

Some Thoughts on Luck and Destiny

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In statistics, they teach you the concept of probability. It's quite simple and conceivable. Suppose a raffle draw is taking place at the end of your office picnic. There are 150 participants and the winner will get a refrigerator. According to statistics, the probability that your name will be picked up in the draw is 1 divided by 150 or approximately 0.67%. Thus, you have less than a one percent chance of getting the refrigerator. Now suppose your name comes up in the raffle draw. All your friends and colleagues are saying that you are a lucky guy. So, what is luck?

If some lottery tickets have 6-digit numbers then mathematically the probability of winning the lottery is only 0.000001 for every ticket. This means the chance of winning the lottery for any ticket is one in a million only, still, there is always a lucky person who wins the lottery. Can we then define luck as attainment that exceeds its probability of occurring?

Let's look into other situations where, unlike the raffle, an individual's skill and efforts matter a lot, for example, job interviews. Suppose you have applied for a dream job in a company. There are only two openings but the number of applicants is more than five thousand. With your strong qualifications and competence, you made it to the top tier among these thousands of candidates. However, you narrowly missed the first two positions. You came out third on the merit list. That's indeed unlucky!

Dr. Derek A. Muller, a Science Communicator, asserts that people need both skill and luck for success. And the importance of luck increases with the intensity of competition such as NASA's selection of 11 astronauts from 18,300 applicants in 2017. Dr. Muller simulated the selection with a model assigning a luck score along with skill weighted in the 95 (skill) to 5 (luck) ratio. He ran the simulation a thousand times and found that the selected astronauts had very high luck scores. So, having skill and competence is not enough; you have to have a pinch of luck as well.

You must have heard stories like somebody missed the plane for getting stuck in a traffic jam and that plane ultimately crashed killing everyone on board. Or, a farmer who lost all his crops because of unprecedented stormwater that never happened before.

The question is why some people get lucky and others don't. Is it called destiny? What is destiny anyway?

Merriam-Webster defines destiny as a 'predetermined course of events often held to be an irresistible power or agency' and the Britannica dictionary defines destiny as a 'power that is believed to control what happens in the future.' The 'power' or 'agency' essentially implies God, the creator of the universe.

So, everything I am doing with my free will, every thoughtful decision I am making in my life constitutes a pre-written role in an endless drama of the universe that I am just playing out. That's kind of sad. Also, in that case, I should not be held accountable for my activities because I am just following my destiny.

Is there a scientific explanation of destiny? Well, the answer is no. This is because science only deals with the physical universe and physical causality as David Zeigler explains in his article 'The Science of destiny: what is the meaning of life, anyway?' published in the Skeptic in 2015. According to Zeigler, if someone believes

that the physical universe is controlled by metaphysical forces like God, destiny, fate, etc. then he has stepped out of the realm of scientific explanation.

Moreover, the reliability of scientific explanations is also questionable. In the book 'Nothing: Surprising Insights Everywhere from Zero to Oblivion' Andy Coghlan remarks that conclusions in science are not forever. Theories are evolving all the time. He quotes Astronomer Jocelyn Bell who discovered pulsars: "Nothing is static, nothing is final, everything is held provisionally"

Who delivers luck or destiny? From the definition of destiny, it has to be God. But why should God manipulate events to save a man from a plane crash and ruin the crops of a farmer? God has no reason to be friendly with that man and hostile to the farmer.

Every element of the universe is interconnected with others by various kinds of forces and force fields. In the living world, everyone's actions are affecting everyone else in the continuum of space and time. Together we are making destiny. The man missed the flight because of too many cars on the street and maybe traffic indiscipline – the consequence of the collective acts of many people. The stormwater that destroyed the farmer's crops was largely due to the global warming caused by carbon emissions by many rich people around the world. And the reason that



those two specific individuals experienced the situations was sheer coincidence. But then somebody said, "A coincidence is a small miracle in which God chooses to remain anonymous."

God cannot be indifferent to the humongous activities going on around the universe. He must have definite plans and objectives. Maybe things happen as a result of individual or collective human activities as well as God's design. That's why sometimes we can't figure out causality for certain events and attribute them to luck or destiny. It may be noted that our existence is rather insignificant in terms of the dimensions of the universe and so is our knowledge. What we know is not even adequate to comprehend what we do not know.

So, senses can't make out luck or destiny. A scientist was once asked whether he was superstitious. He answered emphatically, 'No! Of course not!' Then why are you hanging a horseshoe on your door? 'Because it works,' he replied. That's a joke, but that underlines how our pursuit of attaining luck or controlling destiny may lead to superstitious practices like wearing lucky stones, following horoscopes, visiting shrines, hanging wind chimes, keeping peacock feathers, and so on. When senses give up, nonsense takes over.

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