



Ludwig Boltzmann: The Man Who Trusted Atoms

Carlo Cercignani

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This book presents the life and personality, the scientific and philosophical work of Ludwig Boltzmann, one of the great scientists who marked the passage from 19th- to 20th-Century physics. His rich and tragic life, ending by suicide at the age of 62, is described in detail. A substantial part of the book is devoted to discussing his scientific and philosophical ideas and placing them in the context of the second half of the 19th century. The fact that Boltzmann was the man who did most to establish that there is a microscopic, atomic structure underlying macroscopic bodies is documented, as is Boltzmann's influence on modern physics, especially through the work of Planck on light quanta and of Einstein on Brownian motion.

Boltzmann was the centre of a scientific upheaval, and he has been proved right on many crucial issues. He anticipated Kuhn's theory of scientific revolutions and proposed a theory of knowledge based on Darwin. His basic results, when properly understood, can also be stated as mathematical theorems. Some of these have been proved: others are still at the level of likely but unproven conjectures. The main text of this biography is written almost entirely without equations. Mathematical appendices deepen knowledge of some technical aspects of the subject.

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