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Chance in the Theology of Leonard Hodgson

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A now forgotten theologian at the University of Oxford, Leonard Hodgson, strongly argued for a positive role for chance in achieving God's purpose for creation.

*In his now widely-referenced philosophical work *Chance and Necessity*, Jacques Monod offered a reasoned, albeit polemical, case for the meaninglessness of human existence; if through the self-organization of matter, the eventual development of life has occurred fundamentally by chance, by way of truly random genetic mutations, then traditional philosophical and theological views of destiny or purpose are undermined. In sum, Monod made the case that chance and purpose are mutually exclusive within the general context of the biochemical evolutionary process, but more specifically, in human development. Arthur Peacocke attempted the first comprehensive refutation of Monod's primary philosophical thesis in 1978. Then, in 1984, statistician David Bartholomew built on Peacocke's ideas in a thorough treatment of the interface of chance with Christian theology. More than two decades before Peacocke's seminal work, however, a now forgotten theologian at the University of Oxford, Leonard Hodgson, strongly argued for a positive role for chance in achieving God's purpose for creation. Who was Leonard Hodgson? How much of contemporary thinking about the role of chance in creation did he anticipate? And what contributions might his body of work make to the present-day theological discussion about the chance worldview?*

Few would dispute that the contemporary scientific worldview could be well characterized as a "chance worldview."¹ Regardless of whether one considers random mutations at the biochemical level of evolutionary biology or the uncertainty inherent in elementary particles according to the dominant Copenhagen interpretation of quantum physics, "chance rules."² As the backdrop for many significant scientific theories, chance has evolved into a considerable topic of discussion in the burgeoning discipline of science and religion, particularly Christian theology.³

Chance may be apparent in more personal ways, as well. In July 1991, a commuter flight from New Orleans crashed on its

approach to the Birmingham International Airport. All but two aboard that plane perished; the lone survivors were the pilot, who was thrown through the front windshield into a nearby house, and a local Christian attorney. After his recovery, this attorney recounted his story of having survived the accident. He recalled looking out the windows and seeing treetops and roofs of houses. All the while he was holding the hand of his law partner who was sitting across the aisle from him. Later, as he lay recovering in his hospital bed, he gave thoughtful consideration as to why God had plucked him from disaster while allowing his friend and colleague to die. After careful review of at least half a dozen archetypes for the kind of God that could reign over such an event, he concluded that although the universe had been created by an omnipotent being, this same God stood back and now watched the progress of a creation governed by natural law and chance. He supported his contention by reference to scientific evidence of a universe seemingly designed around chance (e.g., evolutionary processes and quantum theory) as well as biblical passages such as, "... the race is not to the

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swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all" (Eccles. 9:11, ESV) and "... for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45).⁴ A catastrophic life event had transformed this attorney into an Enlightenment-style deist, poignantly illustrating the impact that chance can have on individual lives.

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In his now widely-referenced philosophical work *Chance and Necessity*,⁵ biochemist and Nobel Laureate Jacques Monod offered a reasoned, albeit polemical, case for the meaninglessness of human existence. That is, if through the self-organization of matter the eventual development of life has occurred fundamentally by chance, by way of truly random genetic mutations, then traditional philosophical and theological views of destiny or purpose are undermined. In sum, Monod made the case that chance and purpose are mutually exclusive within the general context of the biochemical evolutionary process, but more specifically, in human development. Some seven years later, Arthur Peacocke, in his 1978 Bampton Lectures published under the title *Creation and the World of Science*⁶ and more directly in his paper entitled, "Chance and the Life Game,"⁷ attempted the first comprehensive refutation of Monod's primary philosophical thesis. Peacocke suggested the clever metaphor that chance serves as God's "search radar,"⁸ arguing that only through chance can the "potentialities of living matter"⁹ be fully and efficiently explored.

In 1984, statistician David Bartholomew built on Peacocke's ideas with his thorough treatment of the interface of chance with Christian theology in *God of Chance*¹⁰ and four years later in his paper, "Probability, Statistics and Theology."¹¹ Although chance has attracted the attention of numerous contributors to the science and theology

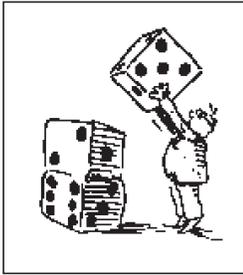
dialogue, only Bartholomew has formal education in chance as a professional matter, through the study of statistics and probability theory. He acknowledges that in the current worldview, science is the benchmark against which truth is measured. Within this context, certainties once accepted by many Christians have been replaced by doubt. In *Uncertain Belief: Is It Rational to be a Christian?*¹² Bartholomew's contention is that a rational person's belief must rest upon uncertainties. It is probability theory that provides the methodology for measuring uncertainty and therefore provides the Christian with the best opportunity for fashioning a rational basis for belief. Bartholomew admits, however, that many issues central to chance and theology remain to be worked through.¹³ Richard Swinburne¹⁴ and others have explored related themes and drawn similar conclusions.

