Introduction
Synchronicity and Its Implications

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Most of us in the course of life have observed coincidences in which two or more independent events, having no apparent causal connection, nevertheless seem to form a meaningful pattern. On occasion, this patterning can strike one as so extraordinary that it is difficult to believe the coincidence has been produced by chance alone. The events give the distinct impression of having been precisely arranged, invisibly orchestrated.

Jung first described the remarkable phenomenon he named synchronicity in a seminar as early as 1928, but he continued his investigations for more than twenty years before at last attempting a full formulation in the early 1950s. He presented his influential, still-evolving analysis of synchronicity in the final paper he gave at the Eranos conferences, immediately followed by a long monograph. Developed in part through discussions with physicists, particularly Einstein and Wolfgang Pauli, the principle of synchronicity bore parallels to certain discoveries in relativity theory and quantum mechanics. Yet because of its psychological dimension, Jung's concept possessed a special relevance for the schism in the modern world view between the meaning-seeking human subject and the meaning-voided objective world. From the beginning, it has held a unique position in contemporary discussions, having simultaneously been described by physicists as posing a major challenge to the philosophical foundations of modern science, and by religious scholars as holding deep implications for the modern psychology of religion. With each decade, increasing numbers of books and heightened attention, both scholarly and popular, have been devoted to this phenomenon.[1]

Jung took particular interest in meaningful coincidences, in the beginning no doubt because their frequent occurrence had exerted a considerable impact on his own life experience. He also observed that in the therapeutic process of his patients such events repeatedly played a role, sometimes a powerful one, especially during periods of crisis and transformation. The dramatic coincidence of meaning between an inner state and a simultaneous external event seemed to bring forth in the individual a healing movement toward psychological wholeness, mediated by the integration of inner and outer realities. Such events often engendered a new sense of personal orientation within a world now seen as capable of embodying purposes and meanings beyond the mere projections of human subjectivity. The random chaos of life suddenly appeared to veil a deeper order. A subtle sign, as it were, had been given—an unexpected color in the pale void of meaning; an intimation, in William James's phrase, of "something more."

Accompanying the more profound occurrences of synchronicity was a dawning intuition, sometimes described as having the character of a spiritual awakening, that the individual was herself or himself not only embedded in a larger ground of meaning and purpose but also in some sense a focus of it. This discovery, often emerging after a sustained period of personal darkness or spiritual crisis, tended to bring with it an opening to new existential potentialities and responsibilities. Both because of this felt personal import and because of its startling metaphysical implications, such a synchronicity carried a certain numinosity, a dynamic spiritual charge with transformative consequences for the person experiencing it. In this respect, the phenomenon seemed to function, in religious terms, as something like an intervention of grace. Jung noted that such synchronicities were often kept secret or carefully guarded, to avoid the possibility of ridicule concerning an event possessing such significant personal meaning.

The classic example of a pivotal synchronistic experience is Jung's well-known description in 1951 of the "golden scarab" case:

> My example concerns a young woman patient who, in spite of efforts made on both sides, proved to be psychologically inaccessible. The difficulty lay in the fact that she always knew better about everything. Her excellent education had provided her with a weapon ideally suited to this purpose, namely a highly polished Cartesian rationalism with an impeccably "geometrical" idea of reality [as in Descartes's characteristic mode of logical demonstration]. After several fruitless attempts to sweeten her rationalism with a somewhat more human understanding, I had to confine myself to the hope that something unexpected and irrational would turn up, something that would burst the intellectual retort into which she had sealed herself. Well, I was sitting opposite her one day, with my back to the window, listening to her flow of rhetoric. She had had an impressive dream the night before, in which someone had given her a golden scarab—a costly piece of jewelry. While she was still telling me this dream, I heard something behind me gently tapping on the window. I turned round and saw that it was a fairly large flying insect that was knocking against the window-pane from outside in the obvious effort to get into the dark room. This seemed to me very strange. I opened the window immediately and caught the insect in the air as it flew in. It was a scarabaeid beetle, or common rose-chafer (*Cetonia aurata*), whose gold-green colour most nearly resembles that of a golden scarab. I handed the beetle to my patient with the words, "Here is your scarab." This experience punctured the desired hole in her rationalism and broke the ice of her intellectual resistance. The treatment could now be continued with satisfactory results. (Jung, 1951/1969, pp. 525-526)

The acute coincidence between the symbolically resonant image that the woman had experienced in her dream the night before and was just then recounting, and the spontaneous appearance at the window of an insect that was "the nearest analogy to a

golden scarab that one finds in our latitudes," effectively broke through the intellectual armoring that had been blocking her psychological development. Now "her natural being could burst through. . . and the process of transformation could at last begin to move." (Jung, 1952/1969, pp. 438-439).

In another such instance, recounted in Esther Harding's notebooks, a patient whose dreams were filled with sexual imagery kept attempting to interpret the dreams in non-sexual symbolic terms, despite Jung's efforts to persuade her of their more plausible straightforward meaning. On the day of her next appointment, two sparrows fluttered to the ground at the woman's feet and "performed the act" (Harding, 1977, pp. 182-83).

