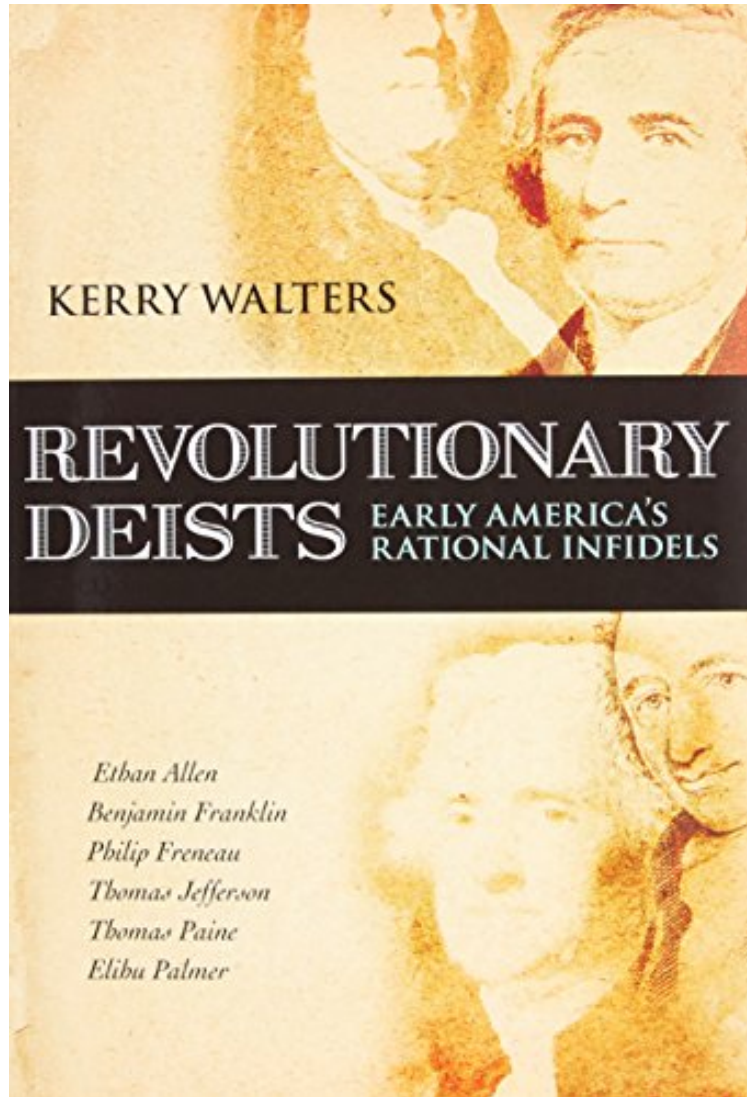


(Download free ebook) Revolutionary Deists: Early America's Rational Infidels

## Revolutionary Deists: Early America's Rational Infidels

*Kerry Walters*

*audiobook / \*ebooks / Download PDF / ePub / DOC*



 Download

 Read Online

#1034246 in Books Prometheus Books 2010-08-24 2010-08-24 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.97 x .63 x 6.071, .84 #File Name: 1616141905279 pages | File size: 53.Mb

**Kerry Walters : Revolutionary Deists: Early America's Rational Infidels** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Revolutionary Deists: Early America's Rational Infidels:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A Great Introduction to the History of Deism (with some flaws)By KeithFor anyone curious about deism, I would recommend them to consider reading this book. Revolutionary Deists very elegantly portrays the thoughts, philosophies and world views of the revolutionary deists during the age of reason in an honest and truthful manner. The author does his very best not to portray any level of bias during his outline of the main revolutionary deists of the 18th century, by allowing the deists to speak for themselves so to speak.Revolutionary Deists performs a just job of outlining the vast extremism present in American Christianity during this time, or to be

