

Deist: So that's what I am! Many have probably never heard of Deism but a 2008 survey says that 12 percent believe in a Deistic God. Deist explores this phenomenon through the eyes of the best-known names in contemporary Deism.

Deist: So that's what I am!

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DEIST

So that's what I am!

A product of the Contemporary Deism Project



Chuck Clendenen, Editor & Contributing Author

Front Room Enterprises
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.

Acknowledgements

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 3 – Contemporary Deism

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." --Author unknown, commonly misattributed to Charles Darwin

Edmund Burke told us, "To read without reflecting is like eating without digesting." To live our lives without reflecting on how we are living leaves us just as hungry. For many Deists our doubting begins when we start reflecting on what we were raised to believe instead of just accepting our lessons unquestioningly. We begin to look critically at what we have been told is absolute truth. We start reflecting on that "truth" and begin to suspect that what we have been taught actually is *not* true, and we begin to hunger for something that makes more sense. We form a set of personal beliefs that includes a God who, for whatever reason, does not seem to perform miracles in the modern age (if He ever did). Our doubt becomes a central feature of our beliefs. We learn to distrust those who are absolutely certain about things we *know* are anything *but* certain. And then we find Deism, and we realize that what we have mostly figured on our own closely matches the beliefs of people who call themselves Deists.

So we begin to study Deism, usually by reading *Age of Reason* or Deist websites. We participate in discussion groups. We begin formulating our own notions, our own beliefs, picking and choosing what makes sense, rejecting what appears to be nonsense and making Deism our own. And when we engage in online dialog, our fellow Deists encourage this pattern of behavior. Is this contemporary Deism? I cannot say with certainty. I know only that I see this scenario play out time after time.

Deism is not a static thing. A religion with written dogma and sacred texts does not change very fast. Deism has no set principles or holy texts; it is capable of significant change over a relatively short span of time. The written works of Deists are considered the opinion of the author with whom everyone is free to disagree. Just a couple of years ago I would have told you that reason, nature and experience form the three pillars of Deism, and I would have anticipated near universal agreement among Deists. But I have found that this is not the case. At least one prominent Deist labels this kind of thinking "reasonist". To him, Deism is something else. Fortunately, I am free to remain a "reasonist", and he is free to pursue the flavor of Deism that makes sense to him. One Deist's beliefs bind no one else, no matter how well-respected (or how obscure) the source. Deism is dynamic and ever-changing. How could it be otherwise? Today's Deism is not yesterday's Deism.

Most contemporary Deists have great respect for famous Deists of the past, which is why we have provided a brief history. Paine, Palmer, Tindal and others have stirred our thoughts and have created notions within us that have grown and developed and have become part of our core beliefs, the foundation upon which we have built our worldviews. A history of Deism tells you that Deism traces its origin to Christianity, but I believe it is just as valid for Deism to have evolved.

In fact, many of us have developed our beliefs independently. It is only later that our independent belief system very strongly resembles a belief system that has existed for a long time. Early Deist belief retained many elements of Christianity but without the dogma and the clergy. It is obvious, however, that not nearly all contemporary Deists trace their Deistic notions to Christianity. Many contemporary Deists come from other backgrounds, religions other than Christianity or from no religion at all. If you sample Deist Websites available on the Internet, you will see that there is a very wide range of Deist beliefs, and Deism has branched into quite a number of sub-categories (see Chapter Four).

I must note that for me some of the most inspirational sources of food for Deist thought come not only from Deists but from modern-day scientists, philosophers and other non-Deists. Deists are students of life, nature and human nature. The Deists I know sample wide varieties of books, magazines, Websites, videos, television programs and every type of media. Science, nature, mathematics, philosophy, psychology and religion are subjects that Deists devour. Then they share their experiences directly or through essays, Web pages and discussion group posts.

People are reading a wide variety of works of interest to Deists, and they are sharing their experiences. Certain author names pop up on a recurring basis: Ken Wilbur, Richard Dawkins, Steven Pinker, Carl Sagan, Sam Harris, Paul Davies; the list goes on and on. While we may not always agree with these authors, they share ideas that start us thinking about life and the universe and human nature. We may agree with them, or we may end up with entirely different conclusions, but the process of assessing their ideas adds to our experience, one of the three pillars of Deism.

