

# Religion, Science, and Synchronicity

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In this paper, I examine the role C. G. Jung's (1875-1961) theory of synchronicity played in his attempt to come to a satisfactory understanding of the relationship between religion and science. First, I briefly explain the theory of synchronicity. Then, I sketch Jung's lifelong preoccupation with the relationship between religion and science and note some of its implications for his general psychological theory. Jung's emphasis in this theory on the primacy of psychic reality provided a ground on which religious (spiritual) imagery and scientific (material) imagery could interact. However, it also left him open to the charge that he was reducing spiritual and material phenomena to psychic phenomena. Next, I show the influence of Jung's understanding of religion and science on his theory of synchronicity. After that, I note some influences that the theory of synchronicity, reflexively, had on Jung's understanding of religion and science. With the theory of synchronicity, Jung achieves even closer interaction between the domains of religion and science and in a manner that is less dependent on the notion of psychic reality. In the last main section, I suggest how the theory of synchronicity supports some of the more spiritual emphases within analytical psychology. I conclude by noting a more general implication of this overall discussion for the status of depth psychology in relation to religion and science.

## JUNG'S THEORY OF SYNCHRONICITY

Jung was in his mid seventies before he formally set down his thoughts about synchronicity—although he had been thinking about and occasionally alluding to the phenomenon for almost thirty years (Jung, 1952b, par. 816; 1963, p. 342). He defined synchronicity in a variety of ways. Most succinctly, he defined it as 'meaningful coincidence' (Jung, 1952b, par. 827), as 'acausal parallelism' (Jung, 1963, p. 342), or as 'an acausal connecting principle' (Jung, 1952b). More fully, he defined it as 'the simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state' (Jung, 1952b, par. 850). What he means by these definitions is most easily conveyed by an example. Jung's best-known account of a synchronistic experience concerns a young woman patient whose excellent but excessive intellectuality made her 'psychologically inaccessible', closed off from a 'more human understanding'. Unable to make headway in the analysis, Jung reports that he had to confine himself to 'the hope that something

unexpected would turn up, something that would burst the intellectual retort into which she had sealed herself'. He continues:

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 jewellery. 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 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-chaffer (*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, 1951b, par. 982)

In this example, the *psychic state* is indicated by the patient's decision to tell Jung her dream of being given a scarab. The *parallel external event* is the appearance and behaviour of the real scarab. Neither of these events discernibly or plausibly caused the other by any normal means, so their relationship is *acausal*. Nevertheless, the events parallel each other in such unlikely detail that one cannot escape the impression that they are indeed *connected*, albeit acausally. Moreover, this acausal connection of events both is symbolically informative (as we shall see) and has a deeply emotive and transforming impact on the patient and in these senses is clearly *meaningful*. (Jung's requirement that the parallel events be *simultaneous* is more problematic. For present purposes, it is sufficient to know that Jung does also allow for paralleling between events that are not simultaneous.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the patient's dream, rather than her decision to tell the dream, preceded the actual appearance of the scarab by several hours. Yet, Jung would certainly have considered the coincidence between the dream and the actual appearance synchronistic even if the patient had not decided to tell the dream at just that moment.)

Jung attempts to account for synchronistic events primarily in terms of his concept of *archetypes*. For this purpose, he highlights the nature of archetypes as 'formal factors responsible for the organisation of unconscious psychic processes: they are "patterns of behaviour." At the same time they have a "specific charge" and develop numinous effects which express themselves as *affects*' (Jung, 1952b, par. 841). They 'constitute the structure' not of the personal but 'of the *collective unconscious* ... a psyche that is identical in all individuals' (Jung, 1952b, par. 840; emphasis added). Also relevant is that they typically express themselves in the form of *symbolic images* (Jung, 1952b, par. 845). Jung considered that synchronistic events tend to occur in situations in which an archetype is active or 'constellated' (Jung, 1952b, par. 847). Such constellation of archetypes in the life of a person is governed by the process of *individuation*—the inherent drive of the psyche towards increased wholeness and self-realisation. Individuation in turn proceeds through the dynamic of *compensation*, whereby any one-sidedness in a person's conscious attitude is balanced by contents emerging from the

unconscious which, if successfully integrated, contribute to a state of greater psychic wholeness.<sup>2</sup> Relating these psychological dynamics to the example, Jung suggests that it has ‘an archetypal foundation’ (Jung, 1952b, par. 845) and, more specifically, that it was the archetype of rebirth that was constellated. He writes that ‘Any essential change of attitude signifies a psychic renewal which is usually accompanied by symbols of rebirth in the patient’s dreams and fantasies. The scarab is a classic example of a rebirth symbol’ (Jung, 1952b, par. 845). The emotional charge or numinosity of the archetype is evident from its having ‘broke[n] the ice of [the patient’s] intellectual resistance’. The compensatory nature of the experience is also clear: her one-sided rationalism and psychological stasis were balanced by an event that both in its symbolism and in its action expressed the power of the irrational and the possibility of renewal. Finally, that all of this promoted the patient’s individuation is implied by Jung’s statement that ‘The treatment could now be continued with satisfactory results’.