Bartholomew's approach to integrating chance into Christian theology tends toward a traditional view of natural theology that often gives knowledge of God through the world primacy over revelation. As Alister McGrath¹⁵ and others have argued, a saving knowledge of God proceeds only through biblical revelation and in the person of Jesus Christ, though a deeper understanding of the nature of God may be arrived at through observation of the natural world. In other words, the Bible is illuminated, rather than contradicted, by science. Is there, then, an interpretation of chance processes in creation that acknowledges our understanding of the world as characterized by science while simultaneously preserving orthodox Christian truths?

The primary purpose of this paper is to briefly introduce the "theology of chance" of a leading mid-twentieth century theologian, Leonard Hodgson, who anticipated Monod's assault (and Peacocke's response) by two decades. Despite impeccable academic credentials, Hodgson's ideas have been omitted from all serious dialogs concerning the theological implications of the chance worldview that has come to form the backdrop of the contemporary science and religion discipline. The position I will take is that Hodgson's theology (1) anticipated significant components of the contemporary scholarly discussion and, (2) continues to offer substantive contributions to our understanding of the role of chance in the universe from an orthodox Christian perspective.

What Is Chance?

Chance, though widely discussed, is a surprisingly difficult concept to pin down. Donald McKay, in his Riddell Lectures, takes a very conservative Christian interpretation that denies the existence of pure chance.¹⁶ Though accepting Monod's science, MacKay sees chance (and the pragmatically probabilistic portrayal of the world by science) as nothing but a way of describing our ignorance. Alternatively, Arthur Peacocke espouses a liberal theological interpretation of chance viewed as a teleological tool



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used by God in creative processes, though many of the foundational creedal Christian beliefs (e.g., the virgin birth, bodily resurrection) become casualties in his theology.¹⁷ John Polkinghorne describes at least five interpretations of chance that have been referenced in the science and religion dialogue and agrees with Peacocke, though less explicitly so, that chance may be considered a tool used by God to achieve God's purpose(s).¹⁸ Although Polkinghorne accepts the possibility of a positive role for chance in creation, he has argued more for a world rife with chaotic systems that are epistemologically indeterminate though ontologically determined.¹⁹ In light of this and more, Bartholomew has carefully argued (like Peacocke and Polkinghorne before him) that chance is not the antithesis of purpose. The case that chance is not inherently anti-teleological has been made statistically through appeals to both stochastic processes (Peacocke) and chaos theory (Polkinghorne). The concept of chance remains ambiguous.

However, for purposes of this article, I will adopt Bartholomew's "common sense" epistemological definition: chance events are "those for which no causal explanation can be conceived of in the present state of knowledge."²⁰ In other words, the presupposition of philosophical realism is adopted in which chance is accepted to be what it appears to be as described by science.²¹

Decades before the earliest of these attempts to address the implications of chance for Christian theology, evangelical²² Oxford theologian Leonard Hodgson, in his Gifford Lectures (1955–1957), anticipated the idea put forth by Peacocke, Polkinghorne, Bartholomew and others that chance could be a tool of God and not anti-teleological. An attractive feature of Hodgson's theology is that it retains its orthodox Christian character while incorporating chance as a positive theological concept. Seemingly, Hodgson possessed insight far ahead of its time.

Leonard Hodgson

Hodgson was born on October 24, 1889 at Fulham in the United Kingdom, the son of Walter, an official shorthand writer for the House of Commons in Parliament, and Lillias. A good student, Hodgson was awarded a scholarship to Hertford College

of the University of Oxford where he earned first class honors in Greats and theology. He was ordained deacon in the Church of England in 1913.

Though very successful in his professional life, he showed clear signs of his humanity as a young man. In June 1917, he met Dorothy L. Sayers, eventually to become one of Britain's greatest novelists, through a mutual friend, Basil Blackwell, bookshop owner and publisher. On one occasion in Oxford, she needed help launching a punting boat and Hodgson, Vice Principal of St. Edmund's Hall, was nearby and able to assist. Following that introduction and several additional brief encounters, Hodgson had become infatuated with her. One month later he appeared, uninvited, at the Blackwell's home on an evening when they were hosting Ms. Sayers for dinner. After dinner, and much to her surprise, Hodgson proposed marriage. In letters to her mother, Sayers described Hodgson as "a perfectly delightful padre" but that in response to his proposal all she could say was "Oh Lord!" and that she had "never for a second" considered him in that connection and that "she certainly did not care for him" as marriage material.²³ Not to be deterred, Hodgson married Ethel Margaret du Plat in 1920 and they subsequently had two children.

After a series of church and academic positions, in 1919 Hodgson became Dean of Divinity and theology tutor at Magdalen College of the University of Oxford. He was active in the ecumenical movement ultimately helping to found the *World Council of Churches*. In 1938 he received the Bachelor of Divinity and Doctor of Divinity degrees from Oxford and succeeded Oliver Chase Quick as Regius Professor of Divinity in 1944. Hodgson's inaugural lecture on this occasion, "Theology in an Age of Science,"²⁴ showed his growing awareness of the importance of science in society and the necessity for theologians to recognize that fact and adapt. He stated:

One may safely prophesy that we have entered upon an age in which science prescribes the prevailing tone and temper of public opinion ... as the education of the laity becomes progressively more scientific in character, the education of the clergy will render them progressively more unfit to under-

stand and be understood by more than a minority of those to whom they are called to minister.²⁵

It was Hodgson's Gifford Lectures of 1955–1957, published under the title *For Faith and Freedom*,²⁶ which would become his *magnum opus* and a serious entrée into the science and Christianity dialogue. Of chance he said:

For the rational purpose of ensuring fair play we create conditions in which decisions shall be left to chance; for the furtherance of His purpose in creation God gives to His universe a mode of reality which admits of the existence and occurrence of such irrationalities as contingency, freedom and evil.²⁷

Mark Chapman observed:

He communicated a dynamic, rational and attractive theology to a wide audience both at home and abroad. His focus on the interaction between the material and the spiritual, between grace and freedom, as "the obverse and reverse sides of a single process,"²⁸ helped shape English theology's continuing concern with the reconciliation of modern science and the claims of religion.²⁹

Hodgson retired from the University of Oxford in 1958.