On rare occasions a synchronicity proves to have an extraordinary power, through its impact on an historically significant individual, so that it ultimately plays a pivotal role in the collective life of the larger culture. The famous coincidence that formed a turning point in the life of Petrarch took place at the climax of his ascent of Mont Ventoux in April 1336, an event that has long been regarded by scholars as representing the symbolic beginning of the Renaissance. For many years Petrarch had been sensing a growing impulse to ascend the mountain, to see the vast panorama from its peak, though doing such a thing was virtually unheard of in his time. Finally choosing the day, with his brother for a companion, he made the long ascent, marked by intense physical exertion and inward reflection. When he at last attained the summit, with clouds below his feet and winds in his face, Petrarch found himself overwhelmed by the great sweep of the world that now opened out to him—snow-capped mountains and the sea in the distance, rivers and valleys below, the wide expanse of skies in every direction. James Hillman recounts the event:

> At the top of the mountain, with the exhilarating view of French Provence, the Alps, and the Mediterranean spread before him, he had opened his tiny pocket copy of Augustine's *Confessions*. Turning at random to book X, 8, he read: "And

> men go abroad to admire the heights of mountains, the mighty billows of the sea, the broad tide of rivers, the compass of the ocean, and the circuits of the stars, and pass themselves by. . . ."
>
> Petrarch was stunned at the coincidence between Augustine's words and the time and place they were read. His emotion both announced the revelation of his personal vocation and heralded the new attitude of the Renaissance. . . . Petrarch draws this crucial conclusion from the Mont Ventoux event: "Nothing is admirable but the soul" (*nihil praeter animum esse mirabile*). (Hillman, 1975, pp. 195-196)

Petrarch was so moved by the coincidental force of the passage that he remained silent for the entire descent down the mountain. He at once recognized the coincidence as part of a larger pattern of such transformative moments which had happened to others in the history of spiritual conversions: "I could not believe that it was by a mere accident that I happened upon them. What I had there read I believed to be addressed to me and to no other, remembering that St. Augustine had once suspected the same thing in his own case" (Petrarch, 1336/1898, p. 317). For indeed Augustine had undergone a nearly identical experience at his own momentous spiritual turning point: In the garden of Milan in 386, in a frenzy of spiritual crisis, he heard a child's voice from a nearby house mysteriously repeating the words "Tolle, lege" ("Pick up and read"). Uncertain of their significance, he finally opened at random a copy of St. Paul's epistles and there read words that spoke with uncanny precision to the nature of his lifelong conflict and its resolution, immediately after reading which "the light of certainty flooded my heart and all dark shadows of doubt fled away" (*Confessions*, VIII, 29).

Here too, Augustine's emotion in the garden of Milan both announced the revelation of his personal vocation and heralded the new attitude of the Christian epoch being born. A thousand years later, it would be Augustine's own words randomly

encountered that provided a strikingly similar catalyzing force for Petrarch on Mont Ventoux. This time the synchronistic epiphany would unfold in a new direction and with different consequences—one revelation in the garden, pointing to Christianity and the Middle Ages, the other on the mountain, pointing to the Renaissance and modernity.

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Jung believed that synchronicities generally seemed to serve the same role as dreams, psychological symptoms, and other manifestations of the unconscious, namely, to compensate the conscious attitude and move the psyche from a problematic one-sidedness toward greater wholeness and individuation. Not only did the unexpectedly externalized pattern of meaning seem to represent more than mere chance coincidence, it also appeared to serve a definite purpose, impelling the psyche toward a more complete psychological and spiritual realization of the individual personality. This self-realization was achieved through a deeper integration of conscious and unconscious, which ultimately required of the individual a discerning surrender of the usual conscious attitude of knowing superiority. In this view, the perceptive interpretation of synchronistic phenomena, as with all expressions of the unconscious, rather than inflating the egocentric importance of the individual in a narcissistic manner, could correct precisely these tendencies and open the psyche to a larger vision.

An instructive example of this self-critical, compensatory approach toward synchronicity in Jung's own life was recounted by Henry Fierz, describing a meeting with Jung in the 1950s. Fierz had come to discuss Jung's assessment concerning the possible publication of a manuscript by a scientist who had recently died. At the appointed hour of five o'clock, Fierz arrived for the meeting and the discussion began:

> Jung had read the book and he thought that it should not be published, but I disagreed and was for publication. Our discussion finally got rather sharp, and Jung looked at his wristwatch, obviously thinking that he had spent enough time on the matter and that he could send me home. Looking at his watch he said: "When did you come?" I: "At five, as agreed." Jung: "But that's queer. My watch came back from the watchmaker this morning after a complete revision, and now I have 5:05. But you must have been here much longer. What time do you have?" I: "It's 5:35." Whereon Jung said: "So you have the right time, and I the wrong one. Let us discuss the thing again." This time I could convince Jung that the book should be published. (Fierz, 1982, p. 21)

Here the synchronistic event is of interest not because of its intrinsic coincidental force but because of the meaning Jung drew from it, essentially using it as a basis for challenging and redirecting his own conscious attitude. The unexpected stopping and resulting error of the watch was immediately recognized by Jung as paralleling—and as thereby bringing to his attention—what he now suspected might be a comparable stoppage and error in his own thinking about the matter at hand. He was alert to the fact that the two events, one inner and the other outer, would have taken place at virtually the same moment. Rather than automatically assuming that there could be no significant connection between the state of his watch and the state of his thinking, which would certainly be the usual assumption, his immediate intuition was of a larger field of meaning underlying and patterning all that happened in the room at the time. In that field, events having no apparent causal connection in the conventional sense could be recognized as participating in a more subtly ordered whole, a larger pattern of meaning that was discernible to the prepared mind—even if that meaning challenged his conscious attitude.

