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original instructions of life and everything followed those instructions of life. The earth has its duties to perform, the sun, the moon, the stars. Everything was given instructions of life. And the trees have never failed to follow those instructions. They have never made a mistake. The rivers have never made a mistake. Every plant, every animal, every bird, every fish have never made a mistake. They still follow those original instructions of life (Interview by author, 1984).

Phillip Deere taught that people should be aware of and appreciative for what Earth provides, recognizing that although they have a spiritual dimension to their lives, they must also care for the natural home that is their earthly dwelling:

We cannot say that “I am just a pilgrim passing through.” We are the caretakers of this land and we are part of this creation. So we must respect Mother Earth.

We believe in natural laws of love, peace and respect. We learned this thousands of years ago and this was the life of our people. When we destroy anything within the creation, we feel that we destroy ourselves . . . So we must preserve what we have . . . We have felt ourselves to be a part of the creation: not superiors, not the rulers of the creation, but only part of the creation. If we understand those natural ways, natural laws of love, peace and respect, we will be able to get along with everyone. We will learn to love and share with everyone (Interview by author, 1984).

Deere taught that spiritual people must be conscious of their responsibilities to the Creator and grateful that this Great Mystery is solicitous of them as a loving parent, called *Father* in the Christian tradition; and they must be conscious of their responsibilities to, and grateful for the nurturing of, *Mother Earth*:

When we learned about Christianity we heard about the Father. We learned to pray to the Father and in the churches every Sunday we heard about Father. To this day we still hear about Father. But we never hear anything about Mother . . . But every Indian knows what you mean when you say, “Mother Earth.” Traditional people know what you’re talking about . . . We must all learn to say “Mother” as well as we say “our Father.” And in this way of life we will have balance (Interview by author, 1984).

The balance that Phillip Deere called for includes the understanding that spirituality is not something reserved only for a part of one’s week; it must permeate every moment:

Native religion to us is a way of life. That religion is based upon this creation and its sacredness. In this religion every day was a sacred day to us. Religion did not take place just Saturdays or Sundays. Every day of our life was a holy day (Interview by author, 1984).

The Muskogee elder Phillip Deere, who walked gently on the Earth and respected all of her life forms as well as her being, lived a way of life related to all creation, and encountered the Great Mystery along that way. When in his company, people sensed that they were in the presence of a spiritual leader who walked with the Spirit, a holy man who not only taught about spirituality but lived connected to its source and to all creatures. When he died, Phillip Deere was mourned throughout the Americas and Europe by people inspired by his words and made whole from his healing touch.

John Hart

Further Reading

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See also: Mother Earth; Traditional Ecological Knowledge among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.

Deism

Deism is a theological position that upholds a belief in God as a creator of the world, but rejects the concept of divine revelation (including miracles and supernatural events). More broadly, Deism refers to a cluster of philosophical and theological ideas that flourished in Europe and North America during the Enlightenment and led to a thorough critique of Christian orthodoxy. These ideas often found their starting point in natural theology, an ancient theological approach which, in the Enlightenment, became increasingly separate from “revealed” and “supernatural” theology, with which it was once joined in complementary fashion.

Deism began as a response to Christianity from within Christian cultural circles, but often leads to a broader view that extended past Christianity to “religion in general” or “natural religion” (the systemization of knowledge of the divine attained through the use of natural theology). Thus, the thinking of some deists led to the evolution of new

ideas of “religiousness” as being part of human nature. This conclusion led, in turn, to the acceptance of non-Christian religious traditions as being equally valid. While deists varied in their particular convictions, most deists affirmed a view of God that could be arrived at solely through rational reflection (as opposed to revelation) and upheld a perspective that either rejected Christianity, accepted it as a moral guide (but not a personal means of redemption), or embraced certain aspects of the Christian tradition without arguing for its uniqueness when compared to other traditions.

