

**Synchronicity**  
**The Anonymous Test of Existence**

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*The only way to learn is to question.*

Jean-Paul Sartre

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I do not have a closed mind. I admit every possibility. Indeed, the only thing I am certain of is uncertainty. And my only presupposition is to question. My only contingent claim is my experience, not the experience of others. That is why I have converged to who I am, to an existence that only I know. And it is an existence conditioned by synchronicity.

In his defining lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre wrote that “*man is nothing other than his own project. In life, a man commits himself and draws his own portrait, outside of which there is nothing.*” But what if the portrait has already been sketched, and that man is simply joining the dots. That is the possibility synchronicity evokes, if only in the eyes of the portraitist.

Synchronicity was defined by Jung to mean the simultaneous occurrence of two meaningful but not causally connected events.<sup>1</sup> Synchronicity was regarded by Jung as a bridge between external reality and a collective unconscious. It is a bridge most of us observe, but nearly all of us discount. Jung had documented and observed synchronicity for many years, in patients’ recollections and in his own recollections.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Jung *Synchronicity* , p.25.

Jung was reticent about synchronicity; unquestionably he feared the ridicule of minds committed to the rational and the real. Synchronicity is not easy to rationalize; usually it is diversified away as a random joint occurrence, an artifact of probability, an event without meaning. More than eighty years after Jung defined synchronicity, it remains marginalized, almost unacceptable as a subject of inquiry. For most, synchronicity is simply a quirk of existence, the price we pay for the singularity of being human.

But synchronicity does exist as the many examples colligated by Jung and others demonstrate. In defining the concept, Jung refers to one of his own observations.<sup>2</sup>

*“A young woman I was treating had, at a critical moment, a dream in which she was given a golden scarab. While she was telling me this dream I sat with my back to the closed window. Suddenly I heard a noise behind me, like a gentle tapping. I turned round and saw a flying insect knocking against the window-pane from outside. I opened the window and caught the creature in the air as it flew in. it was the nearest analogy to a golden scarab that one finds in our latitudes, a scarabeid beetle, the common rose-chafer which contrary to its usual habits had evidently felt an urge to get into a dark room at this particular moment. I must admit that nothing like it ever happened to me before or since, and that the dream of the patient has remained unique in my experience.”*

This is a standard example of synchronicity. For Jung and his patient, the coincidence was meaningful; there was a simultaneous realization of the unconscious. Skeptics however would conclude the coincidence to be no more than the language of chance. A scarab beetle had appeared right on schedule, a schedule within the bounds of probability. Meaning, after all, is in the mind of the observer.

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<sup>2</sup> C. Jung *Synchronicity* , p.22.

Synchronicity is a member of a wider class of problems where meaning exists for some, but not for others. In his book *Incredible Coincidence, The Baffling World of Synchronicity*, Alan Vaughan discusses a number of examples of the improbable, inter alia the case of Allen Falby and Alfred Smith. As described by Vaughan

*“Falby was an El Paso, Texas, highway patrolman who crashed his motorcycle when pursuing a speeding truck. The crash nearly amputated one of Falby’s legs; an artery was ruptured and he was bleeding to death. Alfred Smith saw the accident; he was not a doctor but could see what had to be done for the dying patrolman. Whipping off his tie, Smith bound Falby’s leg in a crude tourniquet. It worked. Smith saved Falby’s life. Falby was hospitalized for several months and returned to his police job... Fast forward to five years later..Falby was on highway night patrol when he was called to investigate a bad accident on US 80. A car had smashed into a tree. A man was in a serious condition; an ambulance was on the way. Falby reached the wreck first. He found the injured man unconscious. The man’s right leg was saturated with blood. He had severed a major artery and was bleeding to death. Falby applied a tourniquet above the artery. When the bleeding stopped, he pulled him from the car. That’s when Falby recognized the victim as Alfred Smith who had saved his life five years earlier.”*

This occurrence, while not simultaneous nor a bridge between the real and the unconscious, does illustrate that the highly improbable can confer meaning to some, but be meaningless to others. Meaning depends on the observer, in this case on whether you were the one saved. There is an added dimension here, the Buddhist principle of karma, cited by Vaughan as *“one good tourniquet deserves another.”* To a believer, synchronicity is not without meaning; nor without value.

My own interest in synchronicity did not emanate from a single occurrence, or a single manifestation of meaning. As one trained in the theory of uncertainty, I was well

conditioned to understand realizations of randomness. And as one cognizant of behavioral studies, I was also well conditioned to understand representative bias and framing in the mind of an observer. A single occurrence would not have initiated my interest in synchronicity. Multiple occurrences, without sufficient meaning, would not have initiated my interest in synchronicity. But multiple occurrences, with meaning and with variation over an extended period, were sufficient to stimulate my interest. Rationality teaches us to observe and to recognize pattern. It was the pattern and frequency of synchronicity that determined its significance for me, just as in a standard significance test. However, as Jung found, for the rational mind to confront the irrational is no easy task. There is no theory of the improbable, or a theory of coincidence; and certainly no theory of meaningful coincidence. The one who researches synchronicity, like the one who observes synchronicity, is on their own.

