

Deism Today

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Non-theistic Deism *Explained*

by Robert B. Reno Jr.

If the world is logical, it must have a logical reason for being. If it does not have a logical reason for being, it is not fundamentally logical, and we should have no expectation that it would behave logically. As science suggests that the world does appear to behave logically, it must be assumed it is logical. And if it is logical, it can be explained. So what is logic?

The phrase "I think, therefore I am" is a self-referential observation that provides certain knowledge of our own conscious existence (in fact it is the only thing of which we may be absolutely certain). But this observation can also be put in the form of a syllogism, which is the formal expression of a logical statement:

*I am a thinking being.
In order to think, a being must exist.
Therefore, I must exist.*

This type of deductive reasoning is the basis of all philosophy, and everything we know about logic is derived from it. We must observe a proper distribution of terms to avoid non-sequiturs (things that do not follow). The subject and predicate are joined by the copula, which establishes the relationship between those terms, either positive or negative, by using a form of the verb "to be" - "is/are" or "is not/are not". We must avoid the fallacy of contradictions, because how could I be aware of myself if I did not exist? In order to better understand, let's look at this statement in its generic form:

*A is B the major premise
B is C the minor premise
A is C the conclusion*

Notice how the middle term "B" occurs in both the major and minor premises, thus connecting the minor term "A" to the major term "C", allowing for a conclusion? This connection must exist, so if a statement

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Sinner! by Charles Clendenen

What makes a person so poisonously righteous?

Why is it so desperately important for some to expend all their energy in condemnation?



My brother came for a visit recently. We had not spent too much time together in recent years. He lives in Illinois, not too far from our childhood home. I've been in Texas for the past dozen years. The reunion was a joyous one that involved a lot of catching up.

At some point our conversation turned to religion. My brother related that he had pretty much stopped going to church after an experience he had a couple of years ago. He went to a new church for the first time and sat in a pew a bit apart from the other parishioners. The church featured a fire and brimstone preacher who decided, for whatever reason, to single my brother out.

To my brother's surprise the minister cried, "There is a sinner among us!" and pointed directly at my brother.

No one else sat close, so my brother knew he was the target of the preacher's sermon. Without skipping a beat, my brother replied, "I thought we were all sinners."

The minister continued his harangue, so my brother left, leaving behind him a few choice words he never figured he would never have used in a church. He certainly never went back there again. In fact, he has not been inside any church since. Nor does he feel any particular need to attend any church anytime soon.

What makes a person so poisonously righteous? What point was so important for that minister to make that he would single out a stranger and launch an unprovoked attack like that? Why is it so desperately important for some people to expend all their energy being critical?

When I first realized I was a Deist I found an Internet discussion group where people talk about Deism, or at least that is the stated purpose of the group. Unfortunately, this group seemed more inclined to political discussions than discussions of Deism. Now, I like a good political debate as much as the next person, but that was not why I was there.

Most disturbing to me was the anti-Semitism I encountered in this



group. There was a lot of general bashing of revealed religion in this discussion group, but as often as not, the conversations focused on Jews and Israel. I had also subscribed to a newsletter published by the organization that sponsors the discussion group. But receiving the newsletter eventually made me feel like I was periodically inviting a little black cloud into my home. I finally had to shut off this source of negativity in my life.

When we are critical, we radiate negative energy. Perhaps more accurately, we suck the positive energy out of others. When we are hyper-critical or unceasingly critical, we draw targets on our chests. We attract criticism in return. When we point at someone else and cry, "Sinner!" we draw attention to ourselves, and people notice that we too have flaws, intolerance being one of the most immediately noticeable.

We are coming up on the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King soon. Among his amazing accomplishments was the establishment of non-violence as a method for getting the attention of the public. King and his followers often provoked violence through non-violent forms of protest. Whenever this happened, King and his protestors captured ever larger areas of moral high ground. Public opinion was swayed in their favor, and much progress was made in the arena of civil rights.

I am a firm believer that if Deism ultimately enjoys greater popularity among the world's religions, it will be the positive and constructive form of Deism that is accepted. Is there plenty to be critical about? Certainly. But we don't have to bash people over the head to demonstrate we disagree with them. We can tear down, or we can build up. We can run away, or we can forge ahead. We can be critical, or we can focus on being constructive. I favor the positive approach.

