



DEIST

So that's what I am!

A collection of essays and other written works on Deism and Freethought
brought to you through the collaborative efforts of the
Contemporary Deism Project



DEIST

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So that's what I am!

A product of the Contemporary Deism Project



Chuck Clendenen, Editor & Contributing Author

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Cedar Park

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Front Matter

Overview

Today's world is far from perfect, but we have advanced greatly as social animals. There is much good in the world today. In many ways, however, mankind is still heavily influenced by old traditions, burdened by old masters and fettered by old chains. Where relics of the Dark Ages prevail, reason often does not.

The religions of our fathers no longer work for some of us. Everything in our lives must be reasonable and rational. Simply stated, what we believe must make sense. We are Freethinkers who place enormous value in reason, logic and science. Some turn to Secular Humanism, a celebration of humankind. Some reject religion outright and embrace Atheism. Others simply admit that they just do not know. So they turn away from all organized religion and simply identify themselves as Agnostics. But most humans seem to turn to some form of religion, and every culture has developed some form of religious belief system.

This book exists for a reason. Many people already believe what Deists believe. They just have not realized yet that what they believe has a name. And now you understand the title of the book.

But why are we religious at all? Some evolutionary psychologists believe that as we have evolved and adapted we have developed traits that are byproducts of some of our adaptations. Such byproducts are called spandrels. These spandrels are not adaptations that made us better survivors in the evolutionary sense, but they are strong human traits nonetheless. It is hard to imagine that the human sense of humor is adaptive, but it is a universal human trait. Nor has a human love for music given us any competitive advantage, but we all tend to like some sort of music. We love puzzles whether they make us better survivors or not. Evolutionary psychologists add to this list of traits the tendency to believe in the mysterious and the mystical. But what good is religion?

What good is humor? What good is music? For some, it appears that religion is not all that important. But when reason compelled us to turn away from our old religion, many of us were left with a feeling that something was missing. We needed to find some purpose or meaning beyond our individual selves. Our individual paths have led us to a belief system that is based on reason, not just on faith, and what we have found helps fill that need.

We can't know whether you, the reader, are engaged in the same search, but if you believe that reason should guide our actions, and if nature fills you with a sense of awe and majesty, Deism may be worth a look. And so we welcome you to our new Digital Age of Enlightenment, our Modern Age of Reason. Welcome to Contemporary Deism.

Preface

The Contemporary Deism Project came into being when a number of us who participate in the Positive Deism discussion board decided that contemporary Deism needed a modern publication to inform a broader public about Deism. David Pyle had conceived an idea he called the Modern Deism Project. We took David's idea and expanded on it a bit, and this is the product. You are holding it in your hand. There is something about the printed word that is superior to reading on a computer screen. To me, a book is better than any other medium for reading and savoring.

This book is also available in electronic form. For economy and versatility, the .pdf format is hard to beat. It can be emailed or downloaded from a Website, and it can have hyperlinks that will allow you to jump from place to place, e.g. to references elsewhere in the

document or to online references. This book has a .pdf version that takes advantage of such enhancements for those who prefer them.

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We must acknowledge all the contributors, without whom this book would not exist: John Earwood for his continuing thought-provoking commentary on contemporary Deism; Jason S. Aaron for his work with Panendeism; Harold Langford for his overview of Spiritual-Deism; Stephen Zinn for his background on efforts by contemporary Deists to become organized; and the Reverend Shaun K. Hunter, Lykos Temple for his contributions in the area of Pagan Deism. Special thanks to Robert Reno, Jr. for his *Paradox* and other contributions and support in the area of Deist ethics and history; Christian Deist John Lindell for his unwavering support, his essays on Christian Deism and the history of Deism and his contributions to Deism as a whole; Dave Gaddis for his fresh and powerful insights; John Casler for making sure there is poetry for all Deists to enjoy; Bob Johnson for his essay, especially after all the hard work he expended publishing *Deism: A Revolution in Religion, A Revolution in You* and to the Reverend Keith Wright of the United Deist Church for his support in this project and others.

I regret that, due to size limitations, I was unable to include Steve Dowell's modernization of *Age of Reason* and my own modernization of Ethan Allen's *Oracles of Reason*. These are already available through Deist Alliance Websites.

Thanks also to the Deist Alliance. At least four members or former members contributed to this volume. The support of other members, even members who have not read a line of this work, has been completely amazing.

And there are so many more people who have contributed so much for so long: David Pyle, Joe McCormick, Jay Boswell and Steve Dowell for providing much inspiration, Peter Hilbig from New South Wales, Jarley Frieb from Rio de Janeiro, my wife for her editing help, the many friends and acquaintances from countless discussion forums who helped hone arguments and sort out so many ideas and concepts. If this book has value for you, it is due to all these people. The flaws are mine.

Editor's Foreword

"Seek out that particular mental attribute which makes you feel most deeply and vitally alive, along with which comes the inner voice which says, 'This is the real me,' and when you have found that attitude, follow it."

-- James Truslow Adams

Deists place high value on reason, nature and experience. Reason and experience tell us that things in nature adapt and evolve to survive in a changing world. Deism survives, but to do so it has had to adapt. This book is a celebration of Deism in the 21st century, which is not the Deism of the 18th century.

The Enlightenment brought a change in religious thought that flourished in certain circles, then faded. The digital age is a new period of enlightenment. The Deism that flourished during the 18th century is enjoying a resurgence. The words of Thomas Paine once stirred the common folk of the New World to throw off the chains of the British monarchy, but his views on religion were unpopular. He and other Deists, however, have inspired many of us to embrace the God of Nature and let reason rule our spiritual lives. But many of us have

ventured beyond Classical Deism and the Deism of Paine. Today's Deists are stretching and extending those original Deistic concepts in many new directions.

This book celebrates the Deism of a new era. Contemporary Deism includes both Neo-classical Deism and evolving forms. We are seeing Deists explore new ideas that lead to a broader definition of Deism for the modern reasoning mind.

It is very common to hear Deists say that they did not consciously "convert" to Deism from something else. They began to doubt their former beliefs and began thinking in ways that to them seemed more rational. They later discovered that what they had come to believe actually had a name, and the name for their new worldview was Deism. This book's intended audience includes anyone interested in rational and reasonable spirituality, whether you are a Deist, an Agnostic, an Atheist, a Humanist, a Bright, another type of Freethinker or simply curious.

This book is meant to expose people to today's Deism, but it is not intended to convert anyone. It describes today's Deism and provides a broad sampling of contemporary Deist thought through essays on a wide variety of subjects. What you do with these messages is entirely up to you.