It is difficult to grasp the incongruity between Hodgson's stature during his life and his virtual anonymity within the theological community, both then and now. Hodgson achieved an exalted position in academia, established meaningful relationships as a parish priest³⁰ and was a high-profile and active participant in the ecumenical movement,³¹ yet he has seldom been referenced by historians of theology or theologians, and he did not appear in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* until 2004.³² Fisher Humphries affirms:

[Hodgson] seemed to realize that in much of what he was doing he was alone, a maverick who would not let the popularity of an idea turn his head from what he believed to be the real issue, the important theme.³³

Regardless, Hodgson published eleven books, fifteen pamphlets, over twenty-five journal articles, as well as a number of letters, sermons, and unpublished manuscripts that are archived at Christ Church, Oxford.

Chance in the Theology of Leonard Hodgson Capacity for Human Reason

Hodgson was a philosophical realist; he placed great confidence in humankind's ability to reason, not in a deductive sense, but rather through the ability to recognize truth. He asserted that the "fact surely is that the primary function of human reason is not the construction of chains of argument, but the *recognition of truth*."³⁴ Reason in this

sense assumes that the world is a logical place. Hodgson believed that "[o]ur fundamental act of faith is that the universe of our experience somehow or other makes sense."³⁵ This is a necessary beginning to any line of rational scientific inquiry.

Hodgson presupposed two components to apprehension of the truth, "... something to be known and a mind capable of knowing it."³⁶ He considered the process of apprehension of the truth to be "a lively exchange between the necessarily subjective seizing upon of reality by a human mind and the necessarily objective reality of the world which it experiences."³⁷

The Relationship between Reason and Revelation

Hodgson believed that "all truth is God's"³⁸ and that "[t]ruth is a quality of statements."³⁹ In other words, there is no distinction between truth as revealed to humankind by God and truth discovered by reason. Hodgson asserted:

Revelation and reason are not alternatives appropriate to different fields of inquiry ... they are the divine and human sides involved in all man's growth in knowledge.⁴⁰

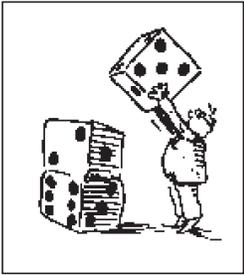
This was nicely illustrated by an example that should resonate particularly well with academics.

In teaching the teacher is giving out from the store of knowledge and (let us hope) wisdom which is already there in his own mind—giving out in such measure as the pupil is able to receive. That is the process as seen from the end of the teacher. The same process, as seen from the pupil's end, is the history of the growth of the pupil's mind, as step by step he becomes capable of assimilating more of what he is given.⁴¹

To Hodgson, revelation came not through words, but through the acts of God. The ability of certain people to see God's acts for what they were, often labeled inspiration, is itself one of those acts of God. This is similar in nature to the physician who is gifted with diagnostic insight beyond that of her colleagues.⁴² Humphries says of this conception of revelation: "It is the act itself, and not the interpretations of it, which is normative for human understanding."⁴³

According to Hodgson, "[h]owever much men may be inspired by God to recognize his working in natural phenomena or historical events, they can only see with the mental eyes of their age and culture."⁴⁴ He further characterizes God's acts as either creative or redemptive:

I have distinguished between the two modes of God's self-revelation: the revelation of His creative activity which we receive through study of the universe in general, and the revelation of His redemptive activity given in the events to which the Bible bears



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witness. In both His method is the same: He reveals Himself by doing things and inspiring men to grasp the significance of what He does.⁴⁵

As such, Hodgson viewed the characterization of theology as natural versus revealed as a false dichotomy. Since all truth is God's, his redemptive activity is revealed through the historical acts chronicled in the Old and New Testaments whereas his creative activity is revealed through science. In other words, science is a conduit for revelation. Neither form of revelation reigns supreme. However, the distinctive quality of Christianity as a religion is its recognition of redemptive revelation, Jesus Christ being the most complete revelation of God to humanity. Hodgson was clear: "To the eye of Christian faith the revelation in Jesus Christ is the clue to the understanding of everything else."⁴⁶

Alternatives to a Doctrine of Creation

According to Hodgson, the nature of the world is not transparent and one

must consider what sort of postulate about the nature of things will make most sense; the Christian philosopher postulates an eternal Reality who is perfect and whose relation to the universe is like the relation of a maker to what he has made. The universe may thus be designated "creation" and God is "Creator."⁴⁷

Hodgson himself describes the Christian doctrine of creation as "the belief that God, for some purpose of His own, calls into existence the universe, giving it the being and the mode of reality which that purpose requires."⁴⁸

Two primary alternatives to a doctrine of creation were examined by Hodgson: materialism and idealism. Materialism has been defined as "the view that the proper explanation of the universe is simply the assertion that the universe is all that is the case."⁴⁹ This leads Hodgson to conclude that materialism necessarily results in the conviction that there is no meaning to the existence of the universe. However, as Humphreys points out, Hodgson also argued that materialism is empirically deficient; materialism cannot

account for human freedom, i.e., human choice.