For Jung, the symbolic connection between the two events was as transparently intelligible as if he were reading a newspaper, and he acted accordingly. What made the correlation between the inner and outer events intelligible was the presence of two factors: first, a developed capacity for thinking and perceiving symbolically, a cultivated sensitivity to metaphoric and analogical patterns that connect and thereby illuminate diverse phenomena; and second, an epistemological openness to the possibility that such meaning can be carried by the outer world as well as the inner, by all of nature and one's surrounding environment and not just by the human psyche.

Yet the recognition of synchronicities involves subtle judgments made in circumstances usually pervaded by ambiguity and open to multiple interpretations. The suggestive patterning and often delicate precision of detail in such coincidences notoriously escapes the net of objectivistic assessments and experimental tests. Synchronicities seem to constitute a lived reality the experience of which depends deeply on the sensitive perception of context and nuance. For synchronicities have a shadow side, as in the exaggeration of the trivial to discover a self-inflating meaning. Similarly, the paranoid's morbidly narrow interpretation of coincidences in terms of other people's malign plots cunningly directed at the self, or psychotic delusions of self-reference. Such interpretations are, as Jung once suggested, pre-Copernican, egocentric. They center the world of meaning naively on the old narrow self, inflating the separate ego, or persecuting it, and thereby evade the more complex and painful emergence of the individuated self that is in dialogue with the whole.

Such an emergence requires attending to the claims and communications of the larger cosmos of the unconscious. A painstaking cultivation of self-knowledge must be undertaken to avoid succumbing to mere projection. Discriminating such events requires a self-critical awareness of unconscious tendencies towards narcissistic distortion, by which random or peripheral events are continually transformed into signs of an egocentric universe. No less crucial is the development and balanced interplay of

multiple faculties of cognition—empirical, rational, emotional, relational, intuitive, symbolic. A capacity for acute yet balanced discernment has to be forged, founded not only on an alertness to meaningful pattern but also on a disciplined mindfulness of the larger whole within which the individual self seeks orientation.

Today, a half century after Jung's original formulation of the principle of synchronicity, with both the concept and the phenomenon now so widely recognized, one can discern a typical sequence and progression in the nature of synchronistic events and responses. The first stage is usually marked by the experience of various ambiguously suggestive coincidences and patternings which may seem somewhat remarkable, curious, or even vaguely uncanny, but can still be regarded as perhaps merely fortuitous or subjective, and are therefore more or less ignored and forgotten. Eventually, there may occur one or more especially powerful synchronicities, unambiguous in their coincidental force and precision of patterning, which have a revelatory impact on the individual and mark a decisive threshold in his or her psychological and spiritual development. Not infrequently, synchronicities of this category occur in association with births, deaths, crises, and other major turning points in life. On occasion, there may take place a sudden convergence of many such synchronicities, intricately interconnected, occurring in close proximity or in rapid succession, and having the effect of an overpowering epiphany of new meaning and purpose in the life of the individual.

Over time, however, after this threshold has been crossed, a new attitude toward synchronicities often emerges as their frequency and character come to seem part of life's pervasive intelligence and artistry—less a paradigm-shifting revelation of a new order of reality and more a continuing source of meaning and orientation with which to participate in life with greater sensitivity and intelligence. A disciplined alertness to significant pattern in the outer world as well as inner begins to develop as an essential aspect of living a more conscious life. The occurrence of synchronicities is seen as permitting a continuing dialogue with the unconscious and the larger whole of life, while also calling

forth an aesthetic and spiritual appreciation of life's powers of symbolically resonant complex patterning.

Although Jung himself did not explicitly describe this later stage in his principal monograph on synchronicity, it is evident from many scattered passages in his writings as well as from the recollections and memoirs of others that he both lived his life and conducted his clinical practice in a manner that involved a constant attention to potentially meaningful synchronistic events which would then shape his understanding and actions. Jung saw nature and one's surrounding environment as a living matrix of potential synchronistic meaning that could illuminate the human sphere. He attended to sudden or unusual movements or appearances of animals, flocks of birds, the wind, storms, the suddenly louder lapping of the lake outside the window of his consulting room, and similar phenomena as possessing possible symbolic relevance for the parallel unfolding of interior psychological realities. For the woman who had the dream of the golden scarab, the next day's synchronistic visitation through the window was dramatically transformative, whereas the same event for Jung represented a striking but not uncharacteristic example of the meaningful patterning of inner and outer events to which he had long learned to be attentive.

In sharp contrast to the modern world view, Jung ceased to regard the outer world as merely a neutral background against which the human psyche pursued its isolated intrasubjective quest for meaning and purpose. Rather, all events, inner and outer, whether emanating from the human unconscious or from the larger matrix of the world, were recognized as sources of potential psychological and spiritual significance. From this perspective, not only the individual psyche, and not only humanity's collective unconscious, but all of nature supported and moved the human psyche towards a larger consciousness of purpose and meaning.[2] Each moment in time possessed a certain tangible character or quality which pervaded the various events taking place at that moment.

