

Deism Today

Spring 2010

Deist Alliance Quarterly Newsletter



Why Does Suffering Exist?

by Dave Gaddis

"I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy." -- Thomas Paine

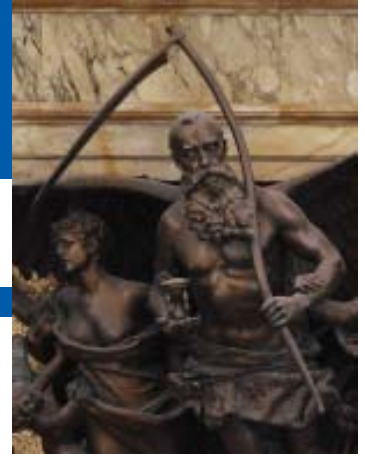


Welcome to the latest issue of Deism Today, the quarterly (when possible) newsletter of the Deist Alliance. Here you will find authors familiar and new. And we are always seeking new material. Contact us at the Positive Deism discussion board.

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A Deist Conception of Time

by Brandon Norgaard

As time passes, many things change, but the questions that we ask to try to make sense of our existence do not change over time. Here is one question that has withstood the test of time: “What exactly is time, anyway?”

We all have memories of the past, experience of the present, and expectations for the future, but how does one actually define time? One way to define time is in terms of our experience of change. We see various different types of change: slow change, fast change, dramatic change, unexpected change. If we try to think of what is common to all of these, one thing we can note is that time must pass in order for any kind of change to occur. There are also other ways of thinking about the nature of time. For example, we can define time as a sequence of events or as a sequence of states of being.

These definitions might help us understand our experience of time, but there

are physicists who want to get the best idea of what time actually is in reality by looking at the available evidence as objectively as possible. This often means avoiding interpretations that are human-centric in favor of theories that are more science-centric. Some physicists have gone so far as to theorize that the movement of time and the distinction between the past, present, and future as we experience it is a human-centric illusion. There are many formulations of this, but in general these theories say that everything that has happened or will happen should be thought of as factual, just as everything that exists in space at any single point in time is factual. Any infinitesimal point in time has adjacent infinitesimal points in time in the past and in the future, but the argument is that this relation is the same as infinitesimal points in space being adjacent to each other. The argument that many physicists have advanced is that the three spacial dimensions and time actually form a four dimensional spacetime (in many theories, spacetime has more than four dimensions, but this is a separate issue). Some theories ascribe special properties to time that the spacial dimensions do not have, while other theories consider them to all have the same properties in essence, where the only difference comes from point of view.

This conception of time has some major problems. If time is nothing more than a dimension where states of being and events are adjacent to each other, then how did this system come about in the first place? What are the factors that led to this system being the way that it is? It is a natural part of humanity to wonder what is the explanation for things. The problem with this system is



that it does not leave room for explanation since one state of being does not actually cause the next state. Within this system, if one state follows another in time, they are just next to each other in a way similar to how two beads on a necklace are next to each other.

I do not see how it can be invalid for me to ask what is the ultimate cause of this system. It seems to me that this conception of time does not avoid the cosmological argument in favor of the existence of God any more than the human-centric conception of time. I have concluded that the best explanation for the universe being the way that it is (and not different) is that it was created by a higher power that can be called God. I have not come across a theory of time that has changed my mind on this.

I have tried to figure out the best definition of time that works with my understanding of the ultimate explanation for existence. I have concluded that the theory of time proposed by physicists as stated above cannot be reconciled with the higher power that I have concluded must exist. Simply because a theory is accepted by the scientific community does not mean that it deserves to be respected as scientific knowledge. Most of the time, I support theories that seem to be accepted by the scientific community at large, but I can usually reconcile these theories with the philosophy that I ascribe to.

From the cosmological argument, I have concluded that all things are dependent on the higher power, and this includes time. God is not beholden to time. The best definition of time that can

coexist with my conception of God is that time is essentially the actions of God in succession. As God acts, we experience time moving. The past is comprised of things God has already done. The future is what God will do, though this may not necessarily have been pre-determined. To further clarify, it does not make sense to ask what God does between actions, nor does it make sense to ask what happened before God first acted.

