

Teaching Deism, Theism, Pantheism, and Atheism at BYU

Dealing with the confusion factors of mixed philosophies

Many of the pro-evolution Mormon professors appear to be accepting atheism, deism, and theism all at once, and then making no effort at all to clarify and resolve the logical differences. I think they need to be held to a much higher standard on their explanations.

Deism is a common theme in defending evolution to religionists, although the BYU professors typically avoid using that term, so perhaps a little better definition would be helpful here:

Deism is the belief that reason and observation of the natural world are sufficient to determine the existence of a creator, accompanied with the rejection of revelation and authority as a source of religious knowledge. Deism became more prominent in the 17th and 18th centuries during the Age of Enlightenment—especially in Britain, France, Germany and America—among intellectuals raised as Christians who believed in one god, but found fault with organized religion and could not believe in supernatural events such as miracles, the inerrancy of scriptures, or the Trinity....

Both [theists and Deists] asserted belief in one supreme God, the Creator... and agreed that God is personal and distinct from the world. But the theist taught that God remained actively interested in and operative in the world which he had made, whereas the Deist maintained that God endowed the world at creation with self-sustaining and self-acting powers and then abandoned it to the operation of these powers acting as second causes.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deism>

I have a problem with these professors who insist that you can believe in complete atheism and complete theism at the same time without any conflict. I believe they can only get away with that claim because no one has taken the small bit of trouble to point out the stark differences between the two, making it clear that one mind, imbued with reason, cannot fully accept both at the same time.

There is definitely an "Alice in Wonderland" aspect to the teachings these professors espouse. I feel like Alice in the story who is speaking with the queen:

"Nobody can do two things at once, you know. Let's consider you age to begin with -- how old are you?"

"I`m seven and a half exactly."

"You needn't say 'exactly,'" the Queen remarked: "I can believe it without that. Now I'll give you something to believe."

"I'm just one hundred and one, five months and a day."

"I can't believe that!" said Alice.

"Can't you?" the queen said in a pitying tone. "Try again, draw a long breath, and shut your eyes."

Alice laughed. "There's no use trying," she said. "One can't believe impossible things."

"I dare say you haven't had much practice," said the queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." Lewis Carroll, "Chapter 5: Wool and Water," *Through the Looking Glass*, <http://www.alice-in-wonderland.net/books/2chpt5.html>.

These professors are asking their students to believe thousands of impossible things, and don't even apologize for it. They try to make it one's duty as a college student to accept and embrace impossible things as a matter of course.

Deism and its religious consequences -- no prayer, prophets, scriptures, or Son of God

Many religionists, not just the Mormons, seem eager to make their peace with the speculations of atheistic organic evolution by dialing back the powers they recognize in God to perhaps one billionth of that which is described and demonstrated in the Scriptures. As with the BYU professors, they often take the Deist route which says that God set up the mechanism which consists of the universe and the earth and the rules for evolution, and then disappeared, never to be heard from again. (The Mormons have a special problem with these Deist rationalizations, since we claim to have recent and current revelation from the living God, something which a true Deist would deny is even possible.)

A thoroughgoing application of these religion-minimizing or Deist rationalizations would mean that either we have no Scriptures at all – the Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price – or that they are all simply the thoughts of non-prophetic men. An atheist, or almost to the same extent, a thoroughgoing Deist, would either say that there is no God, or no active God, and therefore no revelation is possible, because there is no active source, and therefore no legitimate Scriptures are possible, or that God has had no contact with the earth since the existence of physics was first initiated, which supposedly included the mysterious, unknowable rules of evolution carefully hidden completely behind the apparently random behavior of chemicals and particles, and so there cannot have been any messages to prophets to be recorded in Scriptures.

This can get pretty basic. Do we really believe that God the Son spoke to us during Old Testament times, during which he performed many miracles on behalf of the Israelites, and came to earth in human form to teach us the gospel, and show us how to live it? Are you going to tell me that we have God the Son, but we don't have God the Father? But God the Son was the representative of God the Father for almost all purposes. So are you a Deist as it relates to God setting up the physics and chemistry of evolution billions of years ago, and then disappearing for all practical purposes, but you believe in a living, active, involved God the Son who came to earth? That is really complete nonsense. You can't have thought about this for 20 seconds or you would have realized that you are trying to believe a mass of completely inconsistent and impossible things all at the same time.

The Bible and creation

Some people would say that the Bible does not tell us anything about the mechanics of the creation. I beg to differ. I think we can learn a great deal about the creation from the Bible, and it is only our own biases and shallowness of thought that keeps us from realizing how much we have learned. At one point Christ was tempted with turning stones into bread to assuage his great hunger. Now, I don't know if he ever did turn any stones into bread, but at least he and Satan assumed that he could do it if he wanted to. There was a time when he took two fishes and five loaves of bread and turned them into enough food to feed 5000. Matt. 14:17. So where did all of that organic material come from? Was it manna from heaven, as in one of the miracles of the Old Testament, or did he turn some rocks or dirt into fish and loaves?

Recall that he had complete power over the weather around the Sea of Galilee. He could command the fishes to move to the proper place so they could be caught by his disciples. The flood at the time of Noah may or may not have been completely global in fact, but it certainly seemed so to those involved.

