

PRESUMPTION OF ATHEISM?

Is there evidence for the existence of God?

Antony Flew told us to assume that the proposition that God exists is false until arguments are developed to show that the proposition is true. So if there is no evidence for God that means you assume that he does not exist. Like the presumption that a person is innocent when accused even when there is evidence pointing to their guilt until you get strong unassailable proof you make a presumption of atheism.

It has been suggested that Flew has gone too far.

Brian Davies says if you meet Brian Davies at a party and he says he is Brian Davies then you are not being irrational if you believe him without developing arguments as to why you think he is telling the truth (page 32, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*). He adds that if we need arguments before we believe signs telling us where London is or what people or books or anything say we won't be able to live at all.

I have four responses to this.

1 – If you meet somebody saying his name is Brian Davies at a party and believe him that is fine. If you meet a stranger at a party who claims to be the king of Spain then the claim is outrageous and you would be entitled to look for verification first. It would be reasonable to. God is an outrageous claim so you need outrageous evidence before you can believe in him.

2 - The arguments are still being used. You believe him that he is Brian Davies because your argument is that you can't see why he would lie to you. You believe many things because you have the arguments all done for yourself long ago. When you were a child you might have found yourself sceptical about a lot of things that you later saw you shouldn't have been sceptical about. This led you to believe that most signs are correct and most people give their real names at parties. So you did believe Brian Davies was his name because of arguments after all. You had the arguments at the back of your mind. We always use arguments whether we realise it or not.

3 – Even if it is true that we cannot live if we look for arguments all the time that has nothing to do with the question of, “Should we look for arguments all the time?” It is reasonable to believe that Brian Davies is his name because we are unable to look for arguments all the time. In other words, it is only reasonable because we are stuck. It is reasonable to believe a notorious liar who claims to be directing you to the fire escape in a burning building for it is an emergency and his testimony is all you have got. Back to the man claiming he is Brian Davies at a party. If he is not Brian Davies then we are unreasonable in another sense – we made an assumption that what was untrue was true. In that case, it is an issue of logic not practicality. Flew is discussing logic not the practicalities of believing in God.

4 - It might be reasonable yes to take his word for it that he is Brian Davies. But it is obvious that it is far more reasonable to look for reasons that he is telling the truth!

Innocent until proven guilty means you cannot accuse atheists of neglecting God and thus not respecting the one being who matters until you prove God. It is that simple.

Flew has not been proven wrong. Flew was right.