In terms of intellectual history, Deism is associated with such figures as Denis Diderot, Jean Le Rond d’Alembert, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and M. Jean Antione de Condorcet in France; Gotthold Lessing and, to a lesser degree, Immanuel Kant in Germany; Samuel Clark, Matthew Tindal, Anthony Collins, John Toland and Thomas Paine in England, and Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson in America. Not surprisingly, the Deists held a range of theological views, including the shifting views of any number of individuals in the course of a lifetime. Less radical thinkers held positions close to those of the English latitudinarians (who maintained a belief in revelation, but put their emphasis on the “reasonableness” and accessibility of Christianity) or stayed in intellectual conversation with the German pietists, while the most radical bordered on agnosticism and atheism. Most were Enlightenment rationalists, though some, like Rousseau and Lessing, produced writing that also would qualify as “Romantic.”

The term “deist” itself was used more often as an insult (to suggest heresy or atheism) by the theological opponents of Enlightenment thinkers. Most deists upheld a belief in God as the creator of the universe and of humanity. Their precise vision of God, however, tended to be abstract rather than personalistic. God was variously termed “the Great Architect” (who designed the world), Providence (who intended good things for the world at the time of creation and gave humanity the capacity to create and sustain such goodness), and the Great Watchmaker (who wound up the “clock” of the world and set it eternally ticking in an orderly fashion). The implication of these various epithets for the divine was that God set the world in motion and gave it all the necessary ingredients to flourish (including humanity), but that God did not intervene in daily life.

Drawing on the methods and conclusions of seventeenth-century ventures in natural theology (such as the writings of John Locke), the deists discounted those aspects of the Bible that were considered to be “superstitious,” supernatural or dubious accretions. Following in the natural theology tradition, they insisted that the character of God could be discerned by studying the “Book of Nature.” By studying nature’s laws and unifying order, deists and other rationalists believed that the character

of God could be determined, and they assumed that God, by definition, would act in a rational, predictable and ultimately beneficent way. Moreover, they believed that God had endowed humanity with special, rational qualities and expected humans to use these faculties. Moving beyond such thinkers as Locke (who still affirmed the existence of truths beyond reason), the deists embraced only a natural theological approach and some – such as the young Voltaire – eventually rejected even a natural theology stance and took up positions of secular humanism, skepticism or atheism.

In America, Deism was attractive to those thinkers who already accepted the thought of John Locke and the implicit rationalism of Scottish Common Sense realism, but who took the Enlightenment emphasis on rationalism much further, to the point of questioning most orthodox Christian opinion. Deism came to America through largely English sources. Deists such as New Hampshire senator William Plummer and Vermont military hero Ethan Allen, took their cues from English authors, while the more prominent Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson were influenced by the French intellectual circles in which they were both involved.

In America, particularly, Deism was linked with the importance of paying attention to the natural world. Nature was seen as both a mechanical system of divinely ordained laws (the watch made by the watchmaker) and a Providential gift from the divine Creator, which human reason could “use” for its own progress. As such readings of nature suggest, Deism stood with a variety of other intellectual forces relying on natural theology (Scottish Common Sense, the Enlightenment in general, the rise of Unitarianism) in expressing a confidence that nature’s “secrets” could be discovered by humanity and put to use for humanity’s benefit (with God’s blessing). Not surprisingly, one legacy of such approaches to nature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has been the development of a mechanistic view of nature that has played a role in the anthropogenic impact on the natural world and the destruction and depletion of natural resources. At the same time, however, enlightenment interest in studying the book of nature (while criticizing supernaturalism and the concept of miracles) directly influenced the growth of the sciences, including, ultimately, the development of ecology as a field of study. The deists were among the intellectual ancestors of modern science, and thus leave an ambivalent legacy of emphasizing the importance of nature, the value of progress and the promise of human intellectual capacity. At the same time, the enlightenment “disenchantment” of the natural world has led some environmentalists to search for ways in which nature might be reconceptualized as a site of mystery or of divine action and grace, in contrast to a deistic concept of nature as machine or system of laws. In addition, some aspects of eco-criticism explicitly blame

Enlightenment thinking and writing for developing concepts of nature that have led to its exploitation.