I have tabulated forty examples of synchronicity which have had significant meaning for me, and many others of lesser import. One of the less important examples, which was posted on the University of Cambridge website (*Theory of Uncertainty*), occurred in 2012

### ***Example 1***

*I was in a second hand bookshop in Melbourne on a Wednesday. I was looking at a shelf of old books by Mark Twain. I dislodged a book that was next to the Mark Twain books and it fell off the shelf. I picked it up. It was a book by the Russian author Ivan Turgenev titled 'On the Eve'. I have been a collector of Turgenev's books for a couple of years, but I did not have this book. Turgenev is not a well-known author in Australia and, aside from his work 'Fathers and Sons', most of his books are difficult to find. I had no money on me, so I decided the next time I came in to the city I would buy it. On the Friday, I travelled by train to the city. I intended to buy*

*Turgenev's 'On the Eve' that morning. A fellow got on the train two stations after me, sat down next to me, and began reading a book. It was 'On the Eve' by Turgenev.*

This illustrates synchronicity in its benign form. The observer observes the improbable. The improbable in this case involves the conjunction of a rare book and improbable timing. Before this, no one had ever sat next to me on a train reading a book by Turgenev, or indeed a book by Dostoyevsky, Chernevsky, Gogol, Tolstoy, Lenin or any Russian author. Reading Russian literature on Australian trains is rare. Reading Turgenev is rarer. Reading *'On the Eve'* is even rarer. It was the exactitude of the coincidence that made this improbable. The same book, a rare book at that, on the day intended for its purchase. If it had been the day before or day after, the meaning would have been diluted. Synchronicity involves exactitude, exactitude with the power to confront. To the observer, real synchronicity cannot be ignored. But, equally, it cannot be talked about; and certainly not written down. That is the cost of rationality.

### ***The problem of synchronicity***

Synchronicity is beset by many problems which vitiate its study. Four problems, in particular, seem to encompass why synchronicity is so different; so difficult to rationalize; and so difficult to accept. Those problems are

- (i) Observational dependence
- (ii) The impossibility of replication
- (iii) The implied correlation between the real and the unconscious
- (iv) The ambiguity of meaning

## ***1. Observational dependence***

The principal problem is observational dependence. A synchronistic occurrence typically happens only once and is observed by only one. Rather than a test of a hypothesis, synchronicity becomes a test of belief. Even with multiple observers, observational dependence is critical. Consider the following

### ***Example 2***

*In 1993, as part of a legal matter within a university, three colleagues and I petitioned the Governor of Victoria in his role as the Visitor of the University. The Visitorial process is an appeals process dating from 13<sup>th</sup> century England. The Visitor is an ombudsman who receives petitions from appellants within universities. It is a formal legal process. On the afternoon of November 16, 1993, the four of us signed the petition to the Governor in the office of a legal firm in Collins Street. We then proceeded to my car parked in the street below. As we left the parking bay, a car pulled alongside. It was the car of the Governor.*

I regarded this occurrence as meaningful; but for the other three in the car, this synchronistic event was probably just another quirk of existence. Synchronicity may be observed by multiple observers, but it is still a singular occurrence. In the context of subsequent history and in the context of multiple synchronicities, this was a meaningful occurrence for me because it was part of a pattern. It occurred at a pivotal moment, and determined the irreversibility of my role as whistle blower. There is always a probability that two cars can juxtapose in a city street, but the exactitude and symbolism of this juxtaposition was difficult to ignore. The Governor's car appeared just in time, as required for synchronicity. Synchronicity elevates the improbable; but it always depends on the observer. Jung would have regarded this occurrence as meaningful; perhaps too Einstein and Pauli; but 95% of the population would just see

coincidence, a random realization of our probabilistic world. Synchronicity becomes a test of belief; and a test of existence.

Kahneman and Tversky (1974) showed that when individuals attempt to explain an event, they match characteristics of the event with characteristics of an underlying hypothesis. However, there is a tendency to overweight the importance of the matching and the importance of the event; leading to a representative bias. To illustrate representative bias, Kahneman and Tversky used this example

*Linda is 31 years old, single, outspoken, and very bright. She majored in philosophy. As a student, she was deeply concerned with issues of discrimination and social justice, and also participated in anti-nuclear demonstrations.*

When asked which of the following statements A or B more likely;

- A. Linda is a bank teller
- B. Linda is a bank teller and active in the feminist movement

Respondents typically answered B; yet B is a subset of A and hence is less probable. Prior information relating to Linda biases respondents away from an answer consistent with the laws of probability. That is the representative bias.

