

On Synchronicity

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This is an extemporaneous discussion oriented to a preliminary statement concerning the subject of synchronicity. It is my purpose tonight to attempt an extemporaneous presentation of some material which will include, in part, an effort to render intelligible the concept of synchronicity. [Something needs to be turned off there.]

But first I wish to say that there's more than one approach to the general subject of the unconscious and of synchronicity, or what I prefer to call by the older name of parallelism. The approach has been made by two methods: one is the clinical approach, which has been followed by Carus and Dr. Jung, and the other is the philosophic approach, which is exemplified by the work of von Hartmann in his *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, and in the case of synchronicity by the work on *Monadology* by Leibniz. For myself, I prefer the approach through philosophy to the clinical approach because the clinical approach is colored by the concept of illness, of pathology. Now, it is true that pathology is a fact that badgers us in our life here both on the physical and the mental level, and on what we might call the spiritual level, for the reason for most religion is a resolution of a wrongness in the world; and so religion, as we know it, is an expression of an effort to correct a wrong condition. But I envisage a time, or even currently, a point of view whereby we can consider all of these things from a non-pathological perspective in which case religion becomes the expression of spontaneous delight and is not a grim problem of redemption. And I don't think we must wait until some distant day in the future before we may be able to participate in this. In my experience of the action of transcendental function, it is almost imperative that the attitude should be one of a spontaneous delight; that one produces not for any grim or serious reason, but out of the sheer delight of discovery. [Let us wait for a moment. Please turn it off.] In other words, I find that in the producing of tapes, if I produce them in the spirit of the sheer delight of it, doing it for the dickens of it, if you please, the production is apt to be much better than if there is anything like a serious or grim motivation. That is one of the best ways to shut off the action of the transcendental function.¹

I might illustrate something of the spirit of play by one time when I was a guest at a meeting of the Pacific branch of the American Mathematical Association at Berkeley, California. I was at the time in my fifth year in the study of mathematics at Stanford University, and I was invited to be a guest of the meeting of this association at Berkeley. Professors of mathematics came down from Seattle and from as far south as San Diego and met there to give their researches on problems that had not been explored so far. Now, the spirit of this was like that of a game. These were not problems of application. It was in the field of pure mathematics where one searched for truth for no ulterior reason. He did not seek to get a knowledge in order to do something in a mundane sense. He

¹ See the audio recording "Three Fundamentals of the Introceptive Philosophy," parts 3 and 8.

sought knowledge for its own sake. The result was that the real spirit was one of play. To be sure, it was play on an adult level, because it was difficult thinking; but, nonetheless, it was the same spirit as that of the child. And this reminds me of a statement by G. Spencer Brown in his forward to Dr. Lilly's *The Center of the Cyclone* in which he speaks of the preparation for great work, such as that of a Sir Isaac Newton, as spending a lot of time just doing nothing, not even thinking, as it were, and then out of it comes the discovery of the extremely obvious which nobody else had ever seen before.² And he goes on to say that the spirit of this kind of search is represented by the figure of the fool in the tarot cards. You just play on things and the spirit of wisdom comes through just because there's no seriousness in it, but simply the expression of delight. And this I take it is the way in which Sri Aurobindo wrote his *Savitri*, not because of a serious effort to effect the redemption of souls, but rather as the expression of a *lila*, to use his term. It's a lighthearted spirit even though combined with the severest kind of effort, and it is in something of that spirit we shall approach the problem of synchronicity tonight.

I have read a bit in a couple of books trying to explain Dr. Jung's use of this term, and I find them very obscure. They make it very difficult, when I think it could be very easily grasped. Only, to grasp it easily, you have to approach it in the spirit of pure mathematics, not of empiricism—not necessarily the language of mathematics, which is very exacting, very pure, very scientific, but in the spirit; and it is essentially a spirit of play. Now, to illustrate this, there was a time, several years ago in the last century, when a question was aroused concerning the twelfth axiom of Euclid. You're probably all familiar with it in the simple form that states that in a plane with a given straight line and a point outside of it, only one line can be drawn through that point which is parallel to the given straight line. But it wasn't stated that way by Euclid. It was rather complex. It was in some form like this: that if you have two lines in a plane and a transversal cutting them, and the interior angles on one side of the transversal are equal to two right angles, then the lines will not meet. That didn't sound like an axiom. It sounded like a theorem and the effort was made to try to prove it, and they found they couldn't.

