

ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD, by J. H. Hick. *Macmillan*, London, 1970. pp. xiii+148. £2.50.

This book surveys various arguments from Design, Cosmological arguments, Moral arguments and Ontological arguments. It is somewhat selective in choosing the forms to be discussed in detail (e.g. Russell's humanism is not the only kind worth examining in the area of moral arguments, while Newman's argument from conscience is worth more than a couple of dismissive lines). It is concluded that none of the arguments amounts to a proof, or even establishes the probability of God's existence (probability in the required sense being inapplicable to the case). But this doesn't mean it is irrational to believe in God. On the contrary, the last twenty pages seek to show that it is positively rational to do so. It is a pity so little time is given to enlarging on this last point, which is potentially more original—judging from the sketchy outline which is offered to suggest possibilities of further development—than the rest of the book. Being so sketchy, it is hardly fair to comment on it at length. I therefore confine my criticisms to the discussion of the familiar arguments.

The design arguments and the ontological arguments are given better treatment than the others, partly because they are easier to dispose of. Charles Hartshorne's attempt to reinstate the ontological argument by using a few bits of modal logic is neatly sabotaged, as is Lecomte de Noüy's design argument. On the other hand, the cosmological arguments, especially those of Aquinas, are not dealt with so satisfactorily. Most of the difficulties raised by Anthony Kenny, in his *The Five Ways*, are accepted as definitive despite the fact that Kenny's work has been heavily criticized for lack of logical rigour and scholarly exactitude by Peter Geach (*Philosophical Quarterly*, July 1970). I do not feel competent to discuss the formal logical problems involved—in any case, Geach's case is that, until the necessary work in logic is done, we cannot deal properly with all the issues raised by the Five Ways themselves—but it is clear from his criticisms of Kenny that the latter's book is far from being the definitive and final demolition of Aquinas that it might seem to be. That being so, it is hardly to be expected that the much briefer discussion in the present book will dispose of the problems.

One of the weaknesses of the treatment given to Aquinas is that his arguments are not set in the context of his philosophy as a whole. For

example, it is said to be a serious objection to the third way that even if it were shown that a necessary being did exist, it might just as easily be the universe itself, understood as a single entity, as God. Flew is quoted approvingly, as insisting that there is no good reason to say that God is more intelligible as an ultimate than the most fundamental laws of energy and stuff. It is not surprising, in the light of this, to hear that the introduction into the third way of a variety of necessary beings which are yet only derivatively necessary makes no difference to the outcome. For the whole point of that idea is that, even if the universe is 'necessary', the very fact that it is constantly in process of internal change shows that the kind of necessity it has is only of the derivative kind, and is thus inadequate as an 'ultimate'. For God is not just necessary, in the sense that he cannot not exist; his necessity does not derive from outside himself. A non-derivatively necessary being will therefore, *ipso facto*, be changeless, lacking in parts and incorporeal. On Aquinas's principles, he will also be infinite, eternal and good. These are direct inferences from the concept of non-derivative necessity, and (if the whole philosophical scheme is right) makes nonsense of the idea that, even if there were a non-derivatively necessary being it might still—in H. D. Aiken's words—be 'a perfect stinker'.

My conclusion from all this is that one of the most important things about the arguments for God's existence—probably the only important thing in fact—is that they reveal what kinds of philosophy are compatible with belief in a God who creates heaven and earth, and what kinds are not. It is quite possible for a person to believe in God and yet hold to a philosophy which is incompatible with that belief. John Locke, Charles Hartshorne, Leslie Dewart and John Robinson would, I think, qualify as examples. This doesn't mean they are atheists: only that they—like the vast majority of mankind—hold in their heads a variety of mutually incompatible things. The philosophy of Aquinas—though not that of some 'thomists'—is a philosophy which is compatible with belief in God. What matters is whether it is internally free from contradiction. The same would be true of any other philosophy which is compatible with belief in God—the thing that matters is whether it is compatible with itself. It is in this area of investigation that the work needs to be done. BRIAN WICKER