What's Inside

Chapter 1 gives you an overview and definition of Deism. It includes essays by John Earwood and the editor. Chapter 2 gives you Deism's history, and Chapter 3 familiarizes you with contemporary forms of Deism. Chapter 4 discusses the different sub-categories of Deism. It begins with an essay by Robert Johnson, founder of the World Union of Deists. The chapter goes on to discuss Classical, Neo-classical and other categories of Deism, and it includes essays by the Reverend Keith Wright, John Lindell, Jason S. Aaron and Harold Langford.

Essays on Deist ethics and morality comprise Chapter 5. Chapter 6 discusses the successes and failures of attempts at organized religion by contemporary Deists. Chapter 7 covers evolving forms of contemporary Deism including a lengthy study of the Pagan Deism of the Rev. Shaun K. Hunter of Lykos Temple. Chapter 8 is devoted to a discussion of the relationship between Deism and other forms of modern Freethought.

Chapter 9 is entitled *Letter to an Atheist Author*. It is a Deist's response to the Sam Harris book *Letter to a Christian Nation*. Chapter 10 discusses the future of the contemporary Deist movement and the individuals and organizations who are dedicated to the idea of broadening the appeal of modern Deism. We conclude with an essay by Dave Gaddis.

Chapter 11 might be described as a form of guerrilla marketing. Something entitled *The Deist Bible* is obviously unorthodox and intended to grab your attention.

As a bonus, we are including the full text of Robert Reno Jr's book *The Paradox of Nothingness*. His is a unique discussion of creation and the Creator based on logic and reason. John Casler has graciously consented to the use of his poem *Arisen* as an afterward.

Each chapter begins with a quote of interest to Deists, an introduction by the editor and the body of the chapter or essays by one or more of our Deist authors (or both).

Probably every chapter in the book should repeat the point that no one Deist speaks for all Deists. Every essay, every word in this book, is someone's opinion. The reader is cautioned to not consider anyone, especially the editor, an undisputable authority on Deism. No such authority exists.

Chapter 1 – Deism Defined

"I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason and intellect has intended for us to forego their use." -- Galileo Galilei (1564 - 1642)

What is Deism? Let me duck that question for a moment and answer an easier question. Why am I a Deist? I am a Deist because I could no longer believe what I was raised to believe. I started examining my beliefs critically, and I realized that what I believed did not make sense. So I started looking for something that did make sense. It took many years. I was a busy person, and religion just was not all that important in my life at the time. I was in no particular hurry to decide on my beliefs. I examined many religions and philosophies over the years, sampling like a bee, looking for the best nectar. Then I read Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* and realized that I believed in something very much like Paine did.

Deism is a celebration of individualism. Any definition of Deism must necessarily be broad and inclusive. We have no dogma, no tenets. Our beliefs are not based on any sacred text that says, "thou shalt believe this." We have only general principles to define us, and we cannot all agree on every principle. We cannot even agree whether we are a religion. So when you see definitions in this book, please bear in mind that not every Deist agrees with every definition. If you like everything neatly classified and buttoned down, Deism may frustrate you.

Deists tend to believe that a force or entity greater than man created the universe, but no longer intervenes. Through the years Deists have used the terms Creator, Author, First Cause or God. The God of Nature, the Deist God, is a reasoning person's God. No two Deists agree on everything, but as far as I can tell in my research and experience, most Deists believe that, while God could communicate with man and intervene in our affairs, it is highly unlikely that God does. Most Deists see no evidence that God intervenes or intercedes in the affairs of man, and without direct evidence, Deists withhold assent. Most Deists I know, but not all, believe in a God who created the universe. We Deists base our beliefs not on scriptures, but on reason and on experience. Our beliefs must make sense to us or we reject them. Our beliefs reflect our understanding of the nature of the universe. The Deist, like the Theist, relies on faith, but the faith of the Deist is based on reason and evidence, not on claims that God has revealed the truth to some special persons. Unless God reveals the truth to us personally, we are not required to believe it.

Not everyone believes that Deism is a religion. Some believe that Deism is a broad category of belief, i.e. a reason-based belief in a non-interventionist God, just as Theism is belief in a God who *does* interact with mankind, and Atheism is the category of belief for those who conclude there is no God. I also hear people classify Deism as a philosophy, as a worldview. Such labels are helpful if they help us better understand, but they are hindrances if we get hung up on the classification system and forget why we are labeling things in the first place. I consider Deism a religion, and it provides a significant portion of my worldview, while my personal philosophy is based on ancient Greek philosophy, particularly Stoicism. And I certainly agree that Deism is a category of belief. Other Deists avoid calling Deism religion, while they may also combine Zen or Shinto as their philosophy or worldview. I leave these definitions and classifications for the reader to ponder.

Why do I think Deism is a religion? First, we must define just what religion is, and that is no easy task. The definition found at the Religious Tolerance website is broad and inclusive: "*Religion is any specific system of belief about deity, often involving rituals, a code of ethics, a philosophy of life, and a worldview.*" (Robinson) By this definition, religion is larger

than philosophy or worldview. Don Swenson defines religion in terms of the sacred (i.e. that which is entitled to reverence and respect): "*Religion is the individual and social experience of the sacred that is manifested in mythologies, ritual, ethos, and integrated into a collective or organization.*" (Robinson) This definition more closely resembles my own understanding of what religion is. Wikipedia tries to be a bit more specific: "*A religion is an organized approach to human spirituality which usually encompasses a set of narratives, symbols, beliefs and practices, often with a supernatural or transcendent quality, that give meaning to the practitioner's experiences of life through reference to a higher power or truth.*" (Religion. Wikipedia) William James called religion "*the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto.*" This definition really works for me and describes Deism well.

There is one other crucial element in defining religion that I have thought about and talked about for some time. I am taking an audio course in the Philosophy of Religion, and in his lectures Dr. James Hall tells us that there is an important distinction in the way religious people view the world. A secular view of the world revolves around simple cause and effect. Events simply happen for reasons that are entirely clear, or they happen randomly, for no particular reason. With a religious view of the world we allow for intention or purpose. Many things are the way they are because that is the way they were designed to happen in that way. Religious people allow for intention. There is some meaning or purpose to life. (Hall)

Just as I have arrived at my own understanding of Deism, I have reached my own conclusions about religion in general. I believe that a large part of religion is looking at life and its meaning, and when we describe the meaning of life it is natural to do so metaphorically. This fits in well with Swenson's definition above.

