

Synchronicity

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Contributor: Sergei Chekanov

An article about the term "synchronicity" defined as the occurrence of meaningful coincidences that seem to have no cause.

synchronicity

coincidences

Carl Jung

1. Introduction

Synchronicity is a concept first introduced by analytical psychologist Carl G. Jung "to describe circumstances that appear meaningfully related yet lack a causal connection" ^[1] In modern research, synchronicity experiences refer to one's subjective experience that coincidences between events in one's mind and the outside world may be causally unrelated to each other yet have some other unknown connection. Jung held that this was a healthy, even necessary, function of the human mind that can become harmful within psychosis. Synchronicity is a phenomenon where individuals perceive two distinct and apparently unrelated events as being meaningfully connected, despite the lack of evidence suggesting that one caused the other or that there is any causal link between the two. Jung coined the term synchronicity as part of a lecture as early as 1928, at first for use in discussing Chinese religious and philosophical concepts.

Jung developed the theory of synchronicity as a hypothetical noncausal principle serving as the intersubjective or philosophically objective connection between these seemingly meaningful coincidences. Mainstream science generally regards that any such hypothetical principle either does not exist or falls outside the bounds of science. After first coining the term in the late 1920s or early 30s, Jung further developed the concept in collaboration with physicist and Nobel laureate Wolfgang Pauli through long correspondences and in their eventual 1952 work "The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche" (German: "Naturerklärung und Psyche") which comprises one paper from each of the two thinkers ^[2]. Their work together culminated in what is now called the Pauli–Jung conjecture ^[3]. During his career, Jung furnished several different definitions of synchronicity, defining it as "a hypothetical factor equal in rank to causality as a principle of explanation", "an acausal connecting principle", "acausal parallelism", and as the "meaningful coincidence of two or more events where something other than the probability of chance is involved". In Pauli's words, synchronicities were "corrections to chance fluctuations by meaningful and purposeful coincidences of causally unconnected events", though he had also proposed to move the concept away from coincidence towards instead a "correspondence", "connection", or "constellation" of discrete factors. Jung and Pauli's view was that, just as causal connections can provide a meaningful understanding of the psyche and the world, so too may acausal connections.

Jung tells the following story as an example of a synchronistic event in his book *"Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle"* ^[1]:

By way of example, I shall mention an incident from my own observation. A young woman I was treating had, at a critical moment, a dream in which she was given a golden scarab. While she was telling me this dream I sat with my back to the closed window. Suddenly I heard a noise behind me, like a gentle tapping. I turned round and saw a flying insect knocking against the window pane from outside. I opened the window and caught the creature in the air as it flew in. It was the nearest analogy to a golden scarab that one finds in our latitudes, a scarabaeid beetle, the common rose-chafer, which contrary to its usual habits had evidently felt an urge to get into a dark room at this particular moment.

It was an extraordinarily difficult case to treat, and up to the time of the dream little or no progress had been made. I should explain that the main reason for this was my patient's animus, which was steeped in Cartesian philosophy and clung so rigidly to its own idea of reality that the efforts of three doctors—I was the third—had not been able to weaken it. Evidently something quite irrational was needed which was beyond my powers to produce. The dream alone was enough to disturb ever so slightly the rationalistic attitude of my patient. But when the "scarab" came flying in through the window in actual fact, her natural being could burst through the armor of her animus possession and the process of transformation could at last begin to move.

Jung stated that synchronicity events are nothing but chance occurrences from a statistical point of view, but are meaningful in that they may seem to validate paranormal ideas ^[4]. However, no empirical studies of synchronicity experiences based on observable mental states and scientific data were conducted by Jung in order to draw his conclusions though some studies have since been done in this area (see the next section).

2. Further studies

Synchronicity experiences and the synchronicity principle continue to be studied within philosophy, cognitive science, and analytical psychology. Synchronicity is widely challenged by the sufficiency of probability theory in explaining the occurrence of coincidences, the relationship between synchronicity experiences and cognitive biases,

A 1989 overview of research areas and methodology in the study of coincidence published by the Journal of the American Statistical Association addresses various potentials in researching synchronicity experiences ^[5].

A 2009 work found that, clinically, synchronicity experiences seem to cluster around periods of emotional intensity or major life transitions, such as births, deaths, and marriage ^[6].

A 2016 study found that clients who have disclosed synchronicity experiences in clinical setting often report not being listened to, accepted, or understood. The study also found that for therapists these experiences often come as a shock and a challenge their own worldviews, prompting researchers to specify a need to provide accurate and

reliable information about synchronicity experiences for mental health professionals. Another 2016 study of 226 therapists found that 44% reported synchronicity experiences in the therapeutic setting, and 67% felt that synchronicity experiences could be useful for therapy [7]. The study also points out ways of explanations of synchronicity. For example, psychologists were significantly more likely than both counsellors and psychotherapists to agree that chance coincidence was an explanation for synchronicity, whereas, counsellors and psychotherapists were significantly more likely than psychologists to agree that a need for unconscious material to be expressed could be an explanation for synchronicity experiences in the clinical setting.

A 2019 study proposed to test whether synchronicity manifests as an objective feature of the physical world. The results of whether Fibonacci algorithms would predict increased synchronicity experiences compared to chance showed "a significant difference ($p < .10$) between observed synchronicity matches and expected frequencies based on chance for the HM [harmonic model] algorithm, and no significant difference in matches predicted by the GSM algorithm" [8].

A 2024 work [9] proposed searching for instances of coincidences within a well-defined statistically unbiased (with respect to coincidental events) group of individuals, rather than analyzing coincidences retrospectively as Jung originally suggested. Specifically, a statistical method was developed to estimate the probability of significant life-changing coincidences occurring purely by chance among a group of people known for their activities rather than coincidental events. The study concluded that the probabilities of such events are surprisingly low and cannot be easily attributed to cause-and-effect relationships, social behavior or chance alone. The synchronicity phenomenon was connected with the questions of the biological evolution, quantum mechanics and elementary particles.

References

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