

Deism Today

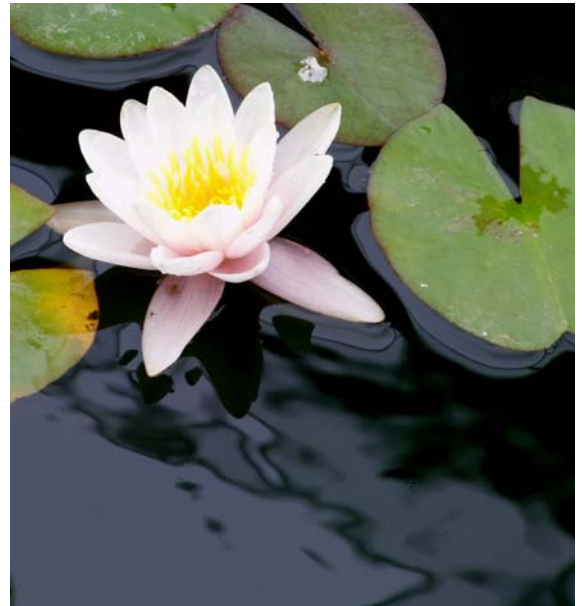
Summer 2010

Deist Alliance Quarterly Newsletter



Observations by Chuck Clendenen

"You can observe a lot by just watching." --Yogi Berra, former major league baseball player known for his "Yogiisms".

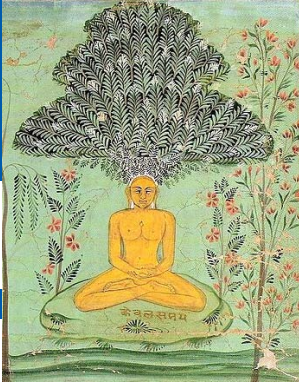


Welcome to the latest issue of Deism Today, the quarterly newsletter of the Deist Alliance. Here you will find authors familiar and new. And we are always seeking new material. Contact us at the Positive Deism discussion board.

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Enlightenment in the Deist Worldview

by Brandon Norgaard

The word “enlightenment” means different things to different people and in different contexts. For instance, it is an important part of the Buddhist faith to seek enlightenment through what is known as the Noble Eightfold Path, which promotes meditation and mental development and stresses the importance of understanding things as they truly are. Also, historically, “The Enlightenment” refers to the period of intellectual development that followed the Scientific Revolution in the 18th century. This movement brought with it a great deal of questioning of traditional institutions, customs, and morals. Enlightenment thinkers argued in favor of replacing many of these traditions with a new understanding of the world based heavily on reason and progress through modern science. In the western secular tradition, “enlightenment” broadly means wisdom or understanding that enables clarity of perception.

It seems to me that there is a certain commonality to these different understandings of enlightenment. The Buddhist conception of enlightenment includes certain spiritual and supernatural connotations that are not shared by others who use this term. There were many competing philosophical ideas advanced during The Enlightenment. And in the modern sense, this word may have other unique connotations. It does seem, however, that there are certain values that are common to all definitions of this word across different cultures and time periods. What is common to all of these meanings is that enlightenment is a personal understanding of life's greatest questions reinforced by observation, reason, and experience.

The philosopher Leo Apostel said that there are several important meta-questions of life, and the way each of us answers these questions constitutes our individual worldview. A worldview is a consistent and integral sense of existence that provides a framework for generating, sustaining, and applying knowledge. Individuals use their worldviews as a tool for interpreting the complexities of the world, while it serves as a guide to their interaction with external reality. The meta-questions that Apostel spoke of include “What is right and wrong?”, “How do we find what is true and what is false?”, “What is the explanation for the universe?”, “What is the meaning or purpose of global reality?” among others. Each of these questions corresponds to a major branch of philosophy, and in the case of the questions mentioned here, these branches are ethics, epistemology, explanation, and teleology, respectively.



