

**THE FOUNDATIONS OF BELIEF:
BEING NOTES INTRODUCTORY
TO THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY,
PP. 1-354**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649746873

The Foundations of Belief: Being Notes Introductory to the Study of Theology, pp. 1-354 by
Arthur James Balfour

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR

**THE FOUNDATIONS OF BELIEF:
BEING NOTES INTRODUCTORY
TO THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY,
PP. 1-354**

PRELIMINARY

As its title imports, the following Essay is intended to serve as an Introduction to the Study of Theology. The word 'Introduction,' however, is ambiguous; and in order that the reader may be as little disappointed as possible with the contents of the book, the sense in which I here use it must be first explained. Sometimes, by an Introduction to a subject is meant a brief survey of its leading principles—a first initiation, as it were, into its methods and results. For such a task, however, in the case of Theology I have no qualifications. With the growth of knowledge Theology has enlarged its borders until it has included subjects about which even the most accomplished theologian of past ages did not greatly concern himself. To the Patristic, Dogmatic, and Controversial learning which has always been required, the theologian of to-day must add knowledge at first hand of the complex historical, antiquarian, and critical problems presented by the Old and New Testaments, and of the vast and daily increasing literature which has grown up around them. He must have a sufficient acquaintance with

the comparative history of religions ; and in addition to all this, he must be competent to deal with those scientific and philosophical questions which have a more profound and permanent bearing on Theology even than the results of critical and historical scholarship.

Whether any single individual is fully competent either to acquire or successfully to manipulate so formidable an apparatus of learning, I do not know. But in any case I am very far indeed from being even among that not inconsiderable number who are qualified to put the reader in the way of profitably cultivating some portion of this vast and always increasing field of research. The following pages, therefore, scarcely claim to deal with the substance of Theology at all. They are in the narrowest sense of the word an 'introduction' to it. They deal for the most part with preliminaries ; and it is only towards the end of the volume, where the Introduction begins insensibly to merge into that which it is designed to introduce, that purely theological doctrines are mentioned, except by way of illustration.

Although what follows might thus be fitly described as 'Considerations preliminary to a study of Theology,' I do not think the subjects dealt with are less important on that account. For, in truth, the decisive battles of Theology are fought beyond its frontiers. It is not over purely religious controversies that the cause of Religion is lost or won.

The judgments we shall form upon its special problems are commonly settled for us by our general mode of looking at the Universe ; and this again, in so far as it is determined by arguments at all, is determined by arguments of so wide a scope that they can seldom be claimed as more nearly concerned with Theology than with the philosophy of Science or of Ethics.

My object, then, is to recommend a particular way of looking at the World-problems which, whether we like it or not, we are compelled to face. I wish, if I can, to lead the reader up to a point of view whence the small fragments of the Infinite Whole, of which we are able to obtain a glimpse, may appear to us in their true relative proportions. This is, therefore, no work of 'Apologetics' in the ordinary sense of that word. Theological doctrines are not taken up in turn and defended from current objections ; nor is there any endeavour here made specifically to solve the 'doubts' or allay the 'difficulties' which in this, as in every other, age perplex the minds of a certain number of religious persons. Yet, as I think that perhaps the greater number of these doubts and difficulties would never even present themselves in that character were it not for a certain superficiality and one-sidedness in our habitual manner of considering the wider problems of belief, I cannot help entertaining the hope that by what is here said the work of the Apologist proper may indirectly be furthered.

It is a natural, if not an absolutely necessary consequence of this plan, that the subjects alluded to in the following pages are, as a rule, more secular than the title of the book might perhaps at first suggest, and also that the treatment of some of them has been brief even to meagreness. If the reader is tempted to complain of the extreme conciseness with which some topics of the greatest importance are touched on, and the apparent irrelevance with which others have been introduced, I hope he will reserve his judgment until he has read to the end, should his patience hold out so long. If he then thinks that the 'particular way of looking at the World-problems' which this book is intended to recommend is not rendered clearer by any portion of what has been written, I shall be open to his criticism; but not otherwise. What I have tried to do is not to write a monograph, or a series of monographs, upon Theology, but to delineate, and, if possible, to recommend, a certain attitude of mind; and I hope that in carrying out this less ambitious scheme I have put in few touches that were superfluous and left out none that were necessary.

