

## **ACCIDENT, PURPOSE AND INEVITABILITY**

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One of the commonest concepts expressed in the English language is that everything which happens, every event which occurs, does so either by accident or on purpose. The philosophical arguments which have raged through the centuries have disputed as to which events fell into which category, but it was generally accepted that the history of Man and the Universe was a mixture of accidents and purposes. Some people, for instance, believed that an avalanche, an earthquake, or a tidal wave was, strictly speaking, an accident. Others saw it as an "Act of God" and thought that such an event occurred "on purpose" and that it served as an explicit expression of Divine wrath.

To give a present day example, suppose that a person has committed an act such as shooting his neighbor with a gun. People would naturally ask questions such as:- "Was it an accident, or was it done on purpose?" Implying that in the former case it could be construed as an excusable act, while in the latter it would be unforgivable.

Human beings, by their very nature, have always regarded themselves as "purposeful" and therefore looked for purposes in others. The Human Race is intelligent and to some degree aware. That is why we look for reasons behind the daily phenomena which confront us.

The near universal concepts of "Accident" and "Purpose" are held to be basic to our understanding of everyday life. However, it does not necessarily follow that this particular classification of conceptual thought is true. Popularity is not, and never has been, the test of truth.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the words "Accident" and "Purpose" are misleading and, in fact, erroneous. According to this theory there is no such thing as an accident - ever. Likewise, the world and everything in it is totally without purpose.

To the question - are there any exceptions to this? The answer would be, never. The world is seen as a series of causes and effects, each inexorable and under the exact circumstances, quite unavoidable.

Now wait a minute, you might say. What kind of logic is that? Surely no-one can seriously maintain that we do not have the ability to change our minds? No-one can convince me that I have no more control of my direction than a stone in an avalanche? Isn't that absurd? Yes, on the face of it, I would agree. However, the questions need to be examined in more detail.

There are on earth certain objects which are referred to as "Animate" and "Inanimate." In other words, those which have an "Animus" (from the Latin = Soul, or Mind) and those which do not. Between the two groups there is a gray area in which it is very difficult to distinguish one from the other. For example, a bacterium or germ - is it animate or is it inanimate? They can live and reproduce and die but are they animate? Whole colonies of bacteria can rapidly become immune to certain antibiotics. Do you suppose that this is a group phenomenon or the choice of one individual? Do bacteria actually decide what to do and then do it? In the generally accepted sense of the term do bacteria have any purpose of their own? What do they think with and how do they decide?

Bacteria are small but viruses are much smaller but the same phenomena are observed!. Molecules are smaller still. Atoms are even tinier. They are made up of a central nucleus and electrons in orbit around it. One of the smallest of all known particles is the electron. This minute speck of almost nothing moves at great speed and in an uncertain manner, at least, so experts like Dr. Werner Heisenberg [1901-1976] tell us. Would anyone suppose that the electron is animate and has a purpose? Or is its motion and position a mere accident?

Before proceeding, more must be said about the basic meaning of the words Accident and Purpose. The word Accident implies that what happened was totally by chance and therefore unpurposeful. It comes from the Latin "Ad-Cadere" = To fall. Webster says: - "An event that takes place without one's foresight or expectation, an undesigned, sudden and unexpected event." [Repeat for emphasis]

Let us imagine a person carrying a large brick. He slips, loses his grip and drops the object on his friend's toe. An accident, no doubt, but was it really? Surely it is understandable and explainable in the minutest of detail. One can account for every single cause up to the final effect, assuming of course that the necessary data were available. There was no miracle involved. Whatever it was which made the person drop the brick in the first place would, under identical circumstances, make them drop it again. Not so you say, if the person knew ahead of time and tightened their grip and walked more carefully, and so on. Of course not, but then the circumstances would not be identical.

What is called an "Accident" might better be described as "a set of unpredicted but not incomprehensible series of circumstances which produced an effect."

The word Purpose is derived from the old French word "Pour" = "For," and "Poser" = the verb "to place." It means, according to Webster: "to set forth" or "that which one sets before himself as an object to be attained: :design, intention." Purposeful behavior is that which responds to the question "Why?" by saying "because thus and so."

Why did the chicken cross the road? Because it wanted to get to the other side. So far, so good. But why did it want to get to the other side? Because there was food on the other side and it was hungry. Why was it hungry? Because it had not eaten all day and there was no food on one side of the road. Now we are beginning to see the purpose for the chicken's motivation. It was not "Free will" which urged it across the road, but the "Necessity" of having to eat to stay alive. The chicken is not by any means an automaton. It may be driven by hunger, or sex drive or innate curiosity but it always seems to make logical choices for one of many complex reasons. Assuming that the chicken is in good mental and physical health there are always good reasons to explain its behavior and activity. In other words "Choice is Caused" All choices are!

