



The Will to Believe,; And Other Essays in Popular Philosophy,

William James

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"The Will to Believe" is a lecture by William James, published in 1897, which defended the adoption of beliefs as hypotheses and self-fulfilling prophecies even without prior evidence of their truth. Many philosophers would agree with James that we have a right to hypothesize and to adopt self-fulfilling beliefs without evidence; James, however, extends this idea to argue that, using this doctrine, adopting beliefs like God, freewill, possibility, and morality would cause evidence to come into existence, thus verifying beliefs that could not have been verified otherwise. James' rationale for this more controversial idea is in combining it with his pragmatic theory of truth, the idea that a belief is verified if it causes better interaction with the world. For example, while no evidence can justify the initial adoption of a belief in God, the adoption of such a belief as a hypothesis without evidence would cause one to succeed better in the world, thus verifying the belief.

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