I am not suggesting that we never examine ideas critically, we should. Nor do I suggest that we should suppress our true feelings and never be critical. That would be hypocritical of me. This article is critical. But time and energy spent finding the positive approach to life's challenges is time and energy well spent. Accentuate the positive, sinner.

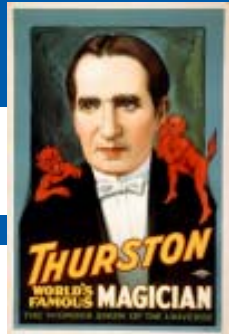
When we are critical, we radiate negative energy.

It is better to capture and hold the moral high ground.

Taking the time to find the positive approach is time well spent.

The Power of Positive Thinking

Positive thinking is not a panacea. We cannot ignore the fact that some very negative things exist in this world, nor should we ever fail to stand up for what is right, even if that means being critical. But being constructive is overwhelmingly better than being critical most of the time. If you must dwell on one or the other, dwell on the positive.



Magic by Peter Hilbig

Have you ever stopped the clock for a while and pondered the human need for magic?

Consider Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, The Da Vinci Code, Crop Circles, Loch Ness, ghosts and apparitions, the Miracle of Fatima, Santa Claus, witchcraft, fairies and leprechauns, Superman and other comic heroes or karma, for example.

And how about those whose lives and deeds have been elevated beyond the normal: the Biblical characters, Mohammed, Buddha, Houdini.

When we were very young, though most of us cannot remember much of it, everything was magic: a butterfly, a dog wagging its tail, the family pets, the animals at the zoo, the brief glimpse of an animal in the wild, a day at the beach or in the woods. Everything was new then and it was a magical world even without fairy tales and Santa Claus.

Then as we grow up our palettes become jaded. Our teachers tell us there is nothing magical. Everything is explained in boring "natural" ways. School, for many, becomes uninspiring drudgery, and our imaginations are (unintentionally) stunted by the system's need to cram as much information as possible into our young receptive minds. And then everything becomes the same ol' same ol' stale rehash of someone else's making rather than our own creative urges.

Albert Einstein once said: "There are only two ways to

live your life, where nothing is a miracle or everything is a miracle". Which camp do you find yourself in these days? Do you believe that everything will one day be explained in naturalistic terms? Have your needs for magic in your life been totally destroyed by your obsession with reason and material evidence?

Personally, I disagree with Einstein. I have come to live my life where nothing is a miracle AND everything is a miracle – in a sort of dualistic way. It all depends on the perspective I

"There are only two ways to live your life, where nothing is a miracle or everything is a miracle".

-- Albert Einstein

have at any given moment. As a Deist I have this freedom to choose according to my whim. Sometimes I need to feel very much down to earth and coldly rational, and others may require that of me in order to fulfil an objective. But there are many times when my mind needs to soar freely, unhindered by the world's preoccupation with the mundane. It's a question of balance.

Most humans have a need to escape from time to time. What are they escaping from? – it could be from the daily humdrum of work, boredom with a daily routine, squabbles or worries. Needing to escape is a symptom of something lacking in life. There are many ways to escape temporarily. Alcohol, drugs and gambling are common methods. Taking a holiday away is popular, so is a spending spree. The more adventurous will ride a roller-coaster, go parachuting, motor-racing etc. The list is almost endless. The trouble is, they all cost money.

But we have at our beck and call a cheaper option – the world of daydreams and magic. All that is required is to



block out unwanted distractions and be alone with our imaginations. Total silence is not necessary, and indeed, the soothing sounds of birds singing, a babbling brook or children playing happily, can be a positive aid. Or maybe you can elevate the feeling to an art form, whereby you can switch yourself off from all worldly intrusions. It is a gift we had when we were children, and if you doubt that, just observe young children in their world of make-believe. The world can be a magical place. It all depends on our perceptions.



"Magic is believing in yourself, if you can do that, you can make anything happen."

-- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

"One man's 'magic' is another man's engineering. 'Supernatural' is a null word."

-- Robert A. Heinlein

"The universe is full of magical things, patiently waiting for our wits to grow sharper."

-- Eden Phillpotts





Godevil: A Complete Creator by John Earwood

The material world, as we experience it, is inherently divided into dualities and opposites such as: matter/anti-matter; left/right; male/female; good/evil. On the other hand, a perfect and complete Creator should be an undivided whole: neither male nor female; neither matter nor antimatter; neither good nor evil; but all of the above.



