

A Critical Study of the Political Philosophy of the American Declaration of Independence (July 04th, 1776)

Azazga Imene

Constantine 1, Department of English

doctorant2018@hotmail.com

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Abstract

This article discusses the political philosophy of the American Declaration of Independence. It discerns the epistemological and naturalist principles by which the American Founding Fathers defended the independence of the colonies. Besides, the 1980's American fundamentalist leaders claimed the origins of the philosophical background of the Declaration merely Scriptural. In contrast to the fundamentalists' interpretation, this study reveals the Platonic origins of the epistemological background of the Declaration. It concludes that the present document implies rational metaphysical principles such as naturalness, empiricism and necessity. It also demonstrates that the Declaration argues independence with the Platonic philosophical principles of the macrocosm and the microcosm.

Keywords: The American Declaration of Independence. Political Philosophy. Epistemology. Rational Metaphysics. Naturalism. Platonism.

ملخص

يناقش هذا المقال الفلسفة السياسية لوثيقة إعلان الاستقلال الأمريكية. كما يدرس المبادئ الابستمولوجية التي جادل بها الآباء المؤسسون استقلال المستعمرات. كما يسعى إلى استنباط الأسس الفلسفية الطبيعية التي عمد من خلالها مؤلفوها للدفاع عن انفصالحهم عن الحكم البريطاني. ذهب قادة الأصولية الأمريكيين في ثمانينيات القرن الماضي بالقول بالأصول الكتابية لفلسفة وثيقة إعلان الاستقلال. و على النقيض من تفسير الأصوليين، تكشف هذه الدراسة عن الأصول الأفلاطونية للخلفية الابستمولوجية لوثيقة الإعلان. يخلص هذا المقال إلى أن الوثيقة تنطوي على مبادئ الميتافيزيقية العقلانية مثل القوانين الطبيعية، الفلسفة التجريبية والاحتمية. كما تستنتج هذه الدراسة أن وثيقة إعلان الاستقلال الأمريكية عرفت مفهوم استقلال المستعمرات بالاستناد ، ضمناً، إلى الفلسفة الأفلاطونية لمبادئ الماكروكوزم و الميكروكوزم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: وثيقة إعلان الاستقلال الأمريكية. الفلسفة السياسية. الابستمولوجية. الميتافيزيقية العقلانية. الفلسفة الطبيعية. الفلسفة الأفلاطونية.

Introduction

The interpretation of the political and philosophical background of the Declaration of Independence is subject to much disputes among politicians, fundamentalist activists, and historians. Moreover, several interpretations of the political philosophy of the Declaration emerged. During the 1980's, American fundamentalist leaders and politicians claimed that the Declaration had theological origins. For them, its Protestant background impelled them to hinder talks with the Soviets. For this, they supported their refusal for nuclear freeze with the political ideals of the Declaration of Independence. On the one hand, the fundamentalists reinterpreted the philosophical ideals of the Declaration basing on their religious background. On the other hand, the representatives of the Second Continental Congress argued their rebellion through a naturalist philosophical transcendence of the terminology of the term: independence. They insisted that their claim for separation from the British was their natural right. In this respect, the Declaration defined the rebels' pleas for independence with several naturalist philosophical terminologies. In fact, the fundamentalists did not take into account the epistemological side of the Declaration. For this, this study sheds light on the political philosophy of the Declaration of Independence; it tends to reveal the epistemological context of the philosophical background of the present document. It also defines its philosophical concepts with the aim of ascertaining its epistemological background. In fact, the Declaration of Independence is a significant document in American history; it proclaimed the independence of the thirteen colonies and the foundation of the United States of America in 1776. American politicians supported their political views with the principles of the Declaration, particularly, Ronald Reagan, who believed in its protestant roots. In this respect, this study uncovers the philosophical origins of the Declaration and the epistemology by which the Founding Fathers claimed their separation from the British. It also tends to reveal the intellectual process by which its authors relied on the principles of rational metaphysics to argue their independence.