What happens to the Accident and Purpose arguments when they are applied to some of the really difficult problems such as the origin of life on Earth, or the beginning of the Universe? Let's try the first question - Was the origin of life on Earth "an accident," or did it occur "on purpose?"

There are many people who firmly defend each point of view. The accident theorists say that the origin of life on Earth is just a fluke which happened billions of years ago, completely by chance. This was followed by an incredible series of evolutionary chances, once again, totally by accident. This is hard to believe.

The purposeful opposition takes a different view. They assume that the very existence of Life in all of its varied forms is so superbly designed that it denotes "a guiding hand." Mankind is the splendid pinnacle of life on Earth and proves beyond a doubt that a Divine purpose must have created it.

Let's think about it. Does the origin of life on Earth have to be "by accident" or "on purpose?" Aren't we presupposing that no other reasonable alternative routes were available? Aren't we falling into a semantic trap. Life on Earth, from the very beginning, could have evolved, step by step, inevitably under the set of circumstances which existed. The very fact that it DID develop is proof enough that it MUST develop and that under identical circumstances it WOULD develop all over again.

The same thesis could be advanced to answer the question on the origin of the Universe. Was it a "Big Bang" or something else? It certainly does not appear to have been an ACCIDENT and it does not necessarily need to have been PURPOSEFUL. Whatever the origin of the Universe was, it could not be otherwise and its beginning and end are and always were inevitable.

The word "Inevitable" basically means Not-Evitable, that is avoidable, from "E" = Out and "Vitare" = To shun. Webster says that it means "incapable of being shunned....especially to that which, in the nature of things, cannot be shunned or evaded." The significance of inevitability patterns will be discussed in due course, but for now let's pose the question:-"If the Universe is an inevitable fact, does this mean that every atom that exists is devoid of Freedom?" Yes, it does.

Does this mean that every atom throughout time will behave exactly along a predetermined course? Yes, it does. Does this mean that each of our lives is of a predetermined length? Yes, it does. **Does this mean that tomorrow is as fixed in certainty today as yesterday is today?** Yes....it does!

What about the person who plans for tomorrow and who has a change of mind? Have they not proved that it is possible to get off the treadmill and show a measure of independence?

No, they have not. They have got off one treadmill by getting on to another one. There is no escape from cause and effect no matter how many times that they may change their mind, or change their treadmills.

Man is a sentient being. He feels. He knows. He is aware. Unlike the stone, he can tell what is happening to him. Yet he is powerless. Unlike the Universe which crushes him, he knows that he is being crushed. This is small compensation, but it is all that he has. There is a difference between him and the stone. It is a difference of organization, of complexity, of differentiation. But when the avalanche falls, the stones fall and man, if he is there, falls with them. It is he alone who knows that he is falling.

As Omar Khayyam [1048-1122] (or Fitzgerald 1809-1883) said so eloquently:

"And that inverted Bowl we call the Sky.  
Whereunder crawling coopt we live and die,  
Lift not your hands to It for help - for It  
Rolls impotently on as you and I."

(Stanza 52)

What of the sensation which all of us have had at one time or another? The feeling that we are the "Captain of our Soul and the Master of our Fate." It is an illusion. A pleasant one to be sure and maybe, even a necessary one for survival, but an illusion nevertheless. The truth is that we are all swept along in our own personal avalanche from birth to death.

So what's the use of trying? If tomorrow is as fixed as yesterday, isn't that rather depressing? Doesn't it take all the fun out of life? Not necessarily. In fact, not at all.

Once we have realized what life is all about, it becomes less agonizing and to a degree much more enjoyable. There is a new excitement in realizing that life is an adventure - no less real, no less sad, no less enjoyable because of its inevitability.

When it comes to trying, we cannot stop because it is built right into us. It is a basic quality of all living matter. Watch a spider spin a web. Watch a cat catch a mouse. Watch a salmon jump the falls and you begin to understand what trying is all about.

Living matter is uniquely capable of being motivated to take the more difficult course. Instead of going with the flow of the river, it can swim upstream. Instead of being bound by gravity it can teach itself to fly. Instead of merely being pulled with the tide, it can split the atom and circumnavigate the moon.

These are the basic tenets of philosophical Determinism. They may represent an unpopular position in these days when most people have an almost fanatical belief in individual freedom. Determinists have nothing against the concept of freedom, such as freedom of choice. However, when a person chooses to do anything for any reason, that choice is itself caused.

How is it possible to make any decision without a cause? You may feel that you are free to choose whether to go or to stay, whether to eat or to starve, whether to help your neighbor or ignore him, vote Republican or Democrat, but in reality you are choosing FOR A REASON - (in the final analysis it could be the wrong reason) - and therefore your choice is caused. This is as true for the most complex decisions as it is for the simple ones. What are the reasons? They may be basic biological urges like the urge to satisfy hunger. Your stomach tells you that it is dinner time and so you eat. Or, alternatively, you are on a diet because you believe that is "Healthy" or "Sexy" to lose weight and therefore you decide not to eat. You may think that you are free, that is to say unfettered by the mechanism of cause and effect, but you are wrong.

