

Anthony Flew's Deism: Critical Remarks on “My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism”*

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Abstract

In January 2004, it was reported that Anthony Flew (1923-) the British atheist Philosopher, announced that he has believed in the existence of God. The report was considered to be very astounding in scientific, especially in religious and philosophical, circles, not only because one of the world's foremost atheist has come to believe in the existence of God – an atheist who, according to many, has produced the most important arguments against the existence of God during the past 50 years – but also it was more important in that he pointed out that the theists' arguments for the existence of God – especially “argument from design” in its recent version – is very good and persuasive. In a dialogue with Gary Habermas, he raised many points concerning the belief in God, revelation, divine religions, and afterlife, that are at once useful and worth deliberating and criticizing but his new approach is still messy and needs some critical remarks in details. Considering this dialogue, I will put forward some points concerning the contents of the dialogue.

Keywords: *theism, atheism, deism, Islam, Anthony Flew*

This report also caused various challenges among atheists. While some of them thought of it as a "Fatal Shock" to atheism, others considered it to be insignificant and in relation to Flew's old age.¹ Of course, I find nothing wrong with him in coming to believe theism or the existence of God in old age! It seems that psychological findings that people are more inclined to believe theism in old age than in other ages not only does not reduce the significance of theism, but also persuades a human being to deliberate further, especially if the aged person is a philosopher such as Flew who has produced the strongest arguments against theism, unless it is claimed that, Flew loses his senses because of old age and may hallucinate. But as it is evident in

Flew's interview with Gary Habermas, and in the book he is compiling, that this is a false claim. In a relatively detailed and all-embracing interview with Gary Habermas, Flew has explained why he has given up atheism and has come to believe in the existence of God. In the dialogue, he raised many points concerning the belief in God, revelation, divine religions, and afterlife, that are at once useful and worth deliberating and criticizing but his new approach is still messy and needs some critical remarks in details:

1. In his interview, Flew has announced that he merely has come to believe in the existence of God, but he has avoided accepting any religion of revelatory system. According to Flew, God, Whom he has come to believe, is the Aristotelian God Who is Omniscient and Omnipotent and Who created the world, but He has not intervened in the world since then. Flew calls his position deism [or natural theism]. According to the deists, intellect can prove the existence of God on the basis of some proofs, but there is no reason to think that God intervenes in the universe constantly, either by way of revelation or anything else. This sort of theism, as opposed to revelation, holds to a belief that God created the world and, from then onwards, exercises His will in two ways: ontologically and legislatively [= through revelation] or by way of *takwin* and *tashri'*, to use the Islamic terms.

Flew does not deny revelation absolutely; rather, in his interview, he points out clearly that he has found no decisive evidence to consider the Bible or the Qur'an to be revelatory, and he would accept divine revelation if such an evidence were produced. Flew's statement has certain epistemological basis. In his view, whatever science proves or supports is acceptable; otherwise, it is not. Accordingly, the only way to accept divine revelation is that what the Prophets have brought as evidence of divine revelation must be in a way or other supported by science, too. In other words, the arguments any Prophet has presented to show the truth of his claim, should be either scientific or supported by science.

Flew's epistemological basis leaves him subject to two objections:

The first objection concerns his basic premise. Flew's epistemological premise (principle) which is said to be general and unexceptionable should necessarily be true of itself. However, which one of the scientific reasons does establish that everything must be proved or supported by science? In other words, Flew's premise may be scientific or unscientific. If it is not scientific, why should one accept it? Which one of the scientific evidences and reasons refutes it as unscientific? And, if it is scientific, what evidence and reason can be offered to confirm it?

The second objection is raised as to the contradiction which has found its way into Flew's claim, which seems to stem from accepting the above-mentioned epistemological principle. On the one hand, Flew holds that he is open to accept divine revelation. On the other hand, he asserts that any evidence for revelation must be proved or supported by science. These two claims appear to be self-contradictory and inconsistent, because, by accepting the above epistemological principle, it does not make sense to accept the divine revelation. If others, through scientific methods, can offer such an evidence and a miracle like that of the divine Prophets, the phenomenon in question can no longer prove the truth of the Prophets' claim.