To discern the political background of the Declaration of Independence, this study relies on a wide range of political and philosophical writings of American Founding Fathers like The American Declaration of Independence, Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* and James Madison's *Selected Writings of James Madison*. It also relies on naturalist philosophical writings like Benedict Spinoza's *Ethics*, John Locke's Letter Concerning Toleration, and Plato's *Timaeus and Critias*. Besides, this study relies on the writings of American fundamentalist leaders and activists like Pat Robertson's *America's Dates with Destiny*, Jerry Falwell's *Listen America*, in addition into Ronald Reagan's addresses. Moreover, this study relies on contemporary studies such as Lorraine Daston's and Michael Stolleis's *Natural Law of Nature in Early Modern Europe: Jurisprudence, Theology, Moral and Natural Philosophy*, David Holmes's *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers*, Bernard Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* and Hans Eicholz's book *Harmonizing Sentiments: The Declaration of Independence and the Jeffersonian Idea of Self-Government*.

Besides, the present article relies on the historical reconstruction method to depict the historical context of the Declaration of Independence and to discern the cultural backgrounds of its authors as well. More, it uses the historical criticism method to

uncover the historical and political backgrounds of the Declaration. It also relies on the comparative method to reveal the ideological convergences and divergences between the fundamentalists' and the Founding Fathers' interpretations of the present document. Moreover, this study uses the interpretative analysis to reveal the epistemological background of the political philosophy of the Declaration of Independence.

1. The Historical and Political Contexts of the American Declaration of Independence

In the second half of the 18th century, riots stirred against the British sovereignty over the colonies. A committee of representatives of the thirteen colonies had been established to lead the rebellion against George III and the British Parliament. The leaders of the rebellious movement in the colonies denounced several acts that were passed by the British Parliament such as the Stamp Act of 1765 and the Townshend Act of 1767. As a response, the colonials founded the Continental Association, in October 1774, to force George III to put down the acts. Consequently, they boycotted all sorts of commercial dealings with the British (Encyclopedia of American Historical Documents 243). As a matter of fact, on October 14th, 1774, the First Continental Congress issued the Declaration of Resolves. The latter emphasized that the pleas of the Continental Congress reflected the colonials' attitude towards the British rule. It accused the British acts and the levying of taxes for violation of the colonials' right of property. In this context, the drafters of the Declaration of Resolves asserted: "That they are entitled to life, liberty, and prosperity, and they have never ceded to any Sovereign power whatever, a right to dispose of either without their consent" (Encyclopedia of American Historical Documents 275).

Besides, two years after the ratification of the Declaration of Resolves of the First Continental Congress, the leaders of the rebellious movement determined to bounce from political militancy and negotiations with George III into military resistance. They announced the American War of independence as a final procedure to establish a sovereign American government. Thus, they asked Thomas Jefferson to draft a document to set grievances against the British sovereignty. In fact, Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was the principal author of the Declaration; he was appointed by John Adams to formulate the document in his style and to present it before the Commission of the Representatives. Then, the Congress made modifications on some paragraphs of Jefferson's draft before proclaiming it officially in July 04th, 1776 (American Revolution Biographies 14). In fact, Jefferson denounced the British economic acts as inhuman laws and usurpation as well. He accused George III and his Parliament for conspiracy against the colonies; he also broke any further political negotiations with the British. Thus, the Declaration of Independence proclaimed the establishment of the United States of America without any reference to the official opinion of the British Sovereign.

2. Epistemology and the American Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence was an explicit message to the British Sovereign and to the citizens of the colonies as well. It declared the colonies

independent states over their economies and political matters regardless to any potential war the British would flare against them. The Declaration of Independence is an historical document that defines several political issues philosophically. Its primary purpose is to present a series of pleas which impelled the colonies to revolt. It represents the colonials' response to the British Crown as a call for independence rather than a rebellion. The Declaration defines the colonies' call for separation a revolutionary act. The representatives of the Second Continental Congress claimed that the British acts on the colonies' commercial dealings had triggered a political *malaise* between the two counterparts. Henceforth, they argued their discontent from the British Sovereign and Parliament with philosophical bases. On the one hand, several scholars and historians approached the Declaration of Independence only from a historical perspective. Likewise, contemporary Americans, particularly fundamentalist leaders, claimed it a historical reference that stands for the revolutionary era of the second half of the 18th century. On the other hand, this study shows that the Declaration of Independence is a historical document which implies a philosophical background as well.

