

[1966. Review of A Defence of Theological Ethics, by G.F. Woods. Christianity Today 16 Sep.]

A Defence of Theological Ethics. by G.F. Woods (Cambridge, 1966, 136 pp., \$3.95) is reviewed by Gordon H. Clark, professor of philosophy, Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana.

The author, professor of divinity at the University of London, addresses himself to a carefully restricted aim. Without going into metaphysics or theology, he considers only the moral challenge to Christianity. The challenge is that morality requires the autonomy of ethics, the autonomy of the moral agent, and is therefore inconsistent with the existence of God, or at least with the ideas of grace and immortality.

Toward the end of the book Mr. Woods makes the excellent point that secular ethics cannot explain the disappearance of autonomy in those cases where we know what we ought to do but have not the power to do it. Autonomy is also curtailed when we are unable to discover what we ought to do. These facts of experience are secularism's great weakness.

Furthermore, the author defends ethics against the charge that the reward of a future life is immoral. Unfortunately, this section is bit awkward, because Woods seems to agree with the secularists that morality must have no reward. He does a little better with the idea of grace as the creative, recreative, perfecting will of God.

By way of criticism: determination to keep the discussion within narrow limits allows the author to waste seventy-five pages warning us of the dangers of analogical language – a moral standard is neither a standing flagpole nor a literal yardstick. All this is as useless as it is obviously true. The same narrow limits prevent him from doing more than suggesting that theism is a more promising thesis than secularism. The main issues are not substantially considered.

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