So if we see a leaf fall to the ground, what has happened is that God has moved it to the ground, according to the laws of nature. God is not beholden to the laws of nature either. The law of gravity, by all appearances, is God's plan. We see everything obey the laws of nature, and this is apparently because God does not wish to deviate from the plan. This does not necessarily mean that God won't. Now, I do tend to focus on understanding the laws of nature first and foremost, and I only look for a supernatural explanation for phenomena as a last resort (which almost never happens), but I do believe that it is important to understand that there is a higher power than the laws of nature and a higher

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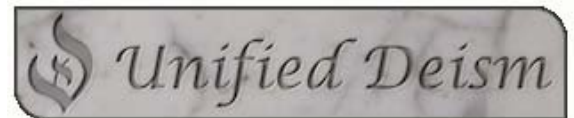


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power than time.

Now, one may ask, what about the theory of relativity? Isn't time relative to motion? Well, yes, according to the laws of nature. Time does appear to be relative to speed and to gravity based on our experiments, but according to the conclusions I have derived from the cosmological argument, this "time" is actually not God's time. This "time" is derived from God's time. There must be an absolute time, which is the actions of God. Just to clarify, "absolute" in this context refers to a quantity that is not purely comparative, but is instead anchored into reality. So while objects have their own local "times" that are determined by the theory of relativity, these are all actually relative to God's absolute time, which is not relative to anything.

God's time works as changes to the physical world on a consistent basis as determined by the laws of nature, which includes the determination of each object's local "time" by their speed and by gravity. Though time may appear to be continuous, this continuity is an illusion and the actual time is discreet. It is a discreet series of actions that change things according to God's pre-defined plan, which we know as the laws of nature.



Unified Deism is an effort to loosely define a broad and inclusive form of Deism that is oriented towards the formation of a Deist fellowship and community and to promote Deism into society's mainstream.

Unified Deism can be described as a religious philosophy of life that advocates reasoned belief in God and which provides context for our lives. We see God as the superior reasoning power revealed in the beauty, complexity and order of the creation. This form of Deism encompasses all branches of Deistic belief.

The Unified Deism Community can be found on the World Wide Web. We believe it to be the first Deist social networking site:

<http://unifieddeism.com/>

We invite you to come explore, to share and to join us in fellowship. Welcome!



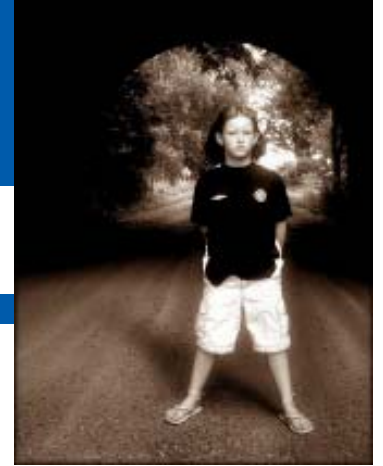
Principles of Unified Deism

Unified Deism holds three principles paramount:

1. We believe that God exists based on reflective reason, personal experience, and observation of nature.
2. We believe that fellowship, community, and mutual respect are essential components of life.
3. We believe our principles should evolve with societal progress and our knowledge of the universe.

We are further guided by these principles (not listed in priority order):

1. We believe everything we need to know of God can be found in the universe itself.
2. We do not believe God acts in the universe in ways that contradict natural law, but do not deny the possibility.
3. We believe that human beings are capable of having profound experiences of God, but hold that such personal revelations are true only for themselves.
4. We believe in the intrinsic value of life and advocate honesty, prudence, compassion, and justice in our dealings with one another.
5. We believe people should be free in all aspects of their lives, provided they do not disturb the peace, happiness, or safety of society.
6. We encourage all to advance the human condition within their personal capacity to do so. However, we believe religion should be separate from government and neither this nor any Deist principle should be used to justify political positions or causes.
7. We believe that religion is a personal matter guided by the dictates of conscience. We do not advocate efforts to convert people to Deism, but instead endeavor to promote Deism and educate those who are interested.



From Secularism to Deism

by Julie

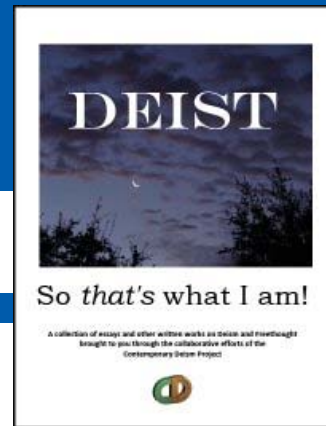
I grew up in a very secular household. The only part Jesus played in our lives was at Christmas as the baby in the manger of my grandparents' nativity set. We didn't discuss God, but mentioning God was not discouraged. I wouldn't have had it any other way. The spiritual journey was mine alone, not clouded by any bias. My only real problem was that I was only familiar with Christianity and Judaism.

