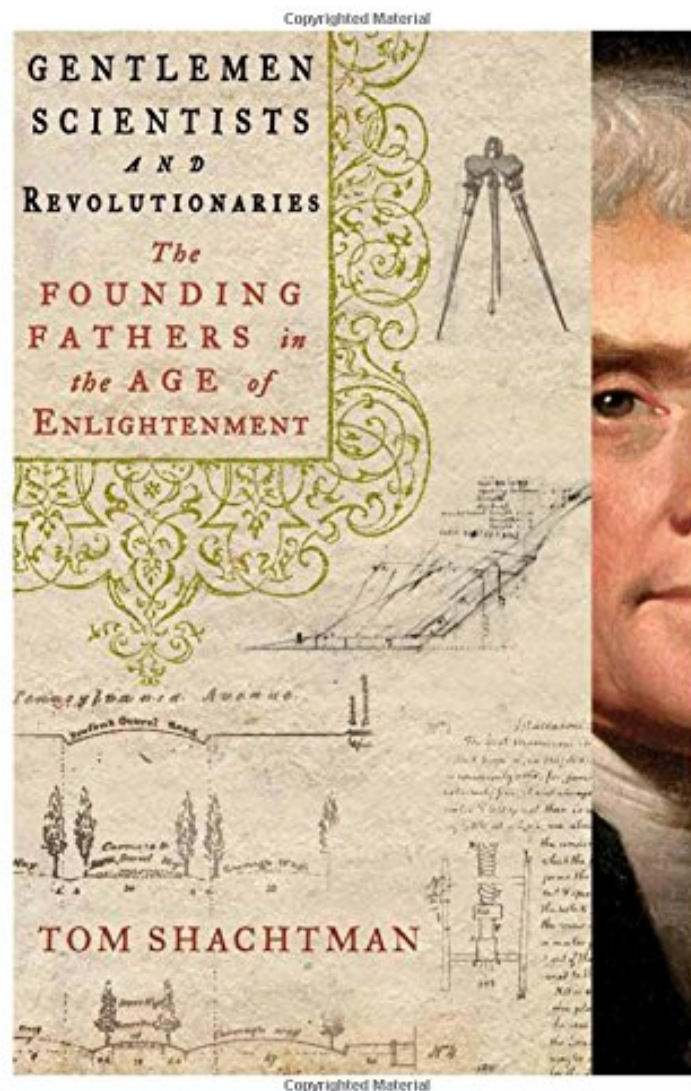


(Download) Gentlemen Scientists and Revolutionaries: The Founding Fathers in the Age of Enlightenment

Gentlemen Scientists and Revolutionaries: The Founding Fathers in the Age of Enlightenment

Tom Shachtman

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Tom Shachtman : Gentlemen Scientists and Revolutionaries: The Founding Fathers in the Age of Enlightenment before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Gentlemen Scientists and Revolutionaries: The Founding Fathers in the Age of Enlightenment:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The American Experiment as Science ExperimentBy S. YoshidaFrom this book, I learned that the Founders of our country were children of the Age of Enlightenment. They

