

# Antony Flew's There is a God - Refuted

## THE REFUTATION OF THERE IS A GOD

Former Atheist Antony Flew in *There is a God - Refuted*, How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind, decided that a deistic God existed. Despite the fact that this God is far from a real God and has a few superficial resemblances to the Christian God, the Christian world used Flew's conversion as an excuse for declaring that their belief in God is plausible. Flew's God does not have the main trait the Christian one has - a capacity to enter into a relationship with his creatures.

### Antony Flew

Antony Flew, who had been Professor of Philosophy at the University of Keele, was the author of the famous essay *Theology and Falsification* in 1950. He published over thirty books. The most famous of his books were *God and Philosophy* and *The Presumption of Atheism* in which he propounded his atheism. Sadly he seems to want to undo his life's work for atheism and philosophy by having produced another very famous book called *There is a God* published by HarperOne, New York, 2007.

Flew commits himself to the words of wisdom from Socrates: "We must follow the argument wherever it leads" (page 22). Evidently the religions of the world are not doing that very well! Why else is every religion made up of disagreeing factions and why does one religion contradict the others in very serious matters? Why is Jesus a fraud according to Judaism and the God of truth according to Christendom? The religions should be regarded with suspicion.

The preface (page xxi) dwells on atheist Bertrand Russell's sense of loneliness and accepts the thought that this was caused by his atheism. Believers frequently try to make it seem that atheism necessarily or usually has to be a misery. They imply we do others harm if we help them become atheists. What about happy atheists? What about happy believers who don't care if there is a God or not?

### God and cause and effect

Page 57 repudiates the view of Hume that you don't experience cause and effect and can't prove them. Hume didn't believe in God. But if you believe in God you believe God did not create the universe in the past and stop. He has been creating it every moment since. If he stopped, the universe would vanish and there would be nothing. This really means that the ball does not fall to the ground. God creates anew every moment. He creates afresh. So he creates afresh countless times until the ball ends up on the ground. It didn't fall to the ground at all. God made it seem to. It is the same thing as with the silent screen movies. Film tape could be full of separate pictures of a ball being dropped from a hand and falling to the ground. The tape goes through a projector to make it seem that the ball is moving. It actually is not. Each moment of time is like a separate picture and the next moment like the next picture and so on. The God belief obliterates the idea of cause and effect that we need to function in the world.

### Free will

Flew admits on page 60, that the idea that our choices are not choices but caused by physical forces and the idea that that they are choices so we could do different from what we do are compatible is wrong. He rejects compatibilism which became popular as a way of explaining how we can have free will despite being subject to deterministic forces.

On page 60 he distinguishes between two different kinds of causes that may have to do with what we decide to do. One is physical cause and it forces us to do things so we are not free. It necessitates. He says if he gives me good news I have the choice of saying whoopee or not. He said I am free to do one or the other. He argues that that if I say he is the cause of my saying whoopee though it is my choice, I can say he caused me to say it. This cause does not necessitate but merely inclines.

This is nonsense. If free will exists, then I caused my saying whoopee not him.

He argues that physical causes such as insanity force us to do things. They are irresistible forces. But he says we have desires and wants and can resist them so they prove we have free will (page 62). This proves nothing. We might be sorely tempted to do wrong and the reason we resist is because we are taken over by a stronger desire than the temptation.

He mentions Plantinga who said that people do not have any obligation to give reasons for believing in God just as they don't have to have reasons for believing in the world (page 70). This is nonsense for we need to make assumptions about the world but not about God. It is people making assumptions about God that causes all the religious trouble in the world.

Page 86 says that atheists who say that we should not ask for an explanation of how it is that the world exists, it is here and that is all are being dogmatic atheists and being narrow and bigoted. He says that atheists who say they can't accept God as maker of life and prefer to believe the impossible which is that life appeared by chance from matter are as bad.