According to this analysis, ordinary human scientific discoveries fail to explain and clarify a miraculous event, and there is no positive way to prove or support it. So, Flew has only one option to accept the revelation: leaving out his own epistemological principle. This means that he can merely accept that there is no contradiction or inconsistency between science and revelation, which paves the ground for him to accept "divine revelation", by leaving out the claim of maximum scientific verification and confirmation. To sum up, if a Prophet has offered some evidence and argument to show the truth of his claim, his evidence or argument should not be in contradiction with science, but it is not necessary that science prove or support it.

Therefore, the epistemological approach that Flew adopts in accepting revelation is incomplete, and he can not accept revelation rationally in so far as he does not leave out this approach. On the other hand, no

scientific reason allows Flew to ask religious believers not to accept a religious claim necessarily if they find no scientific reason to prove the truth of that claim.

2. Another issue that Flew has raised in his dialogue with Gary Habermas is what it is called *the problem of evil*. In Flew's view, Deism is taken to have the advantage of not being in conflict with the problem of evil. As we know, the problem of evil is believed to be one of the most important human problems which has raised many philosophical debates and has always been subject to enormous challenges in theological discussions. Our purpose here is not to discuss all open and hidden aspects of evil², but we try to remind some points regarding the issues that Flew has raised in his dialogue.

Flew has presented two reasons in selecting Deism and refuting revelation:

1. *Not all evidences and reasons presented by religions for divine revelation are proved or supported by science.*

We discussed this claim and its epistemological basis in the previous paragraph.

2. *The existence of real evil in the universe suggests that, having created the world, God did not make an ontological and legislative intervention in the universe.*

Flew's second argument can be stated as follows:

- a) Evil exists in the universe and is undeniable.
- b) The existence of evil in the universe is inconsistent with the divine goodwill

Conclusion: God's will cannot operate in the universe.

In Flew's eye, the first premise of the argument needs not to be established. All of us have experienced some various forms of evil in our ordinary lives. In spite of the fact that there have been numerous debates over the reality and nature of evil, most human beings have reached an agreement about the cases and circumstances which are considered to be evil. Deaths caused by natural hazards such as flood,

earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and some serious diseases like cancer, AIDS and the like are regarded as cases of natural evil. These evils, of course, can be distinguished from the ones which are called moral evils inhering in the wicked actions of moral agents who are free in acting as they do.

The second premise of the argument can be clarified by adding this point that God of religions is Omniscient, Omnipotent, and perfectly Good Being. God, Who is perfectly Good, does not permit evil, and the Omnipotent God, is able to prevent evil. In Flew's eye, the result of the above argumentation is to deny God's intervention in the universe. In fact, Flew suggests that in order to avoid facing the problem of evil by accepting God's intervention in the universe, we can deny God's intervention in the universe altogether. In this case, the so-called problem of evil will not remain. Flew makes clear that "the problem of evil is a problem only for Christians. For Moslems, everything which human beings perceive as evil just as much as everything we perceive as good, has to be accepted obediently as produced by the will of Allah".

There are some considerations about the argument in question as well as Flew's claim about religions, including Islam, which are worth mentioning:

1. Flew has accepted the existence of God. So, for him, the existence of evil in the universe is not meant to be inconsistent with the existence of God. Flew has stated that he accepted the Aristotelian concept of God, a Being who is Omniscient and Omnipotent, but he has failed to explain how the existence of undeniable or real evil in the universe is consistent with the existence of God? If Aristotelian God is Omniscient and Omnipotent, why do the natural evils exist in the universe?

Flew may answer that my Omniscient and Omnipotent God does not intervene in the universe, so there is no room for Him to prevent evil. Aristotelian God has merely created the universe, and to do so, knowledge and power is enough. God, the Creator, is not required to

do anything in the universe, so this leaves us no room to speak about its evil and good.

Flew's answer leads us to something which is the key to the problem. Can one have an exact and reasonable conception of God Who, in spite of being Potent, Wise and Creator, does not intervene in the universe? Some commentators of Aristotle's works believe that Aristotelian God is merely "the First Cause" and Aristotle has no idea about creation or divine providence or dispensation. But others have interpreted Aristotle's notion of God in such a way that it is not inconsistent with providence and dispensation.³ Flew's comment on Aristotle's notion is a borderline between these two comments. Flew has stated that "... if there was the First Cause, has very clearly produced everything that is going on. I suppose that does imply creation "in the beginning". Therefore, in Flew's view, Aristotelian God is also a Creator, but, at the same time, He must not interfere in the universe.

