

# Antony Flew: Philosopher of Atheism

by [Jillian Becker](#) (January 2021)



*The God of Confectioners*, Otto Dix, 1922

**Antony Flew, the philosopher, atheist,** and defender of freedom, died on April 8, 2010, at his home in Reading, England. He was 87 years old. I knew him, to my pride and delight, for many years. We would meet a few times a year (we both served on the Council of the Freedom Association, as I still do), and wrote to each other frequently about books, events, issues, campaigns, tactics. On politics and religion we saw eye to eye. We were both atheist conservatives. He was a classical scholar, widely and deeply erudite. And he had the humility of true greatness. When I asked him to write the introduction to a new edition of a book I was having republished, on and against Karl Marx (*The Red Prussian* by Leopold Schwarzschild), he told me that he was not the best person for the task, and gave me a short list of experts who, he insisted, knew more than he did and whose names would better grace the book. Only when they'd all declared themselves unable or unwilling, Antony said he would "do his best" to write a good introduction—and a very good introduction it is.

Obituaries on both sides of the Atlantic say that Antony Flew was the world's most famous atheist—and that he suddenly changed his mind and declared that God exists after all. It is true that he said it. *But he never said it when he was in his right mind.*

The reasoning by which he had arrived at his certainty that God does *not* exist was never cancelled or reversed by the sloppy arguments of his senility.

Of his many books, the one that matters most for his reputation as an atheist is his brilliantly argued *God & Philosophy*. It was first published in 1966. Later editions appeared at intervals. The last appeared in 2005, and to judge by the new introduction he wrote for it, he was as sure of his atheism then as he had been in 1966.

But in 2007 a new book appeared under his name titled

*There is a God*. The subtitle crows: *How the world's most notorious [sic] atheist changed his mind*. The authorship is ascribed to Antony Flew "with Roy Abraham Varghese." But no one who has read *God & Philosophy* with attention could possibly believe that *There is a God* was a product of the same intelligence. Either the powers of Antony Flew had faded away, or some other mind had engendered this work. In fact, both those things had happened. It is a certainty that he did not write it. He could not even remember—or had never known—what was in it. The actual writers had wickedly taken advantage of his failing memory and a general weakening of his mental faculties—as also of his indestructible humility and intellectual integrity.

*There is a God* is distinctly written for an American readership. It refers, for instance, to the Red Sox. I'd have bet a mint that my friend Tony Flew had no idea who the Red Sox were. Chinese schoolboys, he may have supposed.

According to Dr Richard Carrier, a prolific atheist writer and critic of Christianity who tried to ascertain from Professor Flew himself whether he had really "found God," the authors of *There is a God* are Roy Abraham Varghese, an Indian Christian fanatic known for his work on "the interface between science and religion," and Pastor Bob Hostetler—two people with a big blunt axe to grind.

Carrier's detailed account of how Flew claimed he was, but then again was not, converted to belief in a creator-god when certain scientific facts were brought to his attention, makes the whole sorry story plain. Carrier records that the philosopher admitted to finding the subject "too hard" to deal with; that he failed to remember anything about *There is a God*