As we share our deepest thoughts, we tend to use allegory and metaphor. As we teach others, we often use anecdotes while myths, parables, fables and epics have been used to convey life's lessons to a broad audience since before recorded history. Stories paint pictures; fables and myths stay with us for a lifetime. Deeply spiritual feelings and experiences are difficult to express in literal terms. Sometimes allegory is the only way we can get our message across. All the world's religions use allegory to teach their followers. It is when we start treating the wonderful lessons and advice found in myth and allegory as fact and history that we start running into trouble. If we look beyond the literal, we find the deeper meaning and the true value in mankind's sacred texts. If we start beating one another over the head with them, insisting that only *our* sacred text is the real truth, we lose the spirit, intent and profound wisdom passed down from some of the most intelligent and spiritual people (at the time) in history. The beauty in the message can turn cruel and ugly. That ugliness is called fundamentalism.

So my own definition of religion has evolved: "Religion involves belief about a higher power and the sacred, through which people examine life. Those with a religious view commonly look at life and share its lessons through metaphor, since imagery is often the best way to convey the complex and emotional messages and experiences associated with religious faith and belief. For the religious, life is as it is intended to be. Life has meaning and purpose. Religion is a coping mechanism for life: its beginnings, its ending, its meaning and how to live it." It may only be true for me, but I believe Deism fits this definition.

Does God exist? I do not spend a lot of time on this subject. I am convinced that there is no iron-clad proof that God exists, yet I still believe that God is the source of our existence. I look around me, and I see order, design, and complexity, a universe operating according to natural and physical laws. Others do not see the degree of design and complexity that would indicate a creator. We look at the same evidence and reach different conclusions. The more science discovers, the less likely it seems to me that the miracle of the universe is due to mere chance. The analytical side of me says that all this could be random happenstance, but my

spiritual side finds that the universe makes more sense if some incomprehensible force set it into motion to function according to perfect laws that allow it all to work in a logical fashion. The universe is logical, and its laws are logical. If it is all just chance, why is it all so logical? For me, religion is not the answer, but it is a methodology for formulating my questions. I come from a Scottish background. I suppose it is appropriate that I arrive at a "Scottish verdict" of "not proven." This verdict leaves me as final judge of what I will believe. I have a deep-seated need for something sacred in my life. Natural religion and belief in a Deist God fill that need.

Many of us come to Deism through the rejection of our former religious beliefs. If we realize that sacred texts represent millennia of human experience and wisdom presented in a fashion that can easily be learned and retained, we can again have reverence for works that we may have rejected. When we understand that sacred texts were not meant to be taken literally, we can see a glimmer of truth behind the clergy's demands for faith and obedience. We can enjoy the wonderful mythology and can find the wisdom that is there, while ignoring the parts that are no longer relevant (if they ever were). Must we overlook a lot of cruelty and ugliness to see the beauty? Yes, life in ancient times was barbaric by modern standards. I am sure that our practices today will seem barbaric 2000 years from now. That does not mean that there is not truth, beauty and wisdom in today's civilization.

As we expand our understanding of life and transform ourselves into more accepting persons, we grow intellectually and spiritually. If we are open-minded, we can better integrate ever-broader notions of life and human nature into our worldviews. Literal minds are closed minds. Unquestioning acceptance marks the end of growth and development. An open mind, coupled with critical thinking and a positive attitude, can make us better persons. An open mind must also seek justice and truth, so when we see injustice, we must speak out. But let us use reason always and not blame all for the sins of some.

I will not waste any space here pointing out what is wrong with the holy texts of some of the world's most popular faiths. If someone's faith is strong enough to overcome the arguments of Paine, Allen, Ingersoll, Harris and Dawkins, nothing I could write here would be likely to persuade a person of faith to have a change of heart. That is not the goal of this book. I would rather spend the time sharing what other Deists and I think is good about Deism.

Albert Einstein said, "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is." When you believe that life and the laws that govern the entire universe are miraculous, but you don't believe that God intervenes and suspends these laws to perform feats of magic for certain chosen people, you might be a Deist.

Jay Boswell put together an excellent "you might be a Deist" list.

1. You believe in God but are not accepting of the authoritarian creeds of any particular religion.
2. You believe that God's word is the universe (nature), not human-written holy books.
3. You like to reason or speculate what God might be like rather than be taught about it.
4. You think that religious ideas should reconcile with and not contradict science.
5. You believe God can be best found outside rather than inside a church building.
6. You enjoy the freedom of seeking spirituality on your own.
7. You are morally guided by ethics and conscience rather than by scriptures.

8. You are an individual thinker whose religious beliefs are not formed from tradition or authority.
9. You like to call yourself rational or spiritual before you call yourself religious.
10. You believe that religion and government (church and state) should be separate. (Boswell)

Why does Deism matter? Some would probably tell you that Deism died out long ago, but the reality is different. More and more, people are turning away from organized religion and towards Deistic beliefs. According to the most recent *American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS 2008)*, "The challenge to Christianity in the U.S. does not come from other religions but rather from a rejection of all forms of organized religion." Of particular interest to the editor and the contributors to this book, "Based on their stated beliefs rather than their religious identification in 2008, 70% of Americans believe in a personal God, roughly 12% of Americans are atheist (no God) or agnostic (unknowable or unsure), and another 12% are deistic (a higher power but no personal God)." (Kosmin & Keysar) The study suggests this segment of the U.S. population is growing, not shrinking.

Deism has become a very important part of my life. When we discover something of true value, we want to share it so that others can enjoy the same feelings we have. These feelings include not being inclined to accept someone else forcing their beliefs on us, so it would be hypocritical to force our beliefs on others. The challenge for Deists is to spread the word so that the 12% of the population with Deistic worldviews can discover for themselves that many other people share their views. This book is an attempt to tell them what their belief is named.

Deists believe many different things. No one can state with certainty anything that *all* Deists believe. I believe that Deists are better defined by *how* we arrive at our beliefs than what we individually believe. In the following essay I discuss an idea I first heard from David Pyle. He suggested that it may be better to define Deists by the *method* by which they arrive at their beliefs rather than trying to define them by the *conclusions* they reach. I think this is a very valid way of defining Deism.

Essay – I Believe in Deism for a Reason

Read any good, objective definition of Deism, and it will tell you that Deism is the belief in God based on reason, nature and experience. That is an excellent definition. Now, what does that really mean?

If you are a Deist, that definition probably makes sense because that is how you feel, but when you try to explain this definition in detail to someone who is not a Deist, you may find the task to be a bit difficult. Even for someone who has been a Deist for a while, it is hard to use one simple definition to account for the wide variety of beliefs you find among people who call themselves Deists. And if you try to explain why Deists believe so many different things, you may begin to wonder yourself. *Why* do all these people consider themselves Deists in the first place? How do Deists live their lives any differently than people who believe something else? What does being a Deist mean, and why would you want to be one?