Now, we ask Flew, what is meant by saying that the Aristotelian God must not intervene in the universe?

God's intervention in the universe can be conceived in two ways:

- a) Intervention in the creation of the universe (ontological intervention).
- b) Intervention by way of determining the human fate, behavior and actions (legislative interference).

Flew would not imply (a), because it involves contradiction.

How is it possible that God Who has created the universe has no intervention in its creation and formation? Flew may answer that by "creation" he meant creation "in the beginning"; this means that the universe is God's creature in its temporal origination (contingency) and existence, but He has no intervention even of ontological kind as far as its continuance is concerned. The answer lies in the fact that how we can interpret God's agency in relation to the universe. God is Complete Agent and Complete Cause.

According to the law of causation, effect is dependent on its complete cause both in temporal origination and continuance. This analysis shows that acceptance of God as a Creator will imply ontological intervention in the universe. Obviously, this analysis is not inconsistent with the acceptance of intermediate causes and a chain of material causes as subsidiary factors.

What we have already said suggests that Flew must accept God's ontological intervention in the universe. If so, he is faced with the problem of evil – ,at least, natural evils – too.

From Flew's dialogue with Gary Habermas we infer that he has meant the second kind of intervention – legislative intervention. In this case, we should see what reason he offers to deny legislative interference in the universe. It seems that his argument proceeds as the following:

- a) God's legislative intervention in the universe – as has been stated in divine religions -- involves compulsion and predestination.
- b) Compulsion and predestination is false.

Conclusion: God's legislative intervention in the universe is false.

Flew does not produce any intellectual reason to prove the premise (a), but he only brings some evidence from religions to show that God's legislative intervention in the universe, as has been stated in religions, involves compulsion. Relying upon the two verses of the Qur'an (The Cow: 6 and 7), he makes a general judgment that Moslems believe that everything which human beings perceive as good or evil has to be accepted (on faith) as produced by the will of Allah. In Flew's view, the major premise of the argument is decisive. In this case, the conclusion of the argument will be necessarily true. In the case of major premise of the argument we are in complete agreement with Flew, but we find his minor premise of the argument to be incomplete and subject to falsification in some respects:

First, our objection to (a) is not philosophical and intellectual, because Flew has offered no intellectual reason to prove the first premise of the argument; instead, he has resorted to the sacred scriptures of religions to show that God's legislative intervention, as evidenced by the Qur'an and other divine scriptures, involves predestination and compulsion. So, the logic of discussion necessitates that we take his claim into consideration and see whether what he relies on is true or not.

Second, what he has generally attributed to divine religions cannot be true of both Islam and Christianity. Some Qur'anic verses, such as the two which Flew has brought as evidence and certain other verses also apparently imply compulsion. However, there are also many verses in the holy Qur'an which are evidence of human non-compulsory or free actions, including such verses as "Verily have we shown him the (Right) way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful (Every man: 3); "so, let whosoever will believe, and let whosoever will disbelieve." (The Cave: 29); and "Indeed, Allah changes not what is in a people, until they change what is in themselves (Thunder: 11). Third, there are many thinkers like Flew, who, because of lack of exact and complete acquaintance with views and opinions of different Islamic sects (denominations), have been subject to false and unreasonable generalization.

To believe in "Divine decree and destiny" is among undisputed facts (*musallamāt*) of Islam, but Flew, like many others, has failed to distinguish between belief in divine compulsion and belief in Divine decree and destiny. It goes without saying that conflicts between the two groups of Moslems in the early years of Islam regarding the interpretation of the Qur'an's verses may exacerbate this kind of understanding. Some of *Mu'tazilite* commentators (exegetes) and theologians (*mutakallemun*) believe that the determining action [*taqdir*] of God requires compulsion. Another denomination, *Ash'arites*, held to a view that human free will and the attribution of determining action to the human beings would imply the denial of "Divine decree and destiny." However, this does not settle the problem, because if the overall meaning (implication) of the verses

indicating “compulsion” and those suggesting “free will” were contradictory and/or inconsistent, that is, as a complete mutual exclusion, the contents of one verse might imply the denial of the contents of the other, Flew's understanding would be correct and we necessarily had to accept the implication of one set of verses and give esoteric interpretations of the implication of the other set, but if we can explain the contents of each set so that there would be no need to give the esoteric interpretation(*ta'wil*) of one set and leave out the other, we have succeeded to introduce a third belief which requires no absolute compulsory and absolute authority. The third belief is the very belief that Shi'ah scholars interpret it as "a middle path between two extremes".

