

COINCIDENTIA Olof G. Lidin

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The term 'coincidence' or 'coincidentia' is chosen to name events which are glimpses of the 'zero' reality in man's life, a fitting term for the many ways that such messages take. They have in common that they they fall outside causal laws and evince contingency and fortuity. Man experiences them in many ways, in many places and in many situations wherever he lives and wherever he acts, They just happen and are trifling and inconsequential for the "rational" mind but are so much more interesting and compelling for the person it happens. Coincidence is commonly defined as a collection of two or more events or conditions, closely related to time, space or form which are surprising, noteworthy and non-causal.

Randomness is a synonym but used more widely in a worldly sense about events that surprise. Taleb mentions "randomness-laden professions" and that the world "laden with trillions of details" is random due to man's various interventions. As the world gets more

complex, the chances for randomness are many. One can differentiate between measures of randomness: (1) personal coincidences, (2) in political and economic life (Taleb's black swans) and studied and expected randomness (Taleb's gray swans). The personal coincidence has the extra plus that they are always for the good of man while the 'swans' can be both positive and negative. If not of a religious bent, one can see coincidence as an intricate product of evolutionary factors, brain structure, personal experience, knowledge and emotion. Whether an originator or an evolution is at play, however, a coincidence is a marvel to succour!

Randomness can concern economic and financial matters as well as political and military events. These are only rarely pure coincidences because they concern man indirectly. They are unpredictable 'rare events' planned and instigated by man or nature. For example, the bombing of the trade center in New York (2001) was planned by man while the Katrina flood (2004) was perpetrated by nature. The Thai tsunami was caused by nature alone while the Fukushima catastrophe (2010) were affected by nature and man in tandem. One must make a distinction between personal coincidences and other events that effect man and society. In business there are hopes and desires; another day could bring the hoped-for success. It is up to the person involved to have his eyes open and be prepared for the Swan waiting beyond the corner, expected but unknown. The

true personal coincidence is never expected or known beforehand, but always for the good of man. As regards 'swans' human factors play a role. One can neglect the sacred role of the personal occurrences and concentrate on the rare events that produce either 'black' or 'grey' swans.

The true coincidence, then, differs from the random occurrence that Taleb discourses on. His 'rare events', whether 'black' or 'grey' swans, belongs to and take place in the rational world with seemingly no connection to the 'zero' world and Chance. The pure coincidence has a personal connection and carries a meaning; it is the work of Chance.

A book might open up 'just in time' or 'in the right order', an apt thought might pop up in the middle of the night for no apparent reason, the right person might walk into one's life, and a job might be offered at a bleak time! Such fortuitous occurrences can be ascribed to incredible 'luck', be laughed at and be pushed under the rug. For the man in balance they are divine and to be remembered. They happen at incredible times and are incredible in themselves.

They happen to every individual. Man's coincidental ability is no more marvellous than his other instincts. They are part of his mental apparatus, only seemingly magical for the outer-directed person. For the inner-directed person they are as normal as any other

function. It is only so that certain incidents are more related to personal Chance. A mind must just be ready and accept them.

They happen often in roundabout ways. Fleming's discovery of penicillin is an example of how a stroke of "luck" played into human hands! It happened in a circuitous fashion, fated to be for man's benefit.

Foreknowledge, prescience and premonitions belong among occurrences which can be named "coincidences." They are gleams of a higher order, unnatural at the time but real with the benefit of hindsight. They are better than fantasies, superior to dreams and richer than whims and fancies. They evoke the mystery of life beyond space and time and are difficult to fathom because of their 'causeless freedom'. When they come true, often in improbable ways, they often come in a flash and give the recipient a jolt. They are experienced by mind and heart and bring messages of one kind or another. They remain wonderful, 'occult' memories.

When an event cannot be explained rationally, it is usually mentioned with a smile and called 'a chancy fluctuation'. That it has roots in the 'zero' causeless reality troubles the rational modern person. It disturbs him when things happen, not governed by physical laws. Therefore, he speaks about 'mysticism' as soon as things go beyond what is causal. However, what is

illogical and irrational in a physical sense can be as 'natural' as 'nature' itself in a 'zero' perspective.

People find charm in happenings which are mysterious and occult. One takes note of them and allows them to enrich life whether they be unbelievable illusions, brainstorm or fantasies. In many lands they are part of religious life. After the developments in quantum physics, which have overthrown the rational laws of science, one can also ask whether any random happening can measure up to the 'mysticism' presented in the atomic process.

"Extraordinary events happen without extraordinary causes," says Mlodinow who discusses "the inconsequential random events that lead to big change." He calls them "the butterfly effect" with reference to Edward Lorenz who expressed that atmospheric changes so small as the fluttering of butterfly wings can have a 'consequential' effect on global weather patterns: a butterfly moving its wings in India "could cause a hurricane in New York two years later", in Taleb's words.

"The wind blows where it listeth" says Christ in the Bible, and this refers to all nature. Likewise, Thoreau (1817-1862) writes, "Happiness is like a butterfly; the more you chase it, the more it will elude you, but if you turn your attention to other things it will come and sit softly on your shoulder." Chuang Tzu writes about "the

flitting butterfly" in Chinese thought just like Christ speaks about "the wind that bloweth where it listeth."