Deists are too often defined by what they reject, rather than by what they accept. That is one way to define Deism, but it is not the best way. Many come to Deism after rejecting their former beliefs. They start looking for something that can help them make some sense out of their lives, something to believe in to replace the belief system they turned away from. They start reading about and hearing about

Deism, and they see a good fit. They jump on the bandwagon. But after a while, criticizing other religions gets old. It is just not very constructive. And if the Deist community does not offer more than this, many of these people drift away from Deism. Just look at the number of people registered on discussion boards, and then look at how many are actually active. I believe that Deism must offer more if it is to thrive as a belief system.

Why do Deists believe so many different things? That is not so hard to explain. Deism has no tenets or dogma. There are no Deist clergy telling us how to behave or think. There are no sacred texts. There is no authority anywhere telling Deists what they must think. Deists are expected to figure it out for themselves. How could Deists *ever* think alike? Deists have early classical Deist authors to study, they have websites to visit, and they have discussion groups where they can read and exchange ideas about Deism, but they have no "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not". Deists reach their own conclusions.

So it is not so hard to figure out why Deists, subtly or dramatically, differ in what they believe. What is probably harder to understand is why people who believe so many different things still call themselves Deists.

Someone who has had a profound influence on me as a Deist is David Pyle. Some of the things he said have stuck with me for a long time. He felt that Deism is not only a religion; it is a religious methodology. As we have noted, Deist beliefs vary widely. We have no dogma that we are required to believe. So one common denominator among Deists is the *way* we arrive at what we believe. The *way* we come to believe defines us more than *what* we believe. We are reasoning seekers, and we tend to seek the truth in similar ways. According to David, we Deists tend to look at things in the following ways:

1. We never accept anything as truth if it does not make sense.
2. We have faith primarily in our abilities to reason.
3. We accept inspiration that we personally experience, but we view the inspiration (or revelation) of all others with skepticism.
4. We tend to believe mostly what we can defend in debate with fellow seekers.
5. We accept the possibility, actually the probability, that we may be wrong, and we are willing to modify our beliefs when we are wrong.
6. We search for wisdom everywhere, but we use that wisdom primarily to inspire our own thoughts.
7. To us, the most important ideas and thoughts are our own.
8. We strive for self-honesty. We cannot reason if we cannot be honest with ourselves.
9. We realize that not everyone can walk the same path we do, so we try to learn from the paths others take.
10. We try always to remember that we will never achieve perfection in our beliefs, and if we ever think we have, that is the surest sign that we have not.

You can believe just some of these things or all of these things and still be a Deist either way. When it comes right down to it, *how* you make sense out of things may be more important than the conclusion you reach. As you gather more evidence, your conclusions may change. Our approach to life's questions is based

on reason. That is why Deism is belief in God based on reason: reason, nature and experience.

The "nature" part of the definition of Deism is different for each of us. Some find spirituality in the wonder, beauty, awe and power of nature. Others believe natural laws extend beyond just the physical laws that modern science has discovered, and these natural laws also govern human behavior and morality. Some Deists emphasize human nature as the key element to understanding Deism. Each of us must choose what we believe to be reasonable in light of our worldviews.

We Deists believe that God exists without being able to *prove* that God exists. We must use faith to bridge that gap between proof and belief. As we have mentioned, this is a sensible faith, a faith based on reason, but it is faith, not proof. Unlike many Theists, Deists do not practice unconditional faith. Our faith is accompanied by doubt.

Deists accept doubt as a necessary part of our faith. We arrive at our beliefs through reason, but we have also seen people use reason and rationalization to justify all sorts of bad things, up to and including genocide. Humans are not perfect, and we don't have all the answers.

Deists must not forget to include experience as a factor in our belief in God. All of us have different experiences that have shaped our worldviews. We come to Deism through different experiences, and that gives us different perspectives. Deists arrive at different conclusions because we have different natures and experiences. We *couldn't* all end up believing the same thing. Thinking for ourselves is what makes us Deists, not conforming to someone else's definition of what a Deist must believe.

Deists don't have ceremonies or rituals or churches or organized meetings. We tend to be solitary practitioners of our religion. For a Deist, the simplest things can be spiritual and sacred: any natural phenomenon, such as a rainstorm or a sunny day, studying and learning, meditating or contemplating a work of art. Deists don't need icons or mantras, although they may choose to contemplate them if that is what suits their natures. The faithful of other religions can study a single sacred text for a lifetime. Deists are more likely to consume dozens of books per year on science, nature or any subject that helps liberate their minds.

I am a Deist for a reason. For me, Deism is a way of making sense out of life. Deism is my religion, part of my philosophy, and it makes up a significant portion of my worldview. I would not be complete without Deism in my life. I look at things through the lens of reason. If something does not make sense, I try to make sense out of it. If something is done without reason, I am probably not going to support it. I have become a better student of human nature. And I try to learn from not only my own experiences, but the experiences of others. I don't know if I am a better person, but I am trying, and the path I follow is clearer to me.

I am a student not only of Deism, but of Stoic philosophy. I do not find all of Stoicism reasonable or acceptable, which is probably to be expected. I am, after all, a Deist. But I do want to share one small point. Stoics believe that if you want to be happy, you must be virtuous, and if you are virtuous, happiness will be the natural result. But Stoicism has no arguments for those who are not interested in happiness. If you do not seek the happiness that is the product of a well-lived life, Stoicism has nothing to offer you. If belief in God through reason, nature and experience is not what you are interested in, then Deism is probably not for you. If you find Theism, Atheism, Agnosticism or something else is a better choice, then by

all means, choose the path that works best for you. A Deist would wish for you nothing else.

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When people find that what they believe is called Deism, they are changed by the experience. Deism itself also changes subtly with the addition of each new member. Deists bring with them their experiences and knowledge about a wide variety of other philosophies and religious beliefs, which add to the rich tapestry we call Deism. And while these new Deists may no longer hold to their former beliefs, they have worldviews that include many experiences that they share with us. Deists are former Atheists, Agnostics, Protestants, Catholics, Jews and Muslims. Deism is a religion in which *individuals*, not clergy, decide what to believe, so Deism reflects many complex views like a multi-faceted gem. That means there is broad diversity among the sub-categories of Deism, variety that we will later explore.

Deism is egalitarian. There is no one in a position of authority or power. No one can say definitively that one form of Deism is right, while another is wrong. You can agree or disagree, but you cannot validly pronounce judgment on someone else's decision about what Deism is, what it entails or what its features are. There will almost certainly be some views in this book with which you will not agree. That is Deism. You are not required to believe.