Could synchronicity be just one form of representative bias? Does the observer simply overmatch and overweight characteristics that should not be matched? In synchronicity, if there is a representative bias, it is towards characteristics that the observer has already embedded in their mind; in the above examples, the scarab beetle, the book *On the Eve*, the Governor. The representative bias becomes a bias towards finding significance and away from insignificance; towards finding a deterministic pattern and away from

randomness; towards finding meaning and away from nothingness. For the synchronistic observer, the challenge is to purge their representative bias.

In its extreme form, finding meaning where there is none is called apophenia. Apophenia is a corollary of human evolution. To survive, we have learned to recognize patterns; further we teach our children to recognize patterns and encode our computers to recognize patterns. In 1981 at the University of Florida, I attended a lecture by the Nobel Laureate Herbert Simon, where he spoke of artificial intelligence as having developed to the point where it had discovered Kepler's laws. Artificial intelligence is the pattern recognition we have codified into machines to identify patterns that we have identified. While all species evolve through pattern recognition<sup>3</sup>, humans have extrapolated it further. And apophenia is the risk incurred by extrapolating pattern recognition too far; the risk of interpreting the meaningless as meaningful.

The problem for the observer of synchronicity is that there is no independent observer to confirm or deny the meaning. The observer risks the skeptical diagnosis of apophenia. The skeptic categorizes synchronicity as apophenia to minimize their own risk. The observer of synchronicity can only tell their observation to the trusted few; or anonymously to websites like the University of Cambridge *Theory of Uncertainty*. The risk of apophenia means that the synchronicity that is known is only but a small set of the synchronicity observed. There is a selectivity bias and, as with all selectivity biases, the effect is to distort the estimation of the real meaning.

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<sup>3</sup> As John Hoopes notes in *Apophenia and the Meaning of Life* "Birds do it, bees do it, even uneducated fleas do it. Plants do it. Even one-celled microorganisms do it. In fact, pattern recognition is the way viruses work."



## 2. *Replication*

The second problem with synchronicity is the impossibility of repetition or replication, as required by standard inference. When the Governor's car appeared next to mine, it appeared only once. When the fellow got on the train and sat next to me to read *On the Eve*, it happened only once. A synchronous event occurs only once as it must. That defines its impact. For a given individual, even one exposed to an excess of meaningful coincidence, synchronicity occurs only a limited number of times and certainly insufficiently to permit statistical analysis. Instead, synchronicity requires a case study analysis, not orthodox statistics. A synchronous event is an event, but a special type of event. In 1997, I authored an article *How Eventful Are Event Studies*. In congregating events, it has been customary to use an event study method. In an event study, events are clustered together by defining a period when the event is relevant. An event window is defined in the period before and after the event; for example, for an earnings announcement the event window is the day before the announcement until the day after. By aggregating all events of the same type such as earnings announcements, we can ascertain the effect of unanticipated earnings on the market price. Event study methodology depends on clustering events which are repetitive and then using the change in an indicator such as the market price to determine the significance of the event vis a vis a representative event. But in synchronicity there is no representative event. In synchronicity, there is such wide variation that no representative event exists. What is common in synchronicity is exactitude of timing. What is common in synchronicity is meaning, but only for one. There is no other commonality. For example, how could an example relating to a book and an example relating to a Governor be colligated? Their only commonality was the exactitude of their timing. But there was no indicator of their significance. For, unlike a standard event study, the significance of a synchronous event cannot be measured. It does not admit to a conventional event structure. Synchronicity cannot be codified in terms of a sample

space and probability structure. Synchronicity does not have a significance which can be measured relative to a representative event. Rather, synchronicity has significance for some, but is meaningless for others. That is why synchronicity does not fit easily into a theory of uncertainty. And why it is so easily dismissed as just coincidence without thinking about what that really means. What a closed mind does not understand, what a closed mind finds different, what a closed mind cannot categorise, the closed mind categorises. It is the way we cope with complexity. This type of behavioural framing is summarised in *The Materix*, a poem in my anthology *Poetica*. Terming synchronicity as just coincidence is the framing of the mind which will not hypothesise something else.