> It seems, indeed, as though time, far from being an abstraction, is a concrete continuum which contains qualities or fundamentals which can manifest themselves in relative simultaneousness in different places and in a parallelism which cannot be explained, as in cases of simultaneous appearance of identical thoughts, symbols, or psychic conditions. . . . Whatever is born or done at this particular moment of time has the quality of this moment of time."[3] (Jung, 1930/1966, p. 56)

Central to Jung's understanding of such phenomena was his observation that the underlying meaning or formal factor that linked the synchronistic inner and outer events —the formal cause, in Aristotelian terms—was archetypal in nature. Building on insights from Freud, and drawing from the classical Platonic philosophical vocabulary as well as from esoteric traditions, Jung had long regarded and defined the archetypes as the fundamental governing principles of the human psyche. On the basis of his own analyses as well as that of others, not only of a diverse range of clinical phenomena but also of the art, myths, and religions of many eras and cultures, Jung had come to view archetypes as innate symbolic forms and psychological dispositions that unconsciously structure and impel human behavior and experience at both the personal and collective levels. They are "self-portraits" of the instincts and render human experience meaningful according to certain timeless universal patterns or forms—Light and Dark, Birth and Death, Rebirth, the Hero, the Great Mother, the Child, the Trickster, the Shadow, Good and Evil, Eros and Logos, Feminine and Masculine, as well as more specifically personified and culturally inflected forms such as Aphrodite, Oedipus, Dionysus, Prometheus, Saturn, Shakti, Kali, Shiva, Wotan, Isis, and Sophia. Another major category of the archetypes comprised the mathematical principles of number and geometric form, as in the Pythagorean-Platonic tradition, as well as traditional sacred forms such as the mandala, the circle, and the cross.

All these principles were seen as possessing a primordial, mythic, numinous character grounded in the deepest layers of the psyche, expressing a collective unconscious shared by all human beings.

During most of his career, Jung worked and wrote within the modern Cartesian-Kantian philosophical framework of a basic division between the human subject and the objective world, and thus tended to restrict archetypes to the interior world of the human psyche. His view of archetypes in the early and middle periods of his career was generally equivalent to Kant's notion of a priori forms and categories: They were inherited psychological structures or dispositions that preceded and shaped the character of human experience but could not be said to transcend the human psyche. In his later work, however, and most explicitly in the context of his analysis of synchronicities, Jung moved towards a conception of archetypes as autonomous patterns of meaning that inform both psyche and matter, providing a bridge between inner and outer: "Synchronicity postulates a meaning which is a priori in relation to human consciousness and apparently exists outside man" (Jung, 1952/1969, p. 501-502). Jung's later work thus intimated the ancient understanding of an ensouled world, of an *anima mundi* in which the human psyche participates and with which it shares the same ordering principles of meaning. Jung noted parallels between synchronistic phenomena and the Chinese understanding of the Tao, the ancient Greek conception of the cosmic sympathy of all things, the Hermetic doctrine of microcosm and macrocosm, the medieval and Renaissance theory of correspondences, and the medieval concept of the preexistent ultimate unity of all existence, the *unus mundus* (the unitary world).[4]

In each case of synchronicity, Jung discerned an underlying archetypal coherence that linked the otherwise unconnected events, informed the larger field of meaning, and gave to the time of the synchronicity's occurrence a specific fundamental quality. In the first case cited above, for example, the symbolically charged image of the golden scarab expressed the archetypal principle of rebirth and renewal, visible in the Egyptian myth of

the Sun-god who in the netherworld during the night sea journey changes himself into a scarab, then mounts the barge to rise again reborn into the morning sky at dawn. In Egyptian religion, the mythic journey of the Sun mediated the spiritual journey of the soul, providing the individual with a transformative symbolic pattern of descent and renewal, death and rebirth.

The case of the stopped watch, by contrast, was pervasively informed by the complex archetype of Saturn-Kronos, the *senex* principle, a central symbol and figure in the Western cultural tradition from the ancient Greek and Hellenistic era through the Middle Ages and Renaissance.[5] In this synchronicity, the Saturn archetype was visible not only in all the concrete details involving time, but also in the intricately interrelated themes of stoppage and being stuck (in both mind and watch), of opposition and rejection, error, fault, correction, judgment and self-judgment, the superego. Each element and stage of the event suggested another dimension of the Saturn principle's multivalent spectrum of meanings: the precise meeting time, the task at hand, the problem to be solved, the pronouncement of judgments, the strife of disagreement, the attempt to bring an end to the task, the careful checking and comparing of the time, the act of negation and criticism first directed outward towards the other and then inward towards the self, the self-correction followed by repetition, engaging the problem again and trying this time to get it right. Finally, the overarching themes, deciding the fate of the manuscript, judging the legacy of the deceased, death as the stopping of time: all characteristic expressions of Saturn and the senex discernible within the hour of the meeting.

Because synchronicities seemed to reflect and embody the same archetypal forms that Jung and many others had come to see as basic underlying principles of the human psyche, the occurrence and recognition of such meaningful coincidences gave a crucial new dimension to the archetypal perspective. The empirical conformity between the event occurring in the external world and the archetypal quality of the internal state of

consciousness suggested that the active archetype could not be localized as an exclusively subjective intrapsychic reality. Rather, both psyche and world, inner and outer, were informed by the archetypal pattern and thereby united by the correlation. It was specifically the experiential potency of this spontaneous archetypal resonance that seemed to act as a healing solvent on the hardened polarities—between self and world, subject and object, conscious and unconscious—of the person experiencing the synchronicity.

