SAMUEL BLUMENFELD

From: "John" <onejohn512@yahoo.co.uk>
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Subject: Exclusive Flew Interview

For the last half century, the world's most famous atheist was Anthony Flew. Long before Richard Dawkins began taking swipes at religion, Flew was the preeminent spokesman for unbelief. But now Anthony Flew is the world's most famous convert to belief in God. What turned his world right-side-up? "I must say ... that the journey to my discovery of the Divine has thus far been a pilgrimage of reason. I have followed the argument where it has led me."

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Wiker: You are obviously aware of the spate of recent books by such atheists as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. They think that those who believe in God are behind the times. But you seem to be politely asserting that they are ones who are behind the times, insofar as the latest scientific evidence tends strongly toward—or perhaps even demonstrates—a theistic conclusion. Is that a fair assessment of your position?

Flew: Yes indeed. I would add that Dawkins is selective to the point of dishonesty when he cites the views of scientists on the philosophical implications of the scientific data.
Two noted philosophers, one an agnostic (Anthony Kenny) and the other an atheist (Nagel), recently pointed out that Dawkins has failed to address three major issues that ground the rational case for God. As it happens, these are the very same issues that had driven me to accept the existence of a God: the laws of nature, life with its teleological organization and the existence of the Universe.
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October 30, 2007 by Dr. Benjamin Wiker

Benjamin Wiker: You say in There is a God, that "it may well be that no one is as surprised as I am that my exploration of the Divine has after all these years turned from denial...to discovery." Everyone else was certainly very surprised as well, perhaps all the more so since on our end, it seemed so sudden. But in There is a God, we find that it was actually a very gradual process—a "two decade migration," as you call it. God was the conclusion of a rather long argument, then. But wasn't there a point in the "argument" where you found yourself suddenly surprised by the realization that "There is a God" after all? So that, in some sense, you really did "hear a Voice that says" in the evidence itself " 'Can you hear me now?'"

Anthony Flew: There were two factors in particular that were decisive. One was my growing empathy with the insight of Einstein and other noted scientists that there had to be an Intelligence behind the integrated complexity of the physical Universe. The second was my own insight that the integrated complexity of life itself – which is far more complex than the physical Universe – can only be explained in terms of an Intelligent Source. I believe that the origin of life and reproduction simply cannot be explained from a biological standpoint despite numerous efforts to do so. With every passing year, the more that was discovered about the richness and inherent intelligence of life, the less it seemed likely that a chemical soup could magically generate the genetic code. The difference between life and non-life, it became apparent to me, was ontological and not chemical. The best confirmation of this radical gulf is Richard Dawkins' comical effort to argue in The God Delusion that the origin of life can be attributed to a "lucky chance." If that's the best argument you have, then the game is over. No, I did not hear a Voice. It was the evidence itself that led me to this conclusion.

Wiker: You are famous for arguing for a presumption of atheism, i.e., as far as arguments for and against the existence of God, the burden of proof lies with the theist. Given that you believe that you only followed the evidence where it led, and it led to theism, it would seem that things have now gone the other way, so that the burden of proof lies with the atheist. He must prove that God doesn't exist. What are your thoughts on that?

Flew: I note in my book that some philosophers indeed have argued in the past that the burden of proof is on the atheist. I think the origins of the laws of nature and of life and the Universe point clearly to an intelligent Source. The burden of proof is on those who argue to the contrary.

Wiker: As for evidence, you cite a lot of the most recent science, yet you remark that your discovery of the Divine did not come through "experiments and equations," but rather, "through an understanding of the structures they unveil and map." Could you explain? Does that mean that the evidence that led you to God is not really, at heart, scientific?

Flew: It was empirical evidence, the evidence uncovered by the sciences. But it was a philosophical inference drawn from the evidence. Scientists as scientists cannot make these kinds of philosophical inferences. They have to speak as philosophers when they study the philosophical implications of empirical evidence.

Wiker: You are obviously aware of the spate of recent books by such atheists as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. They think that those who believe in God are behind the times. But you seem to be politely asserting that they are ones who are behind the times, insofar as the latest scientific evidence tends strongly toward—or perhaps even demonstrates—a theistic conclusion. Is that a fair assessment of your position?

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Wiker: You point out that the existence of God and the existence of evil are actually two different issues, which would therefore require two distinct investigations. But in the popular literature—even in much of the philosophical literature—the two issues are regularly conflated. Especially among atheists, the presumption is that the non-existence of God simply follows upon the existence of evil. What is the danger of such conflation? How as a theist do you now respond?

Flew: I should clarify that I am a deist. I do not accept any claim of divine revelation though I would be happy to study any such claim (and continue to do so in the case of Christianity). For the deist, the existence of evil does not pose a problem because the deist God does not intervene in the affairs of the world. The religious theist, of course, can turn to the free-will defense (in fact I am the one who first coined the phrase free-will defense). Another relatively recent change in my philosophical views is my affirmation of the freedom of the will.

Wiker: According to There is a God, you are not what might be called a "thin theist," that is, the evidence led you not merely to accept that there is a "cause" of nature, but "to accept the existence of a self-existent, immutable, immaterial, omnipotent, and omniscient Being." How far away are you, then, from accepting this Being as a person rather than a set of characteristics, however accurate they may be? (I'm thinking of C. S. Lewis' remark that a big turning point for him, in accepting Christianity, was in realizing that God was not a "place"—a set of characteristics, like a landscape—but a person.)

Flew: I accept the God of Aristotle who shares all the attributes you cite. Like Lewis I believe that God is a person but not the sort of person with whom you can have a talk. It is the ultimate being, the Creator of the Universe.

Wiker: Do you plan to write a follow-up book to There is a God?

Flew: As I said in opening the book, this is my last will and testament.

Benjamin Wiker
Benjamin Wiker holds a Ph.D. in Theological Ethics from Vanderbilt University, and has taught at Marquette University, St. Mary's

University (MN), Thomas Aquinas College (CA), and Franciscan University (OH).

He is a full-time writer, husband, and father. Dr. Wiker is a Senior Fellow of Discovery Institute and a Senior Fellow at the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology. He writes regularly for a variety of journals.

Dr. Wiker has written four books, Moral Darwinism: How We Became Hedonists (IVP), The Mystery of the Periodic Table (Bethlehem), Architects of the Culture of Death (Ignatius), and most recently, A Meaningful World: How the Arts and Sciences Reveal the Genius of Nature (IVP).

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