Chapter 11

Synchronicity, Causality, and Acausality

Lance Storm

Mansfield, Rhine-Feather and Hall’s chapter (see Chapter 10) raised some serious issues about the natures of synchronicity and psi. Their thesis is that the two are too dissimilar to be considered one and the same phenomenon, which is contrary to Jung’s original idea. In this chapter, which was originally published as a response to Mansfield et al. (1998), I consider the key aspects that underpin synchronicity—meaning, archetypes, and causality—and argue that there are phenomenological parallels between synchronicity and psi. (Editor)

Overview

Much criticism has been leveled at C. G. Jung’s theory of synchronicity, usually as a result of misunderstanding certain key, but often obscure, concepts used by Jung in his major essay Synchronicity (1952/1960). The issues of meaningfulness, causality, and acausality are discussed, since synchronicity is by definition “a coincidence in time of two or more causally unrelated events which have the same or a similar meaning” (Jung, 1952/1960, para. 849). Synchronicity is contrasted with coincidence as a “meaningless chance grouping,” and the Law of Large Numbers is shown not to give account of all cases of ostensibly synchronicity. Braudel’s (1979) philosophical criticism against synchronicity stems partly from an incomplete consideration of Jung’s understanding of the word “meaning,” and the semantic quandary of what constitutes a cause, and what constitutes contingency. Quantum mechanics has forced the marginalization of historical (efficient) causality as the only cause-and-effect explanation of all

1. [This chapter was originally published as an article in Journal of Parapsychology (1999), vol. 63, pp. 247-260). This version is slightly modified due to some textual errors in the journal article. Permission to reprint has been granted by the journal.—Editor.]

2. The author acknowledges the advice and helpful suggestions made by Dr. Michael A. Thalbourne. Preparation of the original article was supported, in part, by a grant from the Bial Foundation.]
phenomena, while scientific (sufficient) causality explains on pragmatic grounds both quantum effects, and paranormal phenomena (psi) because they have “consistency and repeatability” (Manfield, Rhine-Feather & Hall, 1998, p. 20). Manfield et al. argue that psi is historically causal but scientifically causal, whereas synchronistic phenomena (also historically causal) are too “sporadic and unpredictable” (p. 20) to be considered scientifically causal. Jung’s (1952/1960) and Braud’s (1983) experiments challenge this latter assumption. Both synchronicity and psi are chance-like in manifestation, but their effects can be determined statistically, while many forms of psi phenomena are shown to be meaningful, as is synchronicity. It is suggested that generally psi and synchronicity are more alike than Manfield et al. claim, and that synchronicity and psi are scientifically causal for another reason: synchronistic archetypal contingency is no different in effect than psi-permissive and psi-conducive conditions, which may all be described as metacausal.

Introduction

One of the chief aims of the scientific quest is to look for antecedent conditions of an event that may accurately explain the occurrence of that event in rational terms, which is to say, in causal terms. The scientific objective, then, is to trace events back to first causes. Ironically, virtually all religions attribute a divine origin or Prima Causa as first principle of the Creation, so the idea of causality has been around for a long time. Similarly the secular view of the layperson is that natural events must have causal origins. But it seems that matter is that anything could be construed as provisionally acausal if the ability to completely understand and the nature of that event in causal terms cannot possibly reach the level where it might accommodate an explanation within a framework of descriptive language (or other discourse using, say, a mathematical model). Consequently, a seemingly adequate explanation ultimately may not or cannot describe or even identify, all the pertinent antecedents or contingencies of an event to a satisfactory degree—if at all—even closer analysis. The first claim draws attention to the fact that causal models are relative structures, valid only in accordance with the current epistemological foundations upon which such models are built. The second suggests that by the natural limitations of human cognitive functions, the description of many phenomena in causal terms may come to be seen as less informative than first thought.

In an ideal world, the more astute investigator, very much aware of these limitations, would not continue on the scientific quest as if, in relation to the first claim, understanding by the function of reason alone was sufficient for the task. In relation to the second claim, one would not expect the investigator to hold that absolute knowledge was attainable by that very function. However, such precautions also have their limitations, and the modern physicist or psychologist, for example, must get around these limitations by constructing pragmatic models that necessarily marginalize the incomprehensible. Enter synchronicity and paranormal phenomena (psi), which have long been considered causal for the two reasons just given. They cannot be thoroughly described in causal terms (that is, according to the different forms of causality, as will be seen below), and, as a corollary of this fact, they may possibly have factors associated with them that are barely knowable in human terms, if ever knowable at all. As a consequence of these facts, Jung dealt with the incomprehensibility of the causal by first dealing with the causal.

Jung’s Idea of Causality and Acausality

Generally speaking, causal theory is a scientific and philosophical convention which holds that causes and effects may be related according to impressions gained by:

1. Temporal precedence: Causes must come before effects.
2. Temporal and spatial contiguity: Causes and effects must occur together in time and space.
3. Constant conjunction: The effect(s) which follow a cause must occur on a regular basis.

Jung agreed (1952/1960, para. 836), as per (1) and (2) above, that the possibility of causal links between a cause and an effect, the cause must precede the effect, and both must occur together. Grounded in the classical tradition of positivistic science, Jung also claimed “there must be a transmission of energy from the cause to the effect,” since effect is always the result of some kind of energy flow (Aitz, 1990, p. 73. See also Jung, 1952/1960, para. 840). When it is no longer possible to posit energy exchange as an intrinsic component of the phenomenon, the event is considered acausal. (Later it will be seen that some critics—Beloff, 1990; Braude, 1970; Manfield, Rhine-Feather, & Hall, 1998—are of the opinion that the inability to posit an energy exchange of some kind, crucial for a mechanistic view of causality, undermines the cause-and-effect hypothesis only in so far as it is termed “historical causality.” They hold that if an association—a “sufficient condition”—can be established between an event and a probable cause then there is satisfactory evidence for a causal explanation—conventionally called “scientific causality.”)

Jung (1952/1960, para. 819) argued that on the strength of (3) alone, it is clear that statistical truth underlies the causal world. Thus we must accept that no absolute case can be made for so-called causal events, in the sense of trying to explain cause-and-effect phenomena as events that are eternally and forever explainable causally. As a working hypothesis, therefore, causality must be supplemented by other world-views.