For example, it took me a long time to get my arms around Christian Deism. I considered it a contradiction in terms. After all, Deism was conceived as a rejection of Christianity; just as Protestantism was a rejection of Catholicism. When I chose to no longer accept the Bible as true, I rejected the whole thing, so for a long time I could not understand why a Deist would want to accept selected parts of the Bible as valid. After spending time, however, I understood that this form of Deism is just as valid to Christian Deists as any other Deist's Deism. Christian Deists don't believe in the Bible as literally true, but they find immense value in the words of Jesus. A Pagan Deist's Deism is just as valid to him as Neo-classical Deism is to the Reverend Keith Wright. On the basis of what authority can I declare that a pagan or heathen cannot be a Deist? There are too many points of view to count. There is no such thing as Orthodox Deism.

I believe that Deism is transformational. M. Scott Peck was a psychiatrist who wrote a series of interesting and popular books, the most famous of which is *The Road Less Traveled*. Peck also proposed that there are four stages in the development of human spirituality. The following is mostly from Wikipedia:

Stage I spirituality is chaotic, disordered, and reckless. Very young children are in Stage I. People in Stage I tend to defy and disobey. They do not like answering to any authority. Many criminals are people who have never grown out of Stage I.

Stage II is the stage at which a person has blind faith and trust. Once children learn to obey their parents, they reach Stage II. Many so-called religious people are essentially Stage II people, in the sense that they have blind faith in God, and do not question His existence. With blind faith come humility and a willingness to obey and serve. The majority of good law-abiding citizens never move out of Stage II.

Stage III is the stage of scientific skepticism and inquisitiveness. A Stage III person does not accept things on faith but only accepts them if convinced logically. Many people working in scientific and technological research are in Stage III. (*Editor: I would say that practically all Deists are in Stage III.*)

Stage IV is the stage at which an individual starts enjoying the mystery and beauty of nature. While retaining skepticism, he starts perceiving grand patterns in nature. His religiousness and spirituality differ significantly from that of a Stage II person, in the sense that he does not accept things through blind faith but does so because of genuine belief. Stage IV people are labeled as Mystics. (*Editor: I don't know many Deists I would call Mystics,*

but I know a few who are definitely on their way, although they would probably reject the label. They are serene and very spiritual beings who also happen to be Deists).

Peck argues that, while transitions from Stage I to Stage II are sharp, transitions from Stage III to Stage IV are gradual. Still, these changes are very noticeable and mark a significant difference in the personality of the individual. (Wikipedia. Peck.)

Before we close this chapter with an essay by John Earwood, I would like to briefly comment on Deist belief in an afterlife. The notion of an afterlife is an important aspect of many religions, perhaps of most religions. There is no dogma in Deism. The notion of an afterlife is very much an open question among contemporary Deists.

Many of us came to Deism through the writings of Thomas Paine. Paine hoped for an afterlife, but he never claimed that one exists. I believe this attitude prevails among many, perhaps most, Deists. Hope is the product of faith, not fact. Deists know that the existence of an afterlife can no more be proven than the existence of God, at least not while we live. We see enough evidence to believe in the possibility of something beyond this life. The universe might have been created for a reason. Perhaps life has some purpose beyond a beginning, a middle and an end.

Like many things religious, I think that belief in an afterlife is the triumph of hope over experience. As with revelation and miracles, I will believe in an afterlife when I see some evidence. I try to follow my own advice so I hope for the best, but I plan for the worse. I do not worry about things beyond my control, and death is in that category. Certainly, we all will one day discover the ultimate answer to this question.

Editor's Note: I don't know any Deists who believe in an anthropomorphic God. As for me, any pronoun would do: He, She or It. I don't know why God would have a gender anyway. I use the capitalized pronoun "He" throughout out of habit and tradition only; likewise, I capitalize the word "God". I am the editor, however, not the author of everything so some essays do not follow these same conventions. Note, for instance, John Earwood's preference for the feminine gender in the following essay.

Essay – The Elusive Deity of Deism
"What in god's name do you believe?"
by John Earwood

As I get older and wiser, my philosophical understanding continues to evolve. From time to time then, I must modify my public position on God to better conform to my current level of knowledge. I have already progressed from True Believer, to Confused Seeker, to Apathetic Atheist, to Inquiring Agnostic and then to goal-oriented Pragnost. Just admitting ignorance of ultimate answers is a pretty dead-end position though, if you don't eventually fill the final-answer void with something. So, for my next stage of existential evolution, I think I will call myself a Deist. But please don't jump to the conclusion that this change is a leap of faith. It doesn't mean that I have actually found God in my heart; or that I am so desperate for deliverance that I will grasp at thin air. It simply means that I have learned enough to move on to the next stage of self-knowledge: from self-sufficient Pragnost to divine-dependent Deist.

Several years ago, I coined the new term "pragnost" to combine the worldly-resignation of agnosticism with the get-it-done attitude of pragmatism. However, making-up your own personal, private word may be smugly satisfying, but not very practical for conversation, unless you can convince lots of other people to adopt it. So it seems more pragmatic to adapt my own inner concepts to the common

vocabulary of the public. Therefore, instead of inventing a word that precisely fits my meaning, I will try to find an existing term that comes close enough to my own personal philosophical position.

I've found that most people don't appreciate the historical and conceptual subtleties of the well-known but poorly understood, "Agnostic" world-view. They just equate Agnostic with Atheist, and ignore the open-minded implication of "wanting" (i.e. not having) knowledge of ultimate things. I am definitely not an Atheist in the usual sense. So I think I'll experiment with a new label of my own choosing for a while, and see if it gets any more respect than Agnostic, which implies that I am blithely-ignorant of spiritual things, or Atheistic, which is taken to mean that I am arrogantly-certain about un-knowable things—concepts beyond human understanding. At least, it may temporarily forestall the knee-jerk assumption of willful rejection of everything related to the very idea of a supreme being, and consequently, the apathetic existentialist acceptance of anarchy or nihilism. Thus, the denomination that most closely matches my current understanding of "God, the Universe, and Everything" is Deism.

Of course, such a vague and open-ended God-concept still won't get me off the hook with my Christian friends and acquaintances. They usually see the world in simple dualities: black or white, spiritual or sinful, god-loving or god-hating. Consequently, they can't understand why Atheists and Agnostics don't live in fear and dread of the God they don't believe in. They also fail to grasp that intelligent and well-informed un-believers don't necessarily reject the God concept; even though they do reject the traditional, anecdotal, and theological evidence presented on behalf of a particular, partisan God. It's a frustrating fact that all human reasoning about transcendent things—literally out of this world—is bound to be circular.

