

## ANTONY FLEW AND INTELLIGENT DESIGN

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*You cannot think if you are not separate from the subject of thought. Descartes said, "I think; therefore I am." The philosophic evolutionist reverses and negatives the epigram. He says, "I am not; therefore I cannot think."*<sup>1</sup>

—G. K. Chesterton

Starting in December of 2004, a very important and puzzling sequence of events began to unfold in the world of philosophy. First, Antony Flew, dubbed by many as "the world's most famous atheist,"<sup>2</sup> announced publically that he had changed his mind; he was no longer an atheist. Second, Flew told the world in a televised broadcast *Has Science Discovered God?* that he had come to the conclusion that an intelligent-designer God must exist for scientific reasons. And third, in a landmark ruling, Judge John E. Jones III, in the now-famous Dover, Pennsylvania "Intelligent Design" trial, ruled that the very nature of science was such as to make it impossible for it to arrive at such a conclusion.

How did it come to pass that this British atheist, who had so often stressed a scientific outlook in his philosophical works, changed his mind for reasons judged to be scientifically impossible by an American judge? In what follows, I wish to argue that in his 2007 book, *There is a God*<sup>3</sup> (coauthored with Roy Abraham Varghese), Flew gives us the answer. I will argue that although Flew maintained that his conversion

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<sup>1</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Garden City, New York: Image, 1959), 34-35.

<sup>2</sup> In the bibliography found in the much-acclaimed *Atheism and Theism* volume of the *Great Debates in Philosophy* series, Flew is listed as "one of the most prominent advocates of atheism" (J. C. Smart and J. J. Haldane, editors, *Atheism and Theism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition [Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 1996], 253).

<sup>3</sup> Antony Flew, with Roy Abraham Varghese, *There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (New York: Harper One, 2007).

was inspired by scientific advances in our understanding of nature, especially advances in the biological sciences, it was largely for philosophic reasons, not scientific, that he gave up atheism. To be sure, scientific discoveries played a large role in his conversion, but it is only when they are viewed from a philosophic standpoint that we can appreciate the true nature of the reasons that led Flew to embrace theism.

### I. FLEW'S ATHEISM AND THE BURDEN OF THEISM

Prior to his conversion to theism, Flew spent his entire career arguing that reason could have nothing to do with God, publishing more "than thirty books attacking belief in God."<sup>4</sup> His most famous work attacking belief was a short article called "Theology and Falsification," also known as the "University Discussion," given in the summer of 1950 at one of C. S. Lewis's weekly *Socratic Club* meetings. It was first published in the undergraduate journal *University* in that same year and later published in a collection of essays.<sup>5</sup> It had, according to Flew himself, "some claim to have been the most widely read philosophical publication of the second half of the twentieth century."<sup>6</sup>

The argument of "Theology and Falsification" can be summarized as follows: If there is no empirical difference between the assertion and denial of a proposition, then there is no real assertion at all. But all so-called assertions about God seem incapable of being falsified in principle. There appears to be no difference between them and their denial. Therefore, Flew concluded, assertions about God are no assertions at all. But unlike the positivist, who rejects theological language as meaningless, Flew remained open to meaning in this area, if it could be found. Flew, therefore, challenged the believer to provide empirical evidence for God's existence and to indicate what was significantly different, empirically speaking, between holding that God exists and holding that He does not. The problem, as Flew saw it, was

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<sup>4</sup> This is from the "Has Science Discovered God" website: <http://www.sciencefindsgod.com>.

<sup>5</sup> Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, editors, *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: The Student Christian Movement Press, 1955; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 96-99.

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/antony\\_flew/theologyandfalsification.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/antony_flew/theologyandfalsification.html).

that there seemed to be no way for the believer to provide a possible scenario that might falsify assertions such as “God exists” or “God loves us,” these and all such assertions and their denials adding nothing to our understanding of the world as it presents itself to our senses. In short, it appeared to Flew that since the disagreement between the believer and the skeptic is not about empirical facts, but about the meaning of those facts, the believer is at a distinct disadvantage, since his view is less economical than the skeptic’s, invoking as it does the existence of something the skeptic’s view does not. The argument of “Theology and Falsification” ends with the claim that there really seems to be no *scientific* difference between belief in a real God, an imaginary one, or even no god at all.

