

A Deist Epistle

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[Although this essay is written in the style of "scriptures", in no way should it ever be considered to be "Divine" or as a "Holy Text". It is simply the thoughts and impressions of the author regarding Deism. It does not, and cannot, express the views of all other Deists. This format was used because of its familiarity, and to enable easy reference for discussion. Note: The words "He", "Him", and "His" in reference to God are used as a matter of convention, and do not indicate that God is male or has a gender.]

Chapter 1. (Deism)

1. My fellow Deists, It fills me with joy that you have had the courage to embrace reason, and step away from the blind superstition that was such an important part of the past for many of you.

2. It's not easy to shake free of the shackles of superstition and fear that have been taught to you since the day you were born. But the light of reason shines brightly, and is freely available for anyone to embrace.

3. God has blessed us with this magnificent ability to reason. Do you think it honors our God to remain in fear and superstition, when we have God's wonderful gift of reason so readily available to us? No! It shows far more honor to God to be good stewards of his gifts; His gifts of life and of reason. Let us use our God-given reason to guide us through the best life we can achieve. Let us honor our God with the way we live.

4. But what are we to do with those who are still bound by the blindness of fear and superstition? Should we attack them without restraint; ridiculing and belittling them, trying to force them to believe what they don't believe? No. There is a better way. A way of love and respect.

5. When people ridicule you, and belittle your beliefs, do you feel inclined to follow them? Of course not. It has the exact opposite effect. It causes you to become even more defensive. When you ridicule and belittle the beliefs of

others, they will react the same way you would... they will become defensive, and shut their ears to your message of reason.

6. Rather than ridicule and belittle the religious beliefs of others, we ought to remain focused on our more excellent Deist beliefs. Our time, attention and energy should be focused on what we do believe, not on what we don't believe with regard to the religious opinions of others.

7. It's true that we don't agree with the theologies of 'revealed religions'. But the fact that we don't agree should not be the entire focus of our own beliefs. The primary focus of our beliefs should be to explore and develop our reason-based belief in God, and how we can honor God in our day to day lives by living and acting according to the gift of reason that God has blessed us with.

8. Deism should be held up like a beautiful gem that attracts people of reason who hear its message.

9. Deists ought to be a people of love, kindness and respect. Not a people of hate, anger or bitterness. If we show ourselves to be a people of anger and bitterness, then that will be the type of people we will attract. If we show ourselves to be a people of love, kindness and respect, then those will be the types of people we will attract.

10. The difference between Deism and Theism is the difference between belief in a personal God and an impersonal God. Theists believe in a God that they claim interacts with them on a personal level. Deists believe in an impersonal God that can't be known personally, but can be

deeply appreciated and honored.

11. Deism is a rational approach to a belief in God. It is a belief in God based on reason, nature and experience, rather than a belief dictated by Holy Texts.

12. Deists believe in God because they have determined to do so based on the design and circumstantial evidence that they perceive in nature. Not because they were told they must believe, or because they were raised to believe a certain way.

Chapter 2 (Deist Beliefs)

1. Our Deist beliefs are simple. We believe in God based on nature, reason and experience. We lead our moral lives according to Reason and The Golden Rule.

2. Nature is the only true unchangeable Word of God. Its order and design speaks to us of God's creative power. Its depths are unfathomable, and leave us gasping in wonder and awe. Yet it always acts according to the Natural Laws that God has established. By observation of those laws, we can gain a better understanding of the universe we live in, and deepen our appreciation of its Designer.

3. As we experience our lives, we come to understand that nature does not act outside of God's natural laws. Whenever someone tells us that something happened that seems to act outside of the Laws of Nature, we should regard those things with skepticism. There are things that happen that we don't understand, but we contend that everything happens according to God's natural laws.

4. Conscientiously applying The Golden Rule to our everyday lives will result in reason and respect in all we think, say and do. It will generally result in a better life for you and for those around you. It is a practical way to act according to love.