In the traditions of western religions, the Creator of the world has been described as altogether good and incapable of evil. However, if the Old Testament is any evidence, that is clearly an unwarranted assumption. The creation itself, the material world, is experienced subjectively by humans as both good and evil. So if the Maker must encompass all of the qualities of Her* product, then God must be both good and evil too. Yet if we look at the Creator objectively as a spiritual being, then God may be beyond good and evil.

The traditional Judeo-Christian-Islamic doctrine of God as the epitome of goodness seems to derive from the ancient conceptual origins of the Deities as metaphorical heavenly replicas of earthly rulers. The Hebrew tribes were familiar with Pharaohs and Kings who exercised the power of life and death over their subjects, most of whom were little more than serfs and slaves. Since absolute power corrupts absolutely, many of these semi-divine rulers were greatly feared. Hence the king's ministers and subjects, if they knew what was good for them, would display the non-threatening characteristics of obsequious sycophants: bowing, groveling, and praising the lord. Their prayers and praise would exaggerate his good qualities and carefully omit any mention of bad behaviors.

Objectively (i.e. viewed from God's point of view) the natural world is a dynamic, evolving, lump of matter with no inherent moral implications. But subjectively, from a human point of view, the world affects us in ways that are both positive and negative, life-enhancing and life-threatening.



Obviously, the Creator can be held responsible for both the good and the evil that we experience as creatures of flesh & blood. This understanding leads to the common philosophical argument against the existence of a perfect deity: the problem of Evil. Even if the world's evil is blamed on a subordinate Devil, though, the ultimate Ruler-of-the-Universe must accept that the blame-buck stops at the top.

However, if we assume that God exists in a "spiritual" realm (whatever that may be) beyond the boundaries of the created, material world, the subjective moral terms "good and evil" may not apply to a deity who is beyond morality. Objectively, then, the "nature" of God is some kind of a composite of those opposing qualities. A literal but impoetic term to describe such a comprehensive god-nature is "good-evil". Which, for the purposes of this essay, I will take the liberty to condense into a more metaphorically suggestive name: "Godevil".

The material world, as we experience it, is inherently divided into dualities and opposites such as: matter/anti-matter; left/right; male/female; good/evil. On the other hand, a perfect and complete Creator should be an undivided whole: neither male nor female; neither matter nor antimatter; neither good nor evil; but all of the above. Everything in the material world is fractional, while God is whole. In quantitative terms: Good + Evil = $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} = 1 = \text{God}$. In other words, God is the whole of which we are all a part.

From this hypothetical, objective viewpoint, we can see the Creator as She is: an all-encompassing whole with none of the "fractional qualities" that we observe in the realm of

matter. As we've seen, the common mistake of labeling God as All-Good and the Devil as All-Evil, stems from our tendency to think of deities as exaggerated versions of mortal beings such as ourselves. Yet, as far as we know, mortals are incapable of creating universes or anything else ex nihilo (something from nothing). So the Complete Creator must be immortal, immaterial, and amoral.

Thus we are justified in assuming that a Complete Creator must comprise all possible qualities and quantities. There is nothing that is not God. Yet, we have no real-world experience with entities that we can't describe and qualify in dualistic terms. Therefore, all we can say without contradiction is that God IS.

** I use the feminine pronoun for rhetorical purposes only.*





Proof of God?

The author will tell you that this theory of Non-theistic Deism does not serve as a proof that God exists. As a basis for a reasoned faith, however, the theory is compelling. For the mathematically inclined and those with analytical minds, Robert Reno Jr. provides a persuasive argument and an interesting way of looking at the universe.



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does not conform to this model it must be dismissed as illogical because the conclusion does not follow unbroken from the premises.

Now it could be argued there are some things that do appear to be illogical or contradictory (especially in modern physics); however, to know if they truly are illogical we would have to have a complete theory of knowledge, but we don't. And history is overstuffed with things that were once thought to be beyond understanding, but which were later explained, and there is no reason to think the problems of today are any different. So as long as that trend continues, we must, again, assume the world is logical and regard any theory that contains contradictions as incomplete (which physics is). Therefore, we should be prepared to follow logic wherever it leads.

Traditionally, rational attempts to answer to the question "why is there something instead of nothing?" have failed because, if we assume our common notion of "nothingness" as a void that is *absolutely* "without property" is correct, "something from nothing" is a non sequitur. But is this definition correct?