Even if you have fifty different things from which to choose, the same rules apply and whatever you choose, your choice is caused. Suppose that you flip a coin, heads you eat, tails you don't. Does that help? Not really. It takes the role of chooser away from you and allows the coin to decide whether you will eat or not. But hasn't that introduced an element of chance or accident into the situation? Once again, the answer is no.

The coin will flip and spin in an unforeseen and apparently unpredictable manner, but that is because you did not know all of the facts. The truth of the matter is that the coin will flip in a highly predictable way, according to which side is up at the start, how much pressure is exerted on the flipping finger, the weight of the coin, the atmospheric pressure, temperature and so on and so forth. Nothing is really a matter of chance. The most unpredictable of all things, can, in the final analysis be explained, if not predicted.

Take a tree in autumn. It has, let us say, 5000 green leaves all of which are more or less firmly attached. Now we can state with all probability that it will be bare by the spring of the following year. The question is, when will the leaves fall and exactly where will each leaf land? The answer is that it depends on the degree of hydration of each stem, the weather, the wind and a hundred other factors. Yet who would seriously contend that the leaves fall off the trees freely?

On the other hand would anyone care to predict when and where each leaf will fall? Of course, the mathematicians would be able to theorize with their random walk equations on the probability of a certain leaf being at a certain place at a certain time. What they cannot tell you is which one exactly and where. At least, not before the actual event takes place. Yet, after the leaf has fallen, it all becomes explicable. The drying of the stem, the separation from the tree, the weight of the leaf, the direction of the wind, the temperature, the humidity, the atmospheric pressure and a host of other factors, including the shape of the leaf and its aerodynamic structure that will determine its fall. Now let's ask the question again. "Did the leaf fall by accident?" Did it descend on purpose? Or, under the exact circumstances, was its fall inevitable? Perhaps there is a case that could be made on the similarity between an individual leaf and an individual life?

Ambrose Bierce, [1842-1914?] the American poet, had some ideas on the subject. In his book the Devil's Dictionary there is a verse called "Decide". It goes like this:

A leaf was riven from a tree,  
"I mean to fall to Earth," said he.  
The West wind, rising, made him veer.  
"Eastward," said he, "I now shall steer."  
The East wind rose with greater force.

Said he: "'Tis wise to change my course."  
With equal power they contend.  
He said: "My judgment I suspend."  
Down died the winds; the leaf, elate,  
Cried: "I've decided to fall straight."  
"First thoughts are best?" -That's not the moral;  
Just choose your own and we'll not quarrel.  
Howe'er your choice may chance to fall,  
You'll have no hand in it at all.

If Life is not comparable to leaves on a tree, then it could be likened to an immense pack of cards, with many thousands of possibilities. The days which you have spent are face-up cards and you know their value and significance. The days which you have yet to spend are still face down. Tomorrow's cards cannot be looked at until tomorrow comes. Once a card is played, it cannot be revoked or replayed and it becomes part of the game. You can reshuffle tomorrow's deck but you might be worse off than if you had left it alone. You only get the cards which you are dealt and the best that you can hope for is to learn to play them wisely.

Next we will consider the question of environment. Does the environment control man or, under certain circumstances, does man control the environment? Perhaps it would be best to first attempt to define the word as it is commonly used.

There are at least two common environments. First, the external one which includes everything from the weather to the social structure of the community. There is no doubt that the external environment molds and creates man into different images at different times. Nevertheless, this is a two-way street. Man, in turn, has a marked effect upon the external environment.

Secondly, there is another environment, an internal one. It is here that the genetic factors modify the glands, the body and the brain. One man's internal environment may be very different from another's. One man may be driven by ambition and another plagued with lethargy.

Can we alter either environment to any appreciable degree? These days, the answer is a definite yes. For instance, the polio virus ravaged children and adults, but with the aid of a vaccine the disease can be prevented. This demonstrates a change in both the internal and external environments. What becomes of inevitability when the inevitable is no longer inevitable? If an obstacle is placed in the path of a river, the river turns and runs in another direction. If left alone the river's course would certainly be inevitable, but its new course is determined by the obstruction which diverts it and this, too, is inevitable.

Take, for example, children with inherited malocclusion (crooked teeth), born into a community which lives on a poor diet. There are no dentists and oral hygiene has not yet been invented. It is inevitable that such individuals will develop tooth decay and lose their teeth early in life.