Causality, then, is congruent with a world which is taken as “natural” (i.e., obeying the classical laws of physics, for example) while acausality embodies the principle of discontinuity, or lack of connectedness (“constant connection,” to use Jung’s term). But, as mentioned, the causal world has been constructed from statistical truth, as a
Synchronicity, Meaningfulness, and Coincidence

**Synchronicity**

According to Jung, two or more events constitute synchronicity when a meaningful connection—a meaningful association—is made between the events, but it is only synchronicity when meaningfulness is the connecting principle between the events with no causal connections (Jung, 1952/1960, paras. 849-850). Furthermore, synchronistic events are not merely coincidences resulting from chance (even though they generally appear as chance events) because they are also characterized by their meaningfulness (para. 967). Of course, this meaningfulness, as a defining element of synchronicity, can only be acknowledged if a certain content in the psyche is made conscious at a time when a physical event of “equivalence” in the real world is also made conscious. Only then can we speak of synchronicity in practical terms (para. 838). Theoretically, and according to Jung, a synchronistic event remains a synchronistic event whether or not its meaningfulness is recognized (Atzi, 1990, p. 76). (Meaningfulness as an absolute and objective fact is discussed later).

For Jung, a synchronistic event usually involves an archetype (archetypes are nodal points or structural components of the collective unconscious that govern or influence patterns of behavior). The archetype forms the substructure of the synchronicity, connecting at least two events (an eco-psycho one, and an endo-psycho one) with a common theme, and acting as a defining quality throughout the experience, thereby intensifying the meaningfulness (Jung, 1952/1960, para. 912). Synchronicity is not time-dependent in the causal sense where cause must precede effect—the physical event may occur at the same time as an experience in the psyche (an internal image), or even after this experience (para. 984). Nor is it dependent on spatial determinants (a phenomenon similar in nature to the quantum effect of isot Snyderly).

The relativization of space and time is a hallmark of synchronicity, as indeed it is of paranormal phenomena. That is, so-called normal phenomena supposedly follow the causal patterns outlined above, whereas synchronicity and psi characteristically infringe those causal precepts. Since space-time now exists as a unitary term in modern physics because the two are inseparably united as a four-dimensional construct, Jung suggests it is reasonable to think of synchronicity and psi in terms of space-time relativity. Specifically, Jung (1952/1960, para. 857) was certain that if space and time might be “psychically relative” as well, then “the moving body (as in PK phenomena) must possess, or be subject to, a corresponding relativity.” Similarly, since ESP and synchronicity cannot be explained in terms of energy transmission, the simultaneity of synchronistic events (i.e., synchronistic events “falling together in time”) comes about because “synchronicity is a psychically conditioned relativity of space and time” (para. 840).

**Meaningfulness**

The issue of meaningfulness needs some clarification. In its simplest form, meaningfulness (in a Jungian sense) is present at the feeling level (although a degree of intellectual satisfaction can be present), and since meaning is interpretative, it may also be highly subjective (Jung, 1971, para. 723ff). But, this subjective component is seen as necessary, and in fact, does not detract from the objective reality of the feeling (Atzi, 1990, p. 65). Jung defines feeling as the conscious function of evaluation that results in the “acceptance or rejection (like or dislike)” of a content in consciousness (1971, para. 724).

Feeling may give rise to associated factors, such as simple and complex emotional responses, which include the affective components of belief and disbelief (the cognitive components of belief and disbelief may also be affected). But more importantly, the likelihood of healing or change in outlook may result (especially if a certain shiftless form of single-mindedness is present). Any or all of these factors may be present to varying degrees of emotional intensity, according to the numerosity of the experience (Jung, 1952/1960, para. 982; Jung, 1971, para. 681). Ultimately, the result is a transformation of personality in some way, which Jung saw as the embodiment of the individualization process, “having for its goal the development of the individual personality” (Jung, 1971, para. 757).

**Examples of Synchronicity and Coincidence**

At this point it may be necessary to illustrate the concept of synchronicity, and Jung gives an example in his essay Synchronicity (1952/1960, paras. 912, 915). In 1759, while in Gothenburg, Swedish religious leader and scientist Emmanuel Swedenborg had a vision of a house on fire hundreds of miles away in Stockholm. He gave the Gothenburg city authorities an account of this fire, including such details as the owner of the house, and the time the fire was put out. Jung writes, “When ... the vision arose in Swedenborg’s mind of a fire in Stockholm, there was a real fire raging there at the same time, without there being any demonstrable or even thinkable connection between the two.” (para. 912). Jung makes a point of this “fire burning in him [Swedenborg] too” as being the prime determinant of the synchronistic event: two events, one physical, one psychic, and this was both out in Swedenborg’s biography, whereby his psychological state gives indication of the likelihood of an “inner fire.” That is, Swedenborg’s inner fire is of particular psychological (meaningful) significance, and is not simply a typical psi phenomenon, although Jung believed that ESP and PK share the same phenomenology as synchronicity (paras. 840, 863, 977-979).
Another example is the phenomenon of clock stopping at the time of the clockowner’s death. It has also been reported that an individual (a family member, friend, or caregiver), who has unilateral or mutual emotional ties with someone (i.e., a loved-one), may be “contacted” or “visited” by the loved-one at the time of the loved-one’s death. This is another form of synchronicity; and is similar to precognitive dreams and visions, which involve foreknowledge of events.

Wilmer (1987, p. 171) gives an example of synchronicity as related by Arthur Koestler of the London Times in 1974:

After landing the leading role in the movie The Girl from Peterska, English actor Anthony Hopkins tried without success to find a copy of the book in London. Then one day as he was passing through Leicester Square he noticed a book lying discarded on a bench. It was The Girl from Peterska. During the movie’s filming Hopkins met the book’s author, George Feiler, who mentioned in passing that he no longer had a copy of his own novel. Feiler said he had loaned his last copy to a friend who had lost it in London. Hopkins showed Feiler the book he had found. Feiler looked inside and discovered notes in his own handwriting. It was the same book.

Wilmer (1987, p. 169) also relates an example of coincidence as told by Jung:

A wife gives a man a new pipe for his birthday. He takes a walk and sits under a tree in a park. Sitting next to him is a man smoking the same kind of pipe. He tells the man his wife gave him this pipe for his birthday. The man says, “Mine too.” It turns out that they both have the same birthday. They introduce themselves. They have identical Christian names. This is not a synchronistic event because there is no simultaneous, inner-meaningful, subjective event.