> The collective unconscious surrounds us on all sides. . . . It is more like an atmosphere in which we live than something that is found *in* us. . . . Also, it does not by any means behave merely psychologically; in the cases of so-called synchronicity it proves to be a universal substrate present in the environment rather than a psychological premise. Wherever we come into contact with an archetype we enter into relationship with transconscious, metapsychic factors. (Jung, 1946/1973, p. 433)

This development in Jung's thought thus constituted a major shift in his understanding of the religious situation confronting the modern psyche. From early in his career, Jung saw both the psychological and the spiritual path of the modern self as requiring a sustained direct encounter with the archetypal unconscious. Here lay the possibility not only of deeper psychological self-awareness but also of spiritual transformation, permitting an engagement with those numinous realities that could profoundly heal the psyche and provide it with an orienting purpose and transcendent meaning. Throughout most of his writings, this engagement was understood as taking place within what Jung essentially regarded as the sacred circle of the human psyche. Eventually, however, Jung's many years of studying synchronicities moved him to recognize this engagement as something that is enacted within the larger sacred circle of

nature as a whole. In this perspective, not just the interior depths of the human psyche but the interior depths of nature itself supported the unfolding of human spirituality and each person's struggle towards individuation.[6]

The recognition of synchronicities' potential metaphysical implications not only suggested a transformation in the psychology of religion, it represented a critical step towards bridging the schism between religion and science in the modern era, so long embodied in the seemingly unbridgeable chasm between psyche and world. As the physicist Victor Mansfield has written, speaking for many: "I have encountered too many synchronistic experiences, both in my life and that of others, to ignore them. Yet these surprisingly common experiences pose tremendous psychological and philosophical challenges for our world view. They are especially troubling experiences for me as a physicist trained within the culture of scientific materialism" (Mansfield, 1995, p. 1). With these implications in mind, both philosophical and psychological, Jung's student and close associate Marie-Louise von Franz stated in an interview late in her life that "the work which has now to be done is to work out the concept of synchronicity. I don't know the people who will continue it. They must exist, but I don't know where they are" (von Franz, 1990/1995, p. 22).

Despite synchronicities' enigmatic and often readily dismissed character, it was with such humble clues that Jung began to open up the possibility of a fundamental redefinition of both the modern religious situation and the scientific world picture, beyond the closed universe of the spiritually aspiring psyche encompassed by a disenchanted world. The existence of synchronicities implied that the world could no longer be seen as a definitively meaningless void. The dynamic relationship between different dimensions of being—both between the human self and the encompassing world, and between consciousness and the unconscious—had to be reconceived. It appears to have been Jung's growing recognition of the magnitude of these implications for the modern world view that impelled him to labor so strenuously, even courageously,

to bring critical awareness of the phenomenon of synchronicity into the intellectual discourse of the twentieth century.[7]

The psychological and spiritual quest of the modern self now extended beyond an exclusively subjective, intrapsychic horizon, for that quest took place within the matrix of a world that evidently possessed an intrinsic capacity for expressing and supporting meaning and purpose. Subtly and tenuously, but unmistakably, the larger context within which the modern psyche pursued its search for wholeness had begun to shift.

Of course it is only in the modern era that synchronicity becomes an issue, something puzzling, disturbing, or amazing. For most of human history, there was no need to single out and name a particular category of anomalous events to describe what we call synchronicities. For primal tribal and contemporary indigenous societies, such events were and are simply an expression of the ensouled, animate field of all reality, the *anima mundi*. In archaic civilizations, what we call synchronicities represented signs and omens from the gods in a cosmos in which above and below, the celestial and terrestrial, were experienced as embodying a deeper meaningful unity. And in societies informed by one of the Axial religions such as Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, or one of the Axial philosophical traditions like Platonism or Taoism, synchronicities would simply be seen as an expression of Providence, of God's will, of the Tao, of the Universal Mind's ordering of reality.

For the modern mind, however, synchronicities constitute an intrinsically controversial phenomenon, as they seem to undermine the global assumption that we live in a randomly evolving universe without intrinsic meaning or purpose. It is only in the disenchanted modern world view, where the buffered rational subject regards all meaning and purpose in the cosmos as originating in the human being, that meaningful coincidences become something to grapple with or dismiss, depending on the degree of epistemic armoring. It is thus perhaps for the buffered modern sensibility that synchronicities can carry the most profound metaphysical impact, be the most radically

transformational, precisely because they point towards a revisioning of not only our overarching cosmology but our underlying identity.

As a distinguished scholar and professor of religious studies once confided to me, "I have stopped believing in most things, but I do believe in synchronicity." So it is that in our postmodern age, marked by a disorienting radical pluralism of perspectives and a pervasive indeterminacy about the ultimate nature of reality, we find ourselves facing synchronistic phenomena with new eyes. The postmodern is itself a crucible of transformation. Our civilization has clearly reached a threshold in human history, and indeed synchronicities seem to occur in individual lives with greater frequency and intensity during major thresholds of human life, births, deaths, crises, sudden openings. Perhaps what is true for individuals is true as well for a civilization.