A. The Fundamentalists' Interpretation of the Declaration of Independence

The political philosophy of the Declaration of Independence was a political reference for American fundamentalist leaders and activists in contemporary United States. The American President Ronald Reagan, Jerry Falwell, Tim Lahaye and Pat Robertson viewed that the Declaration framed the political and the cultural ideals of the United States. For them, the Soviets' ideological background clashed with the political philosophy of the Declaration of Independence for several reasons. They insisted that communism was a godless ideology that propagated antichristian beliefs in the world. More to the point, they claimed the Soviets' presence in the world a violation of peoples' natural right of liberty. Explicitly, the fundamentalist political leaders and activists during the Reagan years insisted that the American civil religion was the ideal ideology that should be adopted in the world by imposition. They also avowed that the United States had a mission to spread a divinely inspired political philosophy to the world's corners. For this, they believed that American political system and ideals made the United States an exceptional nation (Falwell 17; Robertson 68).

Along his two presidential terms, the American president Ronald Reagan (1911-2004) referred to the Declaration of Independence in several addresses. He emphasized that the Soviets' expansion in the world was a transgression of peoples' national liberties. He viewed communism a godless ideology; thus, it was anti-American. In this context, in 1983, before the National Association of Evangelicals, he asserted: "No nuclear freeze for communism a godless nation and the United States followed the principles of the Founding Fathers for a spiritually inspired America" (364). Consequently, he objected nuclear freeze negotiations with the Soviets and signed for the rise of United States' military expenditures. In fact, for Reagan, any peace talks with the Soviets and pro-communist governments would be a betrayal to the political ideals that were set by the Founding Fathers. Besides, for Reagan, the Declaration was a historical document that implied the historical as well as the cultural backgrounds of the

United States. In this context, he claimed that its political philosophy was purely protestant. Accordingly, he insisted that the 1980's was an era of a religious revival in the American political system (Ronald Reagan in Quotations: A Topical Dictionary, with Sources of the Presidential Years 59).

Moreover, several American fundamentalist leaders advocated Reagan's interpretation of the political philosophy of the Declaration. Pat Robertson (1930-), an American fundamentalist activist, asserted in his book *America's Dates with Destiny* (1986) that the natural laws in the Declaration of Independence were inspired from the Scriptural tradition. Robertson interpreted the naturalist concepts, like the natural order and laws of nature, as theological concepts (69). He also viewed the principles of "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" purely theological. Likewise, Tim Lahaye (1926-2016), an American fundamentalist activist, claimed in his *Battle for the Mind* (1980) that the Protestant groups in the early 17th century were the founders of the social, cultural and political backgrounds of the early settlements. He argued that the American War of Independence was waged by Protestant ministries and groups. He also claimed the Declaration of Independence a historical document that defended the colonials' separation from the British with theological references (27). In this respect, the American historian Franklyn Haiman (1921-) viewed in his *Religious Expression and the American Constitution* (2003) that the primary reason that led the early European groups to settle in the American shores was to escape religious persecution in Europe. For this, Haiman asserted that the cultural background of the Americans' forbears was purely Protestant (12). Moreover, Jerry Falwell (1933-2007), an American fundamentalist militant, insisted in his book *Listen America!* (1980) that the early colonies were founded by religious groups. For this, he emphasized that the Founding Fathers had Protestant backgrounds; thus, he concluded that the Declaration of Independence implied Protestant beliefs. He also asserted that the return to the Founding Fathers' principles was a patriotic act (15).

Indeed, Ronald Reagan, Pat Robertson, Tim Lahaye and Jerry Falwell avowed that the 1980's was an era of a cultural revival for the Americans. In this respect, they emphasized that the fundamentalist ministries prevented the propagation of communist ideologies among American citizens. For them, the rise of the fundamentalist movement to the White House fostered a hostile American foreign policy against the Soviet Union. Hence, they defined the belief in the interpretation of the political philosophy of the Declaration with Protestantism a nationalistic behavior. In this context, in his Message on the Observance of Independence Day, in 1985, Reagan asserted: "The Declaration of Independence opened government to the people as never before. Each individual was acknowledged as possessing certain inalienable rights. And these rights in turn enabled our people to take part in their political system. Here was a true revolution, embodying their idea that government required the consent of those it governed" (Ronald Reagan in Quotations: A Topical Dictionary, with Sources of the Presidential Years 60). Henceforth, the fundamentalists claimed the religiously interpreted ideals of the Declaration a return to the original beliefs of the Founding Fathers.