Such rationalized evidence and round-about arguments over the millennia have been sufficient for those who could think of no alternative to a humanoid über-king running the show—because the world "obviously" couldn't run itself. Hence, they envisioned an idealized, parallel world, inhabited by a race of supermen, who pull the strings of the invisible forces behind the operation of this mundane reality. Ironically, their sincere attempts to bring heavenly-perfection to this mediocre planet have only served to antagonize those with different divine traditions. Deism tries to side-step the logical tangles and head-butting of traditional religions by avoiding theological thinking and take-it-or-leave-it dogma.

Deism is simply a free-thinking philosophy based on the reasonable assumption (an educated guess) that the world was created by an intelligent designer (not to be confused with the unspecified, but clearly sectarian ID of fundamentalist Christianity), who reveals Herself only through Her material creation. Admittedly, the choice of a divine creator over an eternal, impersonal universe may be a matter of taste, but in practice, it does make an emotional difference to put a human face on a stark abstraction. This God Hypothesis (GH) is merely the default beginning position for those who want to evade the anomie of existential ennui and to avoid the inherent deceptions and delusions of human testimony and traditions. From the GH premise, each of us must create his own mental image of the creator from the raw material around us. Although Deist philosophy recognizes that the order of the universe implies a designer, it makes no positive assertions about the nature of that designer, except for what each individual can determine and support through reason and observation of the natural universe. *(Some Deists hope for a heavenly hereafter, but most would admit*

it's more a sentiment than a rational expectation.) (Author's note: The Deity has no human gender so the choice of pronouns is strictly arbitrary. Feminine happens to be my preference.)

Furthermore, it's a philosophical fact that no human reasoning can grasp the existence of an entity beyond space and time. The most sublime syllogisms always return back to the point of beginning. Circular arguments lead us nowhere. "No ought can prove an is", as David Hume put it. Consequently, the only reason-for-believing that's left to us is physical evidence, such as a direct revelation of God. Yet the Abrahamic religious traditions assert that "no man can see God and live". If so, that leaves us with no choice but to look for indirect physical evidence. Indeed some say, "Just look around at the glory of God's handiwork". But practical minded folks see only the material universe, which is not in question. Hence, the "handiwork" answer merely begs the question: whose hands created what we see: Allah, Vishnu, Kronos, or Manitou?

In years past, miracles were used, allegedly, to confirm the authority of those who claim to speak for God. Miracles are direct evidence of the divine power behind the human spokesman. Unfortunately, miracles have lost some of their luster in recent years. As modern science reveals the mundane processes behind ancient mysteries, old-fashioned matter-mastering miracles, like parting the sea, have become extinct. Modern wonderworkers may be afraid to openly perform their staff-into-snake illusions because of scientific skeptics who are able to reveal the mundane trick behind their magic feats. Therefore, most modern prophets stick to psychological tricks that are more difficult to debunk. Conveniently, the faithful are inclined to see what they believe.

Most miracles nowadays are limited to mental phenomena and are thus subject to the same illusions and delusions that bedevil all unsubstantiated ideas. OK then, what about the Bible? That's a physical form of evidence, isn't it? Yes, but... there are many "holy books" that claim to reveal the will of God. In the New Testament, Christians are required to accept the testimony of an ancient cult of seemingly-sincere people—who claim to have known Jesus and to have felt the power of the Holy Spirit—because "it is written". Yet, as recent events in major news organizations have shown, fiction is easier to write than fact. And you can pass-off "what-ought-to-be" for "what-is" as long as your credibility is taken on faith. If the Bible were the only written revelation, faith would come easily. But with conflicting stories in various scriptures, and little corroborating evidence, we must either believe them all or none at all. Besides, how can human language reveal to me the knowledge that is beyond understanding?

So now we get down to the only irrefutable evidence for God: personal experience. Mystics throughout the ages have rejected, or neglected, the written words of fallible men. They seem to pity the pathetic parishioners clutching their leather-bound, paper idols and praying to their invisible God-father for some little sign that He is and that He cares about their petty problems. Contrarily, Mystics claim to go directly to the source. They profess to know God in the first person. Even more convincing, their passionate personalities, and their "I-know-something-you-don't" demeanor seem to be a truer manifestation of holiness than methodical piety. Yet again, though, their testimony must be taken on faith, and we must judge by mere appearances. Ironically, pragmatic, materialistic science has learned how to reproduce sublime sensations of oneness and transcendence without resorting to mystical mumbo-jumbo.

Thus, it seems that the God question has evoked an embarrassing plethora of "final" answers. Yet, none of them is convincing apart from blind faith, which is a leap into the darkness of ignorance, motivated by the hope for future light and full knowledge. All of the proposed answers though, fall short of actually demonstrating the glory of God. If you begin your questioning with an open mind, without a preconceived notion of deity, you could search endlessly for a final resolution. Hence, our mental image of God sprouts from a seed of mundane matter, leaving a trace of humble origins on the ideal of divine perfection. (*Agnosticism also hopes for future understanding, but it proceeds cautiously by following the "look before you leap" rule.*)

If the search for God is such a crap shoot then, what option do we have, other than to just close our eyes and pick a faith? Sincere, but skeptical, seekers must try to keep an open mind as they continue to search for the answers to ultimate questions, such as: Why is there something rather than nothing? "God created everything" is not an ultimate answer but a thought-stopper. It only raises more questions, such as "where did God come from?" And what about these more personal corollaries: Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? Who is responsible for all of this? The various and sundry scriptures can't seem to agree on the answers to those queries. Even modern science has no way to prove or disprove such subjective opinions. That's why scientists try to avoid the entanglements of metaphysics by accepting physical reality as a given, and by limiting their search to testable, objective topics.

Nevertheless, for sincere seekers after spiritual solace, such burning questions will torment us until the flames are extinguished by soothing truth. Fortunately (or not?), when healing truth is not available, placebos may give us temporary relief in the form of faith. Yet, some stubborn souls prefer to endure the pain of un-knowing, until the real thing comes along. Such people are called Agnostics or Skeptics. Adopting the "know-nothing" attitude is not very comforting, though, and even seems perverse to most people. So, my plan "B" is to adopt the philosophical stance of many American "founding fathers", such as Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, and Paine. They called themselves "Deists" rather than Christians.