If it be asked, 'For whom is this book intended?' I answer, that it is intended for the general body of readers interested in such subjects rather than for the specialist in Philosophy. I do not, of course, mean that I have either desired or been able to avoid questions which in essence are strictly philosophical. Such an attempt would have been wholly absurd.

But no knowledge either of the history or the technicalities of Philosophy is assumed in the reader, nor do I believe that there is any train of thought here suggested which, if he thinks it worth his while, he will have the least difficulty in following. He may, and very likely will, find objection both to the substance of my arguments and their form. But I shall be disappointed if, in addition to their other deficiencies, he finds them unintelligible or even obscure.¹

There is one more point to be explained before these prefatory remarks are brought to a conclusion. In order that the views here advocated may be seen in the highest relief, it is convenient to exhibit them against the background of some other and contrasted system of thought. What system shall that be? In Germany the philosophies of Kant and his successors may be (I know not whether they are) matters of such common knowledge that they fittingly supply a standard of reference, by the aid of which the relative positions of other and more or less differing systems may be conveniently determined. As to whether this state of things, if it anywhere exists, is desirable or not, I offer no opinion. But I am very sure that it does not at present exist in any English-speaking community, and probably never will, until the ideas of these speculative giants are throughout rethought by Englishmen, and

¹ These observations must not be taken as applying to Part II., Chapter II., which the general reader is recommended to omit.

reproduced in a shape which ordinary Englishmen will consent to assimilate. Until this occurs Transcendental Idealism must continue to be what it is now—the intellectual possession of a small minority of philosophical specialists. Philosophy cannot, under existing conditions, become, like Science, absolutely international. There is in matters speculative, as in matters poetical, a certain amount of natural protection for the home-producer, which commentators and translators seem unable altogether to overcome.

Though, therefore, I have devoted a chapter to the consideration of Transcendental Idealism as represented in some recent English writings, it is not with overt or tacit reference to that system that I have arranged the material of the following Essay. I have, on the contrary, selected a system with which I am in much less sympathy, but which under many names numbers a formidable following, and is in reality the only system which ultimately profits by any defeats which Theology may sustain, or which may be counted on to flood the spaces from which the tide of Religion has receded. Agnosticism, Positivism, Empiricism, have all been used more or less correctly to describe this scheme of thought; though in the following pages, for reasons with which it is not necessary to trouble the reader, the term which I shall commonly employ is Naturalism. But whatever the name selected, the thing itself is sufficiently easy to describe. For its leading doctrines

are that we may know 'phenomena'¹ and the laws by which they are connected, but nothing more. 'More' there may or may not be; but if it exists we can never apprehend it: and whatever the World may be 'in its reality' (supposing such an expression to be otherwise than meaningless), the World for us, the World with which alone we are concerned, or of which alone we can have any cognisance, is that World which is revealed to us through perception, and which is the subject-matter of the Natural Sciences. Here, and here only, are we on firm ground. Here, and here only, can we discover anything which deserves to be described as

¹ I feel that explanation, and perhaps apology, is due for this use of the word 'phenomena.' In its proper sense the term implies, I suppose, that which *appears*, as distinguished from something, presumably more real, which does *not appear*. I neither use it as carrying this metaphysical implication, nor do I restrict it to things which appear, or even to things which *could* appear to beings endowed with senses like ours. The ether, for instance, though it is impossible that we should ever know it except by its effects, I should call a phenomenon. The coagulation of nebular meteors into suns and planets I should call a phenomenon, though nobody may have existed to whom it could appear. Roughly speaking, things and events, the general subject-matter of Natural Science, is what I endeavour to indicate by a term for which, as thus used, there is, unfortunately, no substitute, however little the meaning which I give to it can be etymologically justified.

While I am on the subject of definitions, it may be as well to say that, generally speaking, I distinguish between Philosophy and Metaphysics. To Philosophy I give an *epistemological* significance. I regard it as the systematic exposition of our grounds of knowledge. Thus, the philosophy of Religion or the philosophy of Science would mean the theoretic justification of our theological or scientific beliefs. By Metaphysics, on the other hand, I usually mean the knowledge that we have, or suppose ourselves to have, respecting realities which are not phenomenal, *e.g.* God, and the Soul.