It is within this newly expansive, open-ended, and metaphysically suggestive context that the scholars, scientists, and researchers who have contributed to the present volume share with us representative synchronicities and explore their larger implications. In so doing, they seek to engage a mystery that may hold considerable significance for humanity's quest to understand itself and its relationship to a world that holds more things than are dreamt of in our conventional modern philosophies.

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An earlier version of this essay appeared in Richard Tarnas, *Cosmos and Psyche: Intimations of a New World View* (New York: Viking, 2006), 50-60, 494-500.

Notes

1. The primary texts by Jung are the 1951 Eranos conference lecture "On Synchronicity" and the longer 1952 monograph *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, both in *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, ed. H. Read, M. Fordham, G. Adler, W. McGuire, Bollingen Series XX (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953-79), vol. 8. While invaluable and seminal, however, these works by Jung are marked by many conceptual incoherencies and confusions, perhaps inevitable for the first presentation of a

new principle of understanding so radically challenging of existing assumptions. Moreover, as discussed in note 5 below, Jung's lecture and monograph focused on categories of phenomena such as paranormal events and experimental data from physics which obscured the human, psychologically transformative dimension of synchronistic phenomena, though the latter was in fact far more central to Jung's own experience and clinical observations.

Other relevant texts by Jung can be found in *Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal,* edited and with an introduction by Roderick Main (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). For synchronicity's implications for the psychology of religion, see Robert Aziz, *C. G. Jung's Psychology of Religion and Synchronicity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990): "The synchronicity concept is, arguably, the single theory with the most far-reaching implications for Jung's psychology as a whole, particularly for his psychology of religion" (p. 1). For physics and the scientific world view, see Victor Mansfield, *Synchronicity, Science, and Soul-Making* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995). Other significant writings on synchronicity include books or essays by Arthur Koestler, Antony Flew, Michael Fordham, Ira Progoff, Marie-Louise von Franz, Aniela Jaffé, Allan Combs, Mark Holland, Michael Conforti, Jean Shinoda Bolen, David Peat, Sean Kelly, and Ray Grasse.

2. Robert Aziz comments: "For Jung, the call to individuate arises from the deepest sources of life and is supported inwardly and outwardly by the compensatory activities of nature. It is a call, therefore, that is not to be taken lightly. Both inwardly and outwardly nature strives unceasingly to bring about the realization, in the life of the individual, of a unique pattern of meaning. . . . [A]s evidenced by his own writings on synchronicity and, perhaps more importantly, by the way he lived his own life, the individuation process extends beyond the psychological realm and assumes the character of a drama that takes the whole of nature for its stage. What we normally regard as the discontinuous inner and outer worlds become enclosed within the same circle of wholeness. Inwardly and outwardly nature works, through the compensatory patterning of events, to further the movement of the individual toward wholeness. . . . Now one is challenged to achieve a full understanding of the meaning that conjoins one, not only to the unconscious, but to nature in its entirety. This is the new spiritual challenge of individuation. It is the task of experiencing within the sacred circle of nature as a whole the meaning of an individual existence" (*C. G. Jung's Psychology of Religion and Synchronicity*, pp. 165-166).

Jung's attitude closely resembles the characteristic primal and shamanic alertness to nature's symbolically significant patterning, as well as ancient Chinese Taoist philosophy, in which the dominant principles are pattern, order, symbolic correlations, the unity of human and cosmos, and the interdependence of all things. Cf. Richard Wilhelm, *Secret of*

the Golden Flower: “Chinese philosophy is built on the premise that the cosmos and man, in the last analysis, obey the same law; that man is a microcosm and is not separated from the macrocosm by any fixed barriers. The very same laws rule for the one as for the other, and from the one a way leads into the other. The psyche and the cosmos are to each other like the inner world and the outer world. Therefore man participates by nature in all cosmic events, and is inwardly as well as outwardly interwoven with them. (p.11, quoted in Aziz, op. cit., p. 135.) Cf. also Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China:* “The key-word in Chinese thought is *Order* and above all *Pattern*. . . . The symbolic correlations or correspondences all formed part of one colossal pattern. Things behaved in particular ways not necessarily because of prior actions or impulsions of other things, but because their position in the ever-moving cyclical universe was such that they were endowed with intrinsic natures which made that behaviour inevitable for them. . . . They were thus parts in existential dependence upon the whole world-organism” (vol. 2, p. 281, quoted in Aziz, op. cit., pp. 135-36).

3. This formulation of synchronicity in terms of *qualitative time*, from 1930, reflects Jung’s early astrological research, beginning in 1911, and his experiments throughout the 1920s with the I Ching: “Jung's first theorizing about synchronicity was done with reference to astrology and the *I Ching* and focused on the fact that things arising in a particular moment of time all share the characteristics of that moment. It appears to have been this understanding of the role of time, an understanding in which simultaneity does indeed play an essential part, which led Jung to coin the term ‘synchronicity,’ with its emphasis on the element of time (Gk. *syn* = together, *chronos* = time)” (R. Main, *Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal*, p. 23).

In later years, Jung increasingly focused on synchronicity’s parallels with twentieth-century physics, influenced first by his conversations about relativity with Einstein (a dinner guest on several occasions in the 1909-12 period), and then several decades later through his discussions about quantum mechanics with his patient and friend Wolfgang Pauli. Reflecting the parallels with both physics and the parapsychological experiments of J. B. Rhine at Duke University that had started in the 1930s, Jung began to broaden the concept of synchronicity to include many phenomena—various paranormal phenomena such as precognition and telepathy, the discontinuities of modern physics, the properties of natural numbers—for which simultaneity, qualitative time, and meaning were not always relevant factors. Instead, he began to stress “the psychic relativization of time and space” and “general acausal orderedness.” However, as many commentators have noted (Koestler, Aziz, Mansfield, Main), some of these additions stretched the parameters of the concept to include phenomena for which the original term “synchronicity” was now problematic and less obviously appropriate.