We are not in a position to enter into details of the third belief here, but our discussion will suffice to suggest that Flew's general judgment that doctrines of religions imply compulsion is a false judgment. To recapitulate briefly, the main points of the previous paragraph as follows:

First, one can not get rid of the problem of evil theologically and philosophically even by denying revelation. Deists (natural theists), like theists (monotheists) must provide some explanation for the problem of evil.

Second, God's legislative intervention in the universe, as it has been stated in some religions, especially in Islam, implies no belief in compulsion.

3. In his dialogue, Flew makes a comparison between the Qur'an and the Bible (the New Testament) and pronounce judgments about both the Qur'an and the Prophet of Islam.

The present writer believes that Flew's hasty judgments spring from his very little acquaintance with Islam and the Qur'an. However, we may provide the reader with some responses to some of his claims. Flew has offered four claims about the Qur'an:

a) *The Qur'an has no literary attraction.*

Having Compared the Qur'an and the Bible, Flew has come to the conclusion that the Bible is an attractive book even for those who don't believe it, and everybody can read it like any other literary books and enjoy it and that this is not true of the Qur'an.

Flew will be right if he means to read [of course, the English *translation*] of the Qur'an as a literary book, because the Qur'an is not believed to be a literary book in the exact sense. Nor is it a book of physics, chemistry, history, etc. In this sense, the Bible is not a literary book, too. The Qur'an is a Divine book revealed to the Prophet to guide mankind, the sacred book which makes use of all epistemological means and devices in order to achieve this goal.

But if he intends to say that the Qur'an is not attractive in terms of its language and literary features, it should be said that the Prophet of Islam is the only Prophet that his miracle is a miracle of speech and expression. One, and perhaps the most important, aspect of the Qur'an is its eloquence and fluency of the expressions. The Qur'an itself challenges disbelievers when it asked them to bring "[even] a *chapter* like it" which, according to numerous commentators of the Qur'an, indicates that the Qur'an is unique in many respects, especially in its eloquence and fluency (The Cow: 23). Historical evidence shows the eloquence and rhetoric expressions in the Qur'an can not be found even in Arabic literary works as well as in the speeches of Arab writers and poets before and after the Qur'an was communicated to the Prophet of Islam.

This is the secret of eternity of the Qur'an as a miracle. The Qur'an has been revealed to the Prophet among the most eloquent Arab writers and speakers and has presented serious challenges to them. The Qur'anic literary and rhetorical attractions in terms of eloquence, fluency of expressions, word order and sentence patterns are such that, to quote from an eminent scholar working on the Qur'an, "if a Qur'anic term is misplaced, then the whole Arabic language is searched for, no other term will be found to replace it."⁵

Great Arab men of letter and philology have spoken a lot concerning the Qur'an's rhetorical attractions and for that reason they have found it to be a miracle; this means that such a sublime rhetorical is only within God's power to produce. The eloquence and fluency of the Qur'an is so much that it has been a source of Arabic literature and grammatical (syntactical) rules throughout the history.⁶

It must be remembered that Flew has compared the Qur'an's *English version* to the New Testament. Naturally, one can not preserve all literary and linguistic features of an original text when it is translated from a language to another. In this case, a comparison of such kind is wrong and unrealistic. To make a fair comparison, Flew must take the trouble to learn Arabic well.

b) *“There is no particular order or development in the Qur'an's subject mater. All the chapters (the Suras) are arranged in order of their length.... it is difficult to suggest any superior principle of organization.”*

This objection can be answered by saying that materials (contents) of a book are formulated, arranged and developed in line with its purpose or objective which is followed. If the Qur'an had been arranged and organized in the manner that Flew has in mind, it would not have had the result as it has now with its present order and arrangement.⁷ For the Qur'an is widely believed to be the inspiration and guide for human beings, leading them towards happiness in this world and the world to come. By reading one Chapter of the Qur'an and pondering over its verses one can obtain an enormous amount of information about the Origin (*mabda'*) and the Resturn (*ma'ād*), past events, and moral and social issues -- proportionate to the goal that he Qur'an follows. If the Qur'an had been written as a scientific book according to particular principles and rules, undoubtedly, it would be of no avail. Therefore, the present order and arrangement of the Qur'an is considered by most scholars to be one of its virtues and advantages which has given it a particular elegance and freshness.