J. W. Dunne was one the first to study a collection of synchronous-like events together in his book *An Experiment With Time* (1927). Dunne was an aeronautical engineer who had experienced a set of twenty events that suggested the anticipation of future events. While synchronicity relates to exactitude of timing, my own experience has suggested that events can be anticipated; and synchronicity is an indicator. Most of Dunne's events related to dreams which anticipated real events. In one event, for example, Dunne writes of a dream which seemingly predicted a real occurrence

*"The dream occurred in the autumn of 1913. The scene I saw was a high railway embankment. I knew in that dream that the place was just north of the Firth of Forth bridge, in Scotland. The scene came and went several times, but the last time I saw that a train going north had just fallen over the embankment. I saw several carriages lying towards the bottom of the slope, and large blocks of stone rolling and sliding down. I tried to ascertain a date; all I could gather was that this date was probably in the following spring. I told my sister the next morning and we agreed, jokingly, that we must warn our friends against travelling north in Scotland in the succeeding spring. ...On April 14 of that spring, the Flying Scotsman jumped the parapet near*

*Burntisland station, about fifteen miles north of the Forth bridge, and fell on to the golf links twenty feet below.*

Dunne's experiment with time was to test more generally the hypothesis that dreams can anticipate real events; to test that the ability to anticipate future events was not a singular abnormality and that it extended across individuals. He enlisted the assistance of a number of subjects, who recorded their dreams just before waking up and recorded their post-dream experiences. Dunne found evidence of the anticipatory perception of dreams, a precursor to Jung's work. But Dunne was more than a psychoanalyst. He asked the right questions. In chapter 13 of *An Experiment With Time*, Dunne asks "Why only in dreams?" If events can be anticipated, can those events be anticipated while awake? And he came to the conclusion that anticipatory phenomena are not restricted to dreams. Dunne was a scientist. When I read part IV of *An Experiment With Time*, chapters 18-26, the similarity with Einstein's thought experiment which led to the theory of relativity was unmistakable. Dunne implicitly advanced the hypothesis that we exist in one frame of reference, but that there are other frames of reference where time is observed differently. Where the day before and the day after occur simultaneously, where the autumn of 1913 is simultaneous with the spring of 1914, where 1973 is simultaneous with 2013. And that is the view I have converged to. In another reference frame, the events we experience sequentially are not sequential, but simultaneous. The evidence of Dunne suggests that for all individuals, but more pronounced for some, there is an ability to intersect with this other reference frame. This time deformation is related to synchronicity. It is not coincidental that Einstein believed in synchronicity. His quote "*Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous*" underscores this paper.

The possibility of anticipating events is best understood by example. In my book *Trial With No Exit* I describe an event that was more confronting than the examples hitherto. Like all expositions of synchronicity it is likely to elicit skepticism. Most will not question the veracity of the observation, but most **will** question the veracity of the interpretation. That is the story of synchronicity and why it is such a difficult story to tell.

### ***Example 3***

*A few years ago, I was selected for jury service. The defendant was acquitted. After I left the court, I went to my car to drive home. As I pulled into traffic, a car appeared in front of me. On its rear window was a sticker which read "Thank You"; on the rear bumper bar another sticker which read "Evil Prevails When Good People Do Nothing", the motto of Whistleblowers Australia (WBA) of which I was a long-standing member. A few months later, I saw the defendant outside my office building at the University. The next day as I was driving to my office a car pulled out in front of me near a museum. It was the car that appeared after the trial with "Thank You" on the rear window and "Evil Prevails When Good People Do Nothing" on the rear bumper. Three hours later as I returned home and approached the museum, I saw police cars and ambulances across the road where I had seen the car hours earlier. I asked the police what had happened. I was told that three people had been stabbed in the back, and one poor fellow had been killed in a random attack.*

This series of events had four elements which I have identified to be often associated with synchronicity; first, an exactitude of timing; secondly, a series of events rather than a single event; thirdly the possible anticipation of another event; and finally meaning for a particular observer. Another observer would not have been so impacted by a car sticker which read "Evil Prevails When Good People Do Nothing." As a whistleblower, however, I understood the meaning better. I know only too well the cost of indifference.

The series of events in this example confronted me because it suggested an external imposition that the rational mind does not easily appease. More generally however, it suggested a structure of synchronicity which appears to involve exactitude, seriality, anticipation, meaning and externality. One hypothesis and I accept this is not the only hypothesis, is that my existence is being calibrated, with synchronicity revealing some of that calibration. Of course, almost certainly less than five per cent of you will regard the conjunction of events in Example 3 above as consistent with that interpretation. Most of you will think I have connected dots that should never have been connected. Rationality protects us from seeing meaning when it isn't there. But rationality can also over protect, denying the possibility of meaning when it is there.

