

Deism Today

Spring 2009

Deist Alliance Quarterly Newsletter



The Examined Life

by Charles Clendenen

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 conclude 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 should choose courses of action based on what we observe about ourselves. Otherwise, what would be the point of our observing anyway? 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.

I agree that an unexamined life has less meaning. How can we know whether our actions are meaningful unless we assess their impact both on our own selves and on those around us? What do we find when we measure how we influence our surroundings and the lives of those with whom we interact?

An examined life can have a major and positive impact on those we touch. Honest self-criticism is difficult, but it is the most important type of criticism. When we learn honest self-examination, we can make real strides when we undertake any sort of self-improvement. Until we can recognize our *own* shortcomings, we can easily perceive the criticism of *others* as misguided or unfair. The act of accepting valid criticism from others requires honest self-examination. We never mature until we learn this.

Deism means deciding for ourselves what makes sense; it means reasoning things through and coming up with our own conclusions. I think that Deists, if they apply Deism to what they

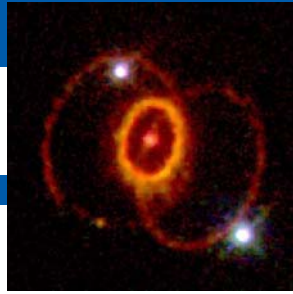
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Welcome to the latest issue of Deism Today, the quarterly newsletter of the Deist Alliance. We offer you authors familiar and new. And we are always seeking new material. Contact us at the Positive Deism discussion board.

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Beauty in Reason

by Robert Reno, Jr.

Seeing the order inherent in nature enhances the awe I feel when looking at the world around me.



I am often asked if researching the underlying mathematical explanations of things makes them less beautiful to me. My answer to this question is simple. No. In fact, the opposite is true. Seeing the order inherent in nature enhances the awe I feel when looking at the world around me. As Charles Darwin once said, "Mathematics seems to endow one with something like a new sense."

Mathematics is everywhere. It infuses the cosmos. It gives structure to experience. Without it there would be only chaos and confusion.

To me, learning how stars are formed and how life evolves is like reading a book. Science tells a story, and mathematics is the language in which it is written. And in my opinion there is really no way to truly understand the meaning of the tale without having some understanding of that language. That doesn't mean we should all become mathematicians or that those less inclined towards that subject are somehow not as appreciative of the beauty of nature. Simply being aware that mathematics underlies everything is enough.

You can see mathematics all around you. It can be found in the shape of a leaf or in the ripples of a still body of water when a child skips a rock across the surface. And it's in the moonlight that illuminates your true love's face.

So you see, when I look at an equation I see art, I hear music and I feel God. For as the poet said:



Euclid Alone Has Looked on Beauty Bare

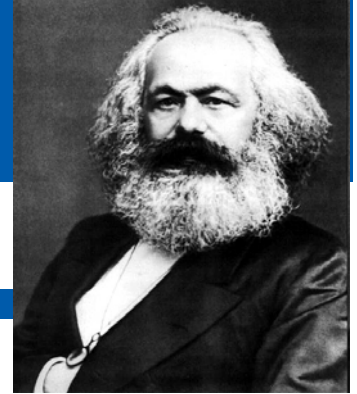
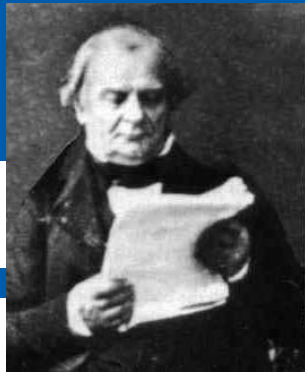
Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare.
Let all who prate of Beauty hold their peace,
And lay them prone upon the earth and cease
To ponder on themselves, the while they stare
At nothing, intricately drawn nowhere
In shapes of shifting lineage; let geese
Gabble and hiss, but heroes seek release
From dusty bondage into luminous air.
O blinding hour, O holy, terrible day,
When first the shaft into his vision shone
Of light anatomized! Euclid alone
Has looked on Beauty bare. Fortunate they
Who, though once only and then but far away,
Have heard her massive sandal set on stone.

When I look at an equation, I see art.

I hear music, and I feel God.

Edna St. Vincent Millay 1923

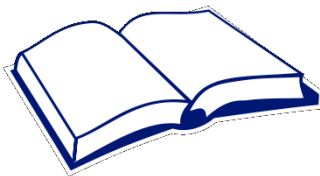




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believe and do, can honestly claim that they live examined lives. They doubt that anyone else can or should decide for them. It is their own assessment that counts. And that is what being a Deist is all about.

Special thanks to Robert Reno, Jr. for using a quote that reminded me of Socrates.



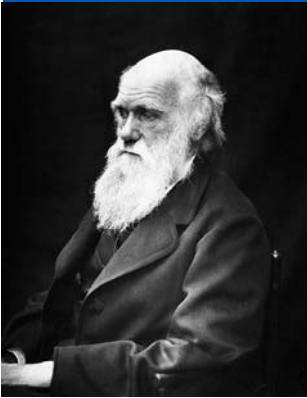
Atheism Remix

Book by R. Albert Mohler, Jr.
Review by Nicole Brown

I have great respect for books. I usually finish them and put them on a shelf to re-read later. I lend them to friends or pass them along to another loving home. I respect good writing, so it pains me to say that Mohler sows only the seeds of propaganda.

Chapter One introduces us to the Four Horsemen of the Modern Apocalypse (Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, and Sigmund Freud), and Chapter Two brings us the Four Horsemen of the New Atheist Apocalypse (Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens). His choice of terms is ironic, because even one “apocalypse” would have left us all dead (and free of the Evangelicals).

Mohler gives Darwin short treatment, and Freud is seemingly accused of wanting an end to Christianity and all Christians for believing that the unconscious mind tells us more than our conscience mind. Mohler’s inclusion of Marx is almost an afterthought, as though he was grasping to find a fourth horseman. He does condemn Marx for his famous concept of the “opiate of the masses”, which led to the Soviet abolition of religion (23 years after Marx died). It is in his treatment of Nietzsche that Mohler is most mistaken: “Nietzsche knew that atheism would be very costly – and very dangerous.”



Mohler looks back fondly on the Renaissance and earlier times when it was required to believe in God. The Enlightenment, “regrettably”, made it possible for people not to believe. Mohler thinks we have now moved into a third stage where “it has become impossible *to believe*... In the first stage there was no rival explanation other than Christianity. But now it is the absolute opposite.”

Our Horsemen of the New Atheist apocalypse get much more coverage than the earlier horsemen. He depicts Christopher Hitchens as thinking that any belief in God is a threat to civilization. He also describes Hitchens as thinking that religion is a great cause of sexual repression. He believes his goal is to encourage other atheists to be more vocal in their unbelief (as opposed to trying to make believers doubt). Mohler exhibits more excitement writing about Daniel Dennett. Mohler considers Dennett to be more philosophical, while Sam Harris can be regarded as a sensationalist atheist, loud, annoying and an intellectual lightweight. He mentions little about Dawkins other than the fact that he published several books, including *The Selfish Gene* and *A Devil's Chaplain*. A number of people, including Deists, are not fans of Dawkins, and we certainly could include Mohler in that number.

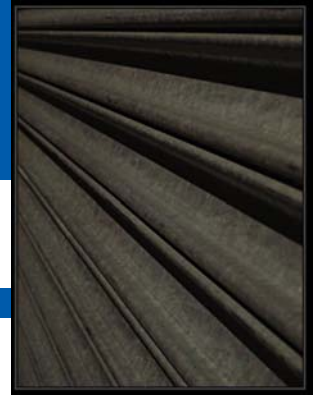
Mohler sees the New Atheism as bold, celebrating the rejection of God, whereas old atheists used to feel a sense of loss. Mohler claims that New

Atheists are terrified by the fact that the majority of Americans do not believe in evolution. (From a personal perspective, the overwhelming majority of the intellectuals I know are saddened, not frightened by this fact).

Chapter Three sadly boils down to Alister McGrath and Alvin Plantinga bickering with Richard Dawkins through various publications. Chapter four examines Christianity itself and introduces two interesting people, Tina Beattie and John F Haught. Tina Beattie is a Catholic theologian and a feminist as well. In her own words, “so let the men fight about God if they want to. My concern is not with debates about God, but with creation and nature, with language and meaning, with people, and with kindness.” Both Haught and Beattie have one thing in common: they believe there is no conflict between Darwin’s theory and Christian theology. The Bible is not to be read literally, rather it is a well of knowledge from which we should draw wisdom. Unsurprisingly, Mohler responds by declaring that people like Beattie and Haught are precisely what is wrong with the church these days. In Mohler’s words, “An accommodationist response to the New Atheism and to the larger challenge of modern thought is simply not an option.”

To me, Mohler set the tone very early in the book: Those who think threaten God’s will. Anyone too curious about science is cultivating ill will against

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Christians and God. Ironically though, Mohler calls upon several Christian biologists as expert witnesses in later chapters.

My overall impression is that Mohler goes for cheap shots, and he just keeps shooting. Though his book is only 130 pages long, it took me nearly three months to finish reading it, take notes, and write my critique. It can go slowly when you can only stand to read two or three pages at a time without having the urge to throw the book across the room.

Yesterday is History,
Tomorrow a Mystery.
Today is a Gift.
That's why it's called the Present.

Editor's note:

Our contributors have typically been some of our "seasoned" regulars. This issue takes a look at Deism from some fresh perspectives.

New to Deism by Brad Topp-Lowe

I have been actively involved with Deism for the last couple of months, and although I have a huge amount to learn and discover, I can say that I have found my religion. I feel free from all religious dogma and pressure, and I live by the golden rule. I feel like I have been spiritually released from the prison I was in, and my mind is now free to search and think on my own behalf.

The problem for newcomers to Deism is the varying types of Deism on the Internet. I must admit that I looked at Deism over a year ago, and I stumbled across a website that in my opinion "bashed revealed religions". Now, the people who were "bashing the revealed religions" are entitled to their opinions and beliefs, and I completely respect that, but Deism needs to be promoted in a positive way. In the end I was put off Deism due to the negativity.

Over a year later I had come to another cross-



road in my journey, and I went back to the Internet, and this time looked at some different Deism websites. I then realised that Deism could be and is so much more than what I first experienced and understood. There are many new developments and initiatives that are taking place in the name of growing and bringing Deism to the world. There is now a Deist Academy where I can study and learn, and there are forums where I can chat. I am even an active member of the Fellowship of Natures God which is building a global community for Deists.

Being new to Deism is awesome, because I am just like a sponge absorbing information, but I am still using reason as my basis for deciding which information is meaningful to me and what information isn't. Deism allows me to do that! I believe in an afterlife, and Deism allows me that as well, because that is what makes sense to me! Deism allows me to be myself and think for myself without the fear of eternal retribution!

I acknowledge that I could be wrong with my belief in an afterlife since I don't have any proof, but I am happy to live with what makes reasonable sense to me in the here and now, and I will deal with whatever comes after death when it happens!

The beauty of Deism is that it can be as complex as you want it to be, or it can be as simple as you want it to be. You do not have to have a degree or be an intellectual to understand Deism. Deism is about just being yourself and being true to yourself with our God given gift of reason. Deism is now part of my daily life and is con-

stantly in my thoughts. I look at life with renewed vigour and I feel on top of the world! Deism has improved me spiritually, physically and emotionally, and if you can just be patient and find what works for you, I have no doubt that Deism can do this for you as well!

This is what it feels like to be new to Deism!





Deist Alliance News

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

The newsletter is a perfect way to share your opinions, theories, hopes and dreams with your fellow Deists and freethinking folks who subscribe. It is also a good way to share a poem, a photo or a sketch.

Volunteer, contribute and express yourself! Promise yourself to make a positive statement in the next quarterly issue. Just watch for a call for submissions on the Positive Deism discussion board.

- * Positive Deism recorded 2,000,000 hits last year.
- * Nature's God has added a discussion board.
- * Positive Deism soliciting updates for its Home Page.
- * Deist.info has gone through a major makeover.

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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Deist Alliance

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