Apart from ample evidence presented by the Muslim scholars for the rhetoric features of the Qur'an and its present preferred arrangement and organization, some Western authors such as Arthur j. Arberry, who is believed to have a thorough knowledge of the Arabic language, and of Islam, and is well qualified to produce a good rendering of the Qur'an, and from whose translation of the Qur'an some verses have been taken as evidence for particular issues by Flew, writes in his introduction to the Qur'an:

In making the present attempt to improve on the performance of my predecessors, and to produce something which might be accepted as echoing however faintly *the sublime rhetoric of the Arabic Koran*, I have been at pains to study *the intricate and richly varied rhythms* which – apart from *the message* itself – constitute *the Koran's undeniable claim to rank amongst the great literary masterpiece of mankind*

This very characteristic feature – ‘that inimitable symphony,’ as the believing Pick- thal described his Holy Book, ‘*the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy*’ – has almost totally ignored by previous translators; *it is therefore not surprising that what they have wrought sounds dull and flat indeed in comparison with the splendidly decorated original. For the Koran is neither prose nor poetry, but a unique fusion of both* [Italics are mine.]⁸

The passage above, especially the sentences and phrases I have selected and written in italics, show that the Holy Qur'an is viewed as a unique divine scripture whose numerous characteristic features, both in form and content, cannot be denied.

C) *...to read the Qur'an is a penance rather than a pleasure.*

This objection bears witness to Flew's insufficient information about Islam and the Qur'an. The Qur'an is a unique Divine scripture on which, both itself and its bearer, the Prophet, have made some statements about the manner of its reading and reciting. For this reason, the Qur'an is widely believed to be a miracle of speech and expression and unique and rare in its kind. Although one can easily realize that Flew's remarks about

the Qur'an are false, it is worth mentioning some points about the traditional manner of reciting the Qur'an.

First, one of the manners of reciting the Qur'an is what it is called "reading and reciting with great contemplation" which has been emphasized both in the Prophet's words as well as his acts.⁹ Essentially, such goals as liberality (openness), luminosity, confidence, tranquility and the like can only be achieved by reciting the Qur'an with great contemplation. We read in the Qur'an: "We have sent down a book to you that is blessed, so prudent men may ponder over its verses and thereby be reminded." (Sād: 29).

The Qur'an frequently asks believers to listen to the contents of the Qur'an and to deliberate and reflect upon it in order to recognize the truth. If they do so, they will certainly be impressed, because the truth will be revealed to them. "And when they listen to what has been sent down to the Messenger, you will see their eyes well up with tears because of the truth they recognize. They say: "our Lord, we believe, so enroll us among witnesses".(The Table:83) . Neither believers nor unbelievers have been asked to read the Qur'an for fear of penance or punishment; rather, unbelievers should read the Qur'an to recognize the truth and believers should read it to increase their faith: "Believers are merely those whose hearts feel wary whenever God is mentioned and whose faith increases when His verses are recited to them. On their Lord do they rely. (Booty: 2).

Second, in Islamic view, any act of worship shall bring human beings closer to God, and thereby God may reward them for doing so out of his grace and generosity, but ,of course, under two conditions: first, the act or deed should be worthy of being approached and second, the doer should have the intention of complying God's command. If these two conditions are fulfilled in performing an act, it will be considered an act of worship, and human beings will achieve the station of "proximity to God." Reading the Qur'an is not an exception to the rule. It is clear that this station can not be achieved merely by reading the Qur'an without contemplation or meditation. This is totally different from what Flew calls "reading the Qur'an for

penance". Third, another point which is only true of reading the Qur'an and no other books can have such a characteristic feature is the pleasure which comes to us as a result of its particular rhythms, patterns and varying musical sequence of the verses of the Qur'an and fascinates any listener, as the believing Pickthall described his [translation of] the Holy Book, 'the very sound of which move men to tears and ecstasy.' Many people have come to believe in God through listening to the verses of the Qur'an recited by mellifluous reciters.

a) *There are references to Hell on at least 255 of the 665 pages of the English version of the Qur'an.*

In this objection, Flew mentions that Qur'an, when compared with the New Testament, has made far more references to and emphasized on the doctrine of Hell, fate and predestination, so that there are quite often pages with two such references to Hell.