From this article, as well as his recently reprinted *God and Philosophy*,<sup>7</sup> it is clear that Flew’s whole viewpoint rested upon what is known as the Stratonician presumption, according to which all explanations of phenomena should end or begin with the experience of the physical universe. Since all explanations must terminate somewhere in brute fact, why not simply posit the universe as the ultimate brute fact? Flew claimed that there was little reason to think that our language could unambiguously reach any farther. As far as he was concerned, the burden of proof belonged to the believer in God, who had to provide evidence strong enough to override the presumption of atheism.<sup>8</sup> As such, in essence the believer’s burden is to provide evidence strong enough to show how or why a naturalistic explanation of the universe falls short of the mark.

## II. PHILOSOPHY WITHIN THE LIMITS OF THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD?

In Roy Abraham Varghese’s *The Wonder of the World: A Journey from Modern Science to the Mind of God*,<sup>9</sup> Gerald Schroeder’s *The Hidden Face of*

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<sup>7</sup> Antony Flew, *God and Philosophy* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2005). This is a reprint of his classic work in atheism, now, according to Flew, “an historical relic.” With regard to the Stratonician thesis, see also his *An Introduction to Western Philosophy*.

<sup>8</sup> For further discussion, see Antony Flew, *The Presumption of Atheism and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

<sup>9</sup> Roy Abraham Varghese, *The Wonder of the World: A Journey from Modern Science to the Mind of God* (Fountain Hills, Arizona: TYR Publishing, 2003).

God,<sup>10</sup> and, most importantly, David Conway's *The Rediscovery of Wisdom*,<sup>11</sup> Flew found just such evidence. According to an Associated Press article that appeared in the *London Times*, Flew had come to believe that recent scientific discoveries revealed the existence of an organizing intelligence. "The investigation of DNA," he said, "has shown, by the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce life, that intelligence must have been involved."<sup>12</sup> In addition, he said, "I have been persuaded that it is simply out of the question that the first living matter evolved out of dead matter and then developed into extraordinarily complicated creatures."<sup>13</sup>

In "My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism: An Exclusive Interview with Former British Atheist Professor Antony Flew," an interview conducted by Gary Habermas,<sup>14</sup> Flew opined that both J. L. Mackie and Bertrand Russell would have been interested in these arguments and thought that Russell in particular would have regarded these recent scientific developments as evidence sufficient to overcome the presumption of atheism. Like Socrates, they would have been willing to follow the argument wherever it led, even out of atheism. At this time, it appeared to many that Flew was converting to theism on account of science alone, but was the argument he followed out of his own atheism strictly scientific?

Socrates, disappointed with Anaxagoras's account of the world, charged him with forgetting that mind (*nous*) must be the director of all things:

What hopes I had formed, and how grievously was I disappointed! As I proceeded, I found my philosopher [Anaxagoras] altogether forsaking mind or any other principle of order, but

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<sup>10</sup> Gerald L. Schroeder, *The Hidden Face of God: Science Reveals the Ultimate Truth* (New York: The Free Press, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> James A. Beverly, "Thinking Straighter: Why the World's Most Famous Atheist (Antony Flew) Now Believes in God," *Christianity Today Online*, April 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Stuart Wavell and Will Iredale, "Sorry, says atheist-in-chief, I do believe in God after all," *The Sunday Times* (London), December 12, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> The interview is available at [www.biola.edu/antonyflew/flew-interview.pdf](http://www.biola.edu/antonyflew/flew-interview.pdf).

having recourse to air, and ether, and water, and other eccentricities. I might compare him to a person who when he endeavored to explain the causes of my several actions in detail, went on to show that I sit here (that is in prison waiting to die) because my body is made up of bones and muscles; and the bones ... are lifted at their joints by the contraction or relaxation of the muscles ... and this is why I am sitting here in a curved position;—that is what he would say, and he would have a similar explanation of my talking to you, which he would attribute to sound, and air, and hearing, and he would assign ten thousand other causes of the same sort, forgetting to mention the true cause, which is, that the Athenians have *thought* fit to condemn me, and accordingly I have *thought* it better and more right to remain here and undergo my sentence.<sup>15</sup>

Socrates followed the argument wherever it led, and it led right out of Anaxagoras's materialism. Had Flew been so led?