Jung mentions several reasons why the theory of synchronicity was important to him. He wished to make sense of the numerous meaningful coincidences he had experienced personally, observed in others, or encountered in the course of his research into the history of symbols. He felt that synchronicity opens up ‘a very obscure field which is philosophically of the greatest importance’. Again, he had become convinced as to ‘how much these inner experiences meant’ to his patients (Jung, 1952b, par. 816). In what follows, I shall argue that the theory of synchronicity was also important to Jung because of the role it played, albeit implicitly, in his attempt to come to a satisfactory understanding of the relationship between religion and science.

## JUNG AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND SCIENCE

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when the depth psychological theories were being developed, much of the most vocal discussion of the relationship between religion and science presented them as irreconcilable and engaged in an epic battle for intellectual and spiritual hegemony. For example, in 1875, the year of Jung’s birth, J. W. Draper published a book entitled *History of the conflict between religion and science*. Twenty years later, in 1895, appeared A. D. White’s volume *A history of the warfare of science with theology in Christendom*.<sup>3</sup> Present-day discussions tend to recognise more nuances. In what follows, I shall make use of the contemporary writer Ian Barbour’s recognition of four main categories of interaction between religion and science (Barbour, 1998, pp. 77-105). First is *conflict*, in which religion and science provide competing and mutually exclusive explanations for the same phenomena (e.g., Bible-belt creationist accounts versus Neo-Darwinian evolutionary accounts of the origin of human life). Second is *independence*, in which religion and science either account for different phenomena (e.g., material and spiritual) or provide different kinds of account for the same phenomena (e.g., science explains the mechanisms, religion explains the purpose); because there is no direct competition between them, these accounts are, at least in principle, compatible. Third is *dialogue*, in which religion and science, for all their differences, have sufficient areas of overlapping interest to allow for a fruitful exchange of insights and ideas (e.g., Fritjof Capra’s [1977] highlighting of a shared concern with interconnectedness in some Eastern religions and some theories of modern physics).

Fourth and last is *integration*, in which religion and science are capable, at least at certain points, of unification into a single discourse (e.g., Teilhard de Chardin's [1959] weaving together of biological and spiritual evolution).

Jung was preoccupied with the relationship between religion and science throughout his life. In one of the chapters he himself wrote for *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* he recalls his youthful interest in both these areas:

The older I grew, the more frequently I was asked by my parents and others what I wanted to be. I had no clear notions on that score. My interests drew me in different directions. On the one hand I was powerfully attracted by science, with its truths based on facts; on the other hand I was fascinated by everything to do with comparative religion. In the sciences I was drawn principally to zoology, palaeontology, and geology; in the humanities to Greco-Roman, Egyptian, and prehistoric archaeology. At that time, of course, I did not realise how very much this choice of the most varied subjects corresponded to the nature of my inner dichotomy. What appealed to me in science were the concrete facts and their historical background, and in comparative religion the spiritual problems, into which philosophy also entered. In science I missed the factor of meaning; and in religion, that of empiricism.

(Jung, 1963, p. 79)

Jung's reference here to his 'inner dichotomy'—between one part of him oriented towards mystery and inner experience and another part oriented towards rationalism and social adaptation—testifies to the personal dimension of his struggle with religion and science. The problem of their relationship was made even more acute for Jung when he witnessed his father, a Protestant pastor, undergoing a crisis of faith largely precipitated by the ascendancy of materialistic science. Writes Jung:

My father was obviously under the impression that psychiatrists had discovered something in the brain which proved that in the place where mind should have been there was only matter, and nothing 'spiritual'. This was borne out by his admonitions that if I studied medicine I should in Heaven's name not become a materialist.

(Jung, 1963, p. 98)

I would not want to suggest that personal factors alone were responsible for Jung's interest in the relationship between religion and science. A fuller contextualisation would have to consider a whole range of other contributory influences—intellectual, professional, social, geographical, economic, and political. I have focused on the personal factors because these most vividly convey the urgency of the problem presented to Jung by the dominant narrative of *conflict* between religion and science. As someone who could count numerous clergymen among his relatives and ancestors and who himself had a strong disposition towards personal religious experience, Jung would likely have experienced materialistic science not just as a threat to religion but as a threat to his own identity.