Several important points can be made concerning Flew's assertion:

1) There are 77 references to "Hell" in the Qur'an. However, there are several other references to Hell under other names (about 21 names).¹⁰ If the number of references to a subject serves as a measure of judgment about what constitutes the contents of a book, it should be said that the number of references to Heaven (Paradise), divine blessings and mercy is far greater than the references to Hell. References to Heaven in the Qur'an under various names amount to about 21 names¹¹, and there is no doubt one of the Qur'an's instructions is to make believers and unbelievers be hopeful for divine mercy, forgiveness and eternal blessings in Heaven, and disappointment and hopelessness are considered to be blameworthy (reproachable).

2) Although Flew has pointed out that every Sura is prefaced by the words "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate", and it would appear to be of very substantial theological significance; however, it is not known why he has left this significant matter in neglect easily. Most of the commentators of the Qur'an believe that "In the Name of God ..." is one verse and part of every Sura (except

Sura Repentance or Dispensation). That "every Sura is prefaced by "In the Name of God" suggests this very significant fact that the contents of the Qur'an and its inspiring doctrines originate in the divine grace. God is All-Merciful, because His general mercy encompasses all human beings, whether believers or unbelievers; "but my Mercy encompasses all things" (Height or Al-A'rāf: 256). God is Compassionate. This means that His Especial Compassion only encompasses believers. With so much emphasis the Qur'an has placed on divine mercy, how can one infer that the doctrine of Hell is much more stronger in the Qur'an than that of Heaven?

3) The doctrine of Hell and Heaven in the Qur'an are to be considered in two ways. First, from the psychological perspective and what appears as the influence of warning, annunciation, punishment and persuasion on human acts and conducts. In this respect, there is, at least, a kind of balance, not to say persuasion and annunciation of Heaven and divine blessings in the Qur'an are much greater. Second, from the theological perspective, the doctrine of Hell and Heaven is related to such doctrines as fate and predestination, divine justice, divine reward in proportion to acts, eternal torment and the problem of good and evil. It seems that Flew's view on this subject is directed toward this aspect (theological aspect). As we explained earlier, Flew held to the view that religious doctrines concerning Hell and Heaven would imply Divine compulsion, because, according to the divine religions, human beings are predestined to be inmates of the Fire or inhabitants of the Garden. We offered the response to this objection earlier.

We stated answer to this objection previously.

In his dialogue, Flew also expresses his opinion about the Prophet of Islam. In this regard, he has mentioned two points:

- a) "... the Prophet, though gifted in the arts of persuasion and clearly a considerable military leader, was both doubtfully and certainly ill-informed about the contents of the Old Testament and about several matters of which God, if not the least informed of the Prophet's contemporaries, must have been cognizant."

b) His illiteracy has produced a book with no order and arrangement. Such a book, along with the Prophet's illiteracy "raises the possibility of what his [Flew's] philosophical contemporaries in the heyday of Gilbert Ryle would have described as a knock-down falsification of Islam."

There is little to be said as to the first objection. The Prophet of Islam is believed to have been illiterate and not informed of the contents of the previous divine scriptures. According to various historical documents, it is known that Prophet of Islam did not know how to read and write at least before his Mission. The Messenger of God lived at a time when there were but 17 literate people in Mecca¹². In such circumstances, if the Prophet was literate, it would customarily be impossible to conceal it.

In different places in the Qur'an, this fact has been explicitly expressed and its philosophy has been explained: "And you had not been reciting any scripture previously, nor did you copy it down with your right hand; *otherwise quibblers would suspect it*. (The Spider: 48); "Those who follow the Messenger, the Unlettered Prophet, whom they will find written down for them in the Torah and the Gospel...Believe in God and His Messenger, the Unlettered Prophet who himself believes in God[Alone] and His Words: Follow him so you may be guided." (The Height: 137, 158).

Therefore, it is evident that before his Mission, the Messenger had been unlettered. What is surprising is the second charge (false claim) which Flew has loaded onto his first claim. In Flew's opinion, because the Prophet of Islam was illiterate, his religion and the Qur'an could have been subject to falsification.

