

Understanding the Basics of Deism (Supplemental Resource for POLS-208)

Origins:

- Originated in Europe, mainly among intellectuals.
- Deism began to gain prominence in the 17th Century.
- An early proponent of Deism was the English Lord Edward Herbert of Cherbury.

Key Facts/Beliefs of Deism:

- Belief in a higher power/supreme being.
- Belief in an afterlife.
- Rejects revelations as a source of religious evidence.
- Oriented toward scientific fact and natural observation, rather than scripture.
- Heavily influenced by ideas from the Enlightenment.
- Very much an intellectual movement.
- Heavily influential during the American revolution and in early America. The Declaration of Independence uses Deistic language.

What Deists Do NOT Believe In:

- The revelations of the Abrahamic religions.
- The Bible as an absolute guide.
- The need for frequent prayer.
- Baptism and circumcision.
- Regularly attending church or any other meeting involving worship.
- The need for a personal relationship with a priest.
- Communion.

Some Deistic Terms for God:

- Divine Providence.
- Nature's God.
- Divine Creator.

Famous Deists (or Suspected Deists):

- **Edward Herbert** — English Lord of Cherbury.
- **Thomas Paine** — English-born American philosopher. Wrote “The Age of Reason,” “Common Sense,” and “Rights of Man.”
- **Thomas Jefferson** — 2nd Vice President, and later, 3rd President of the United States. He was a Christian Deist.
- **George Washington (suspected but not certain)** — 1st President of the United States. Harbored Deist beliefs meaning that he may have been a Christian Deist like Jefferson. He notably always left church services before communion.