In affirming the reality of freedom Hodgson did not deny the reality of material objects. But neither would he permit the materialist to assert that, since there are material objects, man's experience of choice is illusory and must be explained in some terms other than genuine freedom. The denial of the reality of freedom is absolutely essential to materialism; once one admits that the personal life of freedom is real, materialism crumples. Hodgson felt that a true empiricist must reject materialism when he recognizes the reality of freedom.⁵⁰

Hodgson agreed with idealism in that materialism failed to acknowledge a reality beyond what could be empirically documented. Idealism asserts "that since there is an eternal perfect Reality, the world must be an illusion or, at best, a mode of appearance of the perfect Reality."⁵¹ Among other criticisms directed at idealism, Hodgson believed that, like materialism, idealism simply does not account for all of the facts; idealism accounts for neither contingency (chance) nor human freedom, both of which he asserted must be recognized as real by empiricists. In sum, Hodgson addressed the failure of idealism and materialism thus:

If everything happened according to an unbroken order of determinate causal sequence, then all events could be fitted into a materialist philosophy. If all freely willed actions were the intelligently planned expression of good wills, then all events could meet the requirements of an idealism for which the real is the rational. Our accidents, errors and sins will not fit into either scheme without being either ignored or explained away as being in reality something else in disguise.⁵²

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Creation, Hodgson believed, took place through the evolutionary processes described by science.

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ence has come into its present condition through a series of changes in which inorganic matter, organic matter, vegetable life, marine life, animal life and human life followed one another in chronological sequence.⁵³

Platts points out that when "... Hodgson writes of man as subject to the evolutionary process in the *Essays in Christian Philosophy* he clearly has "emergent evolution" in mind, rather than the theories of Darwin."⁵⁴ He goes on to define emergent evolution as:

the theory which maintains that novelties occur in the time process, that the processes which create these novelties are not "mechanistic," that the novelties which emerge exhibit a new kind of relatedness in their internal and external relations, and that the emergence of such novelty is not predictable.⁵⁵

A further example is provided using the water molecule: the first hydrogen atoms to join with an oxygen atom to form a molecule of water would be considered an "emergent"; every subsequent formation of a water molecule, however, would be labeled a "resultant."⁵⁶

Order in Creation

In Hodgson's theology, the evolutionary process consists of three fundamental elements: causal order, purposive order and freedom. Of the first two he said:

In our ordinary, everyday outlook, before we begin to philosophise or psychologise (if one may coin the word) we commonly distinguish between events which we ascribe to the physical order and events which we ascribe to conscious purpose.⁵⁷

It is through the causal order, or necessity (to use contemporary jargon), that God provides us with a universe of predictability and reliability, i.e., natural law. Hodgson actually deemed causal order, not purposive order, to be the more difficult to comprehend: "[t]he events of the purposive order are, as a matter of fact, more intelligible to us than those of the causal. We experience them, so to speak, from the inside, while the others are only observed from without."⁵⁸ Science, therefore, is a gift from God to be treasured by Christians.

In nature there is that orderliness which is necessary to provide man with a world in which rational study can increase human control, a world in which he can be reasonably sure that to light a fire will not warm him on one occasion and freeze him on another, with no reason why sometimes the one thing should happen and sometimes the other. This orderliness, then, is due to God's provision of an orderly world.⁵⁹

Likewise, belief in God is not a threat to science, as argued by Hodgson in his inaugural address as Regius Professor of Divinity:

Why is it that some scientists seem to shrink from such a belief in God as though to admit it were treachery to their scientific loyalties: It is, I believe, at bottom because scientific inquiry presupposes that its objects belong to a rationally dependable order of being, and they think that to ground all events in the purposive will of God is to introduce an incalculable element of caprice which cuts the nerve of scientific endeavor. Here Christian theology needs to make its voice heard. It is the exposition of what God has revealed to us of Himself, and it asserts that there is nothing chancy or capricious about God.⁶⁰

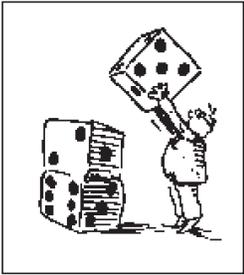
Beyond this, on the same occasion, Hodgson implored his theological colleagues:

However much humanistic studies may rightly be the normal introduction to theology, we shall not meet the needs of the age unless we devise a method by which men whose previous education has made them first and foremost scientific may be welcomed into the ranks of professional theologians.⁶¹

Besides causal order and purposive order, Hodgson identified freedom as the third fundamental order in the evolutionary process.