Flew argued that his conversion was due to scientific reasons. According to Varghese's outlook, Flew was an example of one of those who came to believe that where philosophy had failed in its quest to prove God's existence, science had succeeded. Yet, when the evidence for this thesis is carefully examined, I believe it points to a different conclusion, namely, that Flew followed the argument to a conclusion located outside the limits of the scientific worldview.

Indeed, many have come to see a "god of the gaps" in Flew's position. Flew's sympathy with the world of intelligent design, a world where Michael Behe and others argue for things like the irreducible complexity of certain biochemical reactions and systems, is taken as evidence for this view. Behe and others questioned the gradual step-by-step Darwinian form of evolution and insisted that the data required an intelligent designer. Behe, for example, in *Darwin's Black Box*,<sup>16</sup> argued that certain biological structures and processes such as the bacterial flagella and the human blood-clotting system are difficult to account for using the gradual incremental process that orthodox Darwinian

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<sup>15</sup> Plato, "Phaedo," in *Plato: The Trial and Death of Socrates: Four Dialogues*, 98b-e, translated by Benjamin Jowett (Mineola, New York: Dover, 1992), 96-97. Emphasis added.

<sup>16</sup> Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1996).

theory demands. Like a mousetrap, all of the elements must be in place for these biological mechanisms to work. Absent any of their elements, they would be useless. Moreover, whatever elements might be in place would confer no survival advantage to the organism possessing them unless all the elements were in place. In the case of bacterial flagella, for instance, intermediate developmental changes would not have conferred any traits making the organism better adapted for survival and the passing on of its genes. The only rational way to account for the extraordinary and irreducible complexity seen in living things, Behe et al. conclude, is to posit the existence of an organizing “intelligence.”

Now the primary aim of the intelligent design theorists was to attack neo-Darwinists, such as Daniel C. Dennett and Richard Dawkins, who argued that the study of evolution carries with it philosophically materialist implications. Darwin’s great idea is, to use Dennett’s phrase, like a “universal acid” that burns away everything. For Dennett, Dawkins, and many others, evolution is not just a scientific conclusion, it is a metaphysical or philosophical one. Evolution accounts for everything. It is just these sorts of claims that provoke the intelligent design theorists. They object to the dogmatically uncritical promotion of the methodological naturalism suitable to the scientific method to the status of a full-blown philosophy and world-view, which is then fed to children in school as scientific fact. As Behe complains rather cogently in a letter to the editor:

The Catholic News Service editorial on the Kansas evolution controversy (reprinted Sept. 2 in the *A.D. Times*) mistakenly framed the issue as Christian fundamentalism v. science. Actually, the struggle is theism vs. scientism.

Scientism is a philosophy that often disguises itself as science and asserts that reality is restricted to what can be known through scientific measurements.

For example, in 1995 the National Association of Biology Teachers (NABT) issued a statement defining evolution as “an unsupervised, impersonal, unpredictable and natural process.”

It is not hard to see whom they are trying to exclude with words such as “unsupervised” and “impersonal.” Nor is it hard to see that such statements are philosophy clothed as science, since

no scientific experiment has shown evolution to be unsupervised.<sup>17</sup>

And Behe seems to be right. It does seem to be a philosophy masquerading as science. Scientists, as scientists, should be wary of making any metaphysical claims. All talk of the lack of supervision and supernatural guidance might be nothing more than the result of science bumping up against a wall erected by the scientific method. At the same time, science is as incapable of discerning the presence of supernatural guidance as it is its absence, a possibility of especial significance if such guidance is unevenly distributed throughout the universe.