That events may occur in series was first studied by Kammerer in *The Law of Series*. Kammerer hypothesised that events are generated cyclically, just as we reference the economic cycle and the political cycle. To Kammerer, the clustering of events and the coincidence of events is associated with the persistence associated with a cycle. Kammerer was a great recorder of coincidences, documenting more than one hundred. Jung was skeptical of Kammerer's hypothesis. He noted<sup>4</sup>

*"His concepts of seriality, imitation, attraction, and inertia belong to a causally conceived view of the world, and tell us no more than that the run of chance corresponds to statistical and mathematical probability. Kammerer's factual material contains nothing but runs of chance whose only 'law' is probability; in other words, there is no apparent reason why he should look behind them for anything else."*

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<sup>4</sup> C. Jung *Synchronicity* , p.9.

In general it is easy, even for those like Jung who accept synchronicity, to dismiss the synchronicity observed by others. Imagine what Kammerer would have opined on the synchronicity of Jung in this passage from his book *Synchronicity*

*“There are, however, incidents whose ‘chancefulness’ seems open to doubt. To mention but one example out of many, I noted the following on April 1, 1949: Today is Friday. We have fish for lunch. Somebody happens to mention the custom of making an ‘April fish’ of someone. That same morning I made a note of an inscription which read ‘Est homo totus medius piscis ab imo.’ In the afternoon a former patient of mine, whom I had not seen for months, showed me some extremely impressive pictures of fish which she had painted in the meantime. In the evening I was shown a piece of embroidery with fish-like sea-monsters in it. On the morning of April 2 another patient, whom I had not seen for many years, told me a dream in which she stood on the shore of a lake and saw a large fish that swam straight towards her and landed at her feet. I was at this time engaged on a study of the fish symbol in history. Only one of the persons mentioned here knew anything about it.”*

Many would surmise that there is something fishy about this story; certainly there is a sense of contrivance. It does not have the exactitude, meaning or anticipation that I have experienced in synchronicity. But perhaps synchronicity is so existential and so observer dependent that its significance dissipates entirely when related to another.

To replicate synchronicity, Jung suggested the recording of dreams, very similar to the strategy of Dunne. Jung recorded the dreams of patients, including four hundred dreams of the Nobel Laureate Wolfgang Pauli, with whom he wrote a joint volume *The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche*. Jung hypothesized that dreams permit the detachment of the psyche from the conditioning of reality; and the revelation of a collective unconscious. Jung saw synchronicity as the bridge between reality and this

collective unconscious. The replication of synchronicity required a systematic study of dreams to unravel the unconditioned mind. Jung regarded synchronicity as an empirical, not philosophical, issue. In particular, Jung converged on the notion that synchronicity is a discontinuity in causality. Physics is replete with other forms of discontinuity; for example Jung cites<sup>5</sup> the orderedness of energy quanta and the decay of radium. Jung identified synchronicity as acausality, a discontinuity from the orthodox theory of causality, a discontinuity which connects the psychic and the physical. Jung proposed that the triad of classical physics, *space, time and causality*, should be supplanted by a tetrad with synchronicity as its fourth dimension. While an elegant hypothesis, it does not especially advance our understanding of synchronicity. It is, however, consistent with the thought experiments which led to other important theories, for example, Pauli's exclusion principle and Einstein's theory of relativity. Regrettably though, there is no way to test the hypothesis.

### 3. *Behavioural correlation*

One of the main problems with synchronicity is that it implies a correlation between the real and the unconscious. The correlation between what is observed and what is in the mind of the observer is a correlation that is implausible for us. We accept the correlations in physics which led to the discovery of Kepler's laws and Newton's three laws of motion. We accept the correlations that are the basis of the Walsh diagram in chemistry. We even accept the even less stable correlations in economics. But we will not accept that there can be a correlation between the real and the unconscious. More generally, we cannot accept any correlation between the physical universe and ourselves. The example of Michel Gauquelin is representative of our aversion to such correlations. Gauquelin was a statistician and neo-astrologer who found a statistically

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<sup>5</sup> C. Jung *Synchronicity* , p.101.

significant relationship between the position of planets at the time of birth of an individual and their future career. Gauquelin's *Cosmic Clocks* documents the Mars effect and four other planetary effects; for example, Mars in the ascendant sector correlates with athletic and military prowess. Gauquelin was not a common astrologer; he rejected common astrology. He was more akin to a statistician testing a hypothesis that evidently should not have been tested. Gauquelin himself was sceptical of his initial findings, until he tested and retested the hypothesis in ever larger samples; resulting in a meta-study of 25,000 individuals. His work has been variously corroborated and refuted in later studies. My designation would be that his findings are in the inconclusive region. There is evidence of selectivity bias; for example Gauquelin's sampling, and the sampling which followed, used individuals who had achieved a minimum prominence in their careers. And that minimum was a censoring determined by the researcher. But what I learnt from the study of Gauquelin was how averse we are to the possibility of such a correlation between planetary alignment and ourselves. Gauquelin was subjected to ridicule and significant undermining. His results were continuously challenged. We simply cannot conceive that the alignment of the planets could have any correlative significance with future careers. Our rationality does not permit such a hypothesis. Yet, if the context of Gauquelin's study was removed and the data tested in isolation, most statisticians would find a statistically significant relationship. Behavioural correlations are taboo, because they suggest the renunciation of the free will that underwrites our existence. But are such correlations inconsistent with the first principle of existentialism that Sartre espoused in his lecture on October 29, 1945 at the Club Maintenant, that "*man is not only that which he conceives himself to be but that which he wills himself to be*". Could not the free will of man, the existence which predetermines his essence, also be anticipated and calibrated in another reference frame? And with that question I return to the most fundamental problem of synchronicity, the ambiguity of its meaning.