According to the rules of logic there are only two ways we can legitimately derive definitions: induction (observation) and deduction (the syllogism). Since we see "something" when we look around us, we cannot experience nothingness, so the only way we can define it is by deduction.

Utilizing the methods allowed by those rules we should be able to strip away all the permutations of existence simply by putting a form of the words "is not" (the negative form of the copula in the syllogism) in front of "being as a whole". This ought to give us a definition of nothingness as absolutely "without property". But potential is a property, and the world could not exist if it did not have the potential to. So is this itself not a contradiction, thus proving the world is not logical?

No, because of what is known as the fallacy of composition, which states that it cannot be assumed that what is true of the whole (being) is



also true of its parts (the attributes of being). The definition of nothingness cannot be assumed to be absolute because it is derived from being as a *whole*.

A good example of a concept that may not be considered to be bound by the same rules as a lesser one is the universe as a whole. Consider entropy. The apparent conservation of matter and energy has been well established by scientists and is referred to as the laws of thermodynamics.

The first law says that neither matter nor energy may be created or destroyed, only changed in form. And aside from the fact there apparently is no evidence that energy can be created from nothing, there are good philosophical reasons to accept this as true. If we assumed that "new" energy could be created from nothing, shouldn't we also suppose that there would probably be an equal chance "old" energy would be destroyed at the same rate, thus keeping the total energy level in the universe constant?

The second law says that energy flows in a definite direction. Heat from a flame will flow into a block of ice melting it, but we never see heat flow from the colder ice back into the flame making it hotter. Energy levels tend to equalize and once that equilibrium has been achieved, energy flow stops.

The universe as a *whole*, however, is not the same as the systems within it. The total energy level of the universe will probably never change. There is no apparent input from outside of it, nor is any energy seen to be released. All the energy that has ever existed still seems to be a part of it. In this way the universe as a whole is *different* from the subsystems within it, like the fire and ice, which we know can gain or lose energy.

Likewise the concept of *absolute* nothingness is not the same as the absence of something in the world. Absolute

means just that. ABSOLUTE! No property. No potential. No exceptions. Therefore, since the world exists, logically "nothingness" is not absolute and thus must have at least one property. So perhaps the question should be rephrased as "what is it about nothingness that keeps it from being absolute?"

"Nothingness" is the only thing (and since it has some property it is a thing) that can be thought of in *completely* negative terms except for the fact it is a concept that can be thought of. Nothingness is a concept. *You're thinking about it right now!*

So even when "being" is stripped of every other attribute we are still left with the *idea* of nothingness. But what does that mean?

Consider a scale with 1 ounce of gold in each pan. The scale would read 0 because the pans are balanced but there would still be 2 ounces of gold. So in this case 0 means "no difference" or "neutrality" not "empty". Likewise, what we call "nothingness" is not an empty void "without property", but is actually a neutral concept (which is something) permitting us to now define it as "equilibrium". All other definitions must, for now, be dismissed as unfounded and meaningless. So how can the universe emerge from that?

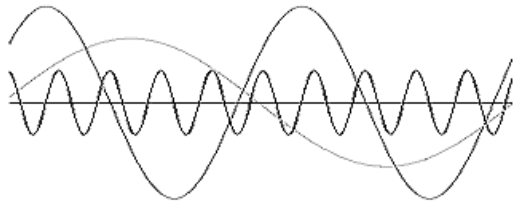
Imagine a straight line that extends outward forever.



Such a *one* dimensional line is analogous to "nothingness" by this definition because it has but *one* property - it is a concept in equilibrium (this technique is called the principle of equivalence and was used by Albert Einstein to equate gravity with acceleration when he formulated the theory of relativity).

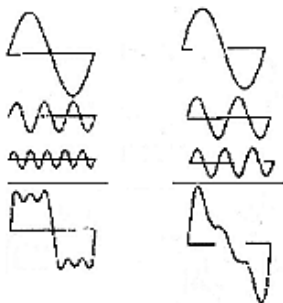


There are an infinite number of waveforms that exist in potential in such a line.



Now if things happen simply because they *can* happen, and they can happen because they don't result in contradiction, then as long as the probability of an event does not equal zero (which is what happens when two identical but opposite waves try to emerge at the same time and cancel each other out), they may occur for no reason other than the fact that there is nothing to prevent them from occurring. Therefore, any of these waveforms may emerge spontaneously by itself or in combination by simple addition.