We have to mention some points in response to the above objection:

a) Distortion or falsification of the Qur'an could be viewed from two aspects. If it is viewed from *within*, the falsification of the Qur'an would imply that those who accept the Qur'an as the Prophet's miracle and have come to believe it, must provide an answer to the question whether what they possess today as

the Qur'an is exactly what has been revealed to the Prophet or it has been falsified. To answer this question, we can bring as certain historical evidence some valid traditions and Qur'anic verses. From this respect, many Muslim theologians and Qur'anic exegetes have raised many issues but we would not intend to discuss them all here.

If it is viewed from *without*, then the argumentation that the Qur'an is 'unfalsifiable' can take a different form. This view of the Qur'an is significant in that the Qur'an can be regarded as the miracle of the Prophet as well as an evidence of his truth-claim only when it is unfalsifiable.

b) Falsification is of various forms.¹³ All forms of falsification are not detrimental to the validity and authenticity of the Qur'an, but some of the alleged six forms of falsification are detrimental to its validity and authenticity. If falsification means that there is some human element added to the Qur'an, this will necessarily be false because all Muslim scholars studying the Qur'an are unanimous that no external human element (falsification by addition) can be found in the Qur'an¹⁴, but if it means falsification by reduction, it will be open to varying disputes. Most of the Moslem scholars believe that the extant Qur'an is exactly what has been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁵

c) In order to make every fair person be assured of the Qur'anic doctrine of the infallible word of God, it is sufficient to draw the attention to some points:

First, the enormous effort by the Muslim to preserve the Qur'an intact and original clears up any doubts about its authenticity. There are numerous unquestionable historical evidences that both the Prophet and faithful Moslems have made big effort to preserve the Qur'an, because the Qur'an means everything to Moslems. This effort is so big that we can say that the Qur'an is widely transmitted or *mutawātir*, to use the Islamic term. The eminent Shi'ah scholar Tabarsi, has quoted from Seyyed Morteza:

To be sure of the validity of the Qur'an as a faithful and unalterable [divine] source is to be sure of the world's big cities and great historic events and famous books by popular writers, and great long poems and songs by well-known poets. However, the attempts and motives to preserve the Qur'an have been far greater than this, for the Qur'an is widely believed to have been the miracle of the Prophet and the origin of Shari'ah (Divine Law).¹⁶

Second, if falsification means that there is some human element added to the Qur'an (falsification by addition), it will be inconsistent with the idea of the miraculous nature of the Qur'an. Since, according to historic evidences and Arab linguists and epilogists, human beings are incapable of producing one verse like that of the Qur'an, possibility of the existence of some human element in the Qur'an is strongly refuted.¹⁷ When it is proved that what exists in the Qur'an is nothing but God's word, falsification by reduction is refuted, too, because God Himself has guaranteed in the Qur'an that He will safeguard the Qur'an: " We Ourselves have sent down the Reminder just as We are safeguarding it (Stoneland: 9).

d) We will now return to Flew's statement. His argument for the falsification of the Qur'an (the possibility of being falsified by some human element) was that the Prophet of Islam was unlettered.

Some points have to be made here:

First, it is not known what relationship exists between being unlettered and possibility of the falsification of the Qur'an? If a bearer of a book is lettered, will there be no falsification in his words? On the contrary, as the Qur'an itself has reminded (The Spider:48) : if the Messenger of Islam had read any book and had copied it down, those who sought to refute his miracle would suspect it and consider it to be the Messenger's own words or be derived from others.

Second, I want to emphasize the point that the most important aspect of the Qur'an as a miracle is that an *unlettered person* has brought a book from God which no one has ever brought a chapter like that to

have such eloquence and fluency and sublime content. How can such a book be subject to falsification?

4. At the end of his dialogue, Flew has attributed some other false assumptions to Islam. He claims, " I would never regard Islam with anything but horror and fear because it is fundamentally committed to conquering the world for Islam."

Flew arises the issue of Palestine as an evidence for his claim and states " ... that Moslem Arab armies moved in to destroy Israel at birth , and why the struggle for the return of the still surviving refugees and their numerous descendants continue to this day."