more precise Calvinism; within its first chapter. There is an even balance in this book in reference to the deists of choice outlined in *Revolutionary Deists*. From Benjamin Franklin (The ambivalent deist), Ethan Allen (the frontier deist), Thomas Paine (the iconoclastic deist), Thomas Jefferson (the deistic christian), Elihu Palmer (the crusader for deism) and Philip Freneau (deisms poet). As I say Walters portrays the deistic thinkers very truthfully within the dedicated chapters for each deist. I'm a little confused about his overly familiar tone in reference to Thomas Paine, as for some reason Walters seem to like to refer to him as Tom Paine throughout his book. Learning about the history of deism from this book is most intriguing to say the least. And being educated on the views of these men, is most thought provoking. If anything this book really captures the diversity of deism in a very true light. However this book was far from without faults. There are many issues with its closing chapter entitled *Zion Restored: The Decline and Fall of American Deism*. In this final chapter Walters attempts to critique deism on quite a few accounts. Some of those accounts, he may have had a point on, while more crucial points put forward by him were indeed very questionable in my opinion. Walters argues that the deistic view of biblical scripture is far too simplistic and points out that not one of them made any acknowledgement to metaphor etc. He goes on to say that many deists use biblical literalism to argue against the bible. That argument has at least problems with it that I can think of. The bible is supposed to be the perfect word of God (from a Christian perspective). If the word of God is so perfect it ought to be easily accessible for God's creations to understand. If I was God, and I was to reveal myself I would want my creations to understand my word. But yet, many Christians who submit to symbolism or metaphorical arguments over complicate the bible by selecting certain passages and claiming that they are symbolic. The second problem with this argument is that arguments from symbolism are far too subjective to be taken seriously. Literally anything in the bible or any other doctrine, could be viewed as symbolic. I could very easily claim that the entirety of the bible is one big piece of symbolic literature. I could argue that the bible is so extreme in its teaching that it must be a symbol of oppression. Created in order to practice reverse psychology and influence us all to question things. But I don't honestly think that, because there is nothing objective about this claim. It would be nothing more than a subjective opinion. The third and last issue with this argument is that in my opinion it's just over stretching, and an act of desperation to even consider this as a feasible argument. All it attempts to do is simply perform excuse seeking. It is a feeble attempt to justify the atrocities promoted in the bible, dismiss inconsistencies, dismiss contradictions of the bible itself and reality. I most certainly cannot accept symbolism as a credible argument against deism. Other issues I found with Walters arguments was that he seems to enforce parameters of what faith and religion ought to be. Putting forward grievance with deism not believing in revelation (at least in the same way as Christians do) or a personal God and viewing the deistic God as too distant. It is because of this very mentality that many deists spoke out against organised religion. It is the sort of mentality that tells one what to believe and how to believe it. The flaw here is not with deism, but with Christianity itself any many other organised religions that promote forced faith, rather than faith discovered through personal application. The final issue I had with this book and possibly the most crucial issue of all. Was the fact that there is not one single mention of modern deism. Yes, the book is about the early American rational infidels. But I think that an outline of how deism has evolved from the age of reason to what it is now, is a crucially important point. An important point that has been entirely avoided. Not only avoided but Walters automatically assumes that deism as a whole ended in the 19th century, which could not be further from the truth. Deism is alive and well in the 21st century and has evolved into a most diverse and interesting faith and philosophy. In saying all this the final chapter of *Revolutionary Deists* is not a total miss. It does have at least one credible point. The point that while deism has not completely replaced Christianity, much of the tactics and practice of reason has been adapted into Christianity. Or at least they have attempted to do so. I wouldn't necessarily agree that deistic arguments of reason, how many of us view the universe and such is that comparable with Christianity. However this is something I have seen my Christians theologians attempt to do, but there is no escaping the fact that they are contradicting their doctrine due to the specific teaching in the bible in reference to spontaneous creation. To conclude this still a worthwhile read despite the disappointing closing chapter. It is still a great introduction to the great historical deists of the past. In fact after reading this book I have a new favourite of the historical deists, that is Elihu Palmer. I am deeply curious now to know more about him and his book *The Principles of Nature*.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Tomgood9 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Excellent background on the US origin and role of Deism By Fozwort This is an excellent book for people curious about the popular current argument about the role of religion in the lives and actions of some of our nation's chief architects at the time of the revolution. I have found no finer concise work that gives brief profiles of these founders and their role in creating and expanding an early refutation of literal church teachings - the latter being something they had seen all too well as too powerful, constraining, abusive and inflexible in their European backgrounds. More importantly, these early scholars and thinkers rebelled against superstition in an age where science was on a rapid learning curve about how the actual universe worked and the rational laws of nature that seemed to offer promise for encompassing all human endeavors as well. Recasting religion as less superstition and more science seemed to them to be no less remarkable, and they still recognized some supreme power. However, in the end, the movement seemed to suffer because it lacked the passion that comes from strong belief which, by definition, must involve 'faith', rather than knowledge. Deism stumbled in the new nation, and the common uneducated

folks were less enamored of science and more willing to be sheep in the fold of the growing religious movements that offered hope to those struggling with difficult lives and basic human needs. Our elitist founders and great thinkers, to my mind, were right to suspect the established church dogma as potentially harmful to the nation and to seek separation of church and state. We can see the re-establishment of organized religion as a divisive issue today. The true role and nature of deism in today's American society will have to be the subject of another book.

This illuminating discussion of deism in the early American colonies presents an overview of its main tenets, showing how its influence rose swiftly and for a time became a highly controversial subject of debate among the first citizens of our nation. The deists were students of the Enlightenment and took a keen interest in the scientific study of nature. They were thus critical of orthodox Christianity for its superstitious belief in miracles, persecution of dissent, and suppression of independent thought and expression. At the heart of his book are profiles of six "rational infidels," most of whom are quite familiar to Americans as founding fathers or colonial patriots: Benjamin Franklin (the ambivalent deist), Thomas Jefferson (a critic of Christian supernaturalism but an admirer of its ethics), Ethan Allen (the rough-edged "frontier deist"), Thomas Paine (the arch iconoclast and author of *The Age of Reason*), Elihu Palmer (the tireless crusader for deism and perhaps its most influential proponent), and Philip Freneau (a poet whose popular verses combined deism with early romanticism). This is a fascinating study of America's first culture war, one that in many ways has continued to this day.

About the Author Kerry Walters (Gettysburg, PA) is the William Bittinger Chair of Philosophy at Gettysburg College. He is the author or editor of nineteen books and more than one hundred articles.