#### 4. *Meaning*

Throughout this lecture, I have suggested that synchronicity is a special type of event which does not admit to statistical analysis. A synchronous event is meaningful for some, meaningless for most. It is that ambiguity of meaning which teases us. There is no uniform significance level to test for the significance of synchronicity. Instead, there are three possible resolutions of the paradox that Jung first termed synchronicity. Those competing resolutions are

- (i) That synchronicity is just randomness with no meaning.
- (ii) That synchronicity has meaning, but with a meaning unknown (**inconclusive**)
- (iii) That synchronicity has meaning partially revealed to at least one observer.

These are the three resolutions that I have contested for a long time. And I have resolved that synchronicity does have meaning which reveals something of my existence. Whether that applies to everyone is problematic. Synchronicity is idiosyncratic, and the resolution of synchronicity is also idiosyncratic. Let me expand the reasons why I consider synchronicity to have meaning and for that meaning to be relevant to my existence. There are five reasons which are considered seriatim

##### 1. *Frequency*

Statistics became accepted as a science, as evidenced by its inclusion in the *Royal Society*, because patterns were observed and identified through the tabulation of frequency. Frequency is one determinant of pattern. Patterns as diverse as the sustainability of a species or attention deficit disorder in children are recognised by establishing a frequency distribution over a large enough sample. As a statistician, the frequency of synchronicity has persuaded me that synchronicity is not the realization of a random process. The forty substantial examples of synchronicity that I have codified suggest non-randomness which, although I cannot specify, I cannot reject. With all behavioral studies there is a selectivity bias. With synchronicity, the perceived bias is greater. The

forty examples selected were based on exactness of timing and obviousness of meaning. Many other examples were censored. Why does the frequency of synchronicity suggest non-randomness? A simple analysis illustrates. Hypothetically, if we prescribe a probability of only 1% that each synchronous event has meaning, when there are forty such events, the probability that there is meaning will exceed 1/3, under an assumption each event is independent of every other event. The more synchronicity observed, the greater the probability of it being meaningful; a corollary of the law of large numbers. In simple terms, the more you see of something, however improbable, the more you begin to believe that it is not by chance. If I had observed only one synchronous event, I would have deemed it an artifact of randomness, an artifact of existence. But I have not experienced one synchronous event. Rather, for me synchronicity has had a recurrence that is inconsistent with the random drawing of the improbable. And, as the number of synchronous events has grown, so has my convergence to a belief that such synchronicity is not generated by chance.

## 2. *Exactitude*

A well-known question often posed by those who want show that the improbable can be probable is the birthday problem “*How large a group of people do you need to make it more likely than not that two of them share a birthday?*” The common answer is 183 (half the days in a year). The correct answer is 23. (*Significance*, pp124-127). What is improbable to us is not always so improbable. I realize that someone in this room may share the same birthday as me, or that two of you may share the same birthday. But synchronicity is not about the birthday problem. Synchronicity is not about seeing symbols in loaves of bread, or in tea leaves or on the walls of buildings. Synchronicity is not about symbols. **Synchronicity is about time.** It is the exactitude of synchronicity that compels. A synchronous event occurs just-in-time. The Governor’s car appeared just-in-time. The fellow reading *On the Eve* appeared just-in-time. The car with *Evil Prevails When Good*

*People Do Nothing* appeared just-in-time. Synchronicity is about time. And the timing suggests a precision more unlikely than the most improbable event. From our knowledge of statistics and continuous distributions, the probability of an event occurring in an interval  $(t, t+dt)$  approaches zero as the length of the interval  $dt$  approaches zero. Synchronicity is really about that interval. In the examples described above, if the event had occurred a day earlier, a day later, a month earlier or a month later, the improbability would not have been compelling. But the event did not occur a day earlier, a day later, a month earlier or a month later. It occurred just at the right time to confer immediacy. Synchronicity is a conjunction of two events, such as signing a petition to the Governor and the Governor appearing, within a very small interval of time. And it is that conjunction, that exactitude that imparts an improbability so different from the birthday problem. With so much exactitude across so many synchronous events, I have converged to a belief that the synchronicity is not generated by chance.