All these considerations lead one to ask what exactly the limits of scientific enquiry are and who, if anyone, is competent to discern them. Flew insisted that he followed the argument wherever it led. But could he have followed it all the way to theism had it led no farther than the limits of the scientific method? This is an important question, for in limiting the scope of our enquiry to what science can prove, we might find ourselves unable to follow Flew all the way to the end of the argument. For there is good reason to believe that science by itself cannot lead us beyond physical and measureable realities. In *Darwin's Black Box*, Behe argues that science is about the search for the truth about the world.<sup>18</sup> It is more true to say that it is the search for *physical* truths about the world. For science, as it has been understood since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, does not promise to supply answers capable of satisfying our unrestricted desire to know, but only a very restricted portion of that desire.

This restriction found expression in the *National Academy of Sciences* comment found in the now famous decision rendered in the Dover Intelligent Design Trial by the presiding judge, John E. Jones, III:

This self-imposed convention of science, which limits inquiry to testable, natural explanations about the natural world, is referred to by philosophers as "methodological naturalism" and is sometimes known as the scientific method. (5:23, 29-30 (Pennock)). Methodological naturalism is a "ground rule" of science today which requires scientists to seek explanations in

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Behe, letter to the editor, *A.D. Times*, September 16, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Behe, *Darwin's Black Box*, 240.

the world around us based upon what we can observe, test, replicate, and verify. (1:59-64, 2:41-43 (Miller); 5:8, 23-30 (Pennock)).

As the National Academy of Sciences (hereinafter “NAS”) was recognized by experts for both parties as the “most prestigious” scientific association in this country, we will accordingly cite to its opinion where appropriate. (1:94, 160-61 (Miller); 14:72 (Alters); 37:31 (Minnich)). NAS is in agreement that science is limited to empirical, observable and ultimately testable data: “Science is a particular way of knowing about the world. In science, explanations are restricted to those that can be inferred from the confirmable data—the results obtained through observations and experiments that can be substantiated by other scientists. Anything that can be observed or measured is amenable to scientific investigation. Explanations that cannot be based upon empirical evidence are not part of science” (P-649 at 27).<sup>19</sup>

At this point, one must choose between accepting the explanatory limitations imposed on science by its methodological naturalism, on the one hand, and placing science on a broader foundation than the one afforded by naturalism. If one were to choose the former, one could set about to better inform the public at large as to the limited range of scientific knowledge, so that people would understand that all spiritual agents, human or divine, are ruled out by “convention” from the start as possible scientific causes of physical phenomena.

If some Neo-Darwinists would wish, on that basis alone, to claim a victory for atheism, theirs would be a hollow victory, at best. For the opposing views would have been bound and gagged from the start by the methodological naturalism that science requires. If one were, instead, to choose the latter, one could argue that science should be broader than methodological naturalism seems to allow. As Alvin Plantinga has argued for a theistic science,<sup>20</sup> some might argue that

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<sup>19</sup> Excerpt from *Tammy Kitzmiller, et al. v. Dover Area School District, et al.*, 400 F. Supp. 2d 707 (M.D. Pa. 2005), Case No. 04cv2688, 66. Judge John E. Jones III’s decision is available at [http://www.pamd.uscourts.gov/kitzmiller/kitzmiller\\_342.pdf](http://www.pamd.uscourts.gov/kitzmiller/kitzmiller_342.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> “‘Unnatural Science,’ ‘Creation Science,’ ‘Theistic Science’—call it what you will: what we need when we want to know how to think about the origin and



science needs to be more open-ended. Perhaps it should not be limited to the examination of physical realities. For, if scientific inquiry were open-ended and free to embrace whatever reality might come its way, then we would be able to say unequivocally that science is about the whole truth concerning the universe. Only then could we say that we were following the evidence wherever it led.