In the latter case, it can be seen that piling up more and more shared or common facts onto such an already astonishing and hard-to-believe scenario, though considered a coincidence—“meaningless chance grouping” (Jung, 1952/1960, para. 846)—would not constitute synchronicity. In order to satisfy the conditions of synchronicity, an inner psychic experience would be required from at least one of the men directly relating to the events at hand (say, a prefiguration of the event). Such a condition must be satisfied, and in fact this is the requirement that is not addressed by many critics of synchronicity. For example, Hines (1988, p. 139) only addresses the issue of meaningfulness. Hines is convinced “[that you can] find meaningful coincidences” if you look for them and, as always in this sort of theory, you are permitted to interpret the “meaning” of the event through symbolism. Hines’ lightweight debunking underscores his dismissal of a theory that he feels is based merely on “constructive and selective memory and perception.”

Hines means that any kind of theory that depends on symbolism is unfettered and open to interpretation. But symbolism does not work the way Hines believes it works. Whereas Hines suggests that symbolic associations can be forcibly made between unrelated images or events, Jung saw the symbol as the common ground between disparate images or events (and the symbol is a connecting principle between what is known and what is unknown). Well-intentioned psychologists and analysts, for example, who take symbolism seriously, do not practice to deceive (symbolic interpretation is not forced upon an unsuspecting client or analysed).

Furthermore, it is not the consistent use of symbolic interpretations that necessarily constructs or proves a theory because symbols can be interpreted with a great deal of subjectivity (which does not, however, undermine the symbol’s personal validity). Nor can a theory necessarily be used to construct or prove a symbolic interpretation. Synchronistic phenomena are certainly not conjured into existence if and when a symbolic aspect only is “identified.”

More correctly, the living character and force of a symbolic experience urges itself upon the layperson and the theorist alike who only subsequently might proceed to posit a theory or interpretation purely in order to rationalize the phenomenon. After all, a theory alone may not be a satisfactory criterion for a meaningful life, whereas the symbolic experience can be vital and purposeful. That is the symbol’s higher function. And the individual has the last word, for it is he or she who ultimately decides on the validity of the interpretation. From such experiences emerge the meaningful component of synchronicity.

Hine’s most telling statement comes in his rhetorical appraisal of synchronicity as a “notion dreamed up by psychoanalyst Carl Jung,” whereby Jung supposedly claimed in his theory that there is no such thing as a coincidence. All coincidences are meaningful” (Hines, 1988, p. 103). However, Jung never claims that all coincidences are meaningful. Jung (1952/1960) writes: “meaningful coincidences are not to be distinguished from meaningless chance groupings” (para. 846), that is, meaningless coincidences (p. 440, n. 41).

The Law of Large Numbers

One ostensible explanation of synchronicity (and, in fact, psi phenomena) depends on an appeal to the Law of Large Numbers which, as defined by Paulos (1991, p. 39), is effective when the “difference between the probability of some event and the relative frequency with which it occurs necessarily approaches zero.” For example, Paulos notes (rather stoically) that coincidences of people’s premonitory dreams of natural disasters with the actual real life disasters are “unimpressive” and to be expected, “[g]iven the half billion hours of dreaming each night in this country [United States]—2 hours a night for 250 million people—we should expect as much.” Statistically, a vast number of topics, themes and scenarios in people’s dreams (and visions, no doubt) would be covered in the time available—especially with so many people with different backgrounds, different problems, and real life issues on their minds. Any match with real world events is inevitable and of no consequence—neither paranormal effect,
"inconstant connection," nor synchronicity, then, need be postulated to explain these anomalous "matches." This reasoning might ostensibly explain Swedenborg's vision.

The Law of Large Numbers implies that now more than ever, with over 6 billion people on the planet, there are more meaningless coincidences than ever before. The Law embodies the categorical assumption that synchronicity and certain kinds of psi (for example, precognitive dreams), no matter how outstanding or remarkable, or on the other hand, no matter how likely they may be (if the Law holds true), must, on probabilistic grounds, be taken as meaningless coincidences, according to the laws of probability.

By such a statistical law one can say that if enough trials are run, if enough samples are taken, if an experiment is repeated often enough, the result one wants is not only probable, but highly likely. By this reasoning, one is free to believe that a first trial (or experiment or observation) may yield a result that should be considered a mere coincidence—especially if the result challenges our causal worldview, or in fact, even if it is believable and well within normal experience. Repeated experimentation (replication) is supposed to determine whether or not these coincidences are to be taken as new facts about the world.

Such facts, then, as Jung would claim, are actually statistical truths, from which the human world comes to be structured meaningfully (since the truths are believable). Prior to becoming statistical truths, these new facts would be congruent with low a priori probabilities. From a different perspective, Swedenborg's vision, as a clairvoyant event, would be given a low a priori probability, since there are no records of similar visions concerning the fire. But as Delin writes (1972, p. 248):

One might have thought that to the scientist, striving to obtain an objective view of the universe, a piece of evidence for a proposition would have a status independent of his previous opinions, but this is not so... [H]e attaches a certain probability to the phenomenon or theory, and demands stronger or weaker evidence in accordance with this a priori probability.

A less conservative scientific approach would mean accepting the fact that there is no reason to assume that (say) a psi phenomenon is a mere coincidence. To do otherwise would mean making an unwarranted assumption prior to any form of measurement. Further investigation may reveal the phenomenon to be causally explicable, or, on the other hand, it might be placed in the more established categories of ESP or PK.

**Problems with the Law**

*The Unique Case*

There are a couple of other problems with the Law of Large Numbers. As just stated, it seems that the meaningful coincidence (the coincidence of a personal nature) is absorbed into the sphere of meaningless coincidences and treated indiscriminately from all other coincidences, which may well be meaningless. The uniquely personal precognition, for example, is not unique in a statistical sense because its qualitatively, i.e., meaningful elements are not, nor cannot be considered by the Law—it is merely "allowed" to occur because the Law of Large Numbers "admits" the probability of its occurrence. As rare or as unlikely as it may appear, it is not a statistical anomaly. The problem with the Law is that it explains too much in the single word "probability," but at the same time, misses the point because it precludes the possibility of other explanations, such as certain forms of correspondence between the components of the so-called coincidence.