### **3. *Wide Variation***

The third reason why I regard synchronicity as non-random relates to its variability across context. For me, there have been three types of synchronicity

- (i) The benign; as in the example of the book falling off the shelf.
- (ii) The transitional; as in the example from *Trial With No Exit*
- (iii) The existential, those that appear to chronicle a convergence to essence.

To an extent, they are related. They tell the same story, but with different gravity. The variation in context is important because it shows there is meaning; it is not just a game. If synchronicity was always related to books falling off shelves, it would be cool. Then every time I went into a bookshop, I wouldn't have to search; just let the universe do the work. But it has not been like that. In some events, the synchronicity has involved

matters of great import for others; in other events the synchronicity has been closely connected with whistleblowing. The synchronicity has not always been cool. The wide variation in synchronicity, the small and the large, has persuaded me that synchronicity is not just the conjunction of many highly improbable events, but a form of calibration. In 1945 in his lecture at Club Maintenant, Sartre hypothesised with such elegance that through existence we converge to our essence. Nothing which I am stating here is inconsistent with that proposition. What is inconsistent, at least in perception, is the possibility that this convergence is calibrated; that in another reference frame the convergence is known, represented, and anticipated. And that synchronicity is an interface to the calibration.

#### **4. Anticipation**

Synchronicity is about time; and not just the exactness of timing. Synchronicity also relates to the anticipation of events. That has been a recurring theme in the synchronicity I have observed. Dunne and Jung believed in the anticipatory power of dreams. I accept the possibility of the anticipatory power of dreams; but not from my own limited evidence. Dreams are not my specialty. History has evoked some examples of the power of dreams; for example, the dream of Abraham Lincoln in the last month before his assassination, which I referenced in *The Diary of an Aphorisiac*

*"About ten days ago, I retired very late... I soon began to dream. There seemed to be a death-like stillness about me. Then I heard subdued sobs, as if a number of people were weeping. I thought I left my bed and wandered downstairs. There the silence was broken by the same pitiful sobbing, but the mourners were invisible. I went from room to room; ...I kept on until I arrived at the East Room, which I entered. There I met with a sickening surprise. Before me was a catafalque, on which rested a corpse wrapped in funeral vestments. Around it were stationed soldiers who were acting as guards; and there was a throng of people, gazing mournfully upon the corpse, whose face was covered, others weeping pitifully. 'Who is dead in the White House?' I demanded of one of the soldiers, 'The President,' was his answer; 'he was killed by an assassin.' ...I slept no more that night; and ... I have been strangely annoyed by it ever since."*

SOURCE: p. 116-117 of *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln 1847-1865* by Ward Hill Lamon (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

Emerging from my experience of synchronicity, I have conducted a thought experiment. Is it not possible that in another reference frame all is anticipated; that what is to happen is known three hours before, one day before, four months before; where 1973 is observed simultaneously with 2013? Is it not possible, for example, that our intelligence, our rationality and our logic is limited by who we are? Is there not an analogy to the *Pauli Exclusion Principle*, discovered by Pauli the 1945 Nobel Laureate in Physics and the co-author with Jung of *The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche*? The *Exclusion Principle* states that no two identical particles with half-integer spin may occupy the same quantum state simultaneously, so that there can be only two electrons in the first shell, eight in the second, eighteen in the third and so on. Is it not possible that we are like the electrons in the first shell occupying one quantum state; and in another reference frame all quantum states are observed? In other words, in another reference frame, our past, present and future are observable. Why is that so preposterous, given what we now know from the theory of relativity? Einstein was not as dismissive of synchronicity as others. Is it not possible that synchronicity is just the interface connecting our quantum state and another reference frame for which all quantum states are observable? Why is that implausible? All we really know about **time** is that it conditions our existence; but we are never able to relax that conditioning. Our existence does not permit it. We cannot release the conditionality of time, nor the conditionality of our existence. Hence we can never test a hypothesis that in another reference frame 1973 and 2013 are simultaneous; or that synchronicity is just the interface to that reference frame. When Jung spoke of a discontinuity in the triad of *space, time and causality*, I sense this is what he meant. Jung's discontinuity is our incompleteness, our exclusion from other quantum states, our inability to extract ourselves from our conditionality. That is the thought experiment I have conducted, and which most adequately explains my experience with synchronicity.