Each person has a worldview, and the worldview that one subscribes to will likely lead the individual to seek answers to many meta-questions, though perhaps not to all questions that one may possibly ask. For example, a faith-based worldview such as Christianity has answers for teleological questions, but more scientific based worldviews may be agnostic on such questions. By this measure, Christianity is more enlightened than a scientific based worldview because it is able to provide more answers overall. Also, some worldviews may be able to guide their adherents to find answers to pretty much any question they might ask, but they may have to rely on blind faith in order to provide such answers. Again, Christianity does have answers to teleological questions, but these answers are provided without anything that can be considered strong or reliable evidence; therefore, these answers must be accepted through a leap of faith. By this measure, scientific based worldviews are more enlightened because the answers they provide are based on observation and reason.

In my opinion, a worldview that encourages the adherent to find answers to as many questions as possible while still relying on observation and reason has a higher level of enlightenment than a worldview that cannot enable the follower to find as many answers to life's questions. All things being equal, I also believe that reason-based worldviews are superior to those that rely mostly on blind faith to provide answers to the deep questions that we all ponder. Since faith-based worldviews are superior in providing answers while scientific based worldviews are better at

justifying answers, it may depend on an in-depth comparison of specific instances of both of these categories in order to evaluate whether the given faith-based worldview or the given scientific based worldview has a higher degree of enlightenment.

Deism can be considered a worldview. Its concepts encourage Deists to find their own answers to some of the important questions of life, most notably those questions requiring reasoned explanation. At its core, Deism builds reasonable arguments in favor of belief in God, and for the most part, Deism does not provide a guide for its followers on questions relating to ethics and teleology. Deists examine other useful and appropriate belief systems and find a way to incorporate useful elements from them into a coherent worldview. One example of this type of syncretism is Unified Deism, which brings together Deism with ethical concepts such as a respect for life and the importance of community.

Other things being equal, I believe that Deist worldviews are more enlightened than Agnostic or Atheistic worldviews,

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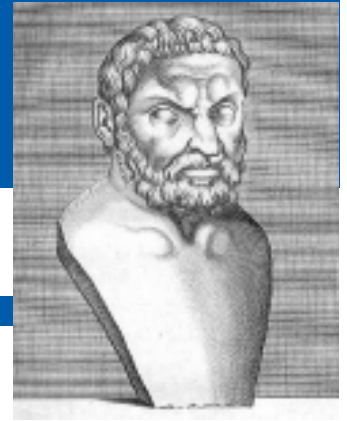
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Editor's Notes:

We welcome Brandon Norgaard as our new Associate Editor this time around. Brandon did much of the real work for this issue. He picked the theme ("Observing, Thinking and Reasoning"), got people motivated, chased down articles, followed up, performed proofreading and editing chores and still found time to submit an article himself. You can't imagine how much I appreciate it.





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because Deists are able to derive their answers and explain the existence of the universe through observation and reason. Once one adopts a Deistic approach, one's worldview will include an ongoing quest to better understand the universe and to find answers to other pertinent questions of life through the use of his or her God-given skills of observing, thinking, and reasoning. These skills will allow the practitioner to build a more enlightened worldview.

Thales and the Beginning of Reason

by Joel Axenroth



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Whose
Monthly Column
Morals?

Right to Die?

Dr. Jack Kevorkian brought the issue straight to our television sets and engaged America in a debate over assisted suicide for the terminally ill. The gap separating the two sides of this issue is as wide as the one in the abortion debate, and the passions run just as hot.

People are against physician-assisted suicide for many reasons. Some believe that death is part of life's lessons, and for one to make such a decision for another would have undesirable spiritual consequences. There are those who believe that if physician-assisted suicide were to be legalized, anyone in a "less than desirable position" would be at risk for such a procedure perhaps without their own consent. It is also believed that someone could be coerced into a decision by a careless relative.

Those in favor of the right to choose whether to live or to die generally believe that each of us knows what we need best. They don't believe there are spiritual consequences for such a choice, and if there are, it's not for anyone else but the patient to deal with. They also feel that they don't have the right to tell someone who is gravely ill that they can't choose to die.

On this issue we are a nation divided. Can a middle ground be found on such an important ethical decision? Can we grow as a people by transcending absolutes of "right" and "wrong" and working towards a compromise? Our country faces many moral issues. Whose morals will prevail?

New Column

"Whose Morals?" is a new regular feature on morals and ethics. The plan is to run a poll about a moral or ethical issue on the Positive Deism Discussion Board in advance of the publication of the next newsletter, and then Julie will produce a column discussing the issue and the poll results. That probably would have happened for this issue if I had not dropped the ball. :-)

I promise to do better next time! I'm sure Julie will provoke our thoughts every time.