Coincidences can concern big and small, long-term and short-term matters. They can be "curiously mild serendipities and stunning visions of great significance." They can concern the moment and also a person's whole life. They can have life-shattering purport. Looking back over his own life's dialectic, a person can register how Chance worked from happening to happening, from phase to phase, in a dialectic of random events, that formed the "zig-zag course of a drunkard." Someone might find unexplainable random happenings which have decided the whole course of his life. Lucky coincidences have guided him along. How poor his life would have been if they had not occurred! How impoverished the person who at old age could only look back at just a planned life! Generally, how poor the world be without Zufälle! How poor the arts would be without them! As Mlodinow writes, "A path punctuated by random impacts and unintended consequences is the path of many successful people, not only in their careers but also in their loves, hobbies and friendships. In fact, it is more the rule than the exception."

Looking back into his own life, a certain person can register how Chance worked from happening to happening, from phase to phase, in a dialectic of 'random' events, that formed the "zig-zag course of a

drunkard." He cannot help wondering, to what extent it was directed by himself and by non-worldly CHANCE! How things happened generally, how education led to a profession, a chancy love affair to a marriage, a short announcement to an international job, an intuitive flash of a foreign university and of a profession in a foreign land, et cetera. Has it been the 'drunkard's walk and the fluttering of butterfly wings wings guided by nature and Chance all the way? How much has education and society and how much has Chance had a role in his life? How could it have been just a series of 'random Zufälle'? It could all not have been humanly planned. It must be divine Chance that intervened and made it! En Tæ Tyxæ agatæ!

The coincidences can be instructions of what to do as well as of what not to do. They come in all kinds of combinations. Time is linked with space and space with time and present time with past and future times. Occasions and places merge, relating to the living and the dead, the near and the far. Events take place both coincidentally and synchronically, following no clear course and showing results which are often rather occult to logical minds. They can be likened, be Kafkaesque and allegorical, showing in one way or another meaning and purpose. They originate in the 'zero' void and follow their own logic! They have in common that they cannot be predicted, known or studied. If they can be studied, it is afterward. Human life is ultimately unplanned and uncertain. It is human

arrogance and blindness to see the future as a field of science.

Different but of interest are the coincidentia oppositorum, 'coincidence of opposites', in Nicholas of Cusa's (1401-1464) philosophical thought. He says that opposites coincide and that there is something divine in their complementarity and in the way they appear in dynamic unity and harmonize. Laurens van der Post (1906-1966) says, "In the moment one reconciles the opposites, it is indeed coincidentia oppositorum. One feels and one exists on that higher level when one is in tune with nature, as nature is supposed to be. It is strength in weakness, weakness in strength."

The coincidentia oppositorum was never a mystery for the Indians and the Chinese who generally perceived matters as complementary pairs. No A without a B and no B without an A. No positive without a negative. This equilibrium was discerned both in nature and in life. Material phenomena always connect with a non-material world. Inner feelings matched outer reasoning. The invisible universe always linked with the visible world.

Coincidences need not concern just individuals. They can be 'universal and collective' and affect groups of people, and affect groups of people, countries and history. Inexplicable events can be mentioned on the national and the global scenes. Human beings are then

the catalysators of 'fatal' events. For example, who can deny that Churchill was a fateful person in 1940 or Cortes in 1519? They were, it seems, the 'destined' persons whose appearance at the 'right' time changed history.

Jung uses the term 'synchronicity' for "the simultaneous occurrence of two significant but not causally connected events." This term puts emphasis on time alone and does not cover coincidence in all its rich variety. Contingence and serendipity, synonymous with coincidence, are wide-ranging terms referring to random happenings in both simple synchronic alignment and multiple complexity, Koestler speaks about "confluent events."

Great things happen naturally. The computer and the internet "were unplanned, unpredicted and unappreciated", says N. Taleb. In early history the wheel was probably also neither planned nor predicted. They were the products of serendipity and the Eternal's finger at play. They show the human inability "to come to grips with our future - our systematic underestimation of what the future has in store."

Thus, Chance and randomness are part of man's psychic activity. They happen unpredictably beyond space and time by the 'zero' logic that cannot be understood or explained. They do not follow the causal law. Man can merely recognise the messages. One tends to agree with

C. E. M. Joad who says, "I am led to postulate the presence in the universe of a ... principle of change which ... is known to the biologist as life, to the psychologist as mind, and to myself as the stream of consciousness which constitutes my being." Or with Marcus Aurelius (121-180): "Everything is connected and the web is holy." So it has been through all Creation and Evolution from age to age. The twentieth century is evidence enough.

In this treatise coincidence is given a divine stamp. This has been so through history among the many who are religious. Not so among the many today who are non-religious. They do not see the divine fluttering in happenings but rather just as chancy happenings. But as Frederick the Great (1712-1786) stated, "The older one gets the more convinced one becomes that his Majesty King Chance does three-quarters of the business of this miserable universe."

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