Meanwhile, the authors of the Declaration of Independence defined several philosophical concepts ,like liberty and democracy, in reference to nature. Even though the present document states concepts ,such as God and divine, it wrapped them under naturalist philosophical connotations. It proclaimed the colonials' pleas for separation substitutes from nature's system. More, it represented the establishment of the United States a divinely granted right by nature. In this respect, it stated:

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation (qtd. in Jefferson 102).

In fact, the drafters of the Declaration intended to argue and legalize the colonials' rebellion by rationalizing their grievances. In other words, they defined their independence from the British sovereignty rationally. They claimed the political philosophy which stirred them for separation to have been submitted to the human reason and natural laws as well. In this context, to uncover the manner by which the Declaration defines independence, this study explores the relationship between the Founding Fathers' conceptualization of independence and rational metaphysics.

B. The Rational Metaphysical Background of the Declaration of Independence

Rational metaphysics is an epistemological interpretation of phenomena; it is a philosophical understanding of historical, social and political knowledge as well. Basically, it treats different phenomena as observable substances. For example, rational metaphysics deals with democracy as an empirical phenomenon; it submits it to scientific maxims and axioms (Oxford Studies in Metaphysics 122). For instance, the Dutch philosopher Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) discussed in his book *Ethics*(1677) the characteristics of man's political and social liberties. He outlined several laws that he called axioms; he claimed: "Those things which have nothing mutually in common with one another cannot through one another be mutually understood, that is to say, the corruption of the one does not involve the corruption of the other" (04). For Spinoza, the human intellectual and political knowledge can be explained naturally. For this, he viewed the concepts like liberty and desires exist only in the mind of man and depend on the human reason and intentions in essence. Explicitly, the human intellect creates the concept of liberty intentionally without any dependence on external factors. Thus, for Spinoza, man possesses an intellectual freedom to define different aspects of his social and political lives. In this respect, he emphasizes a firm relationship between abstract concepts, like democracy, and man's intellectual intentions to desire those concepts. For him, the absence of the former requires the exclusion of the latter. Thus, rational metaphysics interprets abstract phenomena with natural laws such as causality

and order (232). Likewise, the Declaration of Independence defines concepts, such as independence, liberty and democracy, through rational metaphysical ideals.

a. Naturalness

The introductory preamble of the Declaration of Independence claims that the colonials' appeal for separation was a substitute from the chronological order of mankind's political history. In this context, it stated: "When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another" (qtd. in Jefferson 102). In fact, its authors inspired their political vision from the European naturalist philosophy of the 17th century. They emphasized that separation from the British sovereignty was a natural and a political necessity. The present document defines the laws of nature as substitutes from the natural order. In essence, the drafters of the Declaration argued their disapproval of the British presence over the colonies with nature, natural order and the laws of nature. In addition, they proclaimed George III's acts on commerce and his decision to rise military presence in the colonies *contra natura*.

Based on the principle of empiricism, the Declaration discusses independence as an observable phenomenon that could be deduced from nature. It argues the colonists' pleas for rebellion against the British rule through a philosophical vision to independence. It relies on natural order to legitimize and support the colonials' grievances. It also argues the colonies' separation through several principles of the natural order like the laws of nature and empiricism.

In the naturalist philosophy, the human behavior and events are judged through their compatibility with the laws of nature. Relatively, all the human acts ought to be judged through the eye of the human reason. If they clashed with the natural laws, they would be judged *contra natura*. Philosophically speaking, the natural laws are constructed through the laws of the cause and effect. They submit to the philosophical logic of uniformity. In this respect, in their *Natural Law of Nature in Early Modern Europe: Jurisprudence, Theology, Moral and Natural Philosophy* (2008), both scholars Lorrain Daston and Michael Stolleis argued that the naturalist philosophers viewed any act which clashed with the laws of nature a mutual alteration from the human reason (11). Similarly, the drafters of the Declaration argued that the British rule, acts, taxes and military presence in the colonies violated the laws of nature. Referring to the naturalist logic, the British rule over the colonies is *contra natura*. Relatively, from a rational metaphysical perspective, the cause is the laws of nature and the effect is the independence of the colonies.