But if it can't be explained then it can't be explained. The God belief explains nothing. We say that God has no parts but we have no way of testing or ensuring that this idea makes sense. Thinking your way to a God without parts does not mean you are right. Believers say that life can't come from matter. But how do they know if spirit can live? The believers are the ones who are arrogant. If atheists are arrogant they can take pride in the fact that they are less arrogant than the believers.

Page 89 says that when you examine how matter affects other parts of matter that is science but if you ask how the matter came to be that is philosophy. But science may be into theories and verifying them by experiments but it is a form of philosophy and seeking for wisdom and knowledge. Philosophy is replete with theories and experiments too. Philosophy actually has no answer at all for how matter came to be. Nobody can explain how to make matter from nothing. To say God made matter from nothing is to say that 0 can be turned into 1. This either makes no sense or is beyond all comprehension. If we want to claim to be sane then it makes no sense.

Page 92 makes the terrible error of assuming that the God of the Bible matches the best God that philosophy can come up with a spiritual god meaning a God without parts and components who is infinite and all knowing and so on. The God of Christendom is a mongrel. The characteristics of the God of Aristotle and Plato were grafted on to the Bible God. The Bible never says its God is immaterial or without parts. The Bible uses the same word for breath as for spirit indicating that spirit could be a form of undetectable matter. It never uses spirit in the sense that it means today.

Page 99 quotes Einstein saying he was not an atheist and that he thought he was not a pantheist. Einstein then said he thought he was not a pantheist meaning he could have been one but was not sure. A pantheist is pretty close to an atheist for they consider God and nature to be the same.

God the designer?

Page 111 responds to Dawkins argument against God as designer. Dawkins said that if you look at the complicated universe and say the explanation for it is God, the problem is that you are trying to solve the difficulty of how the universe came to be by inventing another difficulty, a complicated God.

Flew replies that the idea of a simple God was so easy that the religions of Judaism and Islam and Christianity understood it. Simple means a God who is spirit and who has no parts. We see atoms and know what atoms can do. But we do not understand an atom as an atom. We only understand that if we do certain things with atoms some things will happen. But we don't understand the atoms themselves or how and why they exist. If we cannot understand something we can see and something of which we are made how can we understand spirit? Religion may say spirit is simple but how does it know? Is God simple? He could be intelligent but not a conscious being. Our intelligence still exists when we are unconscious. We don't use it then that is all. But it still exists. If you say God is intelligent and conscious or alive that does not sound like simplicity!

If God is simple then God does not need to be conscious or alive. In fact if he does and is conscious and/or alive then he is not simple. He is not God. But if he is not alive is it proper to describe him as God? Supreme intelligence would be better.

If we describe him as supreme intelligence and not as God, some believers will be saying we have found God but we have just understood him slightly and need to make progress. This is dishonest of them for we could be right for that is all the being is. They are being arrogant and patronising and condescending implying that anybody that knows what they are doing will agree with their ideas. If God is not God but supreme intelligence then religion has an idol that it calls God. They are in the same league as the person who thinks a mobile phone is a person because he hears a voice coming out of it.

Page 114 says the universe according to science carries strong evidence to the effect that it was prepared for us. Suppose we admit it looks that way. Is it decent and right to ignore the pain of a child suffering in agony as a proof that nothing out there cares about us and then to use science to say that something does care? It is like saying that a doctor who saved every life on earth but who killed one baby was a good man when he killed the baby for the scientific evidence for his goodness is nearly proven so he must have a reason we don't know of or can only guess at that justifies what he did. You belittle the baby if you say that. Atheism is simpler in the sense that you don't have to turn intellectual somersaults and justify God and

come to great difficulty. When people make such a big effort to believe in God despite suffering or because of it and when it torments them if they reluctantly hate God for letting something bad happen to their baby there is only one conclusion that can be taken. They know it is evil but they condone it. The honour of God is the dishonour of humanity.

