

Not A Chance—The Myth of Chance in Modern Science and Cosmology, by R. C. Sproul. 1994. Baker Books. Grand Rapids. 234 pages. \$15.99.

Reviewed by John K. Reed*

R. C. Sproul is a philosophical theologian who has parted the curtain of science surrounding the temple of (and to) modern man, has entered unapologetically, and has thrown down one of the most revered chapels in the complex. *Not A Chance* demonstrates that the myth of modern chance is built on the careless use of language by modern scientists, the wish for emancipation from God by modern atheists and agnostics, and their selective rejection of formal reason.

In a much needed book, Sproul remorselessly zeroes in on the modern myth of chance as a description of something occurring without cause. This view supports a cosmology of chaos and strips science of explanatory power. As Sproul points out, there can be no middle ground: "If chance is, God is not." Sproul explains the absurdities that follow the attribution of causal power to chance. Since they are derived from a denial of the principals of non-contradiction and causality, anyone with training or experience in the hard sciences can easily and existentially understand the disabling consequences of those denials.

In this book, the key to unlocking the myth of chance is the recognition that not knowing a cause is far different from asserting that there is no cause to be known. Sproul demonstrates that even popularly acknowledged critics of causal thinking such as David Hume understood this crucial difference. The move from 'I can't know it' to 'It doesn't exist' blends the arrogance of modern man with the shallowness of his thought—a shallowness undoubtedly related to an evolutionary paradigm that allows him to sneer at his inferiors of the past.

In a telling passage that emphasizes the absurdity of chance as a causal agent, Sproul attacks the statement of Timothy Ferris in *Coming of Age in the Milky Way* (Ferris, 1988).

Quantum indeterminacy may have nothing to do with human will, but as a matter of philosophical taste there are good reasons to celebrate the return of chance to the fundamental affairs of the world (p. 291).

Sproul pours cold water on the celebration by pointing out that science is intrinsically inductive and that any scientific distinction between indeterminacy as ignorance and indeterminacy as a denial of causality is impossible (and such a distinction thus rests on a formal foundation outside of science) because it relies on the empirical demonstration of a negative. He quotes William Poundstone's *Labyrinths of Reason: Paradox, Puzzles, and the Frailty of Knowledge* (1988):

In a infinite universe, proving a negative hypothesis is a supertask. (If the universe is merely finite but very big, proving a negative hypothesis is a herculean labor so close to a supertask as to make no difference) (p. 41).

Sproul agrees, quickly cutting through the grandiose superfluity of Ferris in plain language:

To celebrate the return of chance into the affairs of this world (in the sense that chance causes quantum leaps and therefore justifies the negative hypothesis that "nothing" causes the behavior of subatomic particles) is an exercise in futility. Such justification via negative hypothesis is more than a supertask—it is an impossible task. It is a task that even Hercules could not perform. If Hercules were to return, we would not ask him to perform such a task. We would ask him to repeat one of the tasks he had already performed. We would ask him once again to clean the stables (p. 51).

A helpful aspect of this book is its description of modern causal thinking as an effect of the divorce of science from an explicit dependence on supporting frameworks of knowledge provided in philosophy and theology. Because naturalistic science affirms the metaphysic of *solo phenomena*, it must therefore embrace an epistemology of *solo scientia naturalis*; thus, science becomes burdened with tasks traditionally assigned to philosophy and theology. Sproul ably demonstrates the inability of science to perform those tasks.

Not A Chance provides a bonus of a mini-education in the relationship of philosophy and theology to science from the perspective of a non-scientist. Sproul boldly asserts that philosophy acts as the policeman of science—a position that secularists have hotly contested for over a century. They realize that just as the supernatural transcends the phenomenal, knowledge of the supernatural and the phenomenal reflects not only the distinction between the two, but also their hierarchy, thus destroying a fundamental axiom of their naturalistic worldview.

R. C. Sproul has earned degrees in theology from the Free University of Amsterdam, Geneva College and Grove City College. He is the John Dyer Trimble, Sr., Chair of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, but is better known nationally as the principal theologian of Ligonier Ministries, and author of such books as *The Holiness of God*, *Lifeviews*, *The Psychology of Atheism*, and *Classical Apologetics*.

References

- Ferris, T. 1988. *Coming of age in the Milky Way*. Morrow. New York.
Poundstone, W. 1988. *Labyrinths of reason: paradox, puzzles, and the frailty of knowledge*. Doubleday. New York.

*915 Hunting Horn Way, Evans, GA 30809.