I would like to argue, however, that while this latter approach might seem to be freeing and better suited to our unrestricted desire to know, it would inevitably short-circuit all scientific inquiry, confusing as it would philosophical explanations with scientific ones. With the ultimate answers to all our “scientific” questions in our possession, why would we look any further? If, for example, some version of the intelligent design argument had been widely accepted centuries ago as the fundamental scientific explanation for all physical phenomena, we might never have discovered the various mechanisms or “machines” embedded within things and people, not to mention the fantastic biochemical “machines” that Behe has made so much of. Indeed, had not Descartes redirected philosophy towards the measurable and mathematical by proclaiming that “in seeking the correct path to truth we should be concerned with nothing about which we cannot have a certainty equal to that of the demonstrations of arithmetic and geometry,”<sup>21</sup> there might not have been a ruling heuristic notion of “machines” and “mechanisms” in the first place.<sup>22</sup> Most ironically, the proponents of intelligent design would not now be in a position even to attempt to claim that science had discovered God.

Thus, there seems to be a distinct advantage to maintaining, at least instrumentally (or at least, as Jacques Maritain might say,

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development of contemporary life is what is most plausible from a Christian point of view. What we need is a scientific account of life that isn't restricted by that methodological naturalism” (Alvin Plantinga, “When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible,” in *Intelligent Design, Creationism, and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives*, edited by Robert T. Pennock [Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001], 139).

<sup>21</sup> René Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, AT 366, translated by Laurence J. LaFleur (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961), 8.

<sup>22</sup> This leaves open the question of whether or not there could have been other heuristic notions guiding scientific research.

“perinoetically”<sup>23</sup>), a methodological naturalism. For, although restricted in the kinds of answers it can give, it is also able to give us answers attainable in no other way. When we restrict the field or range of our vision in a telescope, we can see further into space than ever before. And when we restrict the field or range of our vision to a microscope, we can perceive ever more fundamental realities at the cellular and subatomic level. But, for all its advantages, it would be a mistake to suppose that these restrictions do not also narrow the range of things we can see through them. While the intelligent design theorists might be right that one should not export philosophy out of science, and while Dawkins and Dennett certainly go too far in their naturalistic assumptions, the disciplinary boundaries separating science from religion is one that holds in either direction, and philosophical thinking is required to discern them. While one might start an argument for an intelligent designer with scientific premises, the argument as a whole cannot be located within the bounds set by current science, as intelligent design theorists would claim. One might, for example, make philosophical and theological arguments based on scientific premises without thereby rendering the arguments scientific. I might hold that the complexity of DNA gives support to the idea of a God, but the argument itself, because it includes an explanatory appeal to a non-physical object, would, by the convention of methodological naturalism, be excluded from scientific reasoning.

Granted the advantages of the methodological naturalism at the heart of the scientific search for truth, there still remains the question of the possibility of admitting more into our understanding of nature (an understanding, I should add, that would necessarily include more than is found in the scientific understanding of nature) than is strictly permitted by the scientific method. It is to this question that Flew turns in *There is a God*. It is also there, in his last book, that Flew emphasizes,

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<sup>23</sup> For further discussion, see Jacques Maritain, “Philosophy and Experimental Science,” in *Distinguish to Unite or the Degrees of Knowledge*, translated from the 4<sup>th</sup> French edition under the supervision of Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959), 55. By this term, Maritain indicates that the scientist, unlike the philosopher, does not grasp the essence of things directly, but arrives at their intelligibility only in an indirect or roundabout way through the understanding of laws that involve them or by poetic constructions that signal them.

as we will see, the distinction between the domains of philosophy and science.

Before turning to Flew, however, it would be helpful to consider the options available to us given the apparent evidence of design supplied by the dizzying complexity of biochemical machines, on the one hand, and the current paradigm of science which forbids us to draw any such conclusion from the evidence, on the other: (1) Stay within the current practice of science and claim that evolution, while appearing to be the product of intelligent design, is actually nothing more than the sum total of unintelligent processes blindly throwing up wonders such as the human mind, in effect doing philosophy within the confines of methodological naturalism raised to the status of a metaphysical doctrine; (2) Seek to change the parameters of science; or (3) Do philosophy alongside science but without the restrictions imposed by the naturalistic assumption.