It is clergy, preachers, Bibles, theologians and some philosophers who say God has the right to let a baby rot in agony to death. This is people condoning evil they see. Even if God could and does have that right, do people have the right to make assumptions like that? Is it not worse if God can't have that right? Many God-botherers say you should not judge another person but they are judging that God was right to hurt the baby or at least stand by and let the baby suffer. It is certainly disrespectful to say the least when the religious say God was right for it is them saying it not him. Divine authority saying the evil was justified is one thing but human authority saying it is disgraceful - who do they think they are? Humans are not infallible. They say it by their own authority about God. Only God should be saying it. When human authority speaks it speaks primarily not because something is right but because the authority wants it to be right. They want to condone. This is especially bad when they are not the baby!

## The cosmological argument

Page 134 talks about the cosmological argument for the existence of God. It says nothing causes itself. God caused the universe and God has no cause. The page says that the argument starts with the fact that the universe is there. It works back to God.

This is the wrong way around. We should start with what God is or what God is not. Why? Because just because there is a universe does not mean that it had to have God as a creator. If it did there would be no need for the argument. So to show the universe had God as a creator we must correct our idea of God and make it our starting point.

So once we have sorted what God is and or isn't out, we should see if our idea of God is not refuted by say the existence of human evil and human and animal suffering. If we end up with an argument that condones what cannot be condoned then our argument is wicked and if we need the likes of it to prove God then we shouldn't be trying to prove God at all. The believers will fail to show that God and the existence of human suffering can be reconciled. So they can't go any further. The very fact that God lets us have so many unruly feelings against our will that make us weak and incline us to evil while others don't have these feelings proves that religion can only solve the problem of evil by callously turning a blind eye to many things.

If the problem of evil is solved, we should see then if this God can create. If creating out of nothing is logically impossible then it follows that God can still be God and not be able to do it. God can only do what is possible. Flew and the Christians can't prove God can create. They simply assume it. That is why their explanation for how things came to be is a deceit for it is not an explanation at all. To say the universe exists therefore God created it is to make an assumption. It is not an argument for God. It is not a reason to believe in God. The cosmological argument sneaks this assumption in so it is not an argument at all. So when they are guessing that God can create it follows that they are guessing that the creation is his work.

Until Christians know what it is like to be God and to create and how it is done they should not be using the cosmological argument.

The cosmological argument is no use without the thought that because there is an infinite distance between something and nothing only an infinite being can make the universe from nothing. But even if such a being existed it would not necessarily be God or like God. God has all power and there is no power but his - he is infinite like that. His power is unlimited and he has all power. But there is another kind of infinite. This power has no beginning and no end but it is not all power. Imagine infinite lines. It is possible for there to exist any number of infinitely long lines in the universe. These lines have infinite power but not unlimited and all power. There can be any number of infinite beings at the one time in this sense. There can only be one infinite and unlimited being who has all power. But there is no need to assume that there is such a being. An infinitely powerful being who is not God could make the universe if there is anything in the cosmological argument. There could be more than one maker! It is better to hold that there are and that many of the creators did a bad job. It makes sense. It means we don't have to coldly step over the body of a stranger who was tortured to death and flippantly say, "God let that happen to him for a justifiable purpose." Curiously, most people who talk about the cosmological argument being correct ignore the issue of infinity which means they are using tricks with facts to make us think there is a God.

If there was only one being made by God and that being was not God but felt like it was, that being could not work out that there must be a God who made it. How does God know he is God? He can't. So God can feel like he is not God. We know we exist but we don't know how we are and how we are made. God should be the same. The cosmological argument can't even help God see there is a God!

If God exists he needs nothing outside himself. He is not supreme if he has needs. The cosmological argument superficially

looks like an explanation but it is not for how God can have a power he does not need, the power to create or if creating out of nothing is logically possible. It is a distraction from the real question which is why is there a God when there might have been nothing at all not even God? The question is not why is there something rather than nothing but why is there a God when there might have been no God at all?

The believers in the argument say that God is the reason for his own existence but they don't and can't prove this idea even makes sense. Do they mean God creates himself? Do they mean God causes himself? Do they mean he just is. If he just is then he has not chosen to exist and is not God or supreme. Something he had no control over causes his existence. Luck is more important than him than himself. If they are saying God made himself then that is an even more absurd miracle than creation out of nothing!