While Deism is generally understood to be a historical movement, some Westerners today refer to themselves as deists. Moreover, while Deism, by definition, resists “organization,” many individuals without claiming the term, hold essentially deist views, upholding a belief in God, while denying revelation and miracles. Some organized forms of Deism do persist. The World Union of Deists, for instance, promotes Deism as a rational religion that is appropriate to the contemporary period. They also emphasize Deism as a “religion of nature.” This current emphasis counteracts earlier critiques of the Enlightenment legacy and, to a certain extent, rehabilitates older deist concepts of nature which, while scientific, were not wholly disenchanting.

Rebecca Kneale Gould

Further Reading

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- See also: Book of Nature; Natural Law and Natural Rights; Natural Theology.

Deloria, Vine, Jr. (1933–)

The 1960s civil rights movement had an enormous impact on American Indian communities, not least in sparking the career of Vine Deloria, generally considered the leading intellectual figure among twentieth-century American Indians. Deloria has been a prolific author and – for over twenty years – professor at two public universities, making an important impact on scholarly and broader public understandings of native interests and perspectives in fields such as law, political science, religion, and anthropology. In addition to advocating a strong defense of tribal sovereignty and native rights over against mainstream American culture, he has consistently argued that native outlooks on the environment constitute an important critique of American values, and that tribal land-use practices demonstrate an important alternative to American practices toward the natural world.

A member of the Standing Rock Lakota (Sioux) tribe, in

South Dakota, Deloria inherited a long family tradition of “being involved in the affairs of the Sioux tribe” (Deloria 1969: 263), including a father (Vine, Sr.) and grandfather (Philip) who were both important native leaders in the Episcopal church, a great grandfather (Saswe) who practiced as a medicine man within the Yankton Dakota tribe, and an aunt (Ella) who, as an author trained in ethnography and linguistics, wrote a number of important volumes on Lakota/Dakota culture. Although Deloria, Jr. studied theology at Augustana Lutheran Seminary, he eventually did his graduate work in law – at the University of Colorado – after serving as executive director of the National Congress of American Indians from 1964 to 1967.

As a student of both law and theology, Deloria’s early work appeared in the years marked by a resurgence of militancy within native communities, such as the occupations of Alcatraz Island (1969) and Wounded Knee (1973), and the “Trail of Broken Treaties” (1972) – which resulted in the occupation of the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs office in Washington, D.C. With publication of *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969), Deloria issued a series of biting polemics against official American Indian policy and underlying public attitudes and prejudices.

In *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (1973), Deloria developed a sustained critique of the weaknesses of Christianity in contrast with American Indian tribal religions. Key to this critique is the claim, reminiscent of the perspective of historian of religion Mircea Eliade, that Western religious traditions have developed their understandings of human life based more on temporal as opposed to spatial orientation. Native American religions, by contrast, are place-specific, concerned more with maintaining communal and individual well-being within a particular piece of land than in providing salvation at the end of history. Christian religion, for Deloria, thus proved an exercise in alienation when Europeans brought it to the Americas, in effect removing it from its original environment.

Christianity shattered on the shores of this continent, producing hundreds of sects in the same manner that the tribes continually subdivided in an effort to relate to the rhythms of the land. It is probably in the nature of this continent that divisiveness is one of its greatest characteristics, a virtually uncontrollable freedom of the spirit (Deloria: 1992 [1973]: 145–6).

In subsequent work, such as *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (1984) and *Tribes, Treaties and Constitutional Tribulations* (1999) Deloria addressed the continued dilemmas tribes faced in dealing with the legal system, the web of racial stereotypes, and the forms of official knowledge through which Americans have insured the continuing subordination