Put another way, while there may be a great many people dreaming or having visions about neutral (i.e., non-personally relevant) events (such as earthquakes, tornadoes, or even fires in Stockholm), which can be "explained" by the Law, the power of the Law is greatly reduced when these precognitive dreams have contents which are personal or familiar. Dreaming about the death of a loved-one, for example, which then occurs in real life at the same time as the dream, is a phenomenon that cannot be justly considered within the probabilistic framework of the Law. The reason for this limitation comes from the fact that such a dream or vision has a meaningfulness of a nature that makes it unique when compared to only similar dreams by others who do not know and did not dream about that particular loved-one's fate.

Upon reflection, then, it is still possible that Swedenborg's vision was a paranormal phenomenon. The continued accrual of details associated with the fire, as reported by Swedenborg, reduces the probability of the vision being a chance occurrence (against the Law, it becomes more and more improbable that other people could have produced similar reports like Swedenborg's in all its detail). The more particular and detailed the event, the less likely the precognition or clairvoyance of an event be explained by the Law.

---

3. One journal referee noted a reference in Jung (1952/1960, para. 830), who cites two probabilities of paranormal phenomena made by Doets and Hammmann, respectively. Doets, for example, calculated odds of "1: 4,114,545 for telepathic precognition of death." Jung considers it more likely that foreknowledge of death is a "telepathic or accidental, meaningful coincidence" (para. 830).
The Retrieval Case

Hines (1998) also appeals to the Law to justify the same argument that “if an event is given enough opportunities to occur, sooner or later it will occur” (p. 51). Further, the "retrieval cue" mechanism plays a part. When an event in the real world does match a "forgotten" dream, it is immediately recalled (p. 51). Hines believes such dreams are "reliably prophetic" only because they have been "selectively" remembered by real life cues and thereby "come true" (p. 51). Dreams that are irrelevant to real life events are simply never remembered.

But Hines ignores the dreams that are not forgotten, and do not depend on cues, and in fact, usually hold an overpowering (because relevant) emotional component for the dreamer. The "reality" of the dream and the reality of the event merge and give the dream a quality of "truthfulness" in its own right—it is not simply a coincidence. Furthermore, often it is the case that the dreamer has these dreams at the time of the real life event and not before the event. Either way, the claim of synchronicity is warranted.

Synchronicity as a Philosophical Conundrum

The theory of synchronicity has also been subjected to philosophical criticism. Braude (1979, pp. 217-241) critiques synchronicity from two fronts. First, he reminds us of the "context-dependence of relations of meaningfulness" (p. 228), and second, he considers the postulate and construct of an archetypal substratum that underlies synchronicity must imply a causal relation in these events, an actual one based on constant connected through contingency, equivalence, or meaning.

Meaning

In the first case, Braude believes that events are "pared" in a subjective way that can be meaningful or not, according to the interpreter. "Nature...does not dictate how we individualize events" (p. 219). Jung, however, did recognize the subjective component of meaning in synchronicity, but Braude conceals this fact by taking a quote out of context from Jung’s essay. Jung describes synchronicity as a "factor in nature which expresses itself in the arrangement of events and appears to us as meaning" (1952/1960, para. 916). But Jung adds: "Although meaning is an anthropomorphic interpretation it nevertheless forms the indispensable criterion of synchronicity. What that factor which appears to us as meaning” may be in itself we have no possibility of knowing” (para. 916). Again, Braude quotes Jung. "Synchronicity postulates a meaning which is a priori in relation to human consciousness and apparently exists outside man” (para. 942). The idea that meaning could exist "outside man” is not plausible, nor reasonable to Braude. But, in a footnote, Jung adds:

In view of the possibility that synchronicity is not only a psychophysical phenomenon but might also occur without the participation of the human psyche, I should like to point out that in this case we should have to speak not of meaning but of equivalence or conformity (1952/1960, para. 942, n.71).

Braude fails to acknowledge Jung’s influence into the subjective nature of meaning. The problem is not, as Braude would have it, to do with Jung’s failure to grasp the semantic implications of an entity (meaning), or of categories of relation (subjectivity and objectivity). Jung has indeed attempted to find more suitable, more philosophically acceptable words to describe "instances" or "occasions" (synchronicities) which cannot be explained causally, yet still appear to have connections or relations to the experient beyond mere coincidence. Synchronicity is clearly more than coincidence, but the degree or extent—or more correctly—"quality"—of that “membrane” seems descriptive only through words, such as “meaning” or “meaningfulness,” as it would not be measurable (not being a quantity).

Furthermore, upon reflection we must recognize that the identification of equivalence or conformity of a synchronistic nature can have a profound effect on the individual, which must, therefore, be meaningful in some way, regardless of one’s skepticism (Jung, 1952/1960, para. 848). And, most importantly, it appears that this factor which Jung calls meaning must be objective if it is a "self-sufficient meaning" (para. 912) that manifests as "absolute knowledge" (para. 945), as appears to be the case with synchronicity. (Recall Swedenborg’s vision, and his knowledge about specific details of the fire.) Certainly many cases of precognition suggest that knowledge gained by paranormal means has a definitive justifiable quality about it.

Braude, on the other hands, would have to content himself with the possibility—or even fact—that not all phenomena can be conceptualized and drawn into philosophical discourse, especially when his main task is to elucidate the individual about the "true" (subjective) nature of his or her experience. After all, concern over semantic issues can detract from the psychological importance of the synchronicity experience. It is often the case, for example, that meaningful coincidences break through a particular form of intellectual stubbornness that is immune to irrational experiences such as deeply entrenched emotions (Jung, 1952/1960, para. 982). Words limit our thinking, and even though they are the usual well-applied tools of the philosopher, they fail to break free from the type of thinking and rational assumptions with which they are bound.

Jung, on the other hand, aware of this linguistic issue (as is apparent from the foregoing quotes), gave consideration to other words rather than insist on the exclusive use of the word meaning as the most accurate word for qualifying, in most cases, the non-quantifiable difference between disparate forms of coincidence (e.g., chance and synchronicity). In other cases, he used words such as “equivalence,” "conformity," etc. Until we can actually speak in concrete terms about phenomena that have thus far been labeled “indefinable,” “immeasurable,” or “transcendental,” we may have to reconcile ourselves
to the likelihood that only linguistic devices, in the form of complementaries, are the best means we have of accessing these unknown factors.