I had no fear of Hell. The thought of it was nothing more than a flitter in my brain from time to time. I remember going to church with a few different friends, but only a handful of times, mostly for social reasons. The church sermons did nothing for me; I always left unchanged. After graduating from high school I made a new friend. We had many wild, fun times together and he was the only one who called me up on my 18th birthday and asked me out. Before his call, I was at a very low point. One day, out of the blue, he informed me that he had found God. He had been "born again". I was leery when he asked me to attend a group meeting that he loved, but out of friendship I went a few times. For some reason I remember I was scared that I would be roped in and would fall headfirst like my friend had. Upon attending the meeting, I immediately felt a coldness. Something wasn't right with these people. They wanted me to believe their tall tales. They tried to teach me to talk

in tongues. Shortly after, I was out of there, and I lost a good friend.

Not long after, my friend since 5th grade and her husband, a friend since high school, took a walk on the "born again" side. They pressured me and pressured me. They told me my beliefs were wrong. I needed to be saved. Heaven was this fantastic place where the roads were paved with gold. Everyone had mansions and Rolls Royces. I remember thinking how ludicrous that was! Why would I want to leave a world burdened with materialism and ascend to a "heaven" offering more of the same? Unfortunately, as a result, I lost two more dear friends. I couldn't believe the same way they did, and so I fell short of their expectations. Religion could not be a side issue with them; it had to be in the forefront.

Shortly thereafter I found Paganism and Wicca. In retrospect, they may have attracted me because they were as far from Christianity as I could get! However, Paganism did, for a time, motivate me. In fact, my husband and I were even handfasted by a Druid Priestess. I guess I got bored, so I quit



studying the Wiccan path. I later read book after book on Buddhism, but I never practiced it. It taught me that one should be disconnected from material objects. But the fact of the matter is that I just love my objects too much! They connect me to loved ones who have passed on, and they are form my way of artistically expressing myself.

Atheism was my next leap. Here I was content. I felt nothing was missing. But several months ago my spirit started stirring. Was this all there is? Could there be more? I thought of going back to Paganism or Buddhism or maybe Native American Spirituality. Nothing got me motivated, so I just set those thoughts aside. One day, months later, I was talking with a friend, and she mentioned that someone we both knew had become a Satanist. I remembered that Satanists more or less worshipped themselves, but I made a mental note to look up Satanism so that I would be informed.

Then one day I started looking for information about Satanism on the Web, but I instead came across the religious belief system called Deism. I was immediately intrigued, so I looked further. I read on through the day and

the night. Deism just made so much sense! This was what I had been looking for!

I struggled a few days with the fact I was an Atheist. What would make me a believer? It finally came to me. The chicken and the egg! That concept led to my understanding of the survival of species and evolution. There was a God!

I had made that leap of faith, on sensible grounds! I will still say, depending on the day, that I'm 70 percent Deist and 30 percent Atheist. Deism, in the few short months I've been studying it, has allowed me to grow and see things from different perspectives. I have finally found the religion I was searching for all along, the one that allows me to be the individual I've always prided myself to be.

Deist

So That's What I Am!

Deist debuted on January 11, 2010 and is now for sale at <http://sothatwhatiam.com/> in both printed and ebook (.pdf) formats. You can also purchase the book online at Amazon or Barnes & Noble. Deist is a product of the Contemporary Deism Project, which is a spin-off of the Modern Deist Project originally envisioned by David Pyle.

Deist is a collection of essays by thirteen contemporary Deist authors tied together into a meaningful whole that should be of interest to anyone who would like to learn more about Deism in the 21st century.



Your newsletter needs YOU!

The Deist Alliance is looking for authors. We all certainly express ourselves regularly in the discussion forums available at Deist Alliance sites such as PositiveDeism.com, Panendeism.org, Naturesgod.org, EnlightenedWorldview.com and iDeism.com. The newsletter represents one more way we can spread the word about Deism in a positive fashion.

Editor's Note:

The views expressed by the authors of the articles in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of all Deists or of all the members of the Deist Alliance.

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Hail and Farewell

This issue we say farewell to God's Online Home. The demands of real life have force Craig to close down this Deist Alliance member site. We miss him already.

But nature's cycle continues. We also welcome two new Deist Alliance sites: iDeism.com and EnlightenedWorldview.com. Come visit these new members for two unique takes on the wonderful world of Deism.



Deist Alliance

<http://deistalliance.org>