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The Best of All Possible Worlds Mathematics and Destiny

By Ivar Ekeland

University Of Chicago Press. Paperback. Book Condition: New. Paperback. 214 pages. Dimensions: 8.8in. x 6.0in. x 0.6in. Optimists believe this is the best of all possible worlds. And pessimists fear that might really be the case. But what is the best of all possible worlds How do we define it This question has preoccupied philosophers and theologians for ages, but there was a time, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when scientists and mathematicians felt they could provide the answer. This book is their story. Ivar Ekeland here takes the reader on a journey through scientific attempts to envision the best of all possible worlds. He begins with the French physicist Maupertuis, whose least-action principle, Ekeland shows, was a pivotal breakthrough in mathematics, because it was the first expression of the concept of optimization, or the creation of systems that are the most efficient or functional. Tracing the profound impact of optimization and the unexpected ways in which it has influenced the study of mathematics, biology, economics, and even politics, Ekeland reveals throughout how the idea has driven some of our greatest intellectual breakthroughs. The result is a dazzling display of erudition one that will be essential reading for popular-science buffs and...



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