

I want to say that the Declaration of Independence voices a properly political faith, as distinct from a properly religious or philosophical faith. This means that, on my reading, the deistic "God-talk" that we find in the Declaration is to be understood merely heuristically. In other words, it is to be understood, not as expressing one particular religious or philosophical faith as distinct from others, but rather as acknowledging what any religious or philosophical faith somehow acknowledges and expresses—namely, basic faith in the ultimate meaning of human life.

The point of such talk, then, is to say that, whatever else this meaning may be understood to imply religiously or philosophically, it most certainly implies politically, at the level of first or fundamental political principles, the political faith summarily confessed in the opening words of the second paragraph of the Declaration:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it and to institute new government, laying its foundations on such principles and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

True, the deistic God-talk evident not only here but elsewhere in the Declaration (especially in the appeal to "the laws of nature and of nature's God" in the first paragraph) is sufficient to make clear that the political faith thus confessed is exactly that—a *faith*, and that it therefore necessarily presupposes a basic faith in the meaning of ultimate reality for us by which it itself is necessarily implied as the only valid political faith. In this sense, the theory of the validity of a political faith necessarily presupposed by the Declaration is formally realistic, or, if you will, naturalistic, instead of positivistic. Thus it takes itself even as a political faith, no less than any properly religious or philosophical faith, to be grounded objectively in the meaning of ultimate reality for us and thus, indirectly, in the structure of ultimate reality in itself. But what makes it properly *political*, as distinct from properly religious or philosophical, is that it deliberately abstracts from all religions and philosophies as such in order to express solely the properly

*political* implications of the basic faith in the meaning of life that it itself necessarily presupposes but does not and need not make fully explicit as religions and philosophies, in their different ways, properly do.

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