b. Divine Purpose

The drafters of the Declaration of Independence claimed the separation of the colonies from the British rule a fulfillment of God's Will. They declared: "And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor" (qtd. in Jefferson 105). The representatives of the colonies defended their independence through

epistemological beliefs like the “divine Providence” and “the Supreme Judge of the world”. The Founding Fathers viewed the colonials’ political and economic sovereignty a divine Will. Relatively, the Declaration of Independence referred to God’s Will as an epistemological argumentation for the colonials’ separation from Britain. Indeed, it is crystal clear that God’s Will in the Declaration deviated from any religious significance. In this respect, Stolleis asserted: “In the 18th century, the jurists’ reluctance to ground natural law in divine edicts led to a collapse of natural law legislated by God” (10). One concludes that the Declaration argues God’s Will for independence through the naturalist philosophy not from any religious perspective.

c. Platonism

Philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries defended the establishment of republics and democracies with the laws of nature. To illustrate with, John Locke (1632-1704) in his Letter Concerning Toleration (1689), denounced kingship and advocated republicanism epistemologically. He emphasized the transcendence of republican principles from nature. For him, the ideal rule implied the enthronement of a ruler as a defender of people’s natural rights of the trilogy of “life, liberty and the possession of outward things” (61). Likewise, Thomas Jefferson inspired his trilogy of the natural rights from Locke’s political philosophy. The philosophical ideals of the Declaration were imports from the philosophy of the Enlightenment era. In addition into the Jeffersonian trilogy, the Declaration implies the platonic philosophy as well. In fact, for the Greek philosopher Plato (428 BC-347 BC), nature is the first source which dictates the parameters of an ideal political system. In his book *Timaeus and Critias* (360 BC), he defined the bases of an ideal society and rule with a metaphysical understanding of politics, culture and society. He argued that all the human deeds, including politics and economy, submitted to the laws of nature. The latter are embodied in the Soul of the world and the Soul of man. Relatively, Plato viewed that the macrocosm and the microcosm were the core principles by which nature framed man’s social and political lives. For him, the macrocosm is the universe with its cosmic laws; however, the microcosm is the internal world of the human reason. For this, Plato claimed the macrocosm a perfect world for it submitted to purely cosmic laws; however, the microcosm laws were imperfect for they were corrupted by the human body. For Plato, the human reason had to transcend the principles of an ideal rule from the macrocosm through philosophy. He also asserted that because the human soul was corrupted by its first contact with the human body, man became corrupted and lost all pure knowledge of an ideal life. Consequently, man had to depict the principles to run his political, social and economic lives by returning to nature. In this context, Plato claimed the transcendence of the rational metaphysics a mental revolution (27).

Likewise, the drafters of the Declaration of Independence defended their pleas for the separation of the colonies from the British Crown through the macrocosm and the microcosm philosophical principles. To start with, they viewed the political and economic independence of the colonies a right that submitted to the laws of the macrocosm such as infinity, stativity and purity. In this context, they claimed that the

British Crown had to submit to the laws of nature which granted the colonies their right to establish a free government. They also emphasized that the British had to adopt the colonies' pleas for they were irresistible and approved by the laws of nature. Relatively, the authors of the Declaration avowed: "When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume ...the ... equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them" (qtd. in Jefferson 102). Hence, the Declaration claimed the colonies' independence macrocosmical, infinite, unchangeable and a purely natural right. Moreover, the drafters of the Declaration asserted that the British sovereignty over the colonies was a reflection of the corruption of the human reason. They viewed the latter imperfect and corruptible as well. They inspired their vision of the imperfection of the human intellect from the platonic philosophy of the microcosm. In this context, they asserted: "Prudence, indeed, will dictate that...all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable" (qtd. in Jefferson 102). Furthermore, it was the duty of the colonials to discern their right for independence rationally through a political philosophical revolution. This was for Plato a mental revolution to transcend the political rights of man from the macrocosm through the microcosm.