The Archetype as a Contingent Factor of Synchronicity

As regards Braude's second criticism, the notion of causality has always been a contentious issue for many, including parapsychologists and philosophers. David Hume stated that there is no absolute way of empirically demonstrating how an event may have a causal connection to some other event, yet it may still be considered causal. Therefore, from Jung's theory concerning the archetypal "connection" found within synchronistic events, Braude assumes that an archetypal substructure provides the causal threads that link these events, which thereby undermines Jung's idea of an acausal connecting principle. As Jung describes synchronicity, however, we must not fall back on rational (causal) thinking to explain its phenomenology: "As soon as one perceives the archetypal background [one] is tempted to trace the mutual assimilation of independent psychic and physical processes back to a (causal) effect of the archetype, and thus to overlook the fact that they are merely contingent" (para. 965). Jung would be justified in "protesting to the contrary" when it is claimed that he writes "as though . . . the archetypes somehow cause meaningful coincidences between events" (Braude, 1979, pp. 225-226). The idea of the archetype having causal properties which bring about synchronistic events would be as untenable to Jung's idea of synchronicity as claiming, for example, that an immediate drop in land caused the phenomenon of the waterfall. From a scientific point of view it would be more acceptable to give a causal account of the falling water by explaining it in terms of gravity and fluid dynamics. The conditions of the environment are the contingencies necessary for the waterfall to come about. So it is with the archetype. The archetype can be seen as an acausal, but common thread or contingency by which synchronistic events can be linked.

Psi Conditions and Archetypal Conscience as Metacausal Phenomena

Jung recognized that conceptual language has a "causalistic coloring" (1952/1968, para. 965), and to describe archetypes as "underlying" certain "psychophysical equivalences" (para. 964) does suggest causal relations. But, as illustrated in the above example, Jung means an "existing quality" as "irreducible contingency" (para. 965). However, we are left wondering how real is the distinction between cause and contingency. The distinction may only exist discursively. We can test this claim by considering a similar situation in parapsychology, where an apparent distinction exists between psi-causes on one hand, and psi-permissive and psi-conductive conditions on the other.

The parapsychological terms psi-permissive and psi-conductive have arisen as a result of the frequent observation that psi is more likely to occur with certain experimenters, and/or certain subjects. Schneider (1997) considers psi a natural ability, which is enhanced by experimenters who create a warm climate, and encourage the subject to cooperate (these are psi-permissive features). Stanford (1977, p. 831) cites seven psi-conducive "features" developed by Braud (1975). These are:

1. "Physical relaxation,"
2. "Reduced 'physical' arousal or activation." [There are exceptions to this state, such as the precognitive dream, where arousal levels are actually higher than in the waking state (Stanford, 1977, p. 832).]
3. "Reduction in sensory input and processing,"
4. "Increased awareness of internal processes, feelings and images,"
5. "Receptive mode/right-hemispheric functioning as opposed to action mode/left-hemispheric functioning,"
6. "An altered view of the nature of the world." For example, feeling that it is "possible to know things more directly than we usually consider possible,"
7. "Psi (or what might be accomplished through psi) must be (at least) momentarily important,"

While the parapsychologist would be satisfied that these features (conditions) are distinct from the actual psi-cause (assuming such a cause exists), one could argue that any or all of them might indeed be metacausal, such as (7) above. Stanford (1977, pp. 838-839) explains that this feature means there must be a need for success, where motivation is the driving force behind psi success. In one short step one can go from the motivation of the individual (this constitutes the condition), to an actual causal (or better, metacausal) effect of motivation as a factor in and of the individual. The other six features listed above could equally be considered metacausal.

It is important, therefore, to recognize that only an apparent distinction may exist between the psi-cause, and psi-permissive/psi-conductive features as condition. They may be more intricately entwined than the terms suggest. As Jung states: "The causality principle asserts that the connection between cause and effect is a necessary one" (1952/1968, para. 916). Aitken amplifies this point: "The cause must contain those conditions that are necessary for the occurrence of the effect; those conditions in the absence of which the effect would not have come into being" (Aitken, 1990, p. 73). If, then, a cause is only a cause when it "contains" the conditions necessary for an effect to take place, then psi-permissive and psi-conductive conditions are metacausal whenever they are necessary conditions of an actual cause or causes still unknown. It is these and possibly other conditions that give causes their causal properties.

In pragmatic terms, it can be argued, then, that these above-mentioned conditions are effectively causal (i.e., metacausal) in nature, since their presence has a positive influence on psi-effects, while their absence has a deleterious effect, helping

4. [It should be understood that the qualifiers 'psi-conductive' and 'psi-permissive' are relative terms. Experimentally, it is possible to hypothesize that any given condition is a causal factor. The term metacause is proposed to avoid this semantic quandary.— Entron.]
psi become the consistent, and, therefore, the scientifically causal phenomenon that it is. It follows that the presence of the necessary contingency in synchronicity (the archetype) would itself be the “sufficient” condition (metacause) that would satisfy the pragmatic demands of science, and thereby justify the description of synchronicity as also a scientifically causal phenomenon.

While archetypes are not argued here as being causes per se, it is suggested that a metacausal effect (the effect of contingency) is present in synchronistic events. The term metacause is a compromise that recognizes both the “existing quality” and the “irreducible contingency” of the archetype, but goes further by parallelizing these qualities with the psi-permissive and psi-conductive conditions in parapsychological phenomena. This parallel should be made because the similarities are very real, as will become evident in the next section, where the proposition that synchronicity is a scientifically causal phenomenon is also developed further.

Scientific Causality, Synchronicity, and Psi

Beloff (1990) has argued that Jung’s belief in “mechanistic causation,” as the only hypothesis that could explain causal events, was naïve (p. 22). For Beloff an event A is the cause of event B if “it can be shown that an event of class A is sufficient condition for the occurrence of an event of class B” (p. 23). In human fashion he sides with the argument that “anything could be the cause of anything else and only observation can establish what causes what” (Beloff, 1990, p. 173). This argument is the same as that given by Roger Newton (1970, p. 1570):

> We are not interested . . . in what might be called “historical causality” (establishing a causal connection in a single chain of events) but in “scientific causality” (establishing a connection in repeatable events) . . . . It is the external control of A together with the condition with B that establishes, in good human sense, the causal connection between them, as well as the fact that A is the cause and B, the effect.