I claim that the last option is the proper one. On the one hand, there are good reasons to stick with the scientific method and its naturalistic assumption, notwithstanding all of its caustic reductions and the proclamations of randomness made by scientists trying to do philosophy in the mode described in the first option. Because of these reductions, we are pushed to see new rules and connections between material things, even things within human consciousness itself. So, while I believe in a spiritual soul or mind, I do not believe that all neuroscience or brain surgery should stop at a preset point in their attempt to understand the inner workings of the brain or that neurosurgeons should start looking for “souls” or magical tissue. It makes sense to support scientists laboring under methodological naturalism to find cures for diseases such as AIDS and other viral and genetic diseases, especially as the study of such things depend greatly upon evolutionary theory. Yet, on the other hand, we might also insist that the neurosurgeon refrain from drawing philosophical conclusions on the basis of his science alone, conclusions such as Dennett’s that our consciousness is only a “user illusion,”<sup>24</sup> a trick that our neurons play

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<sup>24</sup> Daniel C. Dennett, *Sweet Dreams: Philosophical Obstacles to a Science of Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006). See also his very interesting and provocative video presentation *The Magic of Consciousness*, co-authored with Robert DiNozzi (Los Angeles: Into the Classroom Media, 2006), DVD.

on us. While I do understand that a scientist *qua scientist* must regard something like that to be true, some things are such as to necessarily elude scientific analysis.<sup>25</sup>

### III. FOLLOWING THE ARGUMENT WHEREVER IT LEADS

In *There is a God*, not only do we get Flew's own explicit narrative of his conversion to theism and a much-needed corrective to the one we find in Varghese's "Science Has Now Discovered God," we also get a clear demand for a separate intellectual space, one distinct from science, for philosophical thinking. In short, we get insight not only into the reasons that led Flew to abandon atheism, but also the controversy surrounding intelligent design and creation.

Because they see reality philosophically in a way that is heuristically limited by the scientific method, both Dawkins and Dennett may take the hypothesis of philosophical materialism to be repeatedly confirmed as science makes more and more breakthroughs in theoretical and practical matters. The result is an absolute confidence in their limiting of reasoning to a methodologically narrow, scientific appropriation of the world. But theirs is a confidence wholly unwarranted by the facts. However justified scientific materialism may be *scientifically* speaking, I would argue, along with many others, that it is inherently blind to certain central philosophical questions and the whole realm of value. We might remember what Stephen Jay Gould in his *Rocks of Ages*<sup>26</sup> said with regard to science's inability to discover value, namely, that its teaching authority applied only to the natural world as opposed to religion's authority, which applied to the realm of value. We might also remember what Thomas Nagel said in his *The View From Nowhere*,<sup>27</sup> about the idea that the scientific viewpoint, which attempts to perceive the universe from "no perspectival center," has a "blind spot" with

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<sup>25</sup> In order to avoid misunderstanding, I should add that I think Dennett is perfectly coherent in his denial of human consciousness. If you take methodological naturalism as literally true and you are consistent, you must end up seeing humans and the world around them as machines that have only unintelligent parts that have no clue about the host they are serving.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *Rock of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: Ballantine Publishing, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

regard to moral values, which can only be seen from the subjective viewpoint.

“Science *qua* science cannot furnish an argument for God’s existence,”<sup>28</sup> Flew boldly tells us. He clearly stresses the insufficiency of science to do the job that Varghese had proclaimed that science could do by itself. He tells us that “it is not science alone that has guided me. I have also been helped by a renewed study of the classical philosophical arguments.”<sup>29</sup> Further on he tells us, “[A] discovery of the Divine does not come through experiments and equations, but through an understanding of the structures they unveil and map.”<sup>30</sup>

We are in new territory here. To argue for God we need the discipline of philosophy; science is not enough. To give us evidence as to why science is not enough, Flew provides the reader with an insightful quote from the quantum physics pioneer Erwin Schrödinger:

