

One of World's Leading Atheists Now Believes in God, More or Less, Based on Scientific Evidence

AP Associated Press **The Associated Press**

NEW YORK Dec 9, 2004

— A British philosophy professor who has been a leading champion of atheism for more than a half-century has changed his mind. He now believes in God more or less based on scientific evidence, and says so on a video released Thursday.

At age 81, after decades of insisting belief is a mistake, Antony Flew has concluded that some sort of intelligence or first cause must have created the universe. A super-intelligence is the only good explanation for the origin of life and the complexity of nature, Flew said in a telephone interview from England.

Flew said he's best labeled a deist like Thomas Jefferson, whose God was not actively involved in people's lives.

"I'm thinking of a God very different from the God of the Christian and far and away from the God of Islam, because both are depicted as omnipotent Oriental despots, cosmic Saddam Husseins," he said. "It could be a person in the sense of a being that has intelligence and a purpose, I suppose."

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Flew first made his mark with the 1950 article "Theology and Falsification," based on a paper for the Socratic Club, a weekly Oxford religious forum led by writer and Christian thinker C.S. Lewis.

Over the years, Flew proclaimed the lack of evidence for God while teaching at Oxford, Aberdeen, Keele, and Reading universities in Britain, in visits to numerous U.S. and Canadian campuses and in books, articles, lectures and debates.

There was no one moment of change but a gradual conclusion over recent months for Flew, a spry man who still does not believe in an afterlife.

Yet biologists' investigation of DNA "has shown, by the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce (life), that intelligence must have been involved," Flew says in the new video, "Has Science Discovered God?"

The video draws from a New York discussion last May organized by author Roy Abraham Varghese's Institute for Metascientific Research in Garland, Texas. Participants were Flew; Varghese; Israeli physicist Gerald Schroeder, an Orthodox Jew; and Roman Catholic philosopher John Haldane of Scotland's University of St. Andrews.

The first hint of Flew's turn was a letter to the August-September issue of Britain's Philosophy Now magazine. "It has become inordinately difficult even to begin to think about constructing a naturalistic theory of the evolution of that first reproducing organism," he wrote.



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The letter commended arguments in Schroeder's "The Hidden Face of God" and "The Wonder of the World" by Varghese, an Eastern Rite Catholic layman.

This week, Flew finished writing the first formal account of his new outlook for the introduction to a new edition of his "God and Philosophy," scheduled for release next year by Prometheus Press.

Prometheus specializes in skeptical thought, but if his belief upsets people, well "that's too bad," Flew said. "My whole life has been guided by the principle of Plato's Socrates: Follow the evidence, wherever it leads."

Last week, Richard Carrier, a writer and Columbia University graduate student, posted new material based on correspondence with Flew on the atheistic www.infidels.org Web page. Carrier assured atheists that Flew accepts only a "minimal God" and believes in no afterlife.

Flew's "name and stature are big. Whenever you hear people talk about atheists, Flew always comes up," Carrier said. Still, when it comes to Flew's reversal, "apart from curiosity, I don't think it's like a big deal."

Flew told The Associated Press his current ideas have some similarity with American "intelligent design" theorists, who see evidence for a guiding force in the construction of the universe. He accepts Darwinian evolution but doubts it can explain the ultimate origins of life.

A Methodist minister's son, Flew became an atheist at 15.

Early in his career, he argued that no conceivable events could constitute proof against God for believers, so skeptics were right to wonder whether the concept of God meant anything at all.

Another landmark was his 1984 "The Presumption of Atheism," playing off the presumption of innocence in criminal law. Flew said the debate over God must begin by presuming atheism, putting the burden of proof on those arguing that God exists.

On the Net:

Varghese page:

Infidels on Flew:

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