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SERIES IN PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

Alessandra Melas, Pietro Salis

What are Coincidences?

A Philosophical Guide Between Science and Common Sense

Alessandra Melas
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Summary

It is a common opinion that chance events cannot be understood in causal terms. Conversely, according to a causal view of chance, intersections between independent causal chains originate accidental events, called “coincidences”. Firstly, this book explores this causal conception of chance and tries to shed new light on it. Such a view has been defended by authors like Antoine Augustine Cournot and Jacques Monod. Second, a relevant alternative is provided by those accounts that, instead of acknowledging an intersection among causal lines, claim to track coincidences back to some common cause. Third, starting from Herbert Hart and Anthony Honoré’s view of coincidences (Causation in the Law. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1959). This book provides a more detailed account of coincidences, according to which coincidental events are hybrids constituted by ontic (physical) components, which is the intersection between independent causal chains, plus epistemic aspects, including but not limited to, access to information, expectations, relevance, significance, desires, which in turn are psychological aspects.

The main target of the present work is to show that the epistemic aspects of coincidences are, together with the independence between the intersecting causal chains, a constitutive part of coincidental phenomena. This book aims to introduce and discuss recent work in psychology concerning one’s judgment about coincidences; this data offers further materials and reasons to reflect upon our understanding of coincidences and to refine our hybrid conception.

About the authors

Alessandra Melas collaborates with the University of Sassari (Italy), where she defended her Ph.D. dissertation concerning causal realism in Quantum Mechanics. Her research mostly focuses on the History and Metaphysics of Science, with particular interest in causation, causal models, and chance. She is currently working on metaphysics of coincidences (see “On the Nature of Coincidental Events” with P. Salis, in *Axiomathes*, 2020). Another recent publication within this topic includes “Cournot’s Notion of Hasard: An Objective Conception of Chance”, published in 2017. She is a student in Psychology and was a teacher of History and Philosophy at the High School level for almost a decade. She works on didactic methodologies, along with scientific communication and dissemination. Her last publication on this subject was featured in ‘*Scienza in Piazza 2019: Le Cause delle Cose*’, appearing in June 2020.

Pietro Salis teaches Philosophy of Knowledge at the University of Cagliari in the Department of Education, Psychology and Philosophy. His research interests focus on epistemology, philosophy of language, and philosophy of mind. He has published works mostly on coincidences, meaning, truth, representation, and normativity. His publications include papers published in peer reviewed journals such as ‘*Acta Analytica*’, ‘*Axiomathes*’, ‘*Frontiers in Psychology*’, ‘*Phenomenology and Mind*’, ‘*Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*’, ‘*Philosophia*’, and ‘*Topoi*’. He is also author of the book ‘*Pratiche discorsive razionali. Studi sull’inferenzialismo di Robert Brandom*’ (Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2016).

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