

SYNCHRONICITY various authors

Synchronicity is the experience of two or more events that are apparently causally unrelated occurring together in a meaningful manner. To count as synchronicity, the events should be unlikely to occur together by chance.

The concept does not question, or compete with, the notion of causality. Instead, it maintains that just as events may be grouped by cause, they may also be grouped by their meaning. Since meaning is a complex mental construction, subject to conscious and subconscious influence, not every correlation in the grouping of events by meaning needs to have an explanation in terms of cause and effect.

Description

picture of the concept of synchronicity by CG Jung
The idea of synchronicity is that the conceptual relationship of minds, defined as the relationship between ideas, is intricately structured in its own logical way and gives rise to relationships that are not causal in nature. These relationships can manifest themselves as simultaneous occurrences that are meaningfully related.

Synchronistic events reveal an underlying pattern, a conceptual framework that encompasses, but is larger than, any of the systems that display the synchronicity. The suggestion of a larger framework is essential to satisfy the definition of synchronicity as originally developed by Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung.

Jung coined the word to describe what he called "temporally coincident occurrences of acausal events." Jung variously described synchronicity as an "acausal connecting principle", "meaningful coincidence" and "acausal parallelism". Jung introduced the concept as early as the 1920s but only gave a full statement of it in 1951 in an Eranos lecture and in 1952, published a paper, Synchronicity — An Acausal Connecting Principle, in a volume with a related study by the physicist (and Nobel laureate) Wolfgang Pauli.

It was a principle that Jung felt gave conclusive evidence for his concepts of archetypes and the collective unconscious, in that it was descriptive of a governing dynamic that underlies the whole of human experience and history—social, emotional, psychological, and spiritual. Concurrent events that first appear to be coincidental but later turn out to be causally related are termed incoincident.

Jung believed that many experiences that are coincidences due to chance in terms of causality suggested the manifestation of parallel events or circumstances in terms of meaning, reflecting this governing dynamic.

One of Jung's favourite quotes on synchronicity was from *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll, in which the White Queen says to Alice: "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards".

Examples

The French writer Émile Deschamps claims in his memoirs that in 1805, he was treated to some plum pudding by a stranger named Monsieur de Fontgibu. Ten years later, the writer encountered plum pudding on the menu of a Paris restaurant and wanted to order some, but the waiter told him that the last dish had already been served to another customer, who turned out to be de Fontgibu. Many years later, in 1832, Deschamps was at a dinner and once again ordered plum pudding. He recalled the earlier incident and told his friends that only de Fontgibu was missing to make the setting complete—and in the same instant, the now senile de Fontgibu entered the room.

In his book *Synchronicity* (1952), Jung tells the following story as an example of a synchronistic event: "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 the 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 one finds in our latitudes, a scarabaeid beetle, the common rose-chafer (*Cetonia aurata*), which, contrary to its usual habits had evidently felt the urge to get into a dark room at this particular moment. I must admit that nothing like it ever happened to me before or since."

The wardrobe department for *The Wizard of Oz* unknowingly purchased a coat for character Professor Marvel from a second-hand store, which was later verified to have originally been owned by L. Frank Baum, the author of the novel on which the film was based.

The comic strip character Dennis The Menace featuring a young boy in a red and black striped shirt debuted on March 12, 1951 in 16 newspapers in the United States. Three days later in the UK a character called Dennis The Menace, wearing a red and black striped jumper made his debut in children's comic *The Beano*. Both creators have denied any causal connection.

Fourteen years prior to the sinking of the Titanic, the writer Morgan Robertson wrote the novel *Futility*, the central event of which is the sinking by a collision with an iceberg of the transatlantic Titan, described in the novel as allegedly unsinkable. Some of the circumstances in the novel match the actual disaster to an uncanny degree, including the number of passengers, the insufficient number of lifeboats, the name and size of the ship, the exact site of the incident, and the speed of the ship at the time of the collision. The correspondences have been noticed and the novel republished in the year following the actual disaster under the name *The Wreck of the Titan*.

Jung wrote, after describing some examples, "When coincidences pile up in this way, one cannot help being impressed by them—for the greater the number of terms in such a series, or the more unusual its character, the more improbable it becomes."

Criticisms and possible scientific explanations

Among some psychologists, Jung's works, such as *The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche*, were received as problematic. Fritz Levi, in his 1952 review in *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, critiqued Jung's theory of synchronicity as vague in determinability of synchronistic events, saying that Jung never specifically explained his rejection of "magic causality" to which such an acausal principle as synchronicity would be related. He also questioned the theory's usefulness.

A possible explanation for Jung's perception that the laws of probability seemed to be violated

with some coincidences can be seen in Littlewood's law.

In psychology and cognitive science, confirmation bias is a tendency to search for or interpret new information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions and avoids information and interpretations that contradict prior beliefs. It is a type of cognitive bias and represents an error of inductive inference, or as a form of selection bias toward confirmation of the hypothesis under study or disconfirmation of an alternative hypothesis. Confirmation bias is of interest in the teaching of critical thinking, as the skill is misused if rigorous critical scrutiny is applied only to evidence challenging a preconceived idea but not to evidence supporting it.

Wolfgang Pauli, a scientist who in his professional life was severely critical of confirmation bias, made some effort to investigate the phenomenon, coauthoring a paper with Jung on the subject. Some of the evidence that Pauli cited was that ideas that occurred in his dreams would have synchronous analogs in later correspondence with distant collaborators.

It has been asserted that Jung's analytical psychological theory of synchronicity is equal to intellectual intuition.