

James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic World View Catalog*
Chapter Three: The Clockwork Universe
Deism

Check out this website on deism: <http://www.deism.com/>

I. The Causes of Deism

- A. The ecclesiastical genesis of deism (dualism)

- B. The scientific/philosophical genesis of deism (Newtonian physics)

- C. Other causes leading to deism (*Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2: 327)
 - Anti-trinitarianism
 - Unitarianism
 - Secularism
 - Anticlericalism
 - Erastianism (named after Thomas Erastus who advocated the supreme authority of the state in and over the church)
 - Arminianism
 - Socinianism (named after Faustus Socinus who denied the deity of Jesus, the Trinity, the immortality of man, and explained sin and salvation naturalistically)
 - Rise of the sects
 - General revolt against authority
 - Religious toleration
 - Glorification of the powers of man
 - Advocacy of the right to think and publish freely on all religious and political subjects without fear of persecution

II. Deism geographically:

A. British Deism:

- Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648)
- Charles Blount (1654-1693)
- John Toland (1670-1722)
- Anthony Collins (1676-1729)
- Mathew Tindal (1657-1733)

- William Wollaston (1660-1724)
- Thomas Woolston (1670-1731)
- Thomas Chubb (1679-1746)
- Thomas Morgan (d. 1743)
- Henry St. John Viscount Bolingbroke (1678-1751)
- Peter Annet (1693-1769)
- Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688)
- John Tillotson (1630-1694)

B. French Deism:

- Precursors: Jean Bodin, Rabelais, Pierre Charon, Montaigne, Descartes, Gassendi, Fontenelle, Bayle
- Francois-Marie Arouet Voltaire (1694-1778)
- Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)
- French atheist philosophes (d'Alembert, Diderot, Helvetius, Grimm, La Mettrie, Condillac, Condorcet)

C. German Deism (called Freethinkers or *Freidenker*)

- Karl Bahrdt
- Johann Eberhard
- Johann Edelmann
- Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768)
- Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781)
- Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

D. American Deism:

- Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)
- Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)
- George Washington (1732-1799)
- Thomas Paine (1737-1809)
- Ethan Allen (1738-1789)
- Elihu Palmer (1764-1806)
- Philip Freneau (1752-1832)
- Martin Gardner (b. 1914)

III. Typology of Deism:

A. God is not concerned with the ongoing operation of the world

B. God is concerned with the world, but not with the moral actions of human beings.

C. God is concerned about the world and the actions of man, but there is no after life for man.

D. God is concerned about the world and the actions of man, and man has an after life, but still there is no direct, divine intervention in the affairs of man.

IV. The Essential Tenets of Deism

A. A transcendent God, as a First Cause, created the universe but then left it to run on its own. God is thus not immanent, not fully personal, not sovereign over human affairs, not providential.

1. First Cause (transcendent force, energy, architect, Prime Mover creates the "clock" of the universe)
2. Left to run on its own (the "Clock" runs on its own without any kind of divine interference; God is "Creator Emeritus")
3. Not immanent (distant)
4. Not personal (indifferent)
5. Not sovereign or providential

B. The cosmos God created is determined because it is created as a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system; no miracle is possible.

1. The universe is closed to God's ordering and involvement; miracles do not occur.
2. The universe is closed to man's ordering since human beings are caught in an inescapable web of cause and effect.

C. Human beings, though personal, are a part of the clockwork of the universe.

1. Human beings, like the world itself, are independent of God and caught up in the matrix of a closed system.
2. Consequently, they have lost significance and the ability to act meaningfully.

D. The cosmos, this world, is understood to be in its normal state; it is not fallen or abnormal. We can know the universe, and we can determine what God is like by studying it.

1. Deism discounts the fall and any abnormality to the world.

2. Deism is empirical epistemologically, and only through the study of the world scientifically is knowledge of God possible; there is no room for special revelation or innate ideas.

E. Ethics is limited to general revelation; because the universe is normal, it reveals what is right.

1. Ethical laws are not disclosed by divine revelation.
2. Ethical practices must be discovered by an examination of the universe as it is which in the end destroys ethics since "whatever is, is right."
3. The aim of religion is morality and anything beyond morality is superfluous.

F. History is linear, for the course of the cosmos was determined at creation.

1. History is linear in the sense that it is headed to a final end determined at creation.
2. God is in nature, but not in history.
3. Nevertheless, in the end, God will bring all things to a conclusion at the final judgment.

G. Revelation

1. Since deism is rationalism applied to religion and to revelation, the Hebrew and Christian scriptures were suspect and attacked.
2. This has its counterpart in literary neo-classicism
3. Higher criticism of the Bible is inspired by deistic thinkers-the Bible was no longer considered sacrosanct and its verbal inspiration no longer dogmatically assumed.
4. The study of comparative religion and philosophy of religion resulted since the final truth of the Bible was rejected; other alternatives must be explored.

III. Conclusion

1. Deism slides easily into naturalism or atheism as the French philosophes asserted.
2. Anticlericalism and deism go hand in hand in that a revolt against God is a disguised form of a revolt against the clergy. Deism is thus a symptom of revolt against dogmatism and orthodoxy.
3. Deism adheres to the notion of the right to think for oneself on all subjects and a spirit of toleration; it marks the rise of secularism; the beginning of modernity in theology.

4. Though many claim that deism is defunct historically and philosophically, its legacy lives on. Deism did not die or even fade away and still exists even if not in name with those who say there must be a God even though He/It may not be involved with us down here. God is watching us, from a distance.

Phil 2303 Introduction to World Views
Deism

I. Introduction

The ecclesiastical genesis of deism (dualism)

1. The structural separation of reality into the two parts of the sacred and the secular, with the placing of the sacred on top, the relegation of the secular to the inferior, while seemingly designed to exalt the church and spiritual things, actually led to the secularization of society and to deism.
2. The prime result was that it made the gospel irrelevant to the whole of life such that Christianity has nothing significant to say about our natural and cultural and scientific life.
3. If the gospel has nothing to say, others do and will; Christians will then listen to these other voices and other authorities resulting in a double allegiance, one for spiritual matters and one for secular matters.
4. Since the Church and Christians were relegated to the sacred and the spiritual domains, the consequence was the secularization of society. If it were not for dualism, modern secularism may never have arisen at all. If God and Christianity are irrelevant to most of life (the secular), then there is the tendency to push God out all together, or at least relegate Him to the sphere of existence, but also non-involvement. Nature eats up grace.
5. The Western world did not all of a sudden turn atheistic, but deistic. There is the affirmation of God's existence, but a denial of His authority and revelation and involvement. God has nothing to say about what the world is like or how we should live. Deism and secularism questions the authority and relevance of God for the world—the saeculum—the age or created world as historical and temporal. From this saeculum God was increasingly excluded and the result is deism. When He is excluded entirely, the result is naturalism or atheism.

The scientific/philosophical genesis of deism (Newtonian physics)

1. The Greek scientific and philosophical model (a la Plato and Aristotle) sought to explain order and unity amid change and diversity. Aristotelian science accounted for the order of nature and similarity of things by a system of classification that included genera

and species. Unchanging unity was explained by a in which each particular thing is composed of matter and form together, the latter providing the unchanging definition and principle of an entity. Aristotelian science explained all kinds of change by reference to four main causes: material, formal, efficient, final. This Greek model dominated western thought for 1700 years.

2. The Renaissance model was developed from mechanistic science and was systematized by Isaac Newton. Order is explained by the operation of fixed laws of motion on the particles of matter that comprise the world. It is a clock work or billard ball universe, regular and predictable in its actions, subject to laws and principles like inertia and gravitation. Descartes adopted this model before Newton, and in his system, God is the first cause of the whole chain of physical motions and of undeniable ideas that move in the mind. This model was also applied to language and society.

3. To some (Berkeley, Clarke, Leibniz) the mechanistic model left God out as a remote cause rather than as an intimate creator and they constructed systems to correct this deficiency. Others, however, namely the deists drew exactly the conclusion that science shows that God is no more than a first cause, that science can explain all things, and that since laws of physics govern all things, God cannot or need not intervene within the world and history. Thereby, all acts of God were excluded including miracles, revelation (Bible), and the incarnation (Christ). These notions were unacceptable to science and to reason.

Other causes leading to deism (*Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2: 327)

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