The scientific picture of the world around me is very deficient. It gives me a lot of factual information, puts all our experience in a magnificently consistent order, but is ghastly silent about all that is really near to our heart, that really matters to us.... It knows nothing of beauty and ugly, good or bad, God and eternity.... Science is, very usually, branded as being atheistic. After what we have said this is not astonishing. If its world picture does not even contain beauty, delight sorrow, *if personality is cut out of it by agreement*, how should it contain the most sublime idea that presents itself to the human mind.<sup>31</sup>

Schrödinger is right. Personality is cut out by agreement, by a self-imposed agreement. And, from the scientific point of view, the whole

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<sup>28</sup> Flew, *There is a God*, 155.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 155. He adds: “Are we engaging in science or philosophy here? When you study the interaction of two physical bodies, for instance, two subatomic particles, you are engaged in science. When you ask how it is that those subatomic particles—or anything physical—could exist and why, you are engaged in philosophy. When you draw philosophical conclusions from scientific data, then you are thinking as a philosopher” (*Ibid.*, 89).

<sup>31</sup> Erwin Schrödinger, *Nature and the Greeks in Nature and the Greeks and Science and Humanism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 95-97, cited (incorrectly) by Flew, *There is a God*, 105. Emphasis added.

realm of human “personhood” and its ultimate causes, begins to look very strange. If human reason were nothing more than scientific practice, and if all truths were merely scientific truths, then physical reality would be all that there was. This would be a world where the conscious ego would have to be an illusion. Susan Blackmore, a leading author in consciousness studies, tells us precisely this at the end of one of her works:

There are two really fundamental assumptions that almost everyone makes. The first is that experiences happen to someone; that there cannot be experience without an experiencer. This need not imply a fixed or unchanging self, but it does imply that the ‘you’ who are now conscious of reading this book is the same one who went to bed last night and woke up this morning. This has to be thrown out.<sup>32</sup>

Blackmore ends her book by claiming that a certain method of studying consciousness might, “hold out the hope that science and personal practice might eventually come together to let us see clearly—dropping the delusions, penetrating the illusions of self and other, and leaving us with one world—no duality and no one asking the question.”<sup>33</sup> Clearly, the price for restricting our vision to what can be seen with the scientific method is a very high one. As Chesterton observed: “You cannot think if you are not separate from the subject of thought. Descartes said, ‘I think; therefore I am.’ The philosophic evolutionist reverses and negatives the epigram. He says, ‘I am not; therefore I cannot think.’”

Science deals with the relationships that obtain between physical things and between their component parts. In *The Blind Watchmaker*, Richard Dawkins tells us what counts as an explanation, which to his mind is synonymous with scientific explanation:

This brings me to the final topic ... the problem of what we mean by explanation. We have seen what we are going to mean

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<sup>32</sup> Susan Blackmore, *Consciousness: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 128. The second assumption is “that experiences flow through the conscious mind as a stream of ideas, feeling, images, and perceptions. The stream may break, change direction, or be disrupted, but it remains a series of conscious events in the theatre of the mind” (Ibid., 129).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 133.

by a complex thing. But what kind of explanation will satisfy us if we wonder how a complicated machine works? The answer is ... [w]e look to its component parts and ask how they interact with each other. If there is a complex thing that we do not yet understand, we can come to understand it in terms of simpler parts that we do already understand....

But another kind of question is how the complicated thing came into existence in the first place. I shall just mention that the same principle applies as for understanding mechanism. A complicated thing is one whose existence we do not feel inclined to take for granted, because it is too 'improbable'. It could not have come into existence in a single act of chance. We shall explain its existence as a consequence of gradual, cumulative, step-by-step transformations from simpler things, from primordial objects sufficiently simple to have come into being by chance.<sup>34</sup>

Though useful for explaining how things work, this approach cannot account for the ultimate origins of human persons. It can provide no response to the *philosophical* question of why we or anything else exists. Indeed for some metaphysically-minded thinkers, a science-only view looks more like an evasion than anything else. Consider the following statement from John Paul II:

To all these indications of the existence of God the Creator, some oppose the power of chance or of the proper mechanisms of matter. To speak of chance for a universe which presents such a complex organization in its elements and such marvelous finality in its life would be equivalent to giving up the search for an explanation of the world as it appears to us. In fact, this would be equivalent to admitting effects without a cause. It would be to abdicate human intelligence, which would thus refuse to think and to seek a solution for its problems.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996), 18, 22-24.