5. Many of us hope that there is an afterlife. But we can't know if there will be one or not. If there is one, it is sure to be a wonderful adventure. If there is not one, then we'll never know.

6. Because we don't know if there is an afterlife, neither can we know what the nature of an afterlife would be like. Many of those within revealed religions claim that it will begin as a time of God's judgment, and then result in eternal paradise and bliss, or eternal punishment and torment. But we don't know that. How can we know the details of what happens after death?

7. Deists don't believe in the concept of Hell. Neither do we believe in the concept of a God that would inflict that type of punishment on people for simply not holding the correct religious opinions.

8. Although we believe that God exists, we can't know the true nature and purpose of God. We can make speculations based on circumstantial evidence. But they are only speculations.

9. Assigning human attributes to God nearly always causes logic problems. We tend to assume that our human perceptions of Good and Evil apply to God, and that God is always and only Good. However, this causes problems when bad things happen to good people. People ask, "How can a good God have allowed this tragedy to happen?". Good and Evil don't exist apart from perception, and it's a mistake to assign to God our human perceptions.

10. Instead of saying that God is this or that, it's better to just say that "God IS".

11. Deists believe in God based on the design and order that we observe in nature. We don't believe that the design and order within nature was merely an accident.

12. Whenever someone's religious opinions cause them to act in a manner that is contrary to Golden Rule principles, we ought to speak out against those actions. However, it is the action that should be targeted for the criticism; not the right of that person to hold a different religious opinion.

Chapter 3 (Miracles)

1. We believe that the universe operates according to the natural laws that God has established, and that God will not operate outside of those laws. If God had the need to

do that, then it would indicate that God's natural laws were somehow flawed, or that God was bestowing special favors on certain individuals.

2. God is not honored when we think of God as our personal genie in a bottle, who is only there to do our bidding, and to perform magic tricks for our amusement or benefit.

3. Even if God were to perform a miracle for someone, it would be a miracle for that person only, and possibly for whoever else may have been around when it occurred. For the rest of the world, it can only be hear-say... second hand information.

4. We often find out that many of the things that people claim as miracles aren't miracles at all. Often they are fraudulent, or else can be explained naturally. But even if we don't have a natural explanation, doesn't mean that there isn't one.

5. Sometimes good things happen at just the right time. Believers in miracles will point to these things and claim that they are miracles. We shouldn't assume that 'beneficial coincidences' are miracles from God, any more than we should assume that 'non-beneficial coincidences' are from Satan.

6. Deists don't claim that God cannot do miracles. However, based on our experiences and the natural order of things, we believe that God typically does not work outside of the Laws of Nature that he has established. If God did perform a miracle for someone, then it would be a miracle to that person only, and possibly to those that saw it. It would only be hear-say to everyone else.

7. At any rate, Miracles aren't a very good way for God to prove himself. There are too many ways that "Miracles" can be done by trickery. Just because we see something that we can't explain, doesn't mean that it's a miracle. It could also be a manipulation done by a trickster. Accounts of Miracles done by others, or that others claim to have seen, can be outright lies, or misrepresentations. At any rate, accounts of Miracles told to us by others is merely second-hand knowledge to us, and we are not obliged to believe them.

Chapter 4 (Revelation)

1. In the same way that accounts of Miracles is hear-say, or second hand information; so too is Divine Revelation.

2. Deists don't claim that God cannot give someone a revelation. But if God were to do so, it would be a revelation to that person only. If that person tells someone else that God gave him a revelation, it would be hear-say, or second hand information, to the person being told.

3. The Holy Texts of Revealed Religions fall into the category of second hand information. The text gives accounts of what someone else claims that God did or said. Since we have no way of verifying that the person giving the account isn't lying, or is simply mistaken, then we can only treat the claims of Holy Texts as hear-say, or second hand information. We are under no obligation to believe it.

4. Deists believe that God is revealed thru nature; not the specific attributes of God, but a perception that God exists.