The present writer finds it necessary to remind some points concerning this claim:

First, Flew fails to show which of the doctrines of Islam implies that Moslems should conquer the world for themselves. No Islamic doctrine has such an implication. What is considered as a certain Islamic fact and is expressed in many Qur'anic verses is that Islam is a universal and everlasting religion. "And we have not sent you [Muhammad] except as a newsbearer and warner to every single human being even though most men do not realize it". (Sheba: 28); "Blessed is the One Who has sent down the Standard to His servant so he may [act as] a Warner for [everyone in] the Universe." – (The Standard : 1); "He is the One Who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the true religion so He may cause it prevail over all [other]religion, no matter how associators may hate it." (Repentance: 33). These verse and many others denote that Islam is not restricted to a particular tribe or family or geographical boundaries. Nor is it limited to a particular time or age. This point that Islam is a universal and everlasting religion, has no relationship with the idea of 'conquering the world for Moslems.'

Second, according to the Qur'anic verses, inviting to Islam [and its expansion] should be accomplished by dialogue and good admonition. By sending the Messenger of mercy and compassion and revealing the Qur'an which is a book of guidance, God has shown human beings the

Path to salvation and deliverance, and they can take the right path of their own freewill: "No compulsion is there in [acceptance of] religion." "Rectitude has become clear from error (The Cow: 256)

It is likely that Flew's words refer to some verses which persuade Moslems to fight associators and hypocrites. It is true that in Islam, it is incumbent upon every Muslim to fight for God's sake, but this does not mean to conquer the world for Muslims. Islam invites Muslim people to fight against any form of cruelty and subversion. Having conquered any territory, Muslims had, and still have, no right to make people accept Islam by force, but every tribe, ethnic group and religious denomination can preserve their own religion, ideology and beliefs under the rule of the Islamic government. If Flew's words refer to the Muslim's actions and their conquests, it should be noted that first, Flew does not show any evidence of fighting broken out by Muslims to conquer the world for themselves; second, Muslims' historical actions is not at all a criterion for making a judgment about Islamic doctrines, for it is not reasonable to judge on someone's beliefs merely in terms of one's actions; third, drawing upon their understanding of the holy war (*jihād*), most Muslim scholars believe that a holy war can be carried out just in defense of their country only at the time of occultation (when the Prophet or his successors, Infallible Imams, are absent), but to initiate a holy war and invite disbelievers to Islam is restricted to the time when the Infallible Imams are present.

Third, Flew brings the issue of Palestine as an evidence for his false claim. Of course, that false claim is worthy of being proved by such a flimsy evidence.

Indeed, how can one bring Palestinians' rightful defense of their homeland as an evidence of Palestinians' aggression and violence and attribute horror and fear to Islam? On the basis of which ideology and doctrine and which known international rights and laws can we say that the fighting of an oppressed refugee in order to return to his homeland is an evidence of conquering the world for himself? Is Palestinian refugees' defense of their homeland and the worldwide Islamic support an evidence of the Muslim conquest and horror and

fear, or the Zionists' cruelty, brutality, massacre, aerial bombardment of defenseless civilians and so many terroristic barbaric actions, which have been condemned worldwide even by the truth-seeking people of the Western countries are clear and undeniable unprecedented instances of extreme horror and fear? Having resorted to force, violence and massacre, Zionists made Palestinians homeless and formed the Israeli government based on a radical understanding of Judaism with the help of some colonialist powers such as England, on which many books, articles have been written, and speeches delivered, by honest writers and public speakers throughout the West. Is such an illegitimate political movement an evidence of horror and fear, or Islam, which merely persuade Muslims to fight a holy war against injustice and oppression? However, Flew's understanding of the issue of Palestine suggests that how only a few Zionists managed to misrepresent the historical realities to the West so that the homeless nation's rightful defense of their own country is considered even by thinkers like Flew as an evidence of cruelty and the cause of horror and fear?

5. In conclusion, I would like to make my last point. Flew's remarks concerning religious doctrines, especially the Qur'an and Islam, stimulate feelings of regret and grief simultaneously. On the one hand, it seems to be very astonishing to see how a great well-known philosopher such as Flew, who appears to be least informed of the Qur'an and Islamic doctrines, dares to make such general dogmatic judgments so explicitly and decisively! On the other hand, as a Muslim, especially a Shi'ah Muslim, we can not hide our great regret and sorrow that why there are not sufficient scientific and scholarly books in different languages – especially in English – available for scholars like Flew. To the present writer, Flew's incomplete and insufficient knowledge concerning Islam is partly due to his lack of close acquaintance and access to the original Islamic sources.

However, it is fortunate that Flew has come to believe in the existence of God and there are many attractive and instructive points in his dialogue with Habermas, though some of his views and opinions on different subjects are open to serious criticisms and objections.

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