Besides causal order and purposive order, Hodgson identified freedom as the third fundamental order in the evolutionary process. Interestingly, it has been noted that Hodgson offers an "oblique admission" that in his earlier years he had denied freedom, though his finally coming to accept freedom for what it appeared to be may have been the single greatest catalyst for Hodgson's theological thinking.⁶² Hodgson argued that in neither materialism nor idealism could human choice be accepted for what it appeared to be but rather it was explained away as something else; the true empiricist, however, could not ignore the reality of human choice, or freedom.

Freedom was not defined by human choice alone. The ability of humans to make choices in life was referred to as Freedom A by Hodgson. As far as he was concerned, this was undeniable, particularly for "unphilosophical men." This type of freedom, to be distinguished from causal order which disallows choice, is a reflection of the spiritual nature of humankind, that is, one who is "the individualized subject of self-conscious, intelligent, purposive life."⁶³ However, Hodgson defined another type of freedom, Freedom B, which addressed one's ability to act on one's



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choice. For example, the alcoholic wakes up and faces a new day by choosing not to take a drink for twenty-four hours. Before the sun sets, however, he has imbibed. The alcoholic has clearly made a choice though he was unable to act on that choice, be it due to the contingencies (temptations) faced during the course of a busy day, the grip of the psychological baggage accumulated over a lifetime, the dictates of a biological disease mechanism loosed in his body or the Christian conviction as to the sinful nature of humankind.⁶⁴ Hodgson contrasted Freedom B not with causal order but with the notion of personal slavery. It is this understanding that Hodgson holds to be the key to understanding God's purpose in the universe: to create persons who possess not only the ability to choose but persons with the ability to act on those choices. He makes this clear in his Gifford lectures when he states:

My central thesis in these lectures is that to see the will to create genuinely free finite persons as the determining factor in our understanding of God's creative activity is the master clue to making sense of the whole.⁶⁵

Purpose in Creation

Humphreys' describes Hodgson's view of the interrelationship of causal order, purposive order, and freedom thus:

... the causal order is a means to an end, never an end in itself; it further means that freedom to choose is merely one stage along the journey, the destination of which is the freedom to do what one sets out to do.⁶⁶

To Hodgson, the goal of humankind is to be able to turn one's will over to the will of God for oneself; only when God's will becomes one's personal will does one achieve Freedom B.

The perfection of freedom, as I envisage it in the life of the city of God, involves on the part of its citizens such characteristics as honesty, unselfishness and self-control⁶⁷ [such that] the end of the process is the creation of finite individuals who themselves are not merely free, but good ...⁶⁸; [w]hen from the observation of what actually exists and happens we try to get some idea of what God is aiming at in the

creation of it all, the answer will be a community of persons, each in the perfection of his freedom making his contribution to the common life.⁶⁹

Causation, Purpose and Chance in Creation

Hodgson had much to say on the interrelatedness of causation, purpose, and chance in the evolutionary process of creation. More often referring to chance as contingency, he described it as "the apparent fact that often there is an open possibility of things happening this way or that."⁷⁰ Most importantly, Hodgson's emphasis was on the factual nature of chance. That people use chance devices, the outcomes of which are consciously unknowable, is commonplace: the coin toss at the beginning of a football game to determine which team gets the ball first is but one example. From this Hodgson concluded:

Perhaps in God's plan of creation [contingencies] are needed to perform a function similar to that for which we invoke chance, and for that reason He has given to the universe a mode of reality which admits of their being really themselves.⁷¹

In the current stage of evolution of the human, there is contingency, evil, and freedom present in the universe. Contingency is but one of the irrationalities defined by Hodgson.⁷² These irrationalities are real, but incidental, to God's purpose. By accepting contingency as real, Hodgson did not simply mean human ignorance of outcomes, but also God's ignorance of outcomes. Of this he said:

If God's creative activity includes the creation of contingent events, that means the creation of events opaque to His thought; this is one element in the Divine self-limitation involved in His creative activity.⁷³

This, however, leads to the antinomy that "[t]he world is important even though God is perfect."⁷⁴ Several implications of the problem as drawn out by Hodgson have been suggested:

1. God has limited his impassibility (i.e., his ability to be acted upon by another) in creating the universe;

2. God has limited his immutability (i.e., "God is eternal and unchanging, and yet he acts in the changing process of time"⁷⁵);
3. God has limited his omnipotence by overcoming self-prescribed limitations in working with humankind (i.e., the Incarnation); and
4. God has limited his omniscience to enable the existence of contingency in creation.⁷⁶

Hodgson concluded that it was for the purpose of creating a universe that included finite, genuinely free beings that God limits himself. In his creative act, God creates the antinomy "that He is not acted upon, yet He is; that He does not change, yet He does; and that He is without limitations, but He limits Himself."⁷⁷ Only in terms of his purpose can that antinomy be reconciled; "... the source of the two irreconcilable truths was God Himself, and [Hodgson] believed that, though they were irreconcilable to men now, they would not remain so always."⁷⁸

The point needs to be made that if Hodgson were contributing to the current science and theology discussion, he would no doubt come down on the side of open theism and not process theology. Hodgson envisioned God as complete in all his perfection; any limitations were self-imposed for the furtherance of his purpose for creation. This, he believed, was scriptural. On the other hand, he did not see God as evolving with limitations imposed from without, as process theology would dictate.⁷⁹