<sup>35</sup> Pope John Paul II, General Audience of Wednesday, 10 July, 1985, cited by Christoph Cardinal Schönborn in "Finding Design in Nature," *The New York Times*, July 7, 2005.

Several times in *There is a God*, Flew comments on this issue. Not denying, but assuming the veracity of scientific cosmology and evolution, he repeats Paul Davies's question: "How is it that we have a set of laws that drives featureless gasses to life, consciousness and intelligence?"<sup>36</sup> As Flew pointedly asks, "How can a universe of mindless matter produce with intrinsic ends, self-replication capabilities, and "coded chemistry?" He goes on to say, "Here we are not dealing with biology, but an entirely different category of problem."<sup>37</sup> Flew adds that "[i]n being alive, living matter possesses a teleological organization that is wholly absent from everything that preceded it."<sup>38</sup> And, citing Davies, he avers that "[t]he problem of how meaningful or semantic information can emerge spontaneously from a collection of mindless molecules subject to blind and purposeless forces presents a deep conceptual challenge."<sup>39</sup>

We might say that in *There is a God*, Flew offers what is ultimately a clue to the proper understanding of the domains of science and religion through the mediation of philosophy. In the book, he is very concerned with the origin and conditions of the possibility of the existence of human persons and things, a concern which appears to be absent in earlier works.<sup>40</sup> He seems to embrace a view of philosophy not unlike that of Norris Clarke:

Philosophy is the critically reflective, systematically articulated attempt to illumine our human experience in depth and set it in a vision of the whole. Thus, it is not primarily a search for new experience or new facts—although some may turn up along the way—but a second-level enterprise, so to speak, where we take the experience (including the vicarious

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<sup>36</sup> Paul Davies (1995, May), *Physics and the Mind of God*. Acceptance speech presented at Westminster Abbey. Available at [http://cosmos.asu.edu/prize\\_address.htm](http://cosmos.asu.edu/prize_address.htm), and cited by Flew, *There is a God*, 108.

<sup>37</sup> Flew, *There is a God*, 124.

<sup>38</sup> David Conway, *The Rediscovery of Wisdom* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 125; cited by Flew, *There is a God*, 125.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Davies, "The Origin of Life II: How Did It Begin?" <http://cosmos.asu.edu/publications/papers.htm>.

<sup>40</sup> For example, see Flew's "Preface" to *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), vii, and his *Philosophy: An Introduction* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1980), 3ff.



experience of others) and data we already have and try to illumine them in depth, i.e., to search out their ultimate grounding or necessary conditions of possibility, their ultimate meaning, and their connections with the rest of reality.<sup>41</sup>

When one embraces this understanding of philosophy, one sees that the differences in religion and science are not due (as science itself might prescribe) to the objects considered—facts versus values, for example, as Gould would have it—nor should religion and science be seen as competitors in the search for the one and only true cause of things, with only one set of causes reigning supreme. If we could see that reasoning itself comes in many and varied forms, as Jacques Maritain argues in *The Degrees of Knowledge*, we would realize that there are many layers to our views about reality. Realizing this, we would be able to process reality in multiple and parallel ways, rather than a highly restricted, one-layered serial way. Philosophy could illuminate how this is possible and moderate the claims of the various competing constituents. We should be able to simultaneously embrace the different forms of reasoning, because we are aware of the method through which each views reality. Then, maybe, we would find resolutions to many of our current disputes concerning origins.

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from Flew's conversion from atheism to theism is that while scientists should be allowed to follow the scientific method wherever it leads, we should not take the limits of their inquiry to be limits to all inquiry. For scientists, everything physical matters. But not everything is physical. There are other lines of inquiry that make their own rational demands and raise questions which must be attended to and not simply dismissed in the name of science.

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<sup>41</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press), 5.