The idea of scientific causality was accepted by the sciences when the idea of a determinable universe was undermined by a number of findings in physics, such as that of Werner Heisenberg (Peat, 1991, pp. 61-63). He proposed the uncertainty principle in 1926 to account for the fact that position and velocity of a particle could not be calculated in the same observation. The *uncertainty* decay of radioactive elements was already a challenge to physics at this time, and Sir James Jeans (1942, p. 127) pointed out that “radioactive breakup appeared to be an effect without a cause.”

The discovery of nonlocality in quantum mechanics was evidence again that “historical causality” was deficient in explaining quantum events. Peat (1991, p. 146) describes this effect:

> John Bell (physicist) showed that if two photons or two electrons are allowed to separate to opposite sides of a laboratory, they will still be actively correlated. Moreover, the connection between them is direct and instantaneous and is not the result of some mysterious force or field.

Beloff, in tune with the times, supports the scientific causality principle as an explanation for psi events, and is satisfied, in general, that with “sufficient condition” A causes B, even though one cannot identify the connecting principle between A and B. Jung may have been painfully ignorant of scientific causality, but nevertheless one must follow that this form of causality may well describe some synchronistic events, since Jung regarded ESP and PK as forms of synchronicity. But this conclusion is countered by Beloff’s claim that Jung had the idea that a Leibnizian pre-established harmony was at the heart of synchronicity theory, which allowed Jung the convenience of avoiding the causality issue altogether. Jung, however, refined the theory of a pre-established harmony as the explanation for the “mind/body relationship” (Beloff, 1998, p. 22), and he did not “favor” Leibniz’s theory at all. Jung (1952/1960) has said: “It is not necessary to think of Leibniz’s pre-established harmony . . . which would have to be absolute and would manifest itself in a universal correspondence and sympathy” (para. 948).

> The old theory of correspondence . . . reached its culminating point and also its provisional end in Leibniz’s idea of pre-established harmony, and was then replaced by causality. . . . Synchronicity is a modern differentiation of the absolute concept of correspondence, sympathy, and harmony (put forward to explain the connecting principle between psyche and matter).

A pre-established harmony would have to be absolute. If it could exist at all it could be used to explain every event in terms of some other event, and there would be no need to postulate mechanistically causal connections between events at all. Jung could not have supported Leibniz’s theory, since he recognized that causal events do exist, while synchronicity stands apart from causality (we would now say historical causality). In short, synchronicity appears to be more causal than Jung imagined, and less the reworked anchormony that Beloff claims.

Experimental Synchronicity

Beloff (1990) is satisfied that regularity and lawfulness (and, therefore, scientific causality) is demonstrated in psi phenomena, whereas synchronistic phenomena cannot be the subject of experimentation because they are merely “peculiar correspondences” (p. 23), or “essentially magical” (p. 171) and would therefore be irregular and unlawful. Beloff pre-empts Mansfield, Rhine-Faustus, and Haefl’s (1988, p. 16) similar statement regarding psi and synchronistic phenomena: “Although they [parapsychological phenomena] are clearly acausal (in the Jungian sense of historical
cursory), they also exhibit scientific causality in being repeatable and controllable phenomena." As for synchronicity, it is evidently historically new, but since it is "specific and non-repeatable" it is scientifically valid (p. 18). Again, the implication is that synchronicity is not subject to experimentation.

However, Jung (1952/1960, para. 872-915) conducted an astrological experiment in the 1960s as an attempt to test his theory of the underlying meaningfulness that would connect causally unrelated events. Jung tried to establish an empirical (statistical) basis for evidence of a "psychic equation" between external events (choice of marriage partner) and inner experience (the astrological birth sign as indicative of personality variables).

The statistics calculated on the pooled results were mostly ambiguous and inconclusive, and even claimed as non-significant (Jung, 1977, para. 1179). Results suggesting the presence of synchronicity were found in three subsets of data which were compiled as they arrived in the mail and were then separately analyzed as sub-samples by an impatient Jung eager to test his hypotheses.

Just as important were three smaller experiments, which statistically demonstrated the meaningfulness Jung believed existed between psyche, matter, and external events. Three experiments/subjects were instructed to randomly select sub-samples from the larger sample of natal charts used in the main experiment. The type of conjunction that appeared more often than any other in each sub-sample exactly described the psychological profile of each of the relevant subjects who selected that sub-sample.

1. The first subject was in a state of intense emotional excitement. Mars is the "emotional" planet, and the sub-sample was dominated by Mars aspects (para. 897).
2. The second subject was a female patient whose main problem was to realize and assert her personality in the face of her self-suppressive tendencies. Her sub-sample featured the ascendant-Moon conjunction, which has a passive (suppressed) influence in the chart (para. 898).
3. The third subject was a woman with strong inner opposition whose union and reconciliation constituted her main problem. Sun-Moon conjunctions dominated her selection, symbolizing the union of opposites (para. 899).

Statistically, the results were no considered significant, but the variances in the data, which indicated the featured conjunctions of each sub-sample, corresponded with the psychic state of the subject. Jung found inadvertently that exactly what he was looking for—evidence of meaningful coincidence or synchronicity.*

5. The aforementioned referee pointed out that, as Jung saw it, the non-significant results could be "favorably" seen as attributable to chance. Thus ruling out a causal factor. This interpretation maintains the chance-like nature of synchronicity that Jung held to be the case for meaningful coincidence.
6. [On a "lesser" form of such—i.e., GESP variously referred to as dissonance, precipitation, experimenter effect, or to use Jung's term "seuer manum contineant" (Jung, 1952/1960, para. 905).—Editor.]
7. [Reprinted in this anthology as Chapter 7.—Editor.]

Decades later, Braud (1983) conducted two experiments to quantitatively assess meaningful coincidence, and in both cases he achieved significant results. In the first experiment, Braud selected ten key words on the basis of a "special feeling" or "anomalous attention." Ten control words were selected from a compilation of spoken English frequency norms. Both key and control word-pairs were matched on frequency. The experiment was run over a 24-hour period for each pair. Occurrences of the key words were found in the environment, casual conversation, radio dialogue, etc.

