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FOREWORD

MARY MIDGLEY

How many philosophers are there who can manage to write all the time about something interesting? Leafing through the list of Robin Attfield's works, my eye is continually caught by topics that I want at once to hear more about—wildernesses, animals, euthanasia, Thomas Traherne, unfathomed caves, secular humanism, biocentrism, efficiency in universities, the Continental Shelf, the Precautionary Principle, International Justice and the Third World, Aldo Leopold and Humpty Dumpty. All this on top of the Good of Trees, which is one of those discussions that one never forgets about, so that every oak and beech must surely still be thanking him for bringing the matter to the public attention.

It is really remarkable how Attfield has resisted the deadly tribalism of our age which shuts academic subjects up in separate cells in case they might infect one another. And his feat in doing this is especially surprising since that quarantine is imposed with special zeal over religion, which is thought to be particularly infectious. Long ago, when he (and I) first started writing, philosophers used to police these frontiers pretty sternly. The reproach of being “not real philosophy” hung over every topic that had not been mentioned during the last year in *Mind*. Philosophers did indeed know that some partly civilized territories existed on the borders of philosophy proper, notably philosophy of science and philosophy of religion. But prudent graduate-students were warned to avoid these places and their inhabitants were not supposed to intrude into serious, central business. Certainly nobody was expected to let loose, not just one of them but two simultaneously by using a title like *Creation, Evolution and Meaning*. This sort of combination might not have surprised Spinoza, Aristotle, Kant or indeed most of the mighty dead who are still named in our current syllabuses. But it was held that the times had become sterner and such laxness could no longer be tolerated.

These regulations, however, never deterred Attfield. By flatly ignoring the vetoes he has played a great part in bringing down some of the walls, so that travel between topics has become a good deal easier today. Indeed, with the mixed courses that are now so common, “philosophy of” this, that

and the other is now quite widespread, and even sometimes gets departments and courses of its own. But of course, since academic tribalism is endemic, this can be a mixed blessing, leading to the building of new walls enclosing new enclaves... In fact, it is certainly not time for Attfield to stop writing. His spirit is going to be needed for a long time yet.