

Many of us have experienced instances in our lives when the seemingly logical and predictable fabric of everyday reality, woven from complex chains of causes and effects, seems to tear apart, and we experience stunning and highly implausible coincidences. During episodes of holotropic states of consciousness—holotropic meaning “moving toward wholeness”—these violations of linear causality can occur so frequently that they raise serious questions about the worldview with which we have all grown up. Since this extraordinary phenomenon plays an important role in many stories described in this book, I will briefly discuss its relevance for the understanding of the nature of reality, consciousness, and the human psyche.

The scientist who brought the problem of meaningful coincidences defying rational explanation to the attention of academic circles was the Swiss psychiatrist C. G. Jung. Aware of the fact that unswerving belief in rigid determinism represented the cornerstone of the Western scientific worldview, he hesitated for more than twenty years before making his discovery public. Expecting strong disbelief and harsh criticism from his colleagues, he wanted to be sure that he could back his heretic claims with hundreds of examples. He finally described his groundbreaking observations in his famous essay entitled “Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle” (Jung 1960).

Jung began his essay with examples of extraordinary coincidences occurring sometimes in everyday life. He acknowledged the Austrian Lamarckian biologist

Paul Kammerer, whose tragic life was popularized in Arthur Koestler's book *The Case of the Midwife Toad* (Koestler, 1971), as one of the first people to be interested in this phenomenon and its scientific implications. One of the remarkable coincidences Kammerer had reported involved a situation wherein one day his streetcar ticket bore the same number as the theater ticket he bought immediately afterward. In addition, later that evening, the same sequence of digits was given to him as a telephone number for which he had asked.

In the same work, Jung also related the amusing story told by the famous French astronomer Flammarion about a certain Monsieur Deschamps and a special kind of plum pudding. As a boy, Deschamps was given a piece of this rare pudding by a Monsieur de Fontgibu. For the ten years that followed, he had no opportunity to taste this delicacy until he saw the same pudding on the menu of a Paris restaurant. He asked the waiter for a serving, but it turned out that the last piece of the pudding had already been ordered and eaten by Monsieur de Fontgibu, who just happened to be in the same restaurant at that time.

Many years later, Monsieur Deschamps was invited to a party where this pudding was served as a special treat. While he was eating it, he remarked that the only thing lacking was Monsieur de Fontgibu, who had introduced him to this delicacy and had also been present during his second encounter with it in the Paris restaurant. At that moment, the doorbell rang and an old man walked in looking very confused. It was Monsieur de Fontgibu, who burst in on the party by mistake because he had been given the wrong address for the place to which he was supposed to go.

The existence of such extraordinary coincidences is difficult to reconcile with the understanding of the universe developed by materialistic science, which describes the world in terms of chains of causes and effects. And the probability that something like this would happen by chance is clearly so infinitesimal that it cannot be seriously considered as an explanation. It is certainly easier to imagine that these occurrences have some deeper meaning and that they are playful creations of cosmic intelligence. This explanation is particularly plausible when they contain an element of humor, which is often the case. Although coincidences of this kind are extremely interesting in and

of themselves, the work of C. G. Jung added another fascinating dimension to this challenging, anomalous phenomenon.

The situations described by Kammerer and Flammarion involved highly implausible coincidences, and the story about the plum pudding certainly did not lack an element of humor. However, both stories described happenings in the world of matter. Jung's observations added another astonishing dimension to this already baffling phenomenon. He described numerous instances of what he called "synchronicity"—remarkable coincidences, in which various events in consensus reality were meaningfully linked to internal experiences, such as dreams or visions. He defined synchronicity as "a simultaneous occurrence of a psychological state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state." Situations of this kind show that our psyche can enter into playful interaction with what appears to be the world of matter. The fact that something like this is possible effectively blurs the boundaries between subjective and objective reality.

Struggling with this phenomenon, Jung became very interested in the developments in quantum-relativistic physics and in the radically new worldview to which they were pointing. He had many intellectual exchanges with Wolfgang Pauli, one of the founders of quantum physics, who was his client and personal friend. Under Pauli's guidance, Jung became familiar with the revolutionary concepts in modern physics, including the challenges to deterministic thinking and linear causality it had introduced into science. Jung was aware of the fact that his own observations appeared much more plausible and acceptable in the context of the new emerging image of reality. Additional support for Jung's ideas came from no less than Albert Einstein who, during a personal visit, encouraged Jung to pursue his idea of synchronicity because it was fully compatible with the new discoveries in physics (Jung 1973). Toward the end of his life, Jung became so convinced about the important role that synchronicity played in the natural order of things that he used it as a guiding principle in his everyday life.

The most famous of many synchronicities in Jung's own life is one that occurred during a therapy session with one of his clients. This patient was very resistant to psychotherapy, to Jung's interpretations, and to the notion

of transpersonal realities. During the analysis of one of her dreams featuring a golden scarab, when therapy had reached an impasse, Jung heard a sound of something hitting the windowpane. He went to check what had happened and found on the windowsill a shiny rose chafer beetle trying to get inside. It was a very rare specimen, the nearest analogy to a golden scarab that can be found in that latitude. Nothing like that had ever happened to Jung before. He opened the window, brought the beetle inside, and showed it to his client. This extraordinary synchronicity became an important turning point in the therapy of this woman.

The observations of synchronicities had a profound impact on Jung's thinking and his work, particularly on his understanding of archetypes, primordial governing, and organizing principles of the collective unconscious. The discovery of archetypes and their role in the human psyche represented Jung's most important contribution to psychology. For much of his professional career, Jung was very strongly influenced by the Cartesian-Kantian perspective dominating Western science, with its strict division between subjective and objective, inner and outer. Under its spell, he initially saw the archetypes as transindividual, but essentially intrapsychic, principles, comparable to biological instincts. He presumed that the basic matrix for them was hardwired into the brain and was inherited from generation to generation.

The existence of synchronistic events made Jung realize that archetypes transcended both the psyche and the material world and that they were autonomous patterns of meaning, which informed both the psyche and matter. He saw that they provided a bridge between inner and outer and suggested the existence of a twilight zone between matter and consciousness. For this reason, Jung started referring to archetypes as having a "psychoid" (psychelike) quality. Stephan Holler described Jung's fully advanced understanding of the archetypes in a succinct way and using poetic language: "The archetype, when manifesting in a synchronistic phenomenon, is truly awesome if not outright miraculous—an uncanny dweller on the threshold. At once psychical and physical, it might be likened to the two-faced god Janus. The two faces of the archetype are joined in a common head of meaning" (Holler 1994). Following the publication of Jung's

essay on synchronicity, this concept has become increasingly important in science and has been the subject of many articles and books (von Franz 1980, Aziz 1990, Mansfeld 1995) .

During the fifty years I have been involved in consciousness research, I have observed numerous extraordinary synchronicities in my clients, heard many stories about them from my fellow researchers and therapists, and personally experienced hundreds of them myself. I have selected for this chapter a small representative sample of the most interesting stories from my collection. The first of them bears some similarity to Jung's encounter with the golden beetle in that it involves the appearance of an insect in a place and at a time that was highly unlikely.