Braud did not count the occurrences of the key word in its initial context, since it was over-represented there. Braud also conducted his day-to-day routine as per usual, so as to avoid seeking out "confirmatory contexts" where the key word might appear with greater than usual frequency. Upon statistical analysis, the "key (synchronistic) instances occurred significantly sooner than the matched control instances" (1983, p. 6).

In a second experiment, Braud used a "limited newspaper record" (1983, p. 7) to source his key and control words (selection was as per the first experiment). Again ten trials were run. The newspaper—the San Antonio Express—was pre-selected, as was the issue for the day if "a possible meaningful coincidence was identified on a particular day" (p. 7). Braud read the articles column by column, and readings were timed. The two words were timed from the moment they appeared in the text. Again there was a significant result. The key words were encountered sooner than the matched controls. These results suggested that not only does "a test for the study of synchronicity" exist (p. 8), but also that synchronicity is at least as regular and predictable as parapsychological phenomena. In fact, Jung was never certain on how frequently synchronicity might occur:

[We still do not know whether they [synchronistic phenomena] occur so frequently and so regularly in any field of experience that we could speak of them as conforming to law. We only know that there must be an underlying principle which might possibly explain all such (related) phenomena (para. 938).

It appears that synchronicity may be even more frequent than at first suggested, and the claim made by Mansfield et al. (1998, p. 11) that synchronicity is "resistant to careful empirical investigation" may not be the case at all.

The Presence of Meaning in Psi Phenomena

Synchronicity may be like psi (it is dependent on meta-causes, that is, contingencies or conditions, and can be the subject of experimentation), but is psi like synchronicity? Mansfield et al. (1998, p. 17) make the claim that many experiments in parapsychology
that show paranormal effects do not present the quality of meaningfulness concomitant with their significant results. Granted, a significant result per se, as stimulating and emotionally engaging as it might be, may not have an obvious or manifest meaning for the experimenter or subject (though this state of affairs would not make it any less synchronistic [Aziz, 1990, p. 76]).

Manfield et al. then quote Jung at length (Jung, 1952/1960, para. 846) and argue that Jung was absolutely in his statement that Rhiene's experiments "contain no direct evidence of a constellation of the archetype" where "meaningful coincidences... seem to rest on an archetypal foundation" (para. 846). But the two paragraphs that follow must also be read in the context of this statement. Jung pointed out that Rhiene's experiments got the best results (after boredom set in) when "new interest" was aroused. Jung stressed that the "emotional factor" ("affectivity") rests on the "instincts, whose formal aspect is the archetype" (para. 846). And, earlier in the text, Jung noted that "they [the archetypes] have a specific change and develop numerous effects which express themselves as affect" (para. 841). Consequently, meaningfulness would be present in Rhiene's experiments due to an activated archetype. (Samuels, Shorter, & Plaut [1986, p. 52] note that Jung "perceived meaning to be paradoxical in nature and conceived it as an archetype").

To drive the point home, Jung made another observation about Rhiene's experiments. Like synchronicity, they too contain meaningfulness, which is in the "impossibility of the task that ultimately forces the subject's attention on the process going on inside him, and thus gives the unconscious a chance to manifest itself" (para. 848). The unknowable is (say) an ESP task, potentially knowable:

And this immediately appeals to his unconscious readiness to witness a miracle, and to the hope, latent in all men [sic], that such a thing may yet be possible. . . . An affective expectation is present in one form or another even though it may be denied (para. 848).

This process is exactly that of the fourth psi-conducive feature described earlier ("increased awareness of inner processes, feelings and images"), as posited by Braud (1975), and cited by Stanford (1977, p. 831). But Jung went further by recognizing the emotional component which, as just stated, must be underscored by an archetype (the formal aspect of the instinctual, i.e., emotional response). Here we see how a psi-conducive condition works like a synchronistic (i.e., archetypal) contingency, and how both may be considered metacausal. But furthermore, and more importantly, this process has a meaningful aspect—one of "affective expectation" (Jung, 1952/1960, para. 848) which "touch[es] the heart as much as it touch[es] the mind" (von Franz, 1992, p. 257). The desire to turn one's attention inward would not be undertaken if one thought and felt that the act was meaningless. The meaningfulness, however, as Jung makes clear, is indeed present during the whole experimental process, from beginning to end, because the archetype is activated, which also makes it highly likely that a psi effect may occur.

Altogether, this form of meaning is of a different, sublimer order than the kind of meaningfulness that is found in exemplary cases of synchronicity. We cannot expect meaningfulness to always take a form that is so glaringly obvious as that associated with scarab beetles or Stockholm fires. But it should not be assumed that in most cases of parapsychological experimentation (perhaps especially where we witness results that are significant) there is no "archetypal meaning propelling our individualization" (Manfield et al., 1998, p. 20). One's emotional state must be recognized as meaningful and, therefore, transformative of the personality. The words of Manfield et al. are relevant here: "almost any psychological experience can be understood as presenting a new insight, compensation, or correction for our deficiencies or prejudices" (1998, p. 7).

Under such circumstances, and in disagreement with Manfield et al., there is no good reason why parapsychological laboratory work should not speak directly to the "evaluation of our subjective being" (p. 20). In that sense psi has a synchronistic quality, because meaningfulness is present.

Finally, the mercurial nature of psi is well recognized by parapsychologists, and this is why many trials in many repeated runs are conducted, so that the statistical outcome of a significant result is taken as indicating the presence of a paranormal effect that is not the result of chance alone. Yet it must be remembered that the psi effect is buried somewhere in the data amongst chance events. As Jung notes, "it cannot be predicted in advance when the hit will come. Could we do so, we would be dealing with a law (a mechanistically causal law), and this would contradict the entire nature of the phenomenon" (Jung, 1952/1960, para. 980). Jung speaks of synchronicity in the same way: "synchronicity... consists essentially of chance equivalences... They are indecipherable, that is to say they can be known and determined only approximately" (para. 964).

It seems from these statements that parapsychological effects can have the phenomenonology of synchronicity. Psi (like synchronicity) can be demonstrably meaningful in nature. But also, psi and synchronicity have chance equivalence, and both are determined approximately, which not only qualifies them as historically causal, but more importantly, places synchronicity alongside psi in the category of scientific causality.