In his efforts to include the various phenomena from parapsychology and physics, Jung was essentially combining into one overarching concept several separate classes of events which in many cases seemed to confuse and overlook their fundamental differences. For example, an especially important difference was concealed by Jung's conflation of two basic categories in his discussions, the meaningful coincidence of simultaneous events and the experience of clairvoyant cognition. The first category could be said to represent the classic form of synchronicity, illustrated by the paradigm case of the golden scarab, in which the outer world unexpectedly brought forth a concrete external event that closely paralleled in meaning an inner psychological state. The second category was centered on cases in which an individual experienced internally—by intuition, dream, or vision—some external event in a future time or at a distant location.

But it is only in the first category—the one upon which Jung placed far greater emphasis—that the crucial possibility of a meaning-embedded world presents itself, with all the metaphysical implications associated with the concept of synchronicity. By contrast, in cases involving paranormal experiences like clairvoyance, telepathy, and precognition, the individual in question can simply be seen as exercising some not yet understood perceptual or cognitive faculty, with no implications for the outer world's capacity to embody meaning in a manner that transcends the human psyche. Such cases would thus only provide evidence pointing to the need for a revised understanding of human abilities and the parameters of human consciousness. Other cases such as those involved in the parapsychological experiments and in quantum physics present comparable differences, as well as additional ones that eliminate the presence of meaning altogether as a central factor.

It seems likely that the scientific status of physics and the statistical-experimental nature of the parapsychological research played a significant role in moving Jung in the above direction, encouraging him to modify the terms of his original concept and add further categories to it, in his hope to elevate the viability of his challenging hypothesis within the science-dominated intellectual ethos of the mid-twentieth century (see, for example, Ira Progoff, *Jung, Synchronicity, and Human Destiny* [New York: Dell, 1973], p. 143; Aziz, op. cit., p. 2; Mansfield, op. cit., pp. 33-34; and Main, op. cit., pp. 15-17, 23-27.) This also perhaps explains Jung's 1954 letter to André Barbault where he contrasted synchronicity with the qualitative time hypothesis he had earlier proposed, suggesting now that the idea of synchronicity replaced rather than manifested the principle of qualitative time (C. G. Jung, *Letters 2: 1951-1961*, ed. G. Adler, A. Jaffé, trans. R. F. C. Hull [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976], p. 176). Jung here described the latter concept as tautological because "time in itself consists of nothing," and is only "qualified" or defined by events.

This apparent change in Jung's position probably reflected not only his larger shift in emphasis towards a more broadly inclusive and science-oriented formulation of the synchronicity principle, but also his desire to locate the essence of synchronistic phenomena in the parallel patterning of the phenomena themselves rather than in some a priori characteristics of time apart from the phenomena. Thus, contrary to some commentaries on this topic, Jung's later objection was not to the idea of time having a de facto qualitative dimension, but rather to the idea that time *itself* was the a priori determining factor of the observed qualities. Instead, Jung clearly viewed the determining factor, in the sense of what "arranged" the qualitative patterning within the flux of events, to be not time per se, but rather the constellated archetype. In Aristotelian terms, the archetype is the *formal cause* of the synchronicity. Time is thus regarded as possessing a qualitative dimension, but the quality that will be manifest at any given time is indeterminate and potential until a specific archetype is constellated.

In retrospect, by the time Jung wrote his principal analysis on synchronicity in the early 1950s, his increasing focus on parapsychology and physics had, in a sense, partly colonized the original concept, and thus obscured the reality of how he had integrated his experience of meaningful coincidences into his life and clinical practice. Jung's original and most familiar examples of synchronicities emerged in psychological, therapeutic, religious, divinatory, and esoteric contexts (as compared with experimentally tested telepathy, precognition, clairvoyance, psychokinesis, out-of-body and near-death experiences and other paranormal phenomena, as well as the discontinuities of physics, for all of which alternative explanations have been developed that are arguably more apt than synchronicity). For the more characteristic original categories of meaningful coincidences, such as the golden scarab and stopped watch examples cited in the text, the idea of qualitative time (i.e., time as possessing a qualitative dimension), along with the elements of simultaneity and meaning, clearly remains relevant as part of a larger theoretical conception in which the archetypal meaning informing and connecting the synchronistic events serves as a fundamental explanatory principle.

Many aspects of relativity and quantum mechanics are indeed relevant to synchronistic phenomena—a relativized space-time continuum, the collapse of strict linear causality and a fully independent objective world, complementarity, probabilistic indeterminacy, nonlocality, the interconnected and interdependent nature of reality. Other essential elements of synchronicities, however, have no parallels in physics—above all, the fundamental presence of meaning as the structuring factor, and the apparent teleological or purposive aspect of such events.