5. When we stand in awe and wonder at the majesty of nature and the universe, we get a revelation of sorts. We begin to realize that all of this certainly couldn't be a mere accident, and that there is surely a Designer behind it all.

6. The fact that Deists don't believe in revelations given in Holy Texts should not become the focus of our theology. We should not focus all our time and attention upon that which we don't believe.

7. Neither should we focus on this with regard to those who do believe in Holy Texts. It will only result in strife and contention. We have our faith, they have their faith. As long as someone's religious beliefs don't result in harm to others, then everyone ought to be free to hold whatever faith they wish.

Chapter 5 (Morality)

1. One of the differences between Deists and those of Revealed Religions is that Deists believe that actions are more important than religious beliefs. Whereas, those of Revealed Religions hold that "correct" beliefs are as important, or even more important, as actions.

2. We believe that morality should be reason-

based. Certainly the best reason-based guideline for morality is 'The Golden Rule' in all its various forms.

3. The Golden Rule states that we should act towards others in a way that we would have them act towards us. Another variation is that we should not act towards others in a way that we would not want them to act towards us.

4. The Golden Rule is stated in many different ways in many different religions. But the underlying concept is the same.

5. When we come to a point where we must make a moral decision, we should apply Reason and Golden Rule principles to that decision. If we do that, then we will surely not go far wrong.

6. Since Deists don't believe in the threat of Hell if we don't act in a morally good manner, then what is it that causes us to do so? It is because Reason shows us that acting in a morally good manner, according to reason and Golden Rule principles, is beneficial to us, to those around us, and to humanity in general. Whereas, acting in a morally bad manner causes strife, anger and discord, and is harmful to humanity.

7. What about acting in a morally bad manner, where you won't get caught? This is where integrity comes in. We ought to act in a morally good manner because we understand that it's the right thing to do, regardless of whether anyone else is looking or not.

8. Human values of Good and Bad are tied to perspective, and they can change with time. Therefore application of The Golden Rule can have different results in different situations, different cultures, and different times. Much of morality is not an absolute. So our morality must be flexible enough to take this into consideration.

9. Morality based on rules within Holy Texts are not flexible, and are unable to change as the situation, culture, or time dictates.

10. Acting in a morally good manner is a practical way that we can honor God. God has endowed us with the gift of Reason, and we can consider it to be an honor to God to live and act in a way that uses the reason we have been given.

11. Acting in a morally good manner is more important than our religious beliefs. Even if

we were to embrace a system of religious thought that was not Deist, we still ought to stress the overriding importance of acting in a morally good manner that does not violate Golden Rule principles.

Chapter 6 (Worship)

1. God does not require our worship. However, it is natural to have the desire to have some form of worship toward the God we believe in.

2. Deists must find their own way to worship God. Some worship God through living a morally good life based on reason. Some meditate. Some pray. Some have rituals that they follow. Some show a deep appreciation of nature. Some do other things, or a combination of things.

3. Deists don't dictate a way that must be followed in order to worship God. Worship to God should come from the heart. It should be a natural outpouring of honor, respect, awe and appreciation toward God. No one can tell another person how that must be done.

4. Even if we don't have a formal way of worshiping God, we can still show honor to God by how we live our lives. This is practical worship. Living a morally good life according to reason can be seen as a great honor to God who has bestowed life and reason to us.

5. Worship can also simply be an attitude; an attitude of awe and appreciation towards God.

6. Worship is something that naturally flows from us toward God. God has given us no indication that he requires or demands it.

7. We honor the Designer when we show appreciation for the design. We honor the Architect when we appreciate what was built. We honor the Artist when we appreciate his art. We honor the Giver when we appreciate what was given.

