

## Psycho Mystical Deism

At the risk of appearing insane, I will sketch out my personal view of religion and my intention, at some point, to defend it in more detail.

My central view is that religion is both an intellectual and a psycho-mythical phenomenon.

It is intellectual somewhat in the way proposed by the Deist tradition. The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Deists believed in God and argued that God's existence could be demonstrated by Reason (with a capital R). They were in a tradition that went back very far, at least to Aristotle and Plato and probably further. The other claim that the Deists made was an ethical one. They believed in a version of the Golden Rule – do unto others etc – and sought a rational justification of this ethical principle. To this extent, their 'religion' had a practical dimension.

Otherwise, though, Deism was noticeable for an avoidance of the ceremonial and ritualistic aspects of traditional religion, which it regarded as superstitious, and as merely historical-social responses to God. Some Deists were tolerant of these and saw them as partially acceptable responses to the Deity, but others ridiculed them.

I share with the Deists the view that traditional religions involve a historically and socially conditioned response to God. But I go beyond them in also seeing religion in a more modern way as a psycho-mythical response to the Divine. This approach to religion owes much to the kinds of views held about religion by Carl Jung.

But I think it is important not to go as far as Jung seems to go, and as far as a modern religious commentator like Karen Armstrong seems to go, in regarding religion as *solely* a psycho-mythical phenomenon. It is important to recognise the intellectual dimension of belief in God. This continues to some extent the tradition of natural theology, the idea that religious belief can be made consistent with the products of intellectual activity, such as science and philosophy.

I think it is possible to make belief in God consistent with the products of intellectual activity, such as science and philosophy. I think the view that there is a supreme mind is not inconsistent with these.

But it is also necessary, somehow, to harmonise such a view with the psycho-mythical. This is not easy to do. Typically, those who take this latter view of religion to its limit, that is mystics, argue that the knowledge of God – if it is even possible – takes us beyond any purely intellectual conception of the world. Psycho-mythical deism aims to reconcile, in a sense, mysticism and natural theology. This sounds contradictory, which is why it is quite interesting.