Simply looking at the quotes that headline each chapter in this book reveals that we draw inspiration from many different sources. Contemporary Deism is a syncretic religion. And this is true to a much greater extent than it has ever been in the past. Today's Deists combine and reconcile ideas and beliefs from many schools of thought into one complex set of beliefs upon which they, in turn, use to build their worldview. Contemporary Deists draw inspiration from science and nature as much as they do from philosophy and religion.

The Wikipedia Deism entry (Wikipedia) cites Sir Leslie Stephen's *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (Stephen). The author of one section in the Deism article claims that Deism is made up of critical elements and constructive elements. Both critical and constructive points of view are, of course, necessary in Deism. Deists *do* reject most of revealed religion by rejecting second-hand reports of supernatural events, miracles and direct revelation. Deists do not necessarily reject the notion that God *could* perform supernatural acts, work miracles or communicate with us directly, but unless we experience these supernatural acts personally, we are not required to believe that they actually take place, because there is no *evidence* that they are true. We reach this conclusion through critical reasoning. Rejection is a critical act.

On the constructive side, essentially all Deists believe that it is likely that there is a Creator (or God or First Cause). I think many Deists also look to nature to learn how to live better and more moral lives. Beyond these basic concepts there is much variation among contemporary Deists.

The Wikipedia author, however, cautions against classifying Deist attitudes and behavior towards other religions as critical or constructive. I must disagree. It is on this point that I think we base some of the most important distinctions of contemporary Deism.

The Modern Deism Website suggests that Modern Deism is a new form of Deism, one that transcends classical and critical Deism. I agree and even take that idea one step further. I do not believe that Deism can take its place among the world's principle religions if we do not treat other people and their beliefs with dignity and respect. How can we expect other religions to relate to us respectfully if we have no respect for them or their beliefs?

We live in skeptical times. It is a time for skeptics like Deists to assume their place at the forefront of religious dialog. Many of us have serious doubts about the validity of other, older religions. But let us keep a proper perspective. A Canadian friend recently posted something that I consider quite profound. He noted that we treat scientists like Galileo and Copernicus and Newton with great dignity and respect, even if modern theories have rendered some or all of their foundational scientific theories obsolete. I would add that we have great respect for the ancient philosophers like Socrates and Plato, even though their attitudes towards slavery and other aspects of human existence are quaint or obsolete by modern

standards. We should accord the same respect to the foundational religious beliefs that we no longer consider valid or relevant. (Helium) Just because we have advanced beyond the concept of revealed religion, and we no longer place our faith in the beliefs of our forebears, there is no reason to treat those beliefs and believers with condescension and disrespect. If we scorn them, how can we expect any respect in return? How can Deists, who value reason so highly, act so unreasonably towards others with whom we disagree on religious matters? Let us think critically before condemning other religions. We can disagree without being disrespectful.

When I think of contemporary Deism, I think not only of the oldest sites such as Bob Johnson's Deism.com or the Sullivan County site (<http://www.sullivan-county.com/deism.htm>), but I am also drawn to the pioneering work contributed in the early part of the 21st century by Steve Dowell, Joe Hardwick, David Pyle, Joe Boswell and Steve Zinn, among others. They defined and nurtured a distinct and evolving form of Deism that is called Modern Deism. Their work is being carried on by the administrators of their former Websites and other newcomers.

As the ModernDeism.com site says, "Classical Deism has tended to define God as separate from his creation (only transcendent); however, Modern Deism does not define God. This is because reason is limited in its ability to fully comprehend and define God, which produces different views on what individuals believe the nature of God to be. Some Deists see design in nature and through this design they also see purpose in the universe (and in their lives). Others see God and the universe in a co-creative process, while others see God as a subtle and persuasive spirit. Of course, there are many other views as well. However, the overall view of Deism is to use reason as the foundation and Experience and Nature as the basis of belief. As can be seen, some Deists are classical while others are not, but each is respected and finds a home in Modern Deism." (Hardwick)