Chapter 7

(Evangelizing Deism)

1. Deism should be offered as a possible path to follow. It should never be forced on anyone as "The only Truth".
2. Deists don't believe that they possess the "only true word of God". As such, we should never display a pious attitude that we are right, and everyone else is wrong.
3. We should be ready to share our Deist beliefs with those who show an interest. However, we should not attack the right of others to have religious opinions different than ours.
4. All people have the right to hold the religious opinion of their choice. We should respect that right, even if we strongly disagree with those opinions.
5. Not only should we respect the right of others to hold their religious opinion, but we should ask for the same in return.
6. Deism is a rational approach to a faith in God. Many people aren't ready for that, and are unwilling to hear about our reason-based approach to God. They find it offensive to their own religious beliefs. We should be sensitive to know when is the right time to speak of our beliefs, and when is the right time to remain silent about it.
7. We should make efforts to publicize Deism so that people will know what it is. If they have an interest, then they should be able to easily find more information, or know where to find us.
8. Sometimes a person's religious opinions cause them to act in ways that violate Golden Rule principles. When that occurs, we should speak out against those actions, but not against the right of that person to hold a religious opinion different from our own.
9. Those within the Deist community who have the ability, should consider writing essays or books about their Deist beliefs. Deist writings are a powerful tool that can be used to reach those who have an interest in our beliefs.

Chapter 8 (Deist Community)

1. Like everyone else, Deists have a need to seek out other like-minded individuals for community and friendship. We should seek ways to fulfill this need.
2. Even though Deists are spread out around the world, in our age we have the ability to communicate freely and almost instantly. We should utilize these tools of worldwide communication to build up our Deist communities.
3. Worldwide virtual communities of Deists should be encouraged and facilitated.
4. At the local level, those with the talent and ability should consider the establishment of local Deist Fellowships. Although these Fellowships wouldn't be a "Church" in the traditional sense, they can still fulfill many of the roles that Churches traditionally fill, such as face-to-face community, socialization, real-world friendship and support. A Deist Fellowship would be a place to share and be encouraged in our faith with like-minded believers, and a place to build relationships with others. It would not be a place where dogma is handed down.
5. Various Deist groups ought to find ways to open channels of communication among each other. Although different Deist groups emphasize different beliefs, it's important to the Deist movement that these various groups have a way to communicate with each other.
6. Over time, Deist leaders will naturally emerge who will be able to facilitate our growth as a community. These leaders do not have Divine Authority, and should never be viewed as having such. A Deist leader leads by example and ability, not by authority.

Chapter 9 (Life and Equality)

1. Deists believe in the sanctity of life. Since we don't know if there will be an afterlife, then this physical life is all we can be sure that we have. Therefore, we should be good stewards of the life we've been given.
2. According to our abilities, we ought to strive towards knowledge, happiness and health in our lives.
3. Since we hold human life in high regard, we

should endeavor to never purposefully bring harm to others.

4. If others would harm us, we should defend ourselves.

5. All humans are equal. Not in ability, wealth or position, but in the right to life, freedom and the pursuit of happiness.

Chapter 10 (Politics)

1. Deism is about our belief in God through nature, reason and experience. It is a religious/philosophical issue, not a political issue.

2. Our Deist beliefs may shade our individual political leanings, but there is no political position that one must take in order to be a Deist.

3. Deists typically believe in the separation of Church and State. The government should govern, and remain neutral in matters of religion, except to insure freedom of religion for the people.

4. We should actively resist the efforts of other religious groups to take over the government and turn it into a Theocracy for their religion. This is simply a Golden Rule principle. Would they want other religions taking over the government, forcing their religious beliefs on people? Then they shouldn't attempt to do that to others.

5. Political activity is something that ought to be done by the individual as a good citizen; not something that should be done under the banner of 'Deism'.

Chapter 11 (Nature of God)

1. Although we believe that there is a God, we also know that we cannot know the true nature of that God.

2. Humans tend to ascribe human traits and characteristics to their God. This is a mistake. God is more than human, and we don't have the capability of knowing God, as one human knows another.

3. We can make general speculations concerning God. For example, by observing nature, we can see that God is powerful, orderly and creative. But we cannot know if God is a Judge, or is happy or angry.

