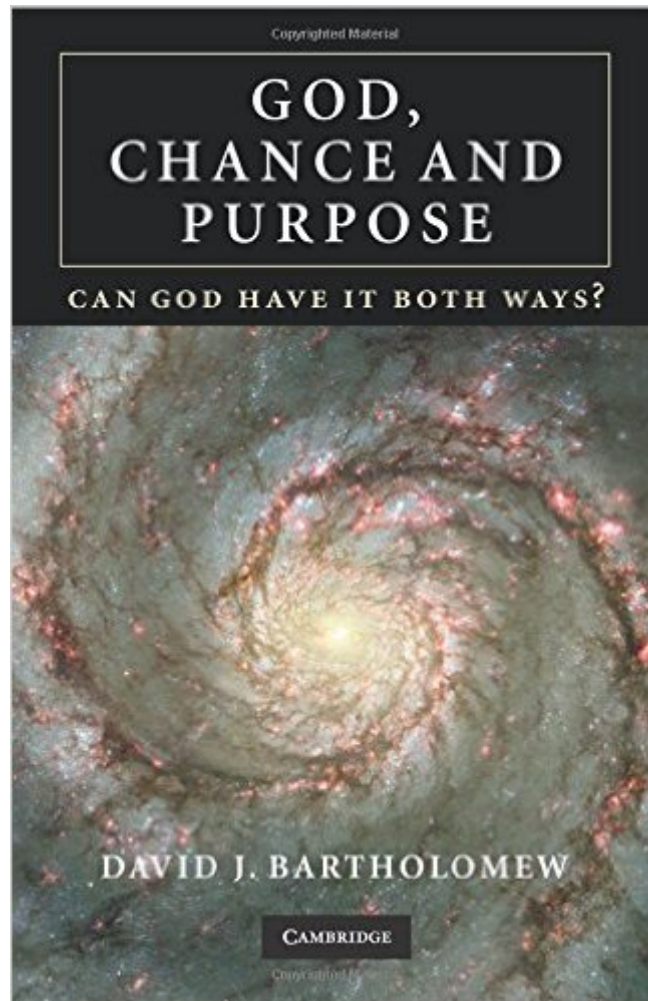


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God, Chance And Purpose: Can God Have It Both Ways?



Synopsis

Scientific accounts of existence give chance a central role. At the smallest level, quantum theory involves uncertainty and evolution is driven by chance and necessity. These ideas do not fit easily with theology in which chance has been seen as the enemy of purpose. One option is to argue, as proponents of Intelligent Design do, that chance is not real and can be replaced by the work of a Designer. Others adhere to a deterministic theology in which God is in total control. Neither of these views, it is argued, does justice to the complexity of nature or the greatness of God. The thesis of this book is that chance is neither unreal nor non-existent but an integral part of God's creation. This view is expounded, illustrated and defended by drawing on the resources of probability theory and numerous examples from the natural and social worlds.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

David Bartholomew is Emeritus Professor of Statistics at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His book offers a perspective on chance and divine action that only a statistician could provide. The problem that his book addresses is that chance suggests lack of purpose, and theology speaks of purpose. His solution is seeing chance within, not outside, the providence of God. "Chance plays a positive role in the world and . . . does not undermine God's sovereignty." Bartholomew identifies three models of evolution: (1) Blind chance: little or no opportunity for God to act at all. (2) Purely deterministic: "God's determinate actions successfully mimic chance and at the same time achieve other desired outcomes." (3) Mostly chance with

occasional intervention by God: a modest amount of direct action (obscured by chance) with a large dose of genuine randomness. "In this scenario there are many random happenings, and most of the time, the deity in charge has no more to do than to sit back and delight in the variety of creation. For example, he cites Simon Conway Morris' notion of convergence, according to which "evolution is liable to produce similar solutions to similar problems wherever and whenever they occur . . . making the emergence of something like ourselves a near-certainty" ("Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe" (Cambridge University Press, 2003)). Regarding the popular notion of God acting undetectably at the quantum level (as suggested by Robert Russell, John Polkinghorne, Nancey Murphy, and others), he concludes that "it is very doubtful whether there are any quantum events which God could influence whose outcomes might significantly determine what happens at the macro level.

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