3. On the Political Philosophy of the American Declaration of Independence

In his book *The Metaphysics of Knowledge* (2007), Keith Hossack, a researcher in the philosophical studies at King's College of London, defines rational metaphysics a mental process which gives credibility to external facts. Explicitly, Hossack views that the human reason transcends and then understands the natural laws. However, without the recognition of the scientific laws of phenomena by the human intellect, the natural values of substances become worthless. Thus, the epistemological reading of phenomena reveals both the nature of the substances and their inner laws as well. In this respect, he asserted: "Knowledge is a metaphysically a fundamental relation between mind and fact" (125). For rational metaphysicians, nature is the primary reference to understand the characteristics of concrete and abstract phenomena. In this respect, European philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries embraced naturalism to transcend knowledge. Moreover, Alexander Bird (1964-), a professor of rational Epistemology at Bristol University, views that naturalism is an intellectual process which analyses phenomena through observation and deconstruction. In his *Nature's Metaphysics: Laws and Properties*(2007), he argues that through deconstructing the properties of a phenomenon, philosophers attain an empirical study of objects. The latter submit to the laws of order, regularities and causality (11). Here one concludes that for naturalist philosophers, the intellectual process of defining the principles of a democratic rule is the natural result of a pre-existed knowledge in nature. More, the need to transcend the terminology of liberty and independence came as a result of facts that existed in nature itself not only in the human reason. In this context, Bird distinguishes between scientific and instinctive knowledge. For him, not all objects that were discussed philosophically

characterized with naturalness. He argued that subjects are divided into natural and non-natural; he claimed: "It is not that properties are ontologically ... categorized as natural or non-natural ... Rather the natural properties are of a different kind from the non-natural ones" (11). In order to discern the naturalness of concepts, Bird avowed that subjects should be submitted to scientific analysis. Moreover, he claimed that subjects which can be deconstructed into a set of properties are empirical. Thus, rational philosophers define the relationships between the constituents of subjects through the laws of duality, order and causality. For Bird, all sorts of phenomena which cannot be subjected to naturalist and scientific processes are non-natural in essence (11). Besides, the American historian Hans Eicholz (1963-) viewed that the laws of nature can be depicted through understanding. He claimed that only through the human reason man attains to establish democracies. In his *Harmonizing Sentiments: The Declaration of Independence and the Jeffersonian Idea of Self-Government* (2001), he argued that the Declaration of Independence revealed political and democratic ideals through several laws of nature including the laws of order and necessity (81).

In fact, the naturalist philosophers tended to find solutions for several political crises that Europe had witnessed during the 17th and 18th centuries. Indeed, the rise of mass discontent to abolish kingship regime was stirred by the publication of several naturalist philosophical writings. In this context, Anthony Savile claimed in his *Leibniz and Monadology* that the Dutch philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1712) viewed that man would attain to understand philosophical ideals, like liberty, through rational metaphysics. Moreover, for Leibniz, through the human reason, man could deconstruct the substances of abstract and concrete phenomena which submitted in turn to divine Providence through the natural laws of causality and order. In this respect, Savile argued: "What I have in mind is that our world, and in particular the composite or aggregative physical world, is subject to natural laws. That this is Leibniz's considered view...where he says Souls act according to the laws of final causation" (133).

In addition, the naturalist Founding Father, Thomas Paine (1737-1809) asserted that the American Revolution was inspired from the naturalist philosophy of the European Enlightenment movement. In his *The Age of Reason* (1794), he emphasized that rational metaphysics was the right way to transcend political ideals like liberty (267). Moreover, Jack Fruchtman, a professor of Political Science at Towson University, claimed in his *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Paine* (2009) that Paine embraced rationalism and naturalism in his political philosophy. He asserted: "Paine's religious beliefs were never founded on Scriptures, but only on his own personal faith in God" (33). Besides, the American Founding Father James Madison (1751-1836) insisted that the political leaders of the American Revolution inspired their political philosophy of independence from the laws of nature. In his letter to Marquis de Lafayette, in March 20th, 1785, he argued: "Nature has given the use of the Mississippi to those who settle on its waters, as she gave to the United States their independence" (28). Moreover, the American historian Matthew Harris claimed in his *The Founding*

