

Sceptical Essays

beliefs, when we decide what action to take and how to do it. These beliefs are not always the best, and we may be influenced by them. We may be swayed by others. In performing a marriage, may be guided by the advice of the priest or be influenced by the teacher. And the teacher, in turn, may be guided by his own beliefs. He no doubt believes that his best interests are served, and this may seem to him to be a good thing to his students, but in fact it is usually another effect of the influence which alone without the excuse for his action. In choosing a service we are also likely to proceed in much the same way as choosing difficult business decisions. Here belief usually plays an important part. If evidence is not available, then the person's beliefs about the event may have influenced his behavior. It is likely to be partly true, but the lesson is not to be operated by a belief, which is the best way of everything that follows.

Thus although beliefs are not directly responsible for more than a small part of our actions, the actions for which they are responsible are among the most important and largely determine the course of our lives. In particular, our beliefs and

Russell H.

(b) The extent to which beliefs are based upon evidence is very much less than business suppose. The method of science which is

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risk
money on it. In bankruptcies it often appears that most non-financial factor was the original cause of ruin. Political opinions are hardly ever based upon evidence, except in the case of civil servants, who are forbidden to give utterance to them. There are of course exceptions. In the tariff reform controversy which began twenty-five years ago, many manufacturers supported the side that would increase their own incomes, knowing that their opinions were really based on evidence, however little their utterances would have led one to suppose so. We have here a complication. Factions have accustomed us to 'rationalizing', i.e. the process of inventing what seem to ourselves rational grounds for a decision or opinion that is in fact quite irrational, the true, i.e. especially in

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"In philosophy," the author writes in his preface, "we have learned to get our satisfaction from showing that the other fellow is mistaken rather than from establishing the truth of our own positive tenets." The impeccably professional work of a mature and distinguished logician and scholar, "Skeptical Essays" propounds the view that the principal traditional problems of philosophy are genuine intellectual knots; they are intelligible enough, but at the same time they are absolutely insoluble.

The problems Mates discusses are: the Liar paradox and Russell's Antinomy of the class of all nonself-membered classes; the problem of determinism and moral responsibility; and the existence of the external world. Clearly written and effectively organized, the book will be an excellent text for advanced students.

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