

Gamwell says: "A democratic constitution . . . makes no sense without a substantive moral backing, even while it remains explicitly neutral to what that backing is" (*Politics as a Christian Vocation*: 81).

But I ask—fully allowing for the obvious verbal differences involved—Does this really say anything other or more than that active participation in the process of democratic governance properly expresses what I mean by a merely political faith, as distinct from a properly religious or philosophical, faith such as is required for a full explication of the basic faith in the meaning of life that a political faith, as much as any religion or philosophy, necessarily presupposes?

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One value of my concept "political faith," as I see it, is that it obviates any need to extend the meaning of "religion" and its cognates unduly—as it seems to me Gamwell winds up doing.

A political faith no doubt necessarily implies, even as it is implied by, some religious or philosophical faith. But simply in itself, it abstracts from any and all religious or philosophical faiths in order to express solely the properly political implications of the basic faith whose existential and therefore metaphysical and moral implications religions and philosophies, in their different ways, make explicit.

Far from being explicitly neutral to properly *political* faith, a democratic constitution is itself the expression of such a faith, just as it expresses a certain corresponding ethics of citizenship.

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What "a democratic constitution requires" is not, as Gamwell allows himself to say, that "religious convictions can be validated and invalidated by argument" (106), but only that any terms of assessment employed in the deliberative process of democratic governance, including any ultimate such terms, be open to argumentative assessment. (For a much happier

formulation to this very effect, cf. 135, where he says that "the nature of democracy as politics by the way of reason" means "that no claim for ultimate terms of political assessment and, therefore, no other claim should determine governmental activities unless it can be redeemed by public argument.") Political discussion, then, is "full" as well as "free" in the sense required by democratic governance if, and only if, any term of assessment employed in determining policy can itself be supported by argument rather than merely by appeal to authority.

Of course, terms of assessment, especially the ultimate terms thereof, may very well be *derived* from tradition, and thus from authority, rather than from argument. But unless, having been so derived, they can also be *supported* by rational argument, they may not play any role in the deliberations constitutive of democratic governance. *This* is the stringent requirement of democracy whether or not religious convictions can be validated and invalidated by argument.

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