4. We can speculate that God favors life and reason, since these are attributes that God has bestowed upon us in his creative power. In return, we ought to be good stewards of these gifts.

5. If God has a perspective, it is something other than a human perspective, since God is more than human. Therefore, we should not make the mistake of applying human perspectives to God.

6. Despite not knowing the true nature of God, Deists still develop models that give them a framework to use when considering questions about God.

7. Some Deists hold to a model of God that is similar to the classic Christian God. It is a God who is outside and separate from the creation. Others have a Pandeistic, or Panendeistic, model of God, where the universe is either a part of God, or all of God. None of these models are necessarily right or wrong. They are simply models.

Chapter 12 (Spirituality)

1. Although Deists don't believe that God communicates directly with us, we can still reach out toward God and strive to get a small taste of the Divine.

2. Spirituality and Worship are related. Often a sense of spirituality can arise from acts of worship.

3. Spirituality is striving toward a closeness or oneness with God. This can be achieved thru meditation, quietness or stillness, gazing upon the beauty of nature, epiphany, or many other avenues.

4. As with Worship, Spirituality can be done in a very practical manner. It can be done by simply making the way we live be an honor to our God, moment by moment. How we live can be an expression of our spirituality.

5. Experiencing a closeness or oneness with God can be very satisfying, and many Deists

seek this. But having, or seeking, this experience is not required in order to be a Deist.

Chapter 13 (Doubt)

1. Most religions discourage doubt, even to the point of calling it an attack from Satan. But Deists embrace doubt.
2. Doubt prevents you from becoming complacent in your beliefs. It encourages you to question and challenge your beliefs in order to refine them.
3. Doubt prevents you from being dogmatic about your beliefs, thinking them to be absolute final truth.
4. Doubt prevents having a pious attitude that we are right, and everyone else is wrong.
5. Doubt is a tool of reason that should be used and heeded.

Chapter 14 (Faith)

1. Faith is a belief in something that cannot be proven. By this definition, all religious beliefs in God, including that of Deists, must be considered as faith.
2. Although we believe in a God, we also understand that we don't have absolute proof for that. Because we don't have absolute proof for our belief, then our belief in God must be considered as faith. However, it is not blind faith, it is a reasoned faith.
3. We don't believe in God simply because we were told to, or because a Holy Text says to, or because we were raised to believe it. We believe it because of the circumstantial evidence that we perceive in nature.
4. All religious beliefs in God must be considered to be faith, including ours. Therefore, even though we might disagree with someone else's faith, we ought to respect their right to believe it. We should also insist that we be granted that same respect in return.
5. A reasoned faith incorporates doubt. A blind faith rejects doubt.

Chapter 15 (Evolving Beliefs)

1. Most religions are dogmatic about their beliefs. They feel that these beliefs were given by God through Holy Texts, and are not subject to change. On the other hand, Deist beliefs are dynamic and individual.
2. Beyond the basic reason-based belief in God, a Deist's beliefs may change over time as new information becomes available.
3. In years past, Deism remained within a particular model, with a particular set of beliefs. Those beliefs were similar in many ways to Christianity. In fact, early Deists considered themselves to be Christians.
4. However, in our age, Deist beliefs have branched out into many different sets of beliefs. There are different models concerning the nature of God, and there are different Deist communities that emphasize different aspects of their beliefs.
5. The Deists views expressed in this very epistle are those of one man. They do not, and cannot express the views of all other Deists.

Chapter 16 (Virtuous Life)

1. The Golden Rule can be stated in a way so that it applies to yourself. "Do unto yourself as you would have your loved ones do unto themselves". Using this principle we can see why we ought to develop various virtues within ourselves.
2. Would we want our loved ones to cultivate things in their lives such as love, joy, peace, contentment, integrity, patience? Then so too ought we to cultivate those things in our lives as well.
3. This principle is the same as leading by example. We ought to cultivate those virtues within our own lives that we would have others cultivate in their lives.
4. Others should be able to see those virtues in

our lives that we would want to see cultivated in theirs.