Modern Deism sees man's relationship with God as transpersonal. "For many religions, the relationship with God is viewed as one that is personal in that God wants to know each of us as individuals and communicates directly with mankind. Many Theists view a transpersonal God as one that is pointless, but for the Deist the opposite is true. This relationship transcends the notion of personal and impersonal and is not pointless, because God does not just have a relationship with humanity, but with all of nature (creation), and man is a part of it. This means that God is not like a parent, but is much grander in scope than can possibly be imagined, which creates a sense of awe and reverence. This is evidenced by how Deists have a calling to nature and study of the universe." (Hardwick)

I personally don't see how we could have a personal relationship with a force powerful enough to create the universe. On what terms would we relate? Imagine making a loaf of bread. Could you have a personal relationship with each yeast cell as it consumes sugar and emits carbon dioxide to make the dough rise? If we cannot relate *down* that many levels, how can we relate *upward* even more levels to relate personally to God? I think the closest we can come is to relate with God's spirit and His creation. We can relate to all things natural. We are a part of creation. We can feel awe and reverence and the power and majesty that is nature. Relating to nature is a spiritual experience. I believe that the supernatural, on the other hand, is the mere product of man's imagination, i.e. powerful, but not nearly as impressive as nature itself.

Nature is neither positive nor negative, neither kind nor cruel; nature just is. Only man makes ethical choices: good and bad, positive and negative, constructive and critical. I am not trying to say that Deists who lean in a critical direction are wrong. Their criticisms are often valid. There is a difference of attitude, not direction. Contemporary Deists, both those who are more constructive and those who are more critical, are heading away from superstition and towards reason. We Deists celebrate and honor the God of Nature, not some construct of

man. We encourage individuality, not the mentality of the herd, led by the clergy. Let us emphasize and celebrate what we have in common rather than emphasizing our differences. Respect is important. Respect does not mean we must always agree, but it does mean that we believe the other person has the right to believe as he or she chooses, as long as they do not interfere with our own right to believe as we see fit.

Essay – Affirmation

"Dream as if you'll live forever, live as if you'll die today." -James Dean

Affirmation is the act of stating or asserting something positively. Affirmation is positive thinking. I believe affirmation is the key factor that will allow contemporary Deism to transcend classical Deism and lead to a much broader acceptance of our belief system. Positive and affirming Deism is a way of looking at life and the universe. To me there must be a reason for the way things are, and there must ultimately be solutions for life's challenges. We do not yet know what all these solution are, but we know more today than we knew yesterday, and tomorrow we will know even more. Our species is always advancing. There is every reason to be optimistic.

Émile Coué de Châtaigneraie is credited with the affirmation: "Every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better." Coué recommended other affirmations: "I am more and more...;" "My...improves every day;" It is easy, and I can..." Coué started practicing hypnosis and developed a technique called optimistic autosuggestion, a type of self-hypnosis, and it has helped many, many people.

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale wrote *The Power of Positive Thinking*. He received a lot of both support and criticism for his views over the years. I am a supporter. I have examined many of the criticisms, and in the same way I recommend tempering idealism with pragmatism, I would recommend tempering Peale's optimism with realism. Hope for the best, but plan for the worst. Substituting hope for good contingency planning is not reasonable. Our planning should include the possibility of even the worst possible turn of events. Assuming that the worst *could* happen is not pessimistic. Assuming the worst *will* happen is pessimistic.

Worry is the inverse of affirmation. "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength." I take this quote by Corrie ten Boom very seriously. Affirmation is looking at the future and imagining good things will come our way. Affirmation is positive, uplifting and constructive. Worry is negative, depressing and destructive.

I have adopted a Stoic attitude about worry. Our choices can be boiled down to two categories: things we can do something about and things over which we have no control. Being concerned over things over which we have no control is pointless. Such worries lead only to despair or frustration. Worry can only make things worse, never better. Worry has no effect on any outcome.