**Synchronicity Today**

Jung's essay on synchronicity was, in part, an attempt to put synchronicity within the grasp of the researcher by first placing this anomalous phenomenon within a theoretical framework. He then tried to demonstrate the presence of the synchronistic effect in an astrological experiment as a move in the direction of establishing the credibility of his theory.

Though much has been written about synchronicity from a theoretical standpoint, experiments in the area are few and far between. If synchronicity had been given the same kind of attention that ESP and PK received in the fifty years since the inception of Jung's synchronicity theory, its status might be very different today. As it happens, a
number of parapsychologists already sympathetic with its basic precepts (Bender, 1976; Brunel, 1964; Rao, 1977). And if psi and synchronicity are very similar in nature, as appears to be the case, it follows that parapsychologists have been inadvertently giving attention to the phenomenon anyway. Further research in both areas may lead to a more precise conclusion.

If synchronicity theory reaches a level of general acceptance, it may add a new and perhaps welcome dimension to parapsychological research. In fact, Greatrex (1999) has recently made the suggestion that synchronicity theory does provide a new accent on psi phenomena, although “serious experimenters and theorists have unfairly neglected theories of the synchronicity type” (p. 7).

Ironically, after the initial protestations of Manfield et al. that synchronicity could not be the subject of experimentation, they change their stance (1998, pp. 23-24). They concede the possibility of experimental synchronicity, and even claim that it “would be done most convincingly” with “sufficient rigor” and extensive consultation (p. 23). In the eventuality that such experiments will be done, the parapsychologist will be availed of the possibility of finding out, perhaps with some degree of certainty, that synchronicity and many parapsychological phenomena may be more like each other than has been supposed.

Conclusion

Jung’s synchronicity theory poses a very real problem for psychologists, philosophers and physicists because its basic premise conflicts with the perceived (or received) model of the world as we ordinarily experience it. By this theory we are to consider meaning from a perspective that not only sees the integration of experiences of the physical world into our thoughts and feelings, but also sees many events in the physical world as consonant with those thoughts and feelings in ways explainable only by the ordering principle of the archetype.

Statistical analysis of data in the quantitative sciences is crucial in testing theories, and is the paragon of research tools in experimentation. However, certain forms of statistical “treatment” such as the Law of Large Numbers cannot give a qualitative account of data. That is not their purpose. But the particular quality of a unique case may remain undetected as a result of an exclusively quantitative approach. (Parapsychological research, for example, generally compensates for this lack by testing “star” subjects for their psi abilities, and collecting anecdotal evidence—the only other means of gaining access to the unique case.)

When causal/accidental issues come under the scrutiny of academics, philosophical criticism is invariably drawn into the fray. The philosopher’s contribution is meant to clarify the reasoning and logical ramifications of theoretical statements. Words, such as “meaning,” “cause,” and “contingence” may be criticized from a semantic perspective, but in the case of synchronicity, the psychological importance of the experience must not be overlooked. In the therapeutic situation, for example, it is often the case that meaningful coincidence can break through a particular form of intellectual resistance to the experience of the irrational, thereby exposing deeply repressed emotional considerations that center on life situations and events.

If we insist on speaking in Jungian terms of synchronicity as being absolutely acausal (i.e., historically and scientifically acausal), then we can only refer to “synchronicity, or equivalence, or meaning, and avoid causal terminology altogether. In part, this makes some sense for synchronicity as a discrete effect, since it cannot be predicted as to when it might appear, and therefore cannot be determined (the event is historically and scientifically acausal). However, since (by definition) contingency, etc., must be present in regular and consistent ways if and when synchronicity occurs, multiple events can be observed (sampled) under experimental conditions (where synchronicity is likely to be present, just like psi), so that as chance might have it synchronicity would be predictable and therefore lawful. Thus, in the large, synchronicity is scientifically causal, like psi.

The traditional parapsychologist may continue to test for psi (a scientifically causal phenomenon), but must recognize that a particular psi phenomenon may also be meaningful in some way, if archetypal contingency can be effectively demonstrated in that phenomenon. Synchronicity is also recognized as having the same chance-like nature as the more general psi phenomena. A traditional Jungian already recognizes these facts, but may have to accept that synchronicity, although historically acausal, may well be scientifically causal. This claim is strengthened by the idea that archetypal contingency (considered necessary for synchronicity) is of the same nature as psi-permissive and psi-conductive conditions (often considered necessary in paranormal phenomena). Both may be seen as scientifically metacausal factors, because they help bring about effects. There may, therefore, be good reason to treat psi and synchronicity as more often the same type of phenomenon than is assumed by some critics. We must now ask the question: “How often?”

References


Chapter 12
Synchronicity and Psi: How Are They Related?1

John Palmer

In this chapter, Dr. Palmer elaborates on the differences and similarities between synchronicity and psi. He finds incongruencies between the two major concepts that suggest synchronicity is not quite the same phenomenon as psi. Palmer considers various parapsychological theories and attempts an approximation of synchronicity to some of these theories. He also suggests ways of testing synchronicity (EDITOR).

Overview

Carl Jung's interest in parapsychology was kindled by personal psychic experiences, especially an anomalous banging sound emanating from a bookcase while he was in the company of Sigmund Freud. He also had an interest in Spiritism and communicated extensively with E. B. Rhine about experimental parapsychology. He credits parapsychology with influencing the development of his theory of synchronicity. The purpose of this chapter is to compare and contrast synchronicity experiences with psi experiences. Jung defined synchronicity as “the occurrence of a meaningful coincidence in time” (italics added). Regarding time, Jung generally viewed the elements of a synchronicity as simultaneous, but he did allow for a temporal relationship akin to precognition.

With respect to meaning, Jung insisted that to be synchronicities, coincidences must reflect the activation of "archetypes", primal themes of good and evil inherited from our ancestors, and be of psychodynamic relevance to the experiencer. Psi experiences are not so restricted. Braud has criticized Jung for erroneously claiming that events can have inherent meaning. This problem can be overcome by saying that events differ in their capacity to evoke meaning in a person. Which events have this capacity must be defined by consensus among Jungian scholars. Jung postulated that one element of a

1. [This chapter first appeared as an article in Proceedings of Parapsychology Association Convention 2004 (pp. 173-184). Permission to reprint has been granted by the author and the Parapsychology Association.—EDITOR]