However, if the water is fluoridated, the tooth brush is introduced, the orthodontist opens an office in town, then the SAME CHILDREN which would have been "destined" to have ugly and misshapen smiles will now have beautiful, white, even teeth which last for a lifetime. Think about it. Which situation is inevitable under the given circumstances - the first, the second, or both?

The use of the word "inevitable" should always be accompanied by the word "providing." There are no clear inevitabilities except under precise given circumstances. For example, water inevitably boils at 212 degrees F. providing you are at sea level, at normal pressure. But if you live high in the Andes your water will boil at 150 degrees and it takes a long time to make hard-boiled eggs!

People inevitably get ill from a deficient diet providing that there is no other source of nourishment. A pint may be a pound the world around, [at least that's what they teach American children!] providing that you are not in orbit around the world, in which case it would weigh almost nothing at all. As a matter of interest a pint in Canada and England is not 16 but 20 ounces!

This completes the discussion of Accident, Purpose, Environment and Inevitability. It is time to return to freedom of choice and re-examine it.

The concept of a freedom of choice is a real fact of life, even though as individuals we are never totally "free" in the philosophical sense. When any choice is considered, we do not "know" what we will decide in advance and therefore we feel a type of uncertainty which could be called a "sense of freedom." Yet we are never free in the sense of being determined by nothing at all. It could be argued that we have the power to limit or expand other people's choices, but that we are powerless to influence our own.

Consider a person with political power, such as a dictator, he could lock a person up, or set them free. He could change their income tax by increasing or decreasing it. He could allow them to have four wives by the age of twenty, or make it illegal to marry more than one person and then not before the age of 40 years! Each of these things would broaden or narrow horizons and allow individuals to have more or less choices.

There might be hundreds of other environmental factors which are involved in human behavior, but Man can still play a major part in controlling other people's environment. On the other hand, what can a person really do for themselves? Can an individual ever become totally self-motivated?

The Free-willists believe that it can be done. Determinists do not. Human behavior can be influenced by the internal genetic environment, but the most effective stimulation has to be external.

What is it that motivates people? Primarily, it is the example of others, the opportunities offered, competitiveness, rewards plus other factors such as having a healthy and active thyroid gland.

The isolated hermit would not be able to "will" himself to do anything original once his external stimuli have been withdrawn or forgotten. Rather like the person who goes totally deaf and eventually forgets how to talk.

This being the case it behooves us all to seek as many stimuli as possible in order to react to them. To use our five senses to their fullest extent and to become more aware of our own and other peoples' problems and limitations. Even if we are totally powerless to create from nothing, we are not powerless to react, to interact and to become involved.

Even if our every action is, in the final analysis, determined by causes over which we have no positive control - we can still enjoy the `game of life' once we have become aware of its nature; and it could be said that whether we win or lose is really not so important as how we played the game.

Let me summarize the arguments as follows:

1. The terms "Accident" and "Purpose," common and useful though they may seem to be, are basically misleading.
2. The term "Accident" implies a disordered Universe wherein totally random events occur. Under identical circumstances these events would never reoccur.
3. The term "Purpose" implies that some Unmoved Mover sits outside the circle of Cause and Effect and manipulates all of creation for his, her or its own special reasons.
4. The term "Inevitability" refers to the normal course of events which will take place if nothing intercedes. An object dropped will accelerate towards the earth at a predictable speed, unless, of course, it is attached to a string like a yo-yo. In which case it will turn around and return towards the hand which dropped it. This can be repeated several times and then, if the string breaks, gravity comes back into play and the object falls to the ground. In each of these three situations we see what is inevitable, providing the given facts are correct. Inevitability and definitive causation should always be looked for wherever and whenever the terms accident and purpose are currently being used.
5. Environment, both internal and external. The Internal

environment (Genetic, glandular, dietary, etc.) determines one's body health, potential and motivational drive. The External environment, which is the social and climatic one, molds us and determines our mores and attitudes. From these two treadmills there is no escape for anyone. Nevertheless, both environments can be altered and thus the inevitable can be changed for better or for worse and a new inevitability put in its place.

6. Freedom of choice is real to the extent that we "feel free" to choose, but it is still true that all choices are caused and therefore not free at all but determined. This does not and should not stop us from exercising our freedom of choice. It should reinforce us with the knowledge that we all have to choose on the basis of experience plus the best information we can gather.

7. Awareness is Mankind's key to individuality and personal success. The greater the awareness, the greater the understanding and the greater the possibility of changing the environment and in time the whole world. The world has already changed a lot, especially during the last 100 years. We are on the threshold of a golden age, or a return to barbarism, or even of total extinction. Our awareness and how we react will decide which course the world will take.

These are some of the thoughts for you to ponder as this paper, like all things, runs its inevitable course....

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,  
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,  
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

(Stanza 51) Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam [1048-1122]  
by Edward Fitzgerald [1809-1883]

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