The enemies of God who attacked the City of Enoch were often crushed by the power of the elements under God's control at the behest of his prophet. As with the Pharaoh whose army was destroyed in pursuit of the Israelites, one might wisely conclude concerning Moses, as Yul Brynner said as he portrayed Pharaoh in the "Ten Commandments" movie, that "His God *is* God," and try to avoid arousing his wrath in the future.

A review of the many recorded miracles might bear on the question of how man was created in the first place. If it was as easy as breathing for Christ to create animals -- in this case fish -- out of the dust, or to make wine from water for a wedding, or place in unending supply of oil in a cruze, how much harder it could it be for him to create a complete human out of the dust? Or let's look at some of his other miracles. It did not take him millions of years of evolutionary time to give sight to the blind or to cure leprosy, or to cure a shrunken hand or a lame leg. He did it instantly. That sounds like the very processes one might need to be able to use to create any particular animals or men or other creatures out of the dust of the earth. In the cases where he raised people from the dead, in the Old Testament or in the New Testament, as with the young woman or as with Lazarus, how much theoretical difference is there between giving complete healthful life to a body which has been dead three days, and concerning which significant deterioration would have happened, and creating the entire body from scratch? We claim that God the Father and his son Jesus Christ have the power to resurrect us in an eyeblink if they choose. Many were resurrected after the time that Jesus was resurrected, so that the First Resurrection is going on now. (Or is all of this completely bogus, and none of it is true?) Were all the resurrected and translated beings who appeared to Joseph Smith and others just a figment of their minds? Or were they restored or preserved in some miraculous and essentially instantaneous way?

It looks very much like Christ had the power to create whatever he wanted instantly, without being bogged down by the speculations of some arbitrary atheistic academics who have decided that God really has no such powers and everything must happen over eons of time through random processes. Who are you going to believe, the God who performed these miracles in front of the eyes of the multitudes, or these atheistic academics who imagine that they can get rid of God through rhetoric and chicanery, and thereby somehow raise their own stature in the world?

As a little sidelight, the Deists might say that God had the power to create the heavens and the earth, but when it came to creating life that was exactly the same as himself, and the same as many millions of other creatures which had lived before and which currently lived in heaven, he had to start over at the beginning and guide the formation of every new protein necessary for every new form and adaptation of life. On the other hand, if he knew exactly what he wanted from the beginning, down to the molecular level, and the power to instantly execute it, why would he need to wait for billions of years and intervene trillions of trillions of times to get the result he wanted? The least troublesome way would be simply to speak and have the creatures formed as he wished. That way, he could check the accuracy and quality of his work. (That famous logical cure-all called Occam's razor ought to confirm this as the most simple explanation.) That is the power which he demonstrated during life on earth, so why would he have any lesser powers at the beginning of earth time? Did he just choose to go super slow to humor the future atheists and evolutionists who would come to Earth? I think not.

Of course, there's no way to know exactly how God chose to take every step in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and all the features and creatures which are upon the earth, but with the powers he exhibited while on the Earth as the Son of God, he could have created the earth and all of its components and inhabitants literally overnight. Why would he choose to take even 6000 years unless perhaps he wanted to slow down the process so that others could be involved in the creation of the

earth?

Deism logically obliterates the LDS gospel

So if the teachings presented by the BYU professors plainly, quickly, obviously, logically, by definition, and "on their face" obliterate the entire gospel, how can they be allowed to skate by unchallenged on those teachings? At least they ought to be required to demonstrate in some detail how they answer these seemingly unanswerable issues. If nothing else, the students should be aware of these enormous objections before they decide to personally accept or reject the secular/atheist dogma of organic evolution.

Pantheism

I have covered this topic at some length in other sections of this website, so I simply mention it here for the completeness factor. The main point is that evolutionists regularly seem to sense that the magical properties they impute to evolutionary processes are far more than anyone could reasonably expect from purely random events. So they start looking for metaphysical forces of one kind or another which are not God, but nonetheless have godlike powers of influencing evolutionary steps. Richard Dawkins and his "selfish genes" is one example. Another example is the typical Deist speculation that God invented an entire library of forces which control the steps of evolution, but still need to operate behind the impenetrable barrier of randomness. Since there is no way for researchers to get past the actual physics of randomness, by definition you have a metaphysical database and force you are proposing. Pantheism seems like a good term to describe this attempt to get away from the observed limits of randomness and add a creative and intelligent force to the grim and unforgiving constraints of randomness.

An organizational response?

It seems to me that a serious religious department, and/or philosophy department, could easily have anticipated these kinds of questions and prepared some detailed answers, if there *are* any such answers. As it is, with campus taboos limiting the discussion of evolution at BYU, and thus providing a layer of protection for evolution advocates, these sensible objections or challenges to evolution cannot even be formulated or raised. We might entertain ourselves in a religion class by idly speculating about our mansions in the heavens, but it is apparently forbidden to discuss the more serious logical consequences of uncritical acceptance of the secular/atheist collection of speculations which comprises the topic of organic evolution.