Now, another line of approach was made, and this was just for the dickens of it, if you please. Let us make the assumption of some other hypothesis than that. Let us say that it is possible to draw two lines in a plane where the interior angles on a transversal on one side are equal to two right angles, and simply postulate that they meet in a finite distance, which means they are not parallel. And so Riemann started with that to see if he could build a geometry that was consistent within itself; and he succeeded. There was no logical difficulty whatsoever. Now, this was as pure exercise alone, not supposed to have any practical application; but several years later when Einstein was dealing with his general theory of relativity, he found that this geometrical conception fit the needs of the facts with which he was dealing.

² John C. Lilly, *The Center of the Cyclone* (New York: Julian Press, 1972):

To arrive at the simplest truth, as Newton knew and practiced, requires years of contemplation. Not activity. Not reasoning. Not calculating. Not busy behavior of any kind. Not reading. Not talking. Not making an effort. Not thinking. Simply bearing in mind what it is one needs to know.

Now, here I think we have an example of synchronicity. Riemann had no idea at all of a practical application. He was just thinking like that inspired fool in the tarot cards for the dickens of it, and he produced an extraordinary system of geometry; and then along comes Einstein sometime later and this is the mathematics that fits the picture of the universe as it has grown in the light of a large number of recent observations. There was no causal connection between these two men, yet the two things fitted. In a case of that kind, it's just the sort of thing which is referred to in bringing up examples of synchronicity, as though there was an order in the universe that prepared the necessary conception through one source that was needed for a cosmic integration developed by another man.

So, we'll start this way. Let us posit as the root source, universal container, and the ultimate goal of all that is, one atom. Let us predicate of it that it is of infinite dimensionality, dimensionality being understood in the sense of degree of freedom. Thus a two-dimensional entity has two degrees of freedom, a three-dimensional entity has three degrees of freedom, and in the case of this atom an infinite number of degrees of freedom. Second, we postulate that it has infinite development of qualities, qualities being entities or states that are not evidently related to each other, that are distinct, such as the difference between a color and a tone. And third, we postulate that it is infinitely great in quantity, so that of this entity, the mathematics of the transfinite applies. Now, we postulate further that there is a tendency in this primary atom to reproduce itself and that the potential of self-reproduction is also infinite. We will call the primary atom the "macrocosmic Monad" and we will call the potentially infinite self-reproductions as the "microcosmic Monads"; and that each of the microcosmic Monads is a reproduction of all the qualities, and quantities, and dimensional freedoms of the macrocosmic Monad, but under a particular mode; that this mode is unique with respect to each microcosmic Monad, so that each entity is in one respect unique, but otherwise a reproduction in every respect of all the qualities, and relationships, and quantities of the macrocosmic Monad. Now, the modality would be the variant in each one, but otherwise each one reproduces the macrocosm.

Now, as a result, any status or process in the macrocosm is reproduced in every microcosm, and, therefore, knowledge of the macrocosm or knowledge of other microcosms by any particular microcosm would not call for anything like external acquaintance, but could be achieved by self-penetration into the qualities within itself, thereby through sufficiently complete self-analysis could know all that was in the macrocosm and also know all that was in each microcosm by the appropriate means of transformation.