## 5. *Meaning*

There is a final reason why I have resolved that synchronicity is not random and is partially revealing. Synchronicity began for me with whistleblowing. Blowing the whistle is a singular and defining experience; it is like an arbitrary trial, just like the trial of Kafka's Joseph K. As I wrote recently in an article in *Independent Australia*

*"Whistleblowing is not an easy issue. It cannot be taught in a textbook, or by consulting an ethicist. No, it is too important for that. Nothing is black and white in whistleblowing. A real whistleblower has to weigh up all types of considerations; but ultimately it reduces to natural fairness. "*

Whistleblowing taught me three lessons. First, I learnt of regulatory failure; that mandated regulation is not real regulation. Secondly, I learnt to be the outsider. As I wrote in my paper *Courage Without Mateship* at the 2004 National Conference of Whistleblowers Australia,

*"By blowing the whistle, the whistleblower ceases to be a mate. The whistleblower becomes the outsider and the whistleblower's world inverts. Secrecy replaces openness, unfairness replaces fairness, and the network replaces true mateship. The outsider is never protected in such a world."*

Thirdly, I learnt of natural justice. Whistleblowers look for an independent arbiter to judge without encumbrance. Whistleblowers rarely find that arbiter. They must instead survive through detachment. Natural justice needs to be found elsewhere. Synchronicity became relevant for me because whenever there was a significant matter associated with the whistleblowing, there was often synchronicity. And whenever there was a sense of natural justice, there was often synchronicity. I do not suggest the

presence of a patron saint of whistleblowers. But I do suggest the universe arbitrates more than we think. And synchronicity appears to be relevant.

Most of you will reject this hypothesis. You will reject it more tomorrow than today, and probably more in a week's time after reflection. That is the consequence of rationality. That is also the consequence of different conditioning; for you have not seen what I have seen. Unsurprisingly, a lecture on synchronicity is probably best delivered anonymously.

### *The Implications for Existentialism*

In the context of synchronicity, existence and existentialism are now briefly considered.

#### *Existence*

Paul Davies in *The Mind of God* considers the question "What Does it Mean for Something to Exist?" Davies was not just considering concrete things, the things we can touch, smell or kick (in the words of Dr. Johnson); he was also considering the abstract like the laws of nature. How do you know an atom exists - have you ever seen one, felt one or split one? How do you know that Newton's laws exist - have you done the experiment yourself and done the calculations? How do you know that short-term interest rates can predict inflation one year ahead - have you satisfied yourself as to the stability of their predictability? We accept the existence of many things, the concrete as well as the abstract, through conditioning. We accept our own existence through conditioning, through the sample path of our life; for we know no other. But we will typically not accept the existence of a concept like synchronicity for two reasons. First, there is insufficient evidence for us; it is not compatible with our own conditioning. Secondly, there is insufficient evidence for others. It has not been shown to be a law of nature; it is not a law that can be demonstrated in the laboratory; it is a behavioral artifact that is too

dependent on the observer to be regarded as a law. It is more like a thought experiment than a law. And while thought experiments such as Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, Einstein's theory of relativity and Pauli's exclusion principle are never questioned, synchronicity is simply too much of a discontinuity. We are too conditioned to rationality; to chronology; to sequencing to even contemplate that there could be another reference frame where 1973 is observed as 2013; not just for the universe as a whole but also for us. Reflecting on my conditionality and the synchronicity, my position is not dissimilar to that of Meursault, the last exclamation of L'Etrangeur,

*"And I, too, felt ready to start life over again. It was as if that great rush of anger had washed me clean, emptied me of hope, and gazing up at the dark sky spangled with its signs and stars, for the first time, the first, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe. To feel it so like myself, indeed so brotherly, made me realize that I'd been happy, and that I was happy still."*

Meursault, The Stranger, Albert Camus

I too am happy to look up at the stars, even if there is calibration. For then, I can look up at the stars without indifference.

### ***Existentialism***

In his 1945 lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre enunciated some principles of existentialism, inter alia

#### ***Existence***

*"Man shall attain existence only when he is what he projects himself to be."*

#### ***Freedom***

*"There is no determinism. Man is condemned to be free. Man is free to invent himself."*

#### ***Signs***

*"Man cannot find refuge in a sign that will guide him on earth."*



## ***Ethics***

*“There is no code of ethics to tell you what you ought to do.”*

## ***Others***

*“Others are essential to my existence, as well as the knowledge I have of myself.”*

By these principles, man’s destiny is determined by himself with the mediation of others. For a man to know himself is to understand his conditioning and to know to whom he has converged. There is nothing in my lecture tonight which contradicts this. Synchronicity may be a calibration of man’s existence, and synchronicity may anticipate the future; but no man could determine that calibration or anticipation ex-ante. Only ex-post, after a man’s essence has been realized, can the calibration provided by synchronicity be realized. Only ex-post can the anticipatory nature of synchronicity be realized. Only ex-post may the arbitration of the universe be seen. We are still free to choose, we are still free to invent. What synchronicity shows is that our existence, our choices, and our commitments may be observed in a reference frame beyond our rationality. We are free, but not necessarily exclusively free.