Fathers and the Debate over Religion in Revolutionary America (2012) that the Founding Fathers, including Thomas Paine, James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, were skeptical towards the background of theology; thus, they advocated rationalism in politics (157). Though they recognized the existence of a god in nature, their terminology of the divinity differed from the theological one. Henceforth, they embraced Deism. Besides, Francis Cogliano (1964-), a professor of American History at Edinburg University, asserted in his *Thomas Jefferson: Reputation and Legacy* (2006) that Jefferson owned a wide library which was abundant with Greek and Latin philosophical writings. He argued that Jefferson was an admirer of Greek and classic philosophies. He added that Jefferson believed that rational metaphysics was the righteous intellectual process to transcend an ideal political and philosophical knowledge (21). In addition, David L. Holmes (1932-), a professor of religious studies at William and Mary college of Virginia, asserted in his *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers* (2006) that rational metaphysics emerged in the colonies under the label of Deism during the 1750's. Several colleges, like Harvard, contributed to the spread of deistic ideas in the colonies. Thus, a wide number of colonial students, including the Founding Fathers, embraced Deism. This refutes the fundamentalists' premise about the Protestant origins of the Founding Fathers. In this respect, Holmes argued:

Thus, it would be surprising if Deism-which was viewed as cutting-edge thought-had not influenced the Founding Fathers, for most were young men when the movement began to spread...Four of the first five presidents of the United States began their college studies during the formative years of Deism (50).

In fact, this study has revealed the platonic influence on the political philosophy of the Declaration of Independence. Though they are implicit, the Platonic macrocosm and microcosm principles are deducible in the way the authors of the Declaration argued their separation from the British rule. Relatively, the American scholar Bernard Bailyn (1922-) asserted in his *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967) that the Greek philosophy influenced the deist rationalism; he argued: "The classics of the ancient world are everywhere in the literature of the Revolution...They contributed a vivid vocabulary but not the logic or grammar of thought, a universally respected personification but not the source of political and social beliefs" (26). On the one hand, the American fundamentalists interpreted the epistemological principles of the present document from a Protestant perspective. They claimed the Declaration's terms, such as divine Providence and God, christological concepts. On the other hand, the Declaration does not refer to Protestant concepts like Scriptures and the church. The fundamentalists claimed it a historical document that declared the separation of the colonies from the British rule with a Scriptural background. Moreover, in contrast to the fundamentalists' interpretation of the beliefs of the Founding Fathers, this study demonstrates the deist background of the American Declaration of Independence. More, the fundamentalists did not refer to the

epistemological bases by which the Declaration defined independence. For this, this study is a reading between the lines of the Declaration's political philosophy; it has uncovered the axioms by which its authors argued their independence. It has also revealed that the Founding Fathers argued the independence of the colonies with rational metaphysics and not with Protestant creeds.

Conclusion

This study has discussed the political philosophy of the American Declaration of Independence. It has depicted the historical and political contexts in which the Declaration was drafted; it has revealed the cultural backgrounds of its authors as well. It has also discerned the epistemological as well as the rational process by which its authors argued the separation of the colonies. As a step to discern the clues of the political philosophy of the Declaration of Independence, this study deciphers the significance of deistic concepts such as Creator, God and divine Providence. More, it depicts the rational metaphysical bases by which the Founding Fathers conceptualized independence. Finally, it uncovers the Platonic philosophical principles that are implied in the Declaration.

Besides, this article has clearly shown that the Declaration implies rational metaphysical principles such as naturalness, divine purpose and Platonism. It has uncovered the naturalist and metaphysical principles that are implied in the Declaration such as empiricism, causality and necessitarianism. It has revealed that the present document argues independence with the platonic philosophical principles of the macrocosm and the microcosm. For its authors, the separation of the colonies submitted to the laws of the macrocosm which are infinite, unchangeable and pure. In this context, the British presence in the colonies was *contra natura* and reflected the microcosm through the corruptible nature of the human reason. Accordingly, through the microcosm, the Founding Fathers transcended their right for independence from the macrocosm.

In fact, the present document defines independence as a pre-existed knowledge in nature that was transcended by the human reason. Indeed, religious sects, particularly the American fundamentalists, interpreted the principles of the Declaration from a theological perspective. Hence, this study has revealed that the political philosophy of the Declaration is purely rational metaphysical and not theological. Besides, the philosophical side of the Declaration opened the doors for several interpretations of its metaphysical background. This makes it open for further interpretations and readings among American fundamentalists, thinkers, historians and scholars.

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