Now, I'll illustrate this with certain properties of infinite sets to make the picture perhaps a little clearer. Let us take as our set the total of all the positive integers, that's the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, up to infinity, and let this set represent the macrocosmic Monad. From that we can derive an infinite number of subsets that are of equal cardinality. By equal cardinality we mean that you can set up a one-to-one reciprocal relationship between all the elements of a subordinate set with all of the elements of the original macrocosmic set. And to illustrate that let us take a subset out of our number system consisting of the doubles of each member of the original macrocosmic set, 1, 2, 3, 4; the doubles would be 2, 4, 6, 8, and so on—the sum total of all even numbers. Now, there

would be a one-to-one reciprocal correspondence between all the entities in the second set and the first set. Corresponding to 1 there would be 2, corresponding to 2 there would be 4, to 3 there would be 6 in the second set, and so on. Therefore we have proved that there are just as many elements in the second set as in the first, but every element in the second set also exists in the first set, that which is obvious, but there are elements in the first set that are not in the second, namely, all the odd numbers, 1, 3, 5, 7, and so on. Therefore, the second set is a proper part of the first set, but it has the same cardinality as the first set. It reproduces, therefore, the first set, and yet it has a distinctive character marking it as different from the first set, namely, it consists only of the even numbers, and the first set has both even and odd. So, therefore, we have a modality that's marked out. Now, we build any number of these. We could take, for instance, for our third set the numbers that are three times the numbers in the first set, giving us 3, 6, 9, and so on. Or we could use the principle of powers; take the squares, or the cubes, fourth powers, and so on. You can see at once, you have the potentiality of building up an infinity of subsets.

Now, here is a very peculiar fact that applies to the mathematics of the infinite, that you could actually subtract an infinite number of infinite subsets from your original macrocosmic set and not reduce its cardinality at all. Now, I'm talking to you straight mathematics. We're applying this to what you might call a mystical view of the universe. Now, you have your potentially infinite number of microcosmic Monads, which would include all human beings, all animals, all vegetables, all stone entities so far as they are entities, you could view our cosmos as one of the microcosmic projections out of that original atom, entertaining the possibility that that original atom may have an indefinite number of other spaces where it is projecting itself at the same time so that our cosmos would be only one of the microcosms in this system. Now, since you have a sympathetic interrelationship between your macrocosmic Monad and this potentially infinite number of microcosmic Monads, there'd be a reproduction within each of the microcosms corresponding to that which was in the macrocosm, and also corresponding with what is going on in the other microcosms, and these events would not be governed by the law of causality, but by the law of parallelism or synchronicity. And that's all there is to the law of synchronicity. You don't have to make it hard.

Now, we go on a little bit further. We predicate that it is possible, but not necessary, that an externalistic relationship may be set up between these Monads. This relationship so far is only internal. One comes to know the macrocosm by penetrating into himself, and understanding himself, he understands the macrocosm, and also potentially can understand every other microcosm, except that there would be a modality in each one that would make it unique and that would be something you'd have to become acquainted with otherwise. But this is all an inner movement. Let us call this inner movement as like a kind of pure mathematics. But in contrast to that there was the potential of these microcosmic Monads colliding with each other. Now, just what 'colliding' would mean in terms of a formal definition I shall not attempt here, so you need not criticize it. But we just predicate this for our convenience, and that they somehow or other collide, bump heads, and so on, and thereby is produced the experience of pain; and thus a new way of consciousness was born, and the name for that consciousness is *Sangsara*, as named by the Buddhists. And the governing law of this zone is learning by pain, namely, by experience, by the brute contact, of a brute external contact with respect to each other. This is the empiric way of learning by experience. It's

the hard way. It's the way that hurts. Now, this I suggest is the way that suffering entered into the universe, the thing which Buddha discovered, and that the end of Buddhism was the elimination of suffering. You eliminate suffering by withdrawing from this way of cognition, namely, through the direct contact of bumping heads together. Naturally, bumping heads together makes one sore, and when one gets sore he fights, and the result is that war is the law of the *sangsaric* world. It's pretty nasty altogether. So, one might feel it was wise, as the Buddhists do, to withdraw from this world and go back into the process of cognition by inner self-penetration whereby one becomes, as I have said, conscious of the macrocosm, if he goes far enough, and potentially of every other microcosm there may be. So withdrawal from the *Sangsara* does not mean withdrawal from a movement of consciousness and the becoming aware. It simply means that you withdraw from the empiric order of bumping heads together to the mathematical order, or the pure mathematical order, of inner imagination operating under a system of order.

