

It is important to notice this book's subtitle: 'A Philosophical Assessment of Secular Reasoning from Bacon to Kant'. Attfield does not deal with secularization *qua* sociologist, and the intellectual problems of many twentieth-century writers just do not come into the reckoning. Nothing here, for example, about Freud, Durkheim, Marx or Wittgenstein: key figures are people like Boyle, Clarke, Newton, Hobbes, Hume and Leibniz. But this restrictedness need not matter. Nobody can deal with everything, and the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries produced many important, seminal arguments well worth summarizing and considering on their own. Attfield's treatment of them is certainly of contemporary interest. For his general aim is to ask whether, and in what ways, various scientific and philosophical positions not directly dictated by religious considerations bear on fundamental religious beliefs, in particular on the belief that there is a God. He is also concerned to examine some attempts to make religious conclusions yield information which might normally now be viewed as falling within the province of an autonomous empirical/scientific enquiry. Roughly speaking, Attfield's conclusion is that independent reflection and religious presuppositions sometimes need to be kept apart but can sometimes go together. Some arguments could undermine specific religious beliefs; but these arguments may often be philosophically suspect. And it is not impossible for philosophical argument to act as an ally of religious belief. Occasionally, indeed, it can act as a necessary ally. Such is the case with natural theology.

Perhaps it is its willingness to emphasize this last claim that makes Attfield's book most worth taking seriously at the present time. For now there really is a need for natural theology. And, as writers like Geach, Swinburne, Plantinga and others have suggested, the *a priori* case for its impossibility is far from being definitively established. But there is still an important question to ask. What kind of God is natural theology interested in arguing for? Here, as it seems to me, we come to the major drawback in Attfield's

study.

I should say that fundamental to any worthwhile natural theology is the recognition that God is, in Aquinas's terminology, *extra ordinem omnium entium*. God must be outside the range of particular beings, outside all genus and class, definitely not a kind of celestial Michelangelo. Attfield, on the other hand, and in spite of occasional concessions to apophaticism, insists on talking about the peculiar anthropomorphic God beloved of Hume and the deists. Here it is all a question of inferring an invisible person, agent, benevolent intelligence, entity, thing, object or being. "It must be agreed", says Attfield, "that God is necessarily of some sort or other. Indeed, he is necessarily of a sort members of which are necessarily timeless, placeless and omnipotent." (p. 165) The observation is not very illuminating. How many members other than God belong to this exclusive club? And can they recognize each other? Perhaps these questions are rather unfair to Attfield. Presumably he would reply that God is the only member of the sort of which he is a member. But this does not really dispose of the uneasiness engendered by Attfield's account. Along with a number of writers (notably including process theologians like Hartshorne) Attfield fails to give weight to the fact that, as long as God is regarded as belonging to a class, as long as he is seen as an individual, the whole doctrine of creation simply collapses. For, as a member of a class, as an individual, God himself requires a Creator.

Yet it must still be said that Attfield is definitely worth reading. His arguments often seem too brief to establish the conclusions aimed at, but anybody who thinks that the last word on natural theology has been uttered by Hume and Kant will find plenty of reason in his book for thinking again. And so will anyone who blissfully believes that religious positions are remote from and unconnected with others that one would not immediately think of as religious. At a fee of £9.50 the lesson is an expensive one. And one will have to put up with a whole lot of misprints along the way. But it is always worth learning. BRIAN DAVIES O.P.