

Clifford on the  
*Ethics of Belief*  
(1877)

# William Clifford



William Kingston Clifford  
(1845-1879)

“It is wrong  
always, every-  
where, and for  
anyone, to believe  
anything upon  
insufficient  
evidence.”

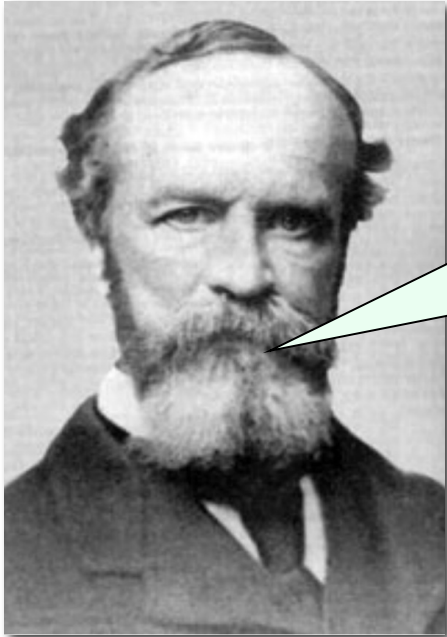
What do you think?

Clifford argued that “it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.”

Do you agree?

James on the  
*Will to Believe*  
(1896)

# William James



William James  
(1842-1910)

A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.

**James's Thesis:** A “genuine option” between two propositions that cannot be decided by **reason** can and must be decided by our non-rational **passions**.

# James's "Genuine Option"

**Every option has three dimensions:**

- (1) **living** (believe in God, or not) or **dead** (believe in Wotan, or not)
- (2) **forced** (believe A or not-A) or **avoidable** (believe A or B)
- (3) **momentous** (believe in God or not) or **trivial** (believe that it will rain tomorrow or not)

**A Genuine Option is living, forced and momentous.**

## Two Epistemic Duties

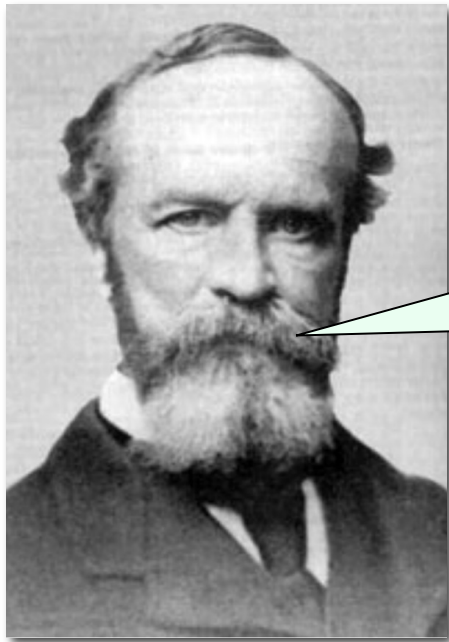
(1) **Believe** all that  
is **true**.

(2) **Disbelieve** all that  
is **false**.

[do we have any other epistemic duties?]

# James vs Clifford

It is wrong always,  
everywhere, and for  
anyone, to believe  
anything upon  
insufficient evidence.



What? You want us to  
believe nothing rather than  
to risk believing something  
false? That is like a general  
refusing to fight for fear of  
risking a wound!