A scan of Jung's work at any stage in his long career shows that this early problem never left him. It is a dominant theme in the five lectures he delivered as a medical student to his fraternity the Zofingia Society (Jung, 1896-99). It is implicit in his decision to base his doctoral dissertation on a case study of a spirit medium (Jung, 1902; Charet, 1993). It was one of the main issues that led to his parting of ways with Freud and psychoanalysis (Jung, 1911-12/1952; McGuire, 1974). In developing and articulating his mature psychological theory, Jung always insisted that he was working as a scientist and empiricist, but he increasingly applied his 'empiricism' to the investigation of religious phenomena (Jung, 1928-54). His dual interest is conspicuous in the three 'Terry Lectures' on 'Psychology and Religion' that he delivered at Yale University in 1937. These were part of a series of 'Lectures on Religion in the light of Science and Philosophy' (Jung, 1938/1940, p. 3). They focused on a set of dreams of a scientist, showing, Jung argued, the spontaneous operation of a religious function in the psyche of someone sceptical about religion. The scientist we now know to have been the Nobel Prize-winning physicist Wolfgang Pauli, with whom Jung was later to collaborate in developing his ideas on synchronicity (Jung and Pauli, 1955). Pauli's dreams and visions also provided material for one of Jung's major works on alchemy (Jung, 1968). This subject, which occupied Jung in the last thirty years of his life, again joins religion and science: for alchemy, Jung shows, was not just a precursor of modern chemistry concerned with material transformations but also, in many cases, an esoteric religious discipline concerned with the spiritual transformation of the personality. Many of Jung's other late works—*Aion* (1951a), 'Answer to Job' (1952a), 'On the Nature of the Psyche' (1947/1954), and not least 'Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle' (1952b)—also evince this preoccupation with religion, science, and the relationship between them.

Jung's guiding motive throughout all of this was to preserve religion in the face of science. In a 1933 letter to Pastor Josef Shattauer, Jung confided that 'it is exceedingly difficult nowadays to inculcate into people any conception of genuine religiosity. I have found that religious terminology only scares them off still more, for which reason I always have to tread the path of science and experience, quite irrespective of any tradition, in order to get my patients to acknowledge spiritual truths' (Jung, 1973, p. 118). In 1945, writing to Father Victor White, Jung claimed that his 1911-12 book translated as *The Psychology of the Unconscious* 'was written by a psychiatrist for the purpose of submitting the necessary material to his psychiatric colleagues, material which would demonstrate to them the importance of religious symbolism'. In the same letter he explained: 'My personal view ... is that man's vital energy or libido is the divine pneuma all right and it was this conviction which it was my secret purpose to bring into the vicinity of my colleagues' understanding' (Jung, 1973, pp. 383-84; see also pp. 349-50).

At early stages in his career, Jung toyed with the *conflict* model of the relationship between religion and science. In doing so, his hope was that religion might win out. For example, in the last of his *Zofingia Lectures* he longs for the return of a mystical approach to religion, even if this entails 'the possibility of social and scientific indifference and call[ing] into question the further progress of civilisation' (Jung, 1896-99, par. 290). However, Jung quickly recognised that on most points of direct confrontation and conflict between religion and science, science was likely to prove the victor. 'The imposing arguments of science,' he acknowledges, 'represent the highest

degree of intellectual certainty yet achieved by the mind of man. So at least it seems to the man of today' (Jung, 1957, par. 543). Consequently, 'the guardians and custodians of symbolical truth, namely the religions, have been robbed of their efficacy by science' (Jung, 1911-12/1952, par. 336).

Jung therefore increasingly appealed to the *independence* position. 'My subjective attitude,' he wrote in 1933, 'is that I hold every religious position in high esteem but draw an inexorable dividing line between the content of belief and the requirements of science' (Jung, 1973, p. 125). At a talk he gave in London in 1939, a questioner put it to him that 'There is obviously, and always has been, a conflict between religion and science. ... How do you bring about a reconciliation, which obviously is the sort of thing that is needed?' Jung replied: 'There is no conflict between religion and science. That is a very old-fashioned idea. Science has to consider what there is. There is religion .... Science cannot establish [or, Jung also implies, refute] a religious truth. ... Our science is phenomenology' (Jung, 1939, pars. 691-92). Again, no less explicitly, he wrote in 1946: 'Science is human knowledge, theology divine knowledge. Therefore the two are incommensurable' (Jung, 1973, p. 411; see also pp. 119, 124, 346, 350, 384).

From the safety of this basic position of independence, Jung explored bolder possibilities for *dialogue* and *integration* between religion and science. 'A rapprochement between empirical science and religious experience,' he writes in *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 'would in my opinion be fruitful for both. Harm can result only if one side or the other remains unconscious of the limitations of its claim to validity' (Jung, 1954-55, par. 457). He notes that 'inside the religious movement there [have been] any number of attempts to combine science with religious belief and practice, as for instance Christian Science, theosophy, and anthroposophy' (Jung, 1936, par. 863). However, he held these particular attempts in low esteem, and this may account for his occasional repudiation of any integrative intent on his own part. For example, to one of the same correspondents to whom he had declared his belief in the independence of religion and science, he wrote: 'I am wholly incorrigible and utterly incapable of coming up with a mixture of theology and science' (Jung, 1973, p. 125). Nevertheless, he did aim to promote dialogue:

I start from a positive Christianity which is as much Catholic as