



Theism and Humanism : The Book that Influenced C. S. Lewis

Arthur James Balfour, C. S. Lewis, Arthur J. Balfour

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In 1962, Christian Century asked the well-known Christian writer, C. S. Lewis, to name the books that had most influenced his thought. Among those that Lewis listed was Arthur J. Balfour's *Theism and Humanism* (1915). This was no passing whim. Almost twenty years earlier, in 1944, Lewis had lamented in "Is Theology Poetry" that *Theism* was "a book too little read."

Many others shared Lewis' enthusiasm. When Balfour gave the original lectures on which the book was based, some 2,000 people crowded into Bute Hall at the University of Glasgow on a weekday winter afternoons to cheer and laugh. Even more telling, they kept coming back, week after week for all ten speeches. Even the staid *Times* of London commented on the "wildly enthusiastic" audiences and noted the diversity of those attending, from citizens and students to professors.

Unfortunately, until now the book hasn't been that easy to find. Copies have only been available on the used market and were thus rare and relatively expensive. This newly typeset edition and enhanced makes the book inexpensive and widely available.

Balfour was a talented writer and perhaps the most intelligent British Prime Minister of the twentieth century. During World War One he replaced Winston Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty and went on to become Foreign Secretary. In the latter office he was responsible for the 1917 Balfour Declaration committing Great Britain to the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. It is no exaggeration to say that Israel owes its existence to Balfour.

Theism and Humanism is based on a 1914 Gifford Lecture that Balfour gave at the University of Glasgow. All the original text is included along with over 50 pages of additional material. There are 11 sketches of Balfour adapted from political cartoons in *Punch* magazine. There are four appendices taken from his other writings, including the marvelous "A Catechism for Naturalism" (which sent the arch-agnostic Thomas Huxley, better known as "Darwin's Bulldog," into a fit of rage). There's also a glossary of people and terms mentioned in the book and a detailed index. Finally, this new edition includes brief quotes from Balfour's other writings to highlight what he is saying. The second edition improves on the first by adding to each chapter in the original, the extensive coverage that *The Times* of London gave to Balfour's original speech. It also includes three letters by C. S. Lewis on themes closely related to Balfour's book.

Balfour's topic is naturalism, the belief that all that exists are natural processes. He challenges those who believe in it to come up with a rationale for what they hold dearest--human reason, human rights, and the importance of art--based solely on naturalism. He believes that cannot be done and summarizes his book in these words:

"My desire has been to show that all we think best in human culture, whether associated with beauty, goodness, or knowledge, requires God for its support, that Humanism without Theism loses more than half its value."

If you like philosophy and provocative ideas, this book is perfect for you. The Cambridge-educated Balfour was very knowledgeable about science. (He was the President of the British Association for the

Advancement of Science in 1904 and his brother was a talented scientist.) That makes this book a useful complement to the Oxford-educated Lewis whose specialty was literature.

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