Well, now, when this field of consciousness that was potential but not necessary was born whereby people learn through bumping heads together, that's by experience, by direct contact, the principle of cause and effect arose, or in other words *karma*. And then we have all that we know here now, and the law of *karma* or law of causality seems to govern everywhere. Now, if we just take the appropriate step and turn inward sufficiently and reactivate that other power of learning by inward penetration, we could transcend *karma* and come under the law of parallelism or synchronicity. Now, this is a very brief statement, but I hope that it's crystal clear; so you should all understand what the principle of synchronicity is in principle. Now, this can be elaborated much more, but this merely gives an attempt to develop a conception of how parallelism could be.

Now, if you'll notice, I don't bring up any empiric justification for the statement, not any more than Riemann did when he assumed that his hypothesis concerning two lines in a plane intersected by a transversal where the sum of the angles on one side of the transversal was equal to two right angles and asserted those lines met in a finite distance. He didn't base that upon any experience whatsoever. He just asserted it; but, nonetheless, it had very important applications later. I'm using the same method in developing this thesis right now, without using the particular language of mathematics, so nothing to be surprised in finding parallelistic sequence of events.

The whole theory of astrology for instance is based upon this. You have a form of a particular microcosm which is our cosmos. You see I regard all of our visible cosmos and all of that which the telescopes can see as only one microcosm out of all of the possible microcosms. Now, then, you take a microcosm which is some particular human being, the implication of our present thesis is that there are certain relationships in the cosmic microcosm that would correspond to certain qualities or relationships in the particular individual human microcosm. They'd be different in form, to be sure. They might be in the form of angles, and so on, corresponding to mental qualities or other qualities in the human being; that would be just the difference of modality. That's why I introduced that term modality. But there would be a correspondential relationship between the different aspects. You can see how this would be in principle possible. It would also imply that there might be even an infinite number of other potential ways by which a cross-reading would be possible, which would be entirely parallelistic or synchronistic, not governed by the causal principle. It is said that the I Ching of the

Chinese is built upon this principle. It gives us the possibility of seeing that there could be a condition of consciousness development without the action of a law of causality, but rather a law of synchronicity. And it's by no means irrational, for as a matter of fact I've been using the language of a formal mathematics to express this all along. Causality is not to be equated to rationality. The causal theory is merely a form of rational expression, but it's not to be equated to the whole of rational expression by any manner or means. The principle of synchronicity can be perfectly logical and mathematical, even more mathematical, than the world of experience. In fact, the world of experience as we know it seems to me to be in many respects quite irrational. At any rate, when I had the experience on August 7, 1936, of Awakening, there was a sense of coming into an inherent orderliness of such magnificence that all of this world seemed to be highly irrational. It was an ascension into a principle of orderliness including that of an unbroken harmony in all things.

Now, the picture I have portrayed implies an unbroken harmony in all things, and that the fraction of consciousness that we have produced by hitting our heads together is something we could do without. Of course, on the other hand, we might make use of it, as Aurobindo suggests, and develop it and get some of the positive values out of it. In other words, we don't need to junk the evolution if we don't want to. We could go to work and try to transform or redeem that order and keep it alive, but it's also possible to withdraw from it and get back into the direct relationship of the macrocosmic and the microcosmic Monads, and know a world where there is no evil and no pain. I'll let it go at that.

Now, this is just a bit of play you know, just a play of the imagination with a little mathematics thrown in. And that is the kind of thing that G. Spencer Brown said that was what Newton did when he sat upstairs working with his figures having lots of fun, so much fun that he even forgot to eat at the right time. The story is told that when he was doing his heavy work, he was living with his sister, and she watched after his external needs. She was in the habit of preparing a breakfast for him, but as he never came down regularly—he might come down anytime to eat—she'd just leave it on the table. One time a man came in and wanted to see him, and she took him into the breakfast room where the meal was on the table and said, "He'll be down ultimately." Well, the man sat there, and finally got hungry, and he nibbled a bit of the breakfast; time went on, he nibbled a bit more, and so on—ultimately finished it. Then after awhile Newton came down and nodded to his friend and went over to the table, looked at it; he said, "I thought I had not eaten my breakfast this morning, but I see I must have." So he was having a lot of fun, you know.