Deism rejects all of the religious scriptures and dogmas created by fallible humans as sources of final Truth. Instead, Deists try to avoid unwarranted assumptions and focus on what is obvious. The world of Nature is where we live and breathe and have our being. But it doesn't seem to be eternal, so someone, or something, must have created it. Since the Creator, whoever She is, does not reveal Herself to us directly, we have no way of knowing what Her intentions for us were. So, as the dominant creatures on earth, we must work together to make our own way in the world. The philosophy of Deism is based on a single, axiomatic premise: that some pre-existing Prime-Mover made us a physical, spherical home, then wound it up, and turned it loose to evolve its own path through space and time. This reasonable inference is not a fixed point of faith, however. It's just a convenient place to start our philosophical journey because it leaves us free to deal with reality, without falling into the trap of logical conclusions derived from unwarranted assumptions.

Yet, if we are going to adopt the God Hypothesis, we must assume that She has the power of intention even though we may not know all the whys and wherefores of creation. However, we must be careful not to ascribe human characteristics to a super-human character. If the Creator loves her children, how

could our Mother-Goddess give birth to us and then abandon us to survive as orphans in the wilderness? To avoid pointless speculation, our hypothetical Deity's inferred attributes and purposes should remain in the realm of abstractions. For example, the office of Creator requires planning and executing abilities. The role of Final Arbiter requires judgment and authority. Since life always comes from life, the Life-giver must be alive in some sense and should serve as the ultimate life-form. Dead matter could very well be eternal, but Life, as we know it, always has a beginning and an end. That's why the atheist Douglas Adams concluded: ". . . Without a god, life is only a matter of opinion". Therefore, a supreme sanction seems to be necessary to curtail the perpetual questioning of children and philosophers. Unfortunately, in this post-prophecy age, Deists have found that ordinary humans have few qualms about offering their own considered opinions as God's divine edicts.

Since Deism has no scripture, no creed, no dogma, and no priesthood, it is not an organized religion. Rather, it is a personal philosophy of life, defining an appropriate way of living. It doesn't require us to accept any specific, traditional "revelation" of God on faith. Instead, it merely requires us to act as-if an undefined, divine Creator exists, simply because we must have a fixed frame of reference against which to define all relative truths. Like God, Absolute Truth is beyond the reach of human reason, so its existence must be assumed without any hard evidence (Just as we act as if we have free-will, despite the compelling evidence for determinism). The Natural Law-giver is a reasonable, but not proven, assumption. The God Hypothesis is an axiom which establishes a foundation upon which to build a rational belief system. It also points us in the direction of answers to other meaningful questions, such as "how ought a person to live in his relations to God, to humanity, to the world". Distilling all we know of existence down to essentials, it appears that the presumptive Creator, for reasons known only to Herself, caused the physical world to exist and to evolve. Change is the only constant in our lives. Thus, the task that we as sentient beings have inherited is simply to live and to evolve in harmony with the natural laws embodied by the Deity in the material world. After careful consideration of the babble of world religions, Deists are forced to conclude that all traditional scriptures and belief systems are human opinions and not divine commands.

The gods of established religions go by many names and manifold manifestations. But the default deity of Deism is the "unknown god" who is called-upon when anthropomorphic idols of carved-wood and hammered-gold and leather-bound-paper fail to answer our prayers. This god-of-last-resort patiently listens to our pleas but then expects us to work out our own salvation because there is no justice in nature, except human justice. There is no morality in the world, except human morality. The deity-with-no-name is infinitely flexible but eternally fixed in mind-space. She may be Good or Evil as the situation requires. She may be Love or Hate, feminine or masculine, hot or cold, black or white, day or night. She doesn't seem to care what you call her: Brahma, Mother Nature, Father-in-Heaven, Great Spirit, Gaia, or World Soul. She is not jealous of other gods, because She/He/It is all of them, and all are One.

Even though Deism is not a religion, *per se*, it fulfils some of the functions associated with religious organizations, such as defining Morality. For example, Mercy and Justice, compassion and cooperation, hope and perseverance, can all be derived from an understanding of the laws of Nature (e.g. the principles of Evolution), especially Human Nature. Indeed, untamed Nature is red in tooth and

claw, living on death, but She is also capable of loving and giving life. Science has only recently begun to codify the expedient morality inherent in natural processes. But all religions have instinctively followed the minimum requirements of human societies that form the core of Morality. Deists have simply distilled their ethic down to one commandment: the Golden Rule.

Although historically, "English" Deism arose out of protestant Christianity; it gives no special credence to the written words of Judeo- Christian interpreters of God's Will and ways. Deism also evolved out of the secular Enlightenment, along with modern Science. Thus it covers the full range of spiritual and intellectual knowledge from physics to metaphysics. For example, religious myths and scriptures long ago developed speculative, but metaphorically powerful, outlines of how creation came about. Yet modern Cosmologists have reverse-engineered the on-going creative process in technical detail, from Big-Bang to Atomic Bomb, with no heavenly assistance. So, the only pertinent scripture for Deists is the history of God's works engraved on tablets of natural matter: the book of Nature. Hence, Religion may tell us how it ought to be, but Science tells us how it is.

Limited, imperfect, and challenging is "how it is". But our purported Creator gave us the power to imagine how-it-ought-to-be. Eternal life in heaven is one possible answer to "where are we going?" But it appears that the Deity, created out of our logic and longing, has decreed that the ultimate outcome is for Her to know, and for us to find out. This existential teasing may seem cruel, but it's infinitely better than the terrible threats and hollow promises of traditional tyrannical gods. Whatever will be, will be; regardless of our preferences and expectations. But, if the idea of heaven makes you happy, by all means believe whatever gets you through the night. That's the advantage of Deism: in Deus all things are possible, but nothing is "written".

The downside of Deism is that we have no reason to expect salvation by faith alone. Any positive outcome in this world will come from old-fashioned hard, dirty work. But there is a ray of hope because the Deity is scrupulously fair; She doesn't play favorites; There are no Elect or Chosen- people; She doesn't care if you are rich or poor, healthy or sick, happy or sad. If you need or desire something, it's your responsibility to make it happen. If you need help to achieve your goal, silent prayer may shore-up your confidence, but direct your spoken request to the source from whence cometh your help: your fellow man. Natural, instinctive Altruism, people-helping-people, is the rock of our salvation.

