biblical narratives as 'mythical', have been associated with the progress of the natural sciences.²

Onto the second myth, Perry and Leidenhag take aim at the typological frameworks used and constructed by scholars. First in the series, and among the more recent, is Stephen Jay Gould's NOMA (Non-overlapping Magisterium). This can be described as the idea that science and theology are aimed at answering quite separate questions: e.g. science deals with facts; theology deals with values. The authors hesitate to support Gould's vision saying:

Gould's more sophisticated (non-slogan) version of NOMA is surprisingly perceptive. Yet the perceptive version's strength is its complexity, which in tricky cases, may struggle to say much beyond 'The relationship is ... complicated'. (p. 13)

² Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 100–12.



Reviews

Ian Barbour proposed a fourfold typology to capture a range of stances on the relationship between science and theology: conflict, independence, dialogue and integration. Here the authors note Barbour's defining role:

Barbour's typology has been undeniably useful as a tool for challenging the monolith of the myth of conflict and reaching wider audiences because of its simplicity. [...] It is, therefore, unsurprising that since Barbour, anyone who is anyone in science and religion has tried their hand at the typology game. (p. 13)

The authors mention John Haught's version of a fourfold typology, introduced in 1995; Ted Peters proposed an eightfold typology in 1998; John Polkinghorne returned us to a fourfold typology in 2004. Alvin Plantinga, in 2011, proposed something different with his distinction between naturalism as a philosophy and the practice of natural science. But the authors have certainly identified a trend in the works. So why all the typologies? Perhaps because the science and religion dialogue is often tied up with apologetic arguments. Indeed, the book suggests,

This co-opts the myth of progress in order to regain some modest place for religion in a scientific world. It is for this reason that typologies have been useful to the apologetic impulse within the science-and-religion field and also why they continuously place theology on the back foot. It must be emphasized that while typologies aim to create more choices, they can simultaneously limit the scope of possibility by giving pre-set options. (p. 15)

This book seems interested in convincing the lay non-academic Christian that science can be a good thing for Christians to think about. The authors argue that scientific and theological claims do not have to be in conflict, and can often provide clarity when they learn from one another's insights. For example:

One way to understand the mindset of science-engaged theology is as a way to place scientific research *alongside*, not in competition with, biblical exegesis, the study of history, or philosophical considerations as a ready resource for theological reflection. (p. 1)



Now there is not a great deal of explanation as to why this is true or how it might be done. There is no discussion, for example, of the important question of dual causality, or divine action, given God's coexistence with the universe. This may be due to the intended audience, which seems to be new entrants into the science and theology discourse, wanting to be encouraged that theological commitments need not perish in view of scientific findings.

Science-engaged theology

After some effective though brief myth busting, the authors move to sketch out their own position. It is well summarised at the beginning of the book where the authors muse, to the reader, about science and theology: 'Are they in conflict or can they help each other out, or do science and religion simply ask different questions? Yes. And yes and yes.' (p. 8)

Indeed, they argue that theology and science may already be closer bedfellows than previously imagined. Theologians make scientific claims, or science-adjacent claims, all the time. The book does argue that any time theologians make said claims when they discuss anthropology, nature, ecclesiology and ethics, the secular fields of knowledge that pertain to these areas must be consulted. Here we may wonder if there are degrees by which each area is associated with the findings of the sciences. But we are just at the beginning of the argument. Indeed, the focus will sharpen. There are some claims made which are layered with theological assumptions. For example, they argue: 'As the rational and personal Creator of the universe, *of course* God speaks through science, and *of course* theologians should listen to all the ways God speaks' (p. 3).

This suggests that the book is inheriting a particular variant of the science and theology discourse which assumes generally that the things we learn about the natural world can tell us positive truths about God. This is not self-evident. Someone in a Thomistic tradition might wonder to what degree the natural sciences can tell us anything directly about God's nature, even if a natural theology or philosophy of nature can demonstrate (or at least point us towards) the existence of God. Of course, Perry and Leidenhag may well mean that *by analogy* we can learn things about the divine life, but the principle of analogy is not mentioned in the text itself. Throughout the book one may ask: How and to what degree do we learn about God by learning about nature? It is a question that the book does not really answer. However, the authors couch their trust in the value of



scientific information for theology in a subtle form of contextualization, saying: 'Rather than seeing the sciences as offering a pile of irrefutable facts about the world, we should think of scientific equipment, methods and theories as offering different perspectives on the world' (p. 41).