In traditional philosophical terms, these two basic elements of synchronicities—meaning and purpose—represent straightforward expressions of what Aristotle called *formal* and *final* causes, respectively. Compared with the simpler (or simplistic) modern

view of causality, which is entirely linear-mechanistic in nature, Aristotle's more nuanced and capacious formulation defined "cause" as that which is a necessary, though not in itself sufficient, condition for the existence of something. Such conditions included formal and final (teleological) factors, as well as the material and efficient factors stressed by mainstream modern science. When Jung originally employed the term "acausality" and emphasized that synchronicities were fundamentally acausal in nature, he provided a helpful and probably necessary counterpoint to the narrow conventional scientific understanding of linear-mechanistic causality that was then (the first half of the twentieth century) nearly ubiquitous. But the clear applicability of Aristotle's richer classical formulation of causality for understanding synchronicities within a Jungian archetypal and teleological perspective places in question the continued usefulness or appropriateness of the term "acausality" in this context.

4. Marie-Louise von Franz: "The most essential and certainly the most impressive thing about synchronistic occurrences, the thing which really constitutes their numinosity, is the fact that in them the duality of soul and matter seems to be eliminated. They are therefore an *empirical* indication of the ultimate unity of all existence, which Jung, using the terminology of medieval natural philosophy, called the *unus mundus.* In medieval philosophy this concept designates the potential preexistent model of creation in the mind of God in accordance with which God later produced the creation. It is, according to John Scotus Erigena, 'God's vital or seminal power which changes from a Nothing, which is beyond all existence and non-existence, into countless forms.'" M.-L. von Franz, *C. G. Jung: His Myth in Our Times* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1998), p. 247.

5. *Senex*, from the Latin: old man, elder, age, as in senescence, senator, senility. Reflecting the complex and ambiguous constellation of qualities, positive and problematic, characteristic of old age, from narrowness, rigidity, and pessimism, and the concern with order, control, and death, to gravitas, experience, and wisdom, the *senex* is closely associated with the Saturn archetype. The senex is the polar complement to the *puer*, or *puer eternus* (eternal child), with which it is mutually implicated. For a richly perceptive exploration of the senex, see two early papers by James Hillman, "On Senex Consciousness," *Spring 1970: An Annual of Archetypal Psychology and Jungian Thought* (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1970), pp. 146-165; and his 1967 Eranos paper, "Senex and Puer: An Aspect of the Historical and Psychological Present," in J. Hillman (ed.), *Puer Papers* (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1991), pp. 3-53.

6. This understanding of Jung's evolution is at the center of Aziz's analysis: "In 1937 when Jung exhorted his Yale audience to move beyond the confines of established

religion and accept the challenge of ‘immediate religious experience,’ what Jung had in mind was for them to enter consciously into a direct encounter with the unconscious. For those for whom the rituals of conventional religion had lost their efficacy, what Jung offered as an alternative was an intrapsychic ritual which, properly followed, would lead to the emergence of a highly personalized spiritual wholeness. What Jung had in mind in 1937, then, was a ritual to be enacted within the sacred circle of the psyche. . . . [H]owever, this earlier Jungian notion of religious ritual has been dramatically transformed by the synchronicity concept, indeed, so much so that we can now say that Jung’s notion of ‘immediate religious experience’ may be taken to refer not simply to an intrapsychic encounter, but to a direct encounter with nature in its entirety. The Jungian ritual, to put it simply, is now a ritual which is to be enacted within the sacred circle of nature as a whole. . . . [F]or Jung the ‘holy’ is encountered as much outwardly, in the synchronistic patterning of events, as it is inwardly. Accordingly, the individual in search of ‘immediate religious experience’ is now required to attend to the compensatory images with which nature presents one outwardly with the same religious seriousness with which one attends to the ‘images of wholeness offered by the unconscious.’ . . . The religious need, as Jung puts it, longs for wholeness, and here the wholeness to which one must open oneself is a wholeness that is not only transmitted intrapsychically, but transmitted to the individual through the synchronistic patterning of events in one’s environment (Aziz, op. cit., pp. 167-168).

7. Cf. R. Main, “Religion, Science, and Synchronicity,” *Harvest: Journal for Jungian Studies* 46, no. 2 (2000), pp. 89-107. “In a 1955 letter to R. F. C. Hull, Jung reported: ‘The latest comment about "Synchronicity" is that it cannot be accepted because it shakes the security of our scientific foundations, as if this were not exactly the goal I am aiming at. . . .’ On the same day he wrote to Michael Fordham of ‘the impact of synchronicity upon the fanatical one-sidedness of scientific philosophy.’ Specifically, Jung thought that his work on synchronicity demonstrated the need to expand the current conception of science in order to include, in addition to the classical concepts of time, space, and causality, a principle of acausal connection through meaning. This, he concluded, would introduce the psychic factor of meaning into our scientific picture of the world, help get rid of ‘the incommensurability between the observed and the observer’, and make possible a ‘whole judgement’—that is, a judgement that takes into consideration psychological as well as physical factors. Because for Jung the psychological mediates between the physical and the spiritual, to link the physical and psychological in this way entails setting up a potential bridge between the physical and the spiritual, hence between science and religion. These bold conclusions and implications from Jung’s work on synchronicity resonate with many subsequent attempts to develop more holistic models

of science—some directly exploring Jung's suggestions, for instance those of David Peat and Victor Mansfield, others working independently but aware of Jung's contribution and possibly influenced or inspired by it, for instance those of David Bohm and Rupert Sheldrake."

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