By themselves, the most basic waveforms (sine waves) have no meaning, but merged with others they can create radically different patterns, which not only match the *same* patterns we see in our world, they also permit the emergence of an infinite number of other universes, each with different physics. In other words, in this model there is a spectrum of universes. And they don't just obey mathematical rules, they *are* mathematics-manifest. Ours just happens to be one that is conducive to life, which explains why it seems so finely tuned.

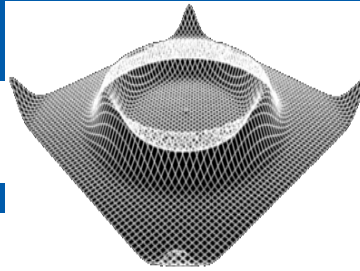


However, *all* the evidence we have says that for a concept to exist there must be a mind to consider it. And if you claim to believe in science and reason, you have to go with the evidence you have not the "evidence" you want to have.

For example, you can have 9 coins in one hand and 9 stones in the other, but where is the number 9 apart from what you hold? Aside from the fact they are "physical", we can sense no other property they have in common. But changing the quantity doesn't seem to affect the physical characteristics of either group, so that particular integer itself is not intrinsic to either group physically. 9 has attributes we can understand. It is the square of 3. It is an odd number. And we can distinguish those traits from, say, the number 8 which is even and not a square. So even though it is not tangible, it is a thing in its own right as a concept, but that is all. You can not point to anything in nature and say, "This is the number 9 by itself." You can only think about it.

A materialist may reply that for the number 9 to exist, it *must* be expressed physically as stones or coins, but what is the "physical"? Albert Einstein proved that mass (matter) is just energy in particle form. Then the physicist Erwin Schrodinger discovered that energy could be manifested as a wave as well as a particle. And finally another scientist, Max Born, showed that waves are just the probability distribution of a possible event. Probability, in turn, is mathematical in nature, and mathematics itself is nothing more than the rules that govern numbers, which are *concepts*.

Others say the numbers themselves are merely the products of material processes in the brain which we impose

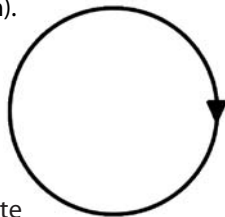


on the world. But it seems to me this is just substituting one unsubstantiated statement for another.

One can not *assert* that the brain and its processes are material in order to prove that the brain and its processes are material. That is a circular argument. The brain is made of tissue composed of cells built from molecules made up of atoms that are particles of matter which is energy...

But if the world is basically concept, and concepts must be observed, what is observing this thing we persist in calling "nothingness" (but which is better defined as the "*concept of equilibrium*") from which the world emerges? This "problem" is really no problem at all. Lines may curve in many ways. One possible curve is a circle. Bending the "concept of equilibrium" in on itself similar to the way space/time does in relativity makes it self-referential or self-observing. And that makes It conscious, because structurally It is *identical* to the self referential observation "I am" (which also stops infinite regressions similar to the "who created the creator" problem).

I call this foundational state the Prime Observer because It is literally observing Itself. The circle in this model is perfectly smooth and, therefore, in equilibrium, but inside It contains an infinite number of potential worlds, which may emerge spontaneously as an epiphenomenon or side effect. In other words, It is the simplest possible structure, but contains within It all the complexities that can ever be.



That means, since everything is derived from this most fundamental premise (which basically is a *Deistic* God), awareness is the basis of all reality. So by this model "God" could be

thought of as an ocean unbounded by any shore and the world is a wave moving through It.

Because it is a concept, we can say "nothingness" is not nothing. That is a contradiction, thus such a state cannot exist if the world is logical. Just saying "nonexistence exists" is absurd. But an unobserved concept is also paradoxical and therefore unstable. It *must* collapse into a state that is stable, but in order to do that, it must have something in common with that state. Since the only property nothingness has is that of a concept, it can only be reduced to something else that is also a concept to avoid a non sequitur, and all it has to do to accomplish that is to bend back on itself. Nothing more.

This argument should *not* be considered a proof of the existence of God. But as the basis for a reasoned *faith*, it is compelling. And though it is rather technical, the understanding it allows could be described as spiritual. However, its most profound revelation may be that, because of the possibility the world may only be an unintentional "byproduct" of God, the only purpose to our existence may be that which we choose to make for ourselves. For to quote the last stanza of William Ernest Henley's poem *Invictus*:

*It matters not how strait the gate,
how charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*



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.org, Panendeism.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.

Credits:

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