



# Theism and Humanism: The Book That Influenced C. S. Lewis

*Arthur James Balfour, Balfour, 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 written in "Is Theology Poetry" that *Theism* was "a book too little read." Unfortunately, until now it hasn't been that easy to find. Copies have been available ONLY on the used market and were thus rare and fairly expensive. This newly typeset edition makes it inexpensive and easy to get.

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 13 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 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.

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."

This book is not light reading. But if you like philosophy and provocative ideas, it is perfect for you. The Cambridge-educated Balfour was very knowledgeable about science. (He was for a time, the President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.) That makes this book a useful complement to the Oxford-educated Lewis whose speciality was literature.

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