As you have no doubt noticed by now, my Deity is a fictional character, in the sense that I'm not reporting my observations but my imagination. Yet most scriptures and myths are also fictional accounts of divine doings. Therefore, I feel free to reject any parts that are immoral or implausible to me. Even then, I can accept the symbolic truth behind the imaginative fabrications. Of course, I could be accused of creating my Creator to suit my own designs and that would be an accurate assessment. Since I can't prove that my kind of God actually exists, why should I believe it? Like most people "almost all of my beliefs are based on faith in people, and processes, and institutions, and their various capacities for correcting themselves when in error." [Oliver Morton] It's in that last part where I find the institution of Science to be superior to the various establishments of Religion. As with any other profession of faith though, I believe in God primarily because that seems better than the alternative, and it suits me.

Because Science mostly studies discrete pieces of reality by the method of analysis, it can safely ignore the ultimate origins of Life, the Universe, and

Everything. Philosophy, though, goes beyond the limitations of science, to study higher-ranking whole things (holons) by the method of synthesis. Hence, the philosophical leading edge of science is currently studying the phenomenon of "emergence". This is the formerly mysterious process whereby a collection of parts suddenly and surreptitiously becomes a new thing. The resulting "holon" is something greater than the sum of its parts. For example, to a scientist, Life is simply a complex arrangement of chemicals processing energy. Also, Mind is simply a blob of neurons processing nerve impulses. And yet, both are so much more than chemicals, and cells, and electrons. We give those independent pieces a collective name referring to the new properties of the whole that didn't exist in the parts. Yet again, in reality, nothing new has been added to the mix, except a connection in the human mind. So Emergence is not a mystical force; it's simply the mental transition from perception to conception, where a new concept or a new category has been born. It is merely a sudden realization of a hidden relationship that was there all along—like a connect-the-dots puzzle—and was born out of all that came before. Perhaps even God Herself was an emergent idea in primitive minds as they imagined a Great Spirit who ruled over all the mundane but mysterious, natural forces. Or maybe the Deity is the mysterious force by which chemicals become complex molecules, and molecules become organized cells, and cells become living things, and biological creatures become sentient beings.

Maybe. But as I said before, the choice between Deism and Atheism may be only a matter of taste. However, I believe that assuming the existence of a sentient deity has profound implications for the future of humanity. Even though we still have to guess at the Creator's purpose, we can instinctively identify with goal-oriented behavior—whereas random change is alien to us. Deists are not required to have faith though, except in the form of optimism. So the choice comes down to this: eternal matter or eternal spirit; an endless succession of multi-verses or one god; an infinite recession of secondary causes or a divine First Cause? Hence, I don't know if my Deus is real, but to me She is definitely beautiful—and useful. By analogy with Pascal's Wager, I'll put my money on the best-looking horse and just hope that she's also the fastest.

Deism strips away all the religious encrustations obscuring the pure, elegant idea of God, the author of all things. It also allows us to accept the best parts of all the sectarian world religions and add them to our emerging holistic belief system. Deists take only one thing on faith: God is. Everything else is subject to skeptical scrutiny. And the only reason God is not scrutinized is that there would be no way to know what the truth is—no way to fact-check—no way to disprove our erroneous presumptions. The God Hypothesis, like many other self-evident concepts, is a tautology: God is the entity who fits the definition of a deity. It makes perfect sense, but those who prefer a deity with human attributes may find that Deism is just as bleak as Atheism.

As a novice Deist then, I am trying on this middle-of-the road philosophy to see if it fits. However, I don't choose to believe unconditionally in the Deist-definition of God, as a matter of blind faith. Rather, I choose to act as-if the Deity exists, as a matter of pragmatic Reason. The God Hypothesis, succinctly, but arbitrarily, puts a stop to the endless recycling of ancient philosophical questions. Space, time, matter, energy: all are physical and finite. And yet, the human soul is able to range beyond all physical limits. The soul-mind can even conceive of things it can't understand, like infinity, eternity, and deity. Such mind-boggling concepts could lead to an infinite regression, and insanity, if they are not contained.

Therefore, to avoid an endless loop of thought, and eventual brain-burnout, we have a built-in fail-safe faith mechanism to shut-down potentially dangerous critical-mass-thoughts before they explode into madness. By faith, we act as if we have the ultimate answer even when we don't. For example, I believe in the Creator in the same way I believe in George Washington. GW is the symbolic Father of our country, just as God is the symbolic Father of the Universe. Just as the presidency is an office, not a particular man, so the role of Creator is an office regardless of the particular attributes of the officeholder.

Such an open-minded conception of deity though, may lead to some unorthodox beliefs about whom or what God is. Even those who don't claim to be Deists have expressed similar beliefs that reconcile some aspects of the science/religion dichotomy. Consider the example of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, (*The Phenomenon of Man*) a Catholic priest and paleontologist, who conjectured that the human mind was evolving, along with the material world, toward an "Omega Point" of perfection equivalent to God. More recently, Amit Goswami, (*The Conscious Universe*) a Hindu and physicist, concluded that God is the conscious Mind of the universe, who continuously creates the physical world out of intention (Will) and information (creative force). To Goswami, this god-concept is the only way to make sense of the baffling but fertile theory of quantum queerness.

Goswami calls his philosophy "Monistic Idealism" to contrast with Descartes' Mind/Body "Dualistic Idealism" and with modern science's Matter-is-all "Monistic Materialism". Monism means that ultimately there is only one essential substance. Idealism means that Mind, not Matter is that substance. Deism agrees that this single-minded substance is the Conscious Creator of the material universe. Thus, all apparent dualities are descended from the divine Singularity. Ironically, this theory of monistic idealism means that Jehovah and Satan, Good and Evil, Matter and Spirit are ultimately the same thing. All manifestations emanate from the One Source. I won't go into all of the ramifications of this concept, but most religious philosophies have eventually come to the same conclusion: that All is One. The Taoist Yin-Yang symbol neatly illustrates the unity of duality.

Therefore, when asked about my religious affiliation, henceforth I will answer that I am a Mono-Deist. That's not intended to be a flip answer; it's just the best way I know to convey my non-mainstream beliefs. Yet, unlike Agnosticism or Atheism, my Deism—my faith in Deus—places me safely in the majority of humans who believe in some form of Supreme Being. And the lack of dogma in my belief system permits me to work together with my brothers and sisters of all faiths to make the world a better place to live. Of course, I understand that such broad-minded acceptance of difference doesn't always work both ways. So my new-found "faith" will surely be tested in the marketplace of ideas. Is it based on cogent philosophical reasoning or on facile sophistry? Is my God anything more than a comforting illusion? Will my faith save me? I resolve to remain agnostic on these moot questions until my virtual faith is replaced by true understanding.

(This essay is also available in its original format [with quotes from Paine and others] on John Armstrong's God versus the Bible site at

<http://www.godvsthebible.com/pdf/The%20Elusive%20Deity%20of%20Deism.pdf>

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