Implications for Orthodox Christian Theology

Regardless of one's stance on the implications of Hodgson's ideas for Christian apologists, it must be acknowledged that he anticipated by more than two decades much of contemporary theological thinking with regard to contingency. Only in 1978 did Arthur Peacocke, in his Bampton Lectures, make the theological case for the positive role of chance in creation.⁸⁰ Peacocke said:

... it would be more consistent with the observations to assert that the full gamut of the potentialities of living matter could be explored only through the agency of the rapid and frequent randomization which is possible at the molecular level of the DNA.⁸¹

However, in the case of Peacocke, it is also safe to say that science takes authority over theology, leading to such conclusions as the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ being scientifically untenable.⁸² As noted before, others, while giving science primacy over theology, though not generalizing to such liberal theological conclusions, have echoed Peacocke's opinion that chance may be used by God as a tool to achieve his purpose.⁸³

Hodgson's theology, taken as a whole, is largely consistent with the historical Anglican faith. Springing directly from Luther's bondage of the will, he affirms the classical Christian vision of humankind as fundamentally sinful by nature. Ashley Null, well-known scholar and student of Thomas Cranmer, stated the idea well when he said:

... what the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies. The mind doesn't direct the will. The mind is actually captive to what the will wants, and the will itself, in turn, is captive to what the heart wants.⁸⁴

Such a view of personal will is counter-intuitive by today's worldly standards. It is precisely this perspective, however, that is espoused by Hodgson in his conception of Freedoms A and B.

[Chance] may be viewed as a tool used by God to achieve his purpose. God's purpose is to create genuinely free beings, leading to the conclusion that free will is an illusion ..., though free choice is not.

What are the implications of Hodgson's theology of chance, or contingency, for contemporary evangelical scholarship in the area of science and theology? We live in the era of the chance worldview. If one takes science at face value, chance must be viewed as real and fundamental to God's creation. Rather than the antithesis of purpose, it may be viewed as a tool used by God to achieve his purpose. God's purpose is to create genuinely free beings, leading to the conclusion that free will is an illusion (i.e., our wills are bounded by sin, psychological baggage, the increasing constraints of our personal lives through time, etc.), though free choice is not. Irrationalities such as evil (in the forms of ignorance, ugliness, suffering and sin) are incidental to God's achievement of creating genuinely free beings, and it is sin that is the most fundamental as it prevents us from combating the other forms of evil. The world exists as a complex mix of certainties and contingencies with a partially open future.⁸⁵ Furthermore, because revelation is a process, not an outcome or an event, God continues to speak to us about his redemptive and creative natures through the Bible and through the natural sciences, respectively, leading to the conclusion that "natural theology" is a myth. All truth is God's, whether revealed through the Bible or through the natural sciences. * *

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Notes

¹P. Dowe, "Chance and Providence," *Science and Christian Belief* 9, no. 1 (1997): 3–20.

²B. S. Everitt, *Chance Rules: An Informal Guide to Probability, Risk and Statistics* (New York: Copernicus, 1999).

³See, for example: D. Alexander, *Rebuilding the Matrix: Science and Faith in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001); D. J. Bartholomew, *God of Chance* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1984); D. J. Bartholomew, "Probability, Statistics and Theology," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society A* 151, pt. 1 (1988): 137–178; D. J. Bartholomew, *Uncertain Belief: Is It Rational to be a Christian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); D. J. Bartholomew, "Chance Versus God," unpublished manuscript (1999); J. Byl, "Indeterminacy, Divine Action and Human Freedom," *Science and Christian Belief* 15, no. 2 (2003): 101–16; P. Dowe, "Chance and Providence," *Science and Christian Belief* 9, no. 1 (1997): 3–20; J. Doye, I. Goldby, C. Line, S. Lloyd, P. Shellard and D. Tricker, "Contemporary Perspectives on Chance, Providence and Free Will: A Critique of Some Modern Authors," *Science and Christian Belief* 7, no. 2 (1995): 117–39; E. A. Johnson, "Does God Play Dice? Divine Providence and Chance," *Theological Studies*, 57 (1996): 3–18; N. Murphy, "Divine Action in the Natural Order: Buridan's Ass and Schrodinger's Cat," in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, ed. R. J. Russell, N. Murphy, and A. R. Peacocke (Notre Dame, IN: The University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 325–58; N. Murphy, *Neuroscience, Determinism, and Downward Causation: Defusing the Free-Will Problem* (Boston: International Society for Science and Religion, 2004); N. Murphy, *Downward Causation and the Freedom of the Will* (Oxford: Austin Farrer Centennial Conference, 2004); A. R. Peacocke, "Chance and the Life Game," *Zygon* 14, no. 4 (1979): 301–22; A. R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science: The Bampton Lectures, 1978* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); M. E. Schrader, "Is Life an Accident," *Zygon* 14, no. 4 (1979): 323–27; and J. J. Davis, "Quantum Indeterminacy and the Omniscience of God," *Science and Christian Belief* 9, no. 2 (1997): 129–44.

⁴See also, 1 Kings 22:34 and Eccles. 2:14.

⁵J. Monod, *Chance & Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971).

⁶A. R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science: The Bampton Lectures 1978* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

⁷A. R. Peacocke, "Chance and the Life Game," *Zygon* 14, no. 4 (1979): 301–22.

