

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Why we fight: the origins, nature, and management of human conflict**, by David Churchman, Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 2013, 320 pp., US\$29.12 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-7618-6138-6

David Churchman cautions that human conflict, the topic he addresses in *Why We Fight*, is highly complex and challenging because managing conflict requires the combined virtues and best qualities of humanity:

[T]he faith and vision of Joan of Arc, the integrity of Socrates, the persistence of Thomas Edison, the empathy of television's Mr. Rogers, the practical creativity of Benjamin Franklin, the courage of ... any Medal of Honor recipient ..., and the analytical mind of Star Treks Dr. Spoc. (87)

Churchman provides examples of all these styles of conflict management, not to lead us to despair, but to serve as a continual reminder that we all have strengths and challenges. All humans get involved in interpersonal conflict; so what should we do about it? Churchman utilizes a 'levels of analysis' approach – individual to interstate – and draws insights from at least two dozen academic disciplines, over 100 theories, 75 methods for dealing with human conflict, and several decades of teaching the topic. The incredible breadth and scope of this book are both its strengths and limitations. He presents materials in a very readable, yet unique way, and includes a number of topics not typically covered in other survey volumes.

Insightful to students in general but especially for veterans in the conflict and peace studies field are the first two chapters and the Appendix. Churchman's main point in Chapter 1 is the problem that too often in the social sciences 'failed theories proliferate and thrive' (1). The difference between the natural sciences and the social sciences is noted. Churchman is more comfortable with statistics and mathematical modeling than most peace practitioners (Chapter 2), and he provides critiques of social science methods throughout the book (109). Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the basics of the biology and social ontology of human nature, concluding that 'there is nothing simple about it' (43) and, relevant to the explicit analysis of conflict, 'the study of crippled, stunted, immature, and unhealthy specimens' presents a caution since it 'can yield only a crippled psychology and crippled philosophy' (43). These opening chapters warrant serious pause and reflection for the reader, 'especially concerning assumptions about a healthy society. The Appendix – 'Major Fallacies in Logic' – could easily be a book-length useful guide expanded with real-world examples and reminders of the possibilities of human fallibility.

The next set of Chapters, 5–10, which deal with a vast range of conflict taxonomies – 'Intellectual', 'Moral', 'Interpersonal', 'Gender', 'Organizational', 'Community' – is fascinating reading because of the diversity of topics covered and also because of the nontraditional way in which they are addressed. Some of the material will be familiar to the reader, much material will be new, some will be

controversial, but all will be interesting. Chapters 11 through 19 provide many useful criticisms and insights, and it is within these chapters that Churchman's answers to *Why We Fight* differ from many, more standard, accounts in conflict and peace studies. This is one of the few survey volumes to deal with the different Just War traditions (183–198) and 'lawfare' (235). However, it is here that Churchman's philosophical and political commitments become more evident.

Most authors in conflict and peace studies are more sympathetic to many of the theories and to approaches to which he offers criticism in *Why We Fight*. As Churchman explains, the vision of peace offered by 'Enlightenment humanists' that view wars as 'misunderstandings' or the lack of adequate international organization and 'preventable by communication, reason and trade' (237) still harbors a few deep ambiguities and assumptions – in a world in which the 'lion lies down with the lamb', what exactly is the lion supposed to eat (237)? Churchman's favored alternative to progressive conflict transformers is, in the end, political Realism.

It would be too easy to simply dismiss this criticism as coming from the pen of a Realist and to ignore the limitations of his analysis e.g. the lack of consideration of the recent empirical scholarship that documents the successes of nonviolent intervention since the twentieth century. Churchman discusses instances where nonviolence has been applied as a means of resolving conflict (251–254) only to dismiss its role/contribution. For example, according to Churchman, in the case of Gandhi and Bashar Kahn 'Britain had already decided to abandon ... empire' (253), and in the case of the US Civil Rights Movement 'integration had begun in the US Army, professional sports, the schools, and in many workplaces over a decade before King began his work' (253). Then, in the latter chapters when he discusses the realm of political conflict his assumptions towards state-centric conflict management becomes explicit. In defending the decisions of state elites, he dismisses the general population because 'Citizens tend not to understand [the policies] and so often oppose them' (247). In defending the interests of the state, Churchman ignores what even Clausewitz recognized: when the state manages conflict it must defer to the will of the citizens. Or, stated another way, Churchman relies too heavily on Joe Nye's hard power and too easily dismisses or ignores soft power. He is also very skeptical of international human rights organizations and international courts because too often they 'attempt to portray US policy as illegal' (235) and are hypocritical toward the US (234). In summary, his account at times seems a bit dated and perhaps too dismissive of more recent improvements on transforming rather than managing conflicts.

The reader may ask whether or not Churchman provides a systematic or scatter-shot account of *Why We Fight*, and if too high a price was paid for breadth rather than depth? Whether or not the reader agrees with all comments and answers in *Why We Fight*, such as it 'may be right that letting people fight it out is the quickest and cheapest route to peace in both money and lives lost' (250), this is an intriguing read because Churchman's assumptions and answers at times agree and at other times contrast with the overarching paradigm of much of peace education. It is most useful because it represents a middle ground between *Realpolitik* and contemporary peace education.

Terry Beitzel  
James Madison University  
[beitzetd@jmu.edu](mailto:beitzetd@jmu.edu)

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