Page 140 mentions the argument of some that the cosmological argument for God is wrong on the basis that the alternative is absurd. The alternative is that you could be caused by causes that are caused by different causes that are caused by different causes again and so on and on . . . without end. The book approves of Conway stating that this leaves us with a pile of beings who do not need to exist or beings that might not have existed. This means that there is no explanation. The entire series needs an explanation (page 144) and none is given. And there has to be an explanation. An analogy is given: there is a million computers that get infected with a self-replicating virus. The number of viruses does not explain the existence of the virus. So the number of causes does not explain the causes. All this makes Flew decide that the cosmological argument is correct and that it may not prove God but makes it likely that he exists (page 145).

Page 162 in Appendix A written by Varghese states that the arguments for God says the arguments are not proof. Pages 163 and 183 say it is obvious that matter cannot produce life and life must have come from a living God. That is interesting for if the cosmological argument for God works then it is a proof!

Page 165 says that atheists say that the universe is inexplicable and we shouldn't try to explain but accept this inexplicability. Believers in God, and Varghese says on page 165 that he agrees, reject this logic and say that God is the explanation for the universe. But what about God who is inexplicable? Varghese answers that God is inexplicable to us but not to himself. The thrust of this is that it make some sense to believe in God for it explains things better. But God might be intelligent. God might be alive. But that does not mean that God is conscious or has understanding. He might not understand himself. We do not understand ourselves. We do not know how we know we are alive.

The atheist is criticised for saying the universe is inexplicable and they don't understand it.

The theist is praised for saying the universe is explained by a God they don't understand. So they are saying that the universe has an explicable God as the cause which is saying the universe is inexplicable just as much as the atheist is. They say God and creation are inexplicable to us but God understands them (page 165). So the theist is saying that God can explain the universe and on that ground deny that the universe is inexplicable.

The atheist does not deny that there is an explanation but only says that we don't have it and that is what he means by inexplicable. The believers are saying the same thing but that God has the explanation not us. So why then are the believers insulting atheists for saying the universe is inexplicable? They say it themselves. Both sides say that finding the explanation is possible in theory and both would agree we will never find it or be clever enough or psychic enough. If you believe in God you have to pretend that God is the explanation and insult those who disagree. You are saying that by implication when you believe in God. Belief in God is not as loving as it is made out to be.

The believers don't understand God so why can they say there are other possible explanations such as magic?

Believers say God is the explanation. This assertion has a nasty implication. It implies that if atheists can't explain how the universe came to be they should leave it alone. In other words, if you don't believe in God then shut up. Belief in God has so many vicious and uncharitable implications.

Page 169 and 170 say that atheists who think nothing is unstable and turned into creation are making no sense. They forget the fact that nothing is nothing and can't be unstable. They say these atheists are making no sense. This is true.

## Consciousness

Page 182 says there are two kinds of consciousness. Consciousness. Consciousness and thinking.

Thinking is processing information you are aware of. It is being conscious of information and then the next moment of the same information or new information. If you look around the room you are in "without thinking" you will see that you are still processing as in absorbing information. So you are always thinking! When you look around "without thinking" all you have done is be more passive but you are still thinking.

## CONCLUSION

Flew is entitled to become a Deist if he thinks Deism is true. But the main points in his book are only superficially convincing. Atheism is the strongest position and the fairest. My exposure of his delusions and errors will be dismissed as many as atheistic fundamentalism - but it is not dogmatism to be right about him being wrong and to give clear reasons to show that so that people can think for themselves! It is not dogmatism so it is not fundamentalism.

GOD, THE FAILED HYPOTHESIS, HOW SCIENCE SHOWS THAT GOD DOES NOT EXIST, Victor J Stenger, Prometheus Books, New York, 2008

The Cambridge Companion to Atheism, Edited by Michael Martin, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007

THE LANGUAGE OF BELIEF, A SCIENTIST PRESENTS EVIDENCE FOR BELIEF, Francis S Collins, Free Press, New York, 2006