⁸Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science*, 95.

⁹*Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁰Bartholomew, *God of Chance*.

¹¹D. J. Bartholomew, "Probability, Statistics and Theology," 137–78.

¹²Bartholomew, *Uncertain Belief: Is It Rational to be a Christian?*

¹³Personal communication from Bartholomew at the London School of Economics on March 9, 2001.

¹⁴For example, R. Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); —, *Evidence for God* (Oxford: Mowbray for the Christian Evidence Society, 1986); —, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); —, *Is There a God?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); —, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); —, *Bayes's Theorem* (Oxford: Oxford Uni-

versity Press, 2002); and —, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

¹⁵A. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology, Volume 1: Nature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001).

¹⁶D. M. MacKay, *Science, Chance and Providence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). Similar views have been expressed by R. C. Sproul, *Not a Chance: The Myth of Chance in Modern Science and Cosmology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), D. L. Overman, *A Case Against Accident and Self-Organization* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).

¹⁷A. R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science: The Bampton Lectures, 1978*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) and —, "Chance and the Life Game," *Zygon* 14, no. 4 (1979): 301–22.

¹⁸Five distinct types of chance were outlined by Polkinghorne during a March 16, 2001 lecture at the Theology Faculty Classroom Building, University of Cambridge, to Samford University students taking the class, "Chance."

¹⁹For example, J. Polkinghorne, *Faith, Science & Understanding* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000) and —, *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

²⁰Bartholomew, *God of Chance*, 68.

²¹Though not directly related to the definitional issues surrounding the concept of chance, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the work done related to chance among intelligent design scholars. Going a step beyond simply definitions, William Dembski describes a process very much like statistical significance testing that he purports can eliminate the chance hypothesis leaving "intelligent design" as the most likely (probabilistically, speaking) alternative. See, W. A. Dembski, *The Design Inference: Eliminating Chance through Small Probabilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and —, *No Free Lunch: Why Specified Complexity Cannot Be Purchased without Intelligence* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

²²Because the term *evangelical* can carry with it various interpretations, I think it wise to explicitly state in what sense I believe Hodgson to be an evangelical Christian theologian. Careful study of Hodgson's work makes it clear to me that his theology adheres to the *Evangelical Alliance of the UK* (www.eauk.org) definition of an evangelical:

1. An evangelical believes in God as sovereign in Three Persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, being three Persons but one God, sovereign in creation, providence, revelation, redemption and final judgment.
2. An evangelical believes in the divine inspiration of the Holy Scripture and its consequent entire trustworthiness and supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.
3. An evangelical believes in the universal sinfulness and guilt of fallen mankind, making him subject to God's wrath and condemnation.
4. An evangelical believes in the substitutionary sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God as the sole and all-sufficient ground of redemption from the guilt and power of sin, and from its everlasting consequences.
5. An evangelical believes in the justification of the sinner solely by the grace of God through faith alone in Christ crucified and risen bodily from the dead.
6. An evangelical believes in the illuminating, regenerating, indwelling, sanctifying and empowering work of God the Holy Spirit.
7. An evangelical believes in the priesthood of all believers, who form the universal Church, the Body of which Christ is the Head and which is committed by his command to the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world.
8. An evangelical believes in the importance of the local church for spiritual growth, fellowship and service.
9. An evangelical believes in the divine institution of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.
10. An evangelical believes in the expectation of the personal, visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and glory.