The authors encourage Christian theologians to enter into dialogue with science using science-engaged theology. Their case is built upon three notable Gifford Lectures. The authors begin with John Hedley Brooke who articulates the historian's task against the tendency to rely on master narratives or typologies. The second, David Livingstone, argues that science and religion interact in a whole host of contextual and geographically influenced ways because they are not 'transgeographical' categories. From here, Peter Harrison engages the theology and science discourse without presenting either as static concepts. Deconstructing these terms is essential to science-engaged theology precisely because it eschews the grand narrative approach to interpretations of both. On this point the authors are harshly critical of views in which all knowledge should be viewed within a teleological framework orientated towards knowing and worshipping God, saying:

The most striking example of giving in to this latter temptation is given by John Milbank: 'unless other disciplines are (at least implicitly) ordered to theology ... they are objectively and demonstrably null and void, altogether lacking in truth'. Notice how this is but the mirror image of [Thomas] Jefferson's border cops. [Russell T.] McCutcheon thinks that theology attempts to be science but fails in the attempt; it's a shoddy imitation. Milbank thinks all science is a bad imitation of theology. (p. 22)

Now on this point I think the authors are misunderstanding Milbank's point and the wider theological context in which he is operating. It is unlikely that Milbank is arguing that science must be directed literally at the discovery or worship of God in order to be truthful or meaningful. Milbank does not argue that the biologist, for example, must be looking for confirmation of God's existence or nature. Instead, he is making an argument about what knowledge is ultimately for: the final end towards which knowledge is directed, and the ultimate source of truth. In the Thomistic-teleological view, it is not the case that knowledge of nature is meaningless because it is not about God. Rather, it is the acknowledgement



that if, say, biology is ordered towards truth, then implicitly it is ordered towards knowing and loving God. It is ultimately meaningful not on its own but because all truth implicitly orders human cognition towards the grounds of meaning and truth itself: God. Milbank is making a point about *why* information is ultimately meaningful rather than *what subject of* information is meaningful. Jefferson and McCutcheon, on the other hand, seem to be arguing that certain subjects, like Christian theology, are either inherently meaningless or otherwise disreputable, and so have little or no place in public education. One might question, then, whether they and Milbank really are mirror images of each other.

In the final movement of the book, the authors attempt an explanation of how science-engaged theology moves past simply saying ‘It’s complicated’. The authors acknowledge that it can be difficult to incorporate scientific findings or methods into theology, dealing with revelation and the human experience, because each subject operates by vastly different methods and norms. The authors explain:

[T]he natural sciences as we currently understand them do not neatly fit into the category of reason. Although they are a discourse based on evidence, logic, debate and intellectual discernment, they are also practices of testing, observing, measuring and recording. There is a sense in which the practices of the sciences rationalize, by narrowing, replicating and operationalizing, the theological source of experience. (p. 51)

Science-engaged theology attempts to solve this problem by proposing a method where a theologian could ask a question of the form: How does *x* finding in the sciences shed new light on – correct a distortion of, or corroborate a position in – theological enquiry *y*? For example, in the growing field of liturgical theology, psychological studies can no doubt provide insights on the emotional effects of different forms of liturgy and communal worship on believers; while psychology has long contributed to pastoral-theology.

The lay Christian reader is left with a constructive contribution to what is, at times, a difficult debate. They can use the formula of science-engaged theology to probe where the sciences can contribute to Christian life and practice. When the Christian uses science-engaged theology they do not neglect or ignore confessional beliefs but simply use scientific findings to



provide greater depth and context to Christian life. As advocates for this approach the authors are successful, and they will hopefully open the doors to continued engagement between theology and the wide world of human knowledge.

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Suzanne Owen and Angela Puca, eds., *Pagan Religions in 5 Minutes* (Sheffield; Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2024), pp. xi + 224, ISBN 978-1800505254. £22.95

According to the 2022 census, Paganism is now the fourth-largest religion practised in Scotland, with 19,113 people declaring it to be their religion of choice.³ At the time of writing the social media platform TikTok hashtag #witchtok has over eight million posts with content including live-streaming tutorials, educational videos and online journals from creators who subscribe to various Pagan traditions, including Wicca. With the growing interest in Pagan traditions, *Pagan Religions in Five Minutes*, edited by Suzanne Owen and Angela Puca, offers an accessible and insightful compilation of short essays by established scholars in the field that explore the complexity of Pagan identities and practices, both historical and contemporary.

The preface explains that this work is the culmination of a planned public event at Leeds Trinity University scheduled for 24 March 2020 entitled, “Everything You Wanted to Know About Paganism (But Where

³ See “Scotland’s Census 2022 – Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion”, 21 May 2024, <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/2022-reports/scotland-s-census-2022-ethnic-group-national-identity-language-and-religion/>.