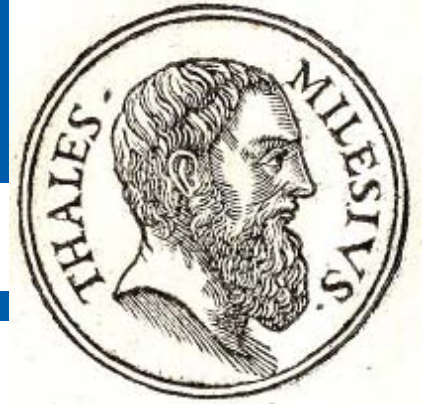
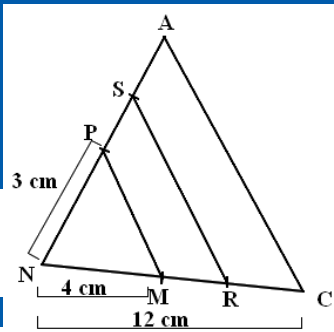




Reasoned Spirituality

by Dave Gaddis





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discussion that we enjoy today. In many ways he can truly be considered the father of reason.

May 28th 585 BCE.

Selected References:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thales#Water as a first principle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thales#Water_as_a_first_principle)

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/thales/>

<http://www.mathopenref.com/thalestheorem.html>

Thales is thought to have believed in a spherical earth and in his later years developed a theory to measure the diameter of the sun and moon. He charted the time of the summer and winter solstices and from these confirmed the 365 day solar calendar.

Thales was the founder of the Milesian school of philosophy and this was continued by his pupil Anaximander and Anaximander's pupil Anaximenes. Between them they developed the process of critical discussion of their respective theories that continues as peer review to this present day.

phenomena and believed in natural events and natural causes. By doing so he developed theories that could be challenged by other men free from the taint of religious persecution and instituted the concept of free





Alliance News

And a lot of news there is for this issue of Deism Today, the Deist Alliance Newsletter, so much so that it takes up an entire page.

A lot of the news revolves around Unified Deism, which became a chartered organization and also joined the Deist Alliance. That has not resulted in a lot of new faces, since Dad, Dave Gaddis and yours truly founded the community, but we believe it marks a sea change for Deism. We plan to take Deism into the mainstream of world philosophical thought, where it deserves to be. No one will accuse us of thinking small.

For those who have not yet dropped by, the Unified Deism main Website link can be found on any DA Website. The main page points to our blogs, videos, other resources such as our YouTube channel, and it points to our Community site. The UD Community is the first Deist social network. We have a discussion forum like PD and Panendeism.org, but we also offer personal blogs, a place for videos and sound files, and we are starting up Deism University, where we will be offering online classes in Deism. Come on over and find your niche!

Panendeism.org went through some domain name turmoil recently. Aaron expects to get his sorted out soon, but meanwhile, use a link on a DA member site or update your favorites to point to

<http://panendeism.web.officelive.com/default.aspx>. The discussion board remains at the usual URL:

<http://panendeism.userboard.net/>.

Dave Gaddis has absorbed his iDeism.com site into the Unified Deism Community. The excellent Deism Network still remains as part of the DA.

Positive Deism moved to a new hosting service. It has a new look and feel if you like (you can select your own theme), but more importantly, people say the performance is much better.

For long-time friends of the Deist Alliance, our old friend David Pyle has completed seminary and has been ordained as a Unitarian Universalist Minister. He has also fixed the old Dynamic Deism Discussion Board and has preserved it as an archive. It no longer accepts new members, but you can still log in there if you had an account. Best of all the search function has been fixed, so you can research the old posts.

I've already said so elsewhere, but I must say again how much I appreciate the support and input from so many folks: Brandon, Dave, Joel and Julie. A few issues left me feeling a bit lonely, but no more. Thanks to all of you! It makes it all worthwhile.

Chuck Clendenen



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 Unifieddeism.com. The newsletter represents one more way we can spread the word about Deism in a positive fashion.



Deist Alliance

<http://deistalliance.org>

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My profound thanks to all who contributed. All credit goes to those who devoted their time and energy to this project. Any mistakes are mine.

--Chuck