- ²³D. L. Sayers and B. Reynolds, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, 1899–1936: The Making of a Detective Novelist* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 130–3.
- ²⁴L. Hodgson, *Theology in an Age of Science* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1944).
- ²⁵*Ibid.*, 4.
- ²⁶L. Hodgson, *For Faith and Freedom: The Gifford Lectures, 1955–1957 in the University of Glasgow, Volume I* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1968).
- ²⁷*Ibid.*, 150.
- ²⁸L. Hodgson, *Essays in Christian Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green & Company, 1930), 48.
- ²⁹M. D. Chapman, "Hodgson, Leonard (1889–1969)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 [accessed 17 Nov 2004: www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/58805]).
- ³⁰See, for example, the column written by Hodgson for the church newsletter, *The North End Review*, addressed to the parishioners of St. Mark's Church, Portsmouth, years after he had moved on from parish ministry. It is a sincerely sentimental love letter in which he says:
I cannot close without adding that throughout I have never ceased to be thankful that my ministry started where and how it did ... I learned something of what the Church of England can be in the life of the country. The people of North End enriched my education by giving me what books could never teach. The longer my experience of academic life, the more I have come to realize and be thankful for what I owe to St. Mark's (from a copy of the letter in the Leonard Hodgson archives of Christ Church, Oxford; accessed July 2004).
- ³¹As evidence consider letters exchanged between Hodgson and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in 1935 and 1939 concerning the Reichskirche and Bonhoeffer's attendance at Faith and Order Movement meetings, in E. Band, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Munich: Chr Kaiser Verlag, 1958), 230–9, 279–86.
- ³²Chapman, "Hodgson, Leonard (1889–1969)."
- ³³F. Humphreys, *God in the Theology of Leonard Hodgson* (diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1972), 5.
- ³⁴L. Hodgson, *The Place of Reason in Christian Apologetic* (New York: Appleton, 1925), 4.
- ³⁵Hodgson, *For Faith and Freedom, Volume 1*, 46.
- ³⁶Hodgson, *And Was Made Man: An Introduction to the Study of the Gospels* (London: Longmans, Green & Company, 1928), 209.
- ³⁷Humphreys, *God in the Theology of Leonard Hodgson*, 37.
- ³⁸Hodgson, *Essays in Christian Philosophy*, 121.
- ³⁹Hodgson, *For Faith and Freedom, Volume 1*, 49.
- ⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 91.
- ⁴¹*Ibid.*, 152–3.
- ⁴²*Ibid.*, 98–9.
- ⁴³Humphreys, *God in the Theology of Leonard Hodgson*, 40.
- ⁴⁴L. Hodgson, *The Bible and the Training of the Clergy* (London: Darton, 1963), 45.
- ⁴⁵Hodgson, *For Faith and Freedom, Volume 2*, 104–5.
- ⁴⁶Hodgson, *For Faith and Freedom, Volume 1*, 116.
- ⁴⁷Humphreys, *God in the Theology of Leonard Hodgson*, 59.
- ⁴⁸Hodgson, *For Faith and Freedom, Volume 1*, 136.
- ⁴⁹Humphreys, *God in the Theology of Leonard Hodgson*, 62; note that in contemporary discussions the term naturalism is considered more appropriate than materialism.
- ⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 63; as pointed out by Humphreys, see also L. Hodgson, *Christian Faith and Practice* (New York: Scribner, 1951), 24.
- ⁵¹*Ibid.*, 64.
- ⁵²L. Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Atonement* (New York: Scribner, 1951), 42.
- ⁵³Hodgson, *For Faith and Freedom, Volume 1*, 124.
- ⁵⁴T. C. Platts, *A Comparative Study of the Theologies of Leonard Hodgson and John Baillie* (D. Phil. diss., St. Cross College, University of Oxford, 1988), 181.
- ⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 194; see also the passages in Hodgson's writing that lead Platts to these conclusions: Hodgson, *Essays in Christian Philosophy*, 55–7.
- ⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 194.
- ⁵⁷Hodgson, *Essays in Christian Philosophy*, 16.
- ⁵⁸Hodgson, *For Faith and Freedom, Volume 1*, 138.
- ⁵⁹L. Hodgson, *The Christian Idea of Liberty* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1941), 66.
- ⁶⁰L. Hodgson, *Theology in an Age of Science: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 3 November 1944* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1944), 15.
- ⁶¹*Ibid.*, 5.
- ⁶²Humphreys, *God in the Theology of Leonard Hodgson*, 76.
- ⁶³Hodgson, *For Faith and Freedom, Volume 1*, 161.
- ⁶⁴I wish to thank Wolfhart Pannenberg for offering this example in a conversation at Wycliffe Hall, University of Oxford, August 8, 2003.
- ⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 183.
- ⁶⁶Humphreys, *God in the Theology of Leonard Hodgson*, 79.
- ⁶⁷Hodgson, *For Faith and Freedom, Volume 1*, 195.
- ⁶⁸L. Hodgson, *Towards a Christian Philosophy* (London: Nisbet and Company, Ltd., 1943), 177; and L. Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Atonement*, 111.
- ⁶⁹Hodgson, *For Faith and Freedom, Volume 1*, 185–6.
- ⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 136.
- ⁷¹*Ibid.*, 144–5 and Hodgson, *Towards a Christian Philosophy*, 177.
- ⁷²Hodgson considers such things as contingency, freedom and evil (of which he identifies four types: ignorance, ugliness, suffering and sin) as irrationalities since they can be accounted for neither by causal nor purposive order. Of the irrational evils, it is sin which is at the core since ignorance, ugliness and suffering happen to people; it is *inner* corruption that is responsible for sin, or wickedness, and therefore the greatest hurdle to the eradication of the other three evils.
- ⁷³Hodgson, *Essays in Christian Philosophy*, 55.
- ⁷⁴Humphreys, *God in the Theology of Leonard Hodgson*, 86.
- ⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 87.
- ⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 88–9; see also critics such as B. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* and J. Piper, J. Taylor and P. K. Helseth, *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*.
- ⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 88.
- ⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 89.
- ⁷⁹For example, see J. B. Cobb and D. R. Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1976).
- ⁸⁰A. R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science: The Bampton Lectures, 1978* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979).
- ⁸¹*Ibid.*, 94.
- ⁸²From a lecture to Samford University students, Daniel House, Samford University London Study Centre, March 23, 2001.
- ⁸³Notably, see: D. J. Bartholomew, *God of Chance*; —, "Probability, Statistics and Theology," 137–78; —, *Uncertain Belief: Is It Rational to be a Christian*; —, "Chance Versus God."
- ⁸⁴Anglican Church League, "Interview with Dr. Ashley Null on Thomas Cranmer: Primary author of the Book of Common Prayer," Sydney, Australia, September 2001, www.acl.asn.au/null.html (accessed July 20, 2005).
- ⁸⁵For an excellent exposition of this aspect of open theism, see Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000). Also see, C. Pinnock, R. Rice, J. Sanders, W. Hasker and D. Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994). For opposing views, see B. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* and J. Piper, J. Taylor and P. K. Helseth, *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*.

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