learned science in their classrooms, used an early form of smallpox vaccination (variolation) to protect the Revolutionary troops, and admired Isaac Newton (one of the founders of calculus). But I thought the most interesting topic was their view of nation-building as a science experiment. I describe this further with quotes from the book referenced by page numbers in parentheses. Among the Founders, concurrent belief in a Deity and science was not unusual. They relied on both to understand the natural world, which included human nature, and to form a government compatible with human nature. It is also important to note that the Founding Fathers' science was in no way opposite to their religion. The notion that science and religion were antithetical is a nineteenth-century construct. (p. xii) The Declaration's preamble stated that the people of the new United States were assuming a station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitled them. These phrases have been variously interpreted. Laws of Nature is not the same thing as natural law. The reference to Laws of Nature is to rules that have emerged from observation of nature, in specific contrast to those obtained from the divinity: those laws of nature that Galileo, Newton, Boyle, Hooke, and other scientists had been discovering. (p. 97) Shachtman also provided a quote from Carl Becker who wrote that by Jefferson's time, God was considered the final Cause, or Great Contriver, or Prime Mover of the universe [who revealed] his will indirectly through his creation. . . . There was no longer any way to know God's will except by discovering the laws of Nature, which would doubtless be the laws of Nature's God, as Jefferson said. (p. 97) That is, science might be a way to understand God. Science might also be a path to understanding morality. In my review of the Great Courses video on Natural Law and Human Nature, I wrote that natural law seems to be an innate form of morality that was incorporated into the Declaration of Independence and Constitution, but that there may be no consensus on the source of natural law. Although Shachtman distinguishes Laws of Nature from natural law, I suspect that when analyzing human morality, Laws of Nature (from science) and natural law (from religion) may share common ground. As for the concepts that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, each of these words and phrases had a basis for which scientific verity as well as legal precedent can be claimed. . . . As Boorstin suggests, It is easy to forget that the assertion of human equality . . . was not a direct statement of a moral principle, but rather of a scientific and historical fact from which the principle [of equality] was supposed to follow. (p. 98) Although the theory of evolution did not formally appear until the mid-1800s, it may share a feature with divine creation: that people are derived from a single or common source. And with this kinship, the Founders put forth the idea that we are created as equals, perhaps not as materially identical clones, but as moral equivalents. I also wrote in the Great Courses review that natural law advocates believe that positive (i.e., human) law should be guided by natural law. Passages from Shachtman's book support this. Jefferson . . . aligned his Declaration with the assertions about nature and its imperatives . . . natural law stood in opposition to laws made by man, including the monarchical system and the codification of rule by divine right. (p. 98) Once men were understood to have been created equal not born equal, but created equal by their Creator it was logical to also believe that they possessed certain inherent and inalienable (or unalienable) rights, given to them when they were created, and not to be taken away by any human being. (p. 98) In summary, (1) science is a useful tool to better understand human nature (presumably one of God's creations), (2) a better understanding of human nature may help in the development of positive laws that are more compatible with human nature, (3) this compatibility may facilitate the governed's willingness to follow these positive laws, (4) the governed want equality of conditions or fairness, and (5) this innate desire for fairness is related to natural law. Or at least, these are what I conclude from my studies. America's success is based, at least partly, on reason (e.g., science) balanced by morality (e.g., religion). Walter Isaacson (author of *Steve Jobs*, etc.) believes that we will benefit greatly from the intersection of the sciences and the humanities. Maybe the Founders were already there at the intersection (or before the divergence). My question is: where do we go from here? Washington explained to a learned friend: Should the proposed government be generally and harmoniously adopted, it will be a new phenomenon in the political moral world; and an astonishing victory gained by enlightened reason over brute force. (p. 162) Shachtman wrote: The evidence-based spirit in which the Constitution had been constructed, the debates over its adoption, and the symbolism accompanying its acceptance all emphasized the process by which the old hypothesis about how the best government ought to work had been tested, the positive and negative results of experience incorporated into a revised theory, and that theory newly codified and promulgated. In the future, should the Constitution, that embodiment of the theory, not prove able to best govern the country, it would be similarly refined to take into account new facts that was the way science proceeded, and it was to be the American way. (p. 164) I believe that today's traditions were likely yesterday's innovations. In my review of the Great Courses video on *The Great Debate: Advocates and Opponents of the American Constitution*, I wrote that the Federalists were innovators. They learned from the past; they did not live in it. We will continue to learn, change, and improve because our collective human nature seems to naturally operate this way. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great Book! By Aristotle Dipteron I had expected a pure history of science text, but found much American social/economic/political history braided into the history of science. To my surprise, the American history was interesting. I have learned a great deal about the scientific contributions of the Founding Fathers and the milieu in which they lived. I am very glad that I have read *FOUNDING FATHERS*. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. scrapbook By H. Chandler A scrapbook of interesting information, but in my opinion no more than that.

A fresh exploration of the scientific pursuits of the Founding Fathers that reveals their science as critical to the great political "experiment" of the day

A well-researched, lively entry into the current debate about the role of science in a democracy. KirkusAn intriguing survey of science's influence on the Founders. BooklistWe might hear as children about Ben Franklin with his kite and key in the thunderstorm, but this lively and learned book gives us the grown-up view of the Founders and their fascination with things scientific. Employing a large cast of colonial characters--Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, and other famous figures of the era, but also lesser-known thinkers and tinkers--Tom Shachtman makes a compelling case that the American Revolution became a movement not only for political independence, but for scientific independence as well. Indeed, Shachtman shows us that the two can hardly be considered separable. Greg Nobles, Professor of History, Georgia Institute of Technology, and co-author of *Whose American Revolution Was It?* This splendid book tells the eye-opening story of America's founding generation as first-class scientists. We know how they created the government of the United States. Here we learn much more--and what a story it is! Lee Dembart, former science book reviewer, Los Angeles TimesBrilliant new book by Tom Shachtman: science as practiced by the Founding Fathers and their generation. Charles ClarkAbout the AuthorTom Shachtman is an author, filmmaker, and educator. He has written or co-authored more than thirty books, including *Rumpringa*, *Airlift to America*, and *Terrors and Marvels*, as well documentaries for ABC, CBS, NBC, and PBS, and has taught at major universities. Publishers Weekly lauded his book *Rumpringa: To Be or Not to Be Amish* as "not only one of the most absorbing books ever written about the Plain People, but a perceptive snapshot of the larger culture in which they live and move." He has written articles for *The New York Times*, *Newsday*, *Smithsonian*, and environmental monthlies, and writes a column for *The Lakeville Journal* (CT). A two-hour television documentary based on his book *Absolute Zero and the Conquest of Cold* was broadcast on PBS in February 2008.