Entire philosophical and spiritual movements influencing millions of people have been built around the power of positive thinking. Motivational speakers who accentuate the positive, like Dr. Wayne Dyer, are immensely popular (and rich). The Religious Science, or Science of Mind, movement is built largely on positive thinking. Positive thinking is the core message of many motivational speakers and authors. Even the Mayo Clinic recommends it for its health benefits. I believe that affirmation extends Deism in ways that we have not yet fully explored. Affirmation extends Deism from a merely critical religion that rejects claims of special revelation

and miracles to a positive religion whose members look at every day as an affirmation of the creation.

It is difficult to maintain a positive attitude when there is much around you that is negative. Let's be realistic. It isn't possible to be positive all the time. Positive cannot exist without negative. They are opposites, and opposites exist only in pairs. But when negative thoughts penetrate, stop and assess. Is something bad happening? What is the cause? Is it within your control? If it is, do something about it. Replace it with some useful activity.

∞

Does that mean we should accord all religious activity with respect? Certainly not. Barbaric is barbaric, and uncivilized is uncivilized, but let us take care we do not paint with a brush that is too broad. When people fail to think critically for themselves, they allow themselves to be controlled. When they fail to consider the long-range impact of their actions, they act senselessly. When people behave like a mob, they lose their sense of individual responsibility, and shame comes too late, after the damage is done.

Those who were raised in revealed religions are not terrible people. Many Deists were raised in revealed religion, and many of our friends and relatives are still Christian. The worst we can usually expect from our Christian friends and family when they discover that we are Deists is that they will feel sorry for us. We will "go to Hell" because we are not "saved".

Occasionally, however, believers who are in the majority assume too much. They assume that we will accept them pushing their faith on us without invitation or even against our protestations. This presumption interferes with our right to believe as we choose, or it at least makes us uncomfortable. But let us not attribute to malice what is caused by ignorance. When it is obvious that our rights are ignored, let not be obnoxious, but let us be firm and assertive. Our right to believe is every bit as valid as anyone else's.

Most of our religious friends and family have the best of intentions. They have our well-being at heart when they steer us towards their beliefs. We do not have to overreact, but we should be assertive when we encounter rude behavior. I am not one to recommend turning the other cheek. When people become pushy, when they cross the line from being assertive to being aggressive, I recommend that you return aggression with bluntness. You should be assertive if your rights and sensibilities are being trampled.

The Internet is a wonderful medium for religion. People tend to be more honest and open, which can be a good thing and a bad thing. It is a good thing in the sense that the relative anonymity that the Internet provides allows people who would otherwise be persecuted for their beliefs to speak out. I live in the United States, so I tend to take freedom of speech for granted. Such freedom is not found everywhere. I think especially of the Saudi Deists Blog, where a Deist in Saudi Arabia blogs about religion in his country. He has to post to his blog through a proxy in order to preserve his anonymity. If he were to be caught, he could lose his freedom for a long, long time. Even in the Bible Belt where I live some people are not comfortable with speaking their minds because openly being something other than Protestant Christian can bring unwelcome attention.

There is, of course, a dark side to the anonymity that the Internet affords. Knowing that any sort of retaliation is difficult, people can sometimes display their worst side. Some people can publish incredibly vulgar, hateful and hurtful things. Opinions can run to the extreme, and there are more than a few genuine "kooks" out there. Sometimes people believe that a vocal lunatic speaks for an entire group, and that is a shame.

But for the most part, people are allowed to be themselves online. They don't necessarily have the social influences of family, friends, neighbors and co-workers pressuring

them to maintain the status quo. The Internet allows people to speak freely and to explore and share new ideas. One of those "new" ideas is Deism, and the Internet is the main reason for its resurgence. I think that surveys cited earlier indicate that many millions of people are inclined to think in ways similar to the way Deists think. The Internet has translated that inclination into action for many. A history of contemporary Deism is a history of its online development and growth.

It is easy being critical. I find the positive approach much more satisfying and ultimately more promising for broader acceptance. I am convinced that being constructive will pay off better in the long run. Let us examine our lives as objectively as we can. Are we holding others to a higher standard than we hold ourselves? Does Deism not have some flaws and weaknesses that we still have to figure out? Do we really think we have it all solved? I submit to you that if we think we have found the ultimate truth, and we stop searching for truth, that is the day that we become unreasonable. We are mere humans, mere finite beings. Real truth is so much larger than we are. Only the arrogant think that they have it all figured out. Arrogance is not, in my estimation, a virtue.

We have said over and over that Deism has no tenets. That has not stopped modern Deists from coming up with some "unofficial" tenets of Deism. These are found on the Modern Deism site. Deists are free to agree or disagree with these basic tenets:

1. Belief in God based on Reason, Experience and Nature (nature of the universe) rather than on the basis of holy texts and divine revelation. Essentially, through the use of Reason, God's existence is revealed by the observation of the order and complexity found within nature and our personal experiences.
2. Belief that the nature of God is abstract and generally incomprehensible, which puts it beyond definition for humanity at this time. Furthermore, human language is limited and inadequate to define God; however, man can use reason to theorize and speculate on what this possible nature is.
3. Belief that man's relationship with God is transpersonal. However, this does not create a feeling of a distant and cold deity but of one in which God has a profound and unfathomable relationship with all of creation (nature) rather than just one aspect of it.
4. Belief that humanity has the ability to use reason to develop ethical/moral principles and through the application of reason these principles can be used to implement moral behavior, which in turn creates a Utilitarian-Humanist morality. Essentially, humans can be guided by their conscience in matters of morality.
5. Belief that humans have the individual capability of experiencing God, which is defined as spirituality. These spiritual experiences are multi-faceted and can include awe, epiphany, fellowship and even the transcendental. Essentially, each human is capable of having a profound experience of God and nature.
6. Belief that God should be honored in a way that the individual believes is best and most appropriate for them. Individuals must determine for themselves how best to honor God, and only they can develop how to accomplish this. For many, it is a multi-faceted and an individualized process.
7. Belief in the principle of natural law that states that all men and women are created equal to each other with inherent freedom and liberty so that no human has more worth than another. Essentially, each human is equal in terms of the freedoms that they have and in the eyes of the law.
8. Belief that mankind's purpose is to use our God-given reason to understand what it means to be alive in every sense of the word (to live life to the fullest) and to act in such a way as to secure human happiness and contentment for all involved.

9. Belief that reason and respect are God-given traits to mankind and that we are to utilize them in all aspects of our daily lives thus creating a pragmatic approach to life. This includes respecting other alternative views and opinions of God (other religions) as long as they do not produce harm and/or infringe upon others.

Do I agree with all these tenets? I have to be honest and say that, while I agree with most of them, I do not agree with every detail in them.

Essay – The Examined Life

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Socrates said that "the unexamined life is not worth living." By the nature of what we believe, I think that the life of a Deist is (or should be) one that is examined, leading me to believe that a Deist's life is naturally one that is well worth living.

If Deism is based on reason, nature and experience, and I believe that it is, then I think reason dictates that we examine nature, especially our own natures, to see how we fit in. We can't know whether the things we think, believe and do make sense or not if we don't examine our thoughts and actions. And if we do examine what we think and do, it is reasonable that we will choose courses of action based on what we observe. Otherwise, what would be the point of our observations? Because if we aren't choosing reasonable courses of action, our self-examination is futile. If we aren't making sensible and reasonable things happen, then things are merely happening *to us*.

To me, an unexamined life has less meaning. How can we know whether our actions are meaningful unless we assess their impact on us and those around us? What other measure of our own purpose can there be other than the effect we have on our own futures and the lives of those around us?

An examined life, however, can have a major and positive impact on those we touch. Honest self-criticism is the most important type of criticism. When we can achieve that, we can make real strides when we choose to attempt to improve ourselves. Until we can recognize our own shortcomings, we perceive the criticism of others as misguided or unfair. Accepting valid criticism requires self-examination. We never mature until we learn this.

Deism means deciding what makes sense; it means reasoning things through for ourselves. I think that Deists, if they apply Deism to what they believe and do, can honestly claim that they live examined lives. They doubt that anyone else can or should figure things out for them. It is their own assessment that counts. And that is what being a Deist is all about.

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I believe that contemporary Deists are indeed living examined lives. Today's Deists have taken a critical look at their beliefs and have made a conscious decision to pursue a course that makes sense. They refuse to accept the unreasonable and the absurd.

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