5. Our lifestyle ought to reflect qualities that we would desire as the best for those we love. These are things such as orderliness, healthy lifestyle, good work ethic, cleanliness, good stewards of our money and time, balance, and many other such things.

6. In the same way, we ought to avoid those things in our own lives that we would hope our loved ones should avoid. Again, this is leading by example.

Chapter 17 (Dogmatism)

1. To consider that your beliefs are absolutely true, and beyond question is dogmatism. Deists avoid dogmatism.

2. Being non-dogmatic is related to the way that Deists embrace doubt with regard to religious opinions. By admitting that we don't know all the answers, and that we could in fact be mistaken in our opinions, we are immediately set free from dogmatism.

3. However, dogmatism goes both ways. We should not be dogmatic about our religious opinions being absolutely true, but neither should we be dogmatic about other religious opinions being false.

4. Oftentimes, another religion will make a claim that something is true that obviously is not true, and can be shown to be false. However, they will often make claims that cannot be shown to be either true or false. For those matters of faith, we should simply 'agree to disagree', and not make a dogmatic claim that they are wrong.

5. Religious opinions concerning God cannot be proven as either true or false, and therefore must be considered as Faith. We cannot be dogmatic about something for which we have no proof.

6. Many atrocities have been committed against humanity due to extreme dogmatism. But even milder forms of dogmatism causes anger, strife and division. It is better to avoid dogmatism altogether.

7. There is a difference between feeling confidence in your beliefs, and being dogmatic. The difference is the degree one is willing to have doubt. The remedy for dogmatism is to embrace doubt.

8. If one embraces doubt, and has seriously considered other points of view, and arrives at a well thought-out conclusion, then that person can feel a comfortable sense of confidence that their religious opinion might be closer to the truth than someone else's. But the moment someone decides that their religious opinion is THE only truth, then they have crossed into dogmatism.

9. Extreme forms of dogmatism goes even further. Not only does extreme dogmatism claim that their religious views are right and everyone else's religious views are wrong; they also feel compelled to eliminate the opposing point of view. Taken to an extreme, this attitude has actually resulted in the murder of fellow humans.

10. Dogmatism is arrogant, disrespectful, and potentially dangerous to human life.

11. Golden Rule principles show us that dogmatism ought to be avoided. With regard to religious opinions, we don't want others to treat us with a dogmatic attitude of "We're right, and you're wrong". Therefore we shouldn't treat others in that way either.

12. Unfortunately, many revealed religions make dogmatism an integral part of their belief system. Doubt is strongly discouraged, and is often considered to be an attack of Satan. So, although we reject dogmatism, we must acknowledge that they do not, and we must act accordingly. In some cases, we can ignore. In other cases, we can 'agree to disagree' and move on. In more extreme cases, we must be prepared to defend ourselves.

13. Non-dogmatism ought to be considered a core tenet of Deism.

Chapter 18 (Integrity)

1. Integrity is steadfastly holding to a moral or ethical code. When we act in ways that violate The Golden Rule, we are showing a lack of integrity.

2. Lack of integrity has consequences. It can incur anger, distrust, and loss of respect from others. It can result in punishment.

3. Lack of integrity has personal consequences as well. It can cause feelings of guilt, low self-esteem, and a withdrawal from those with higher levels of integrity.

4. Avoiding bad consequences is a valid reason to act with integrity. However, there is a better approach. We ought to act with integrity in order to stay true to what we believe is morally right.

5. A Golden Rule principle can be applied to acting with integrity. We desire for others to act with integrity towards us. Therefore, we ought to act with integrity towards others.

6. But acting with integrity doesn't only apply to the way we act towards others. It also applies to how we act towards ourselves. For example, if we have some personal habits that we know are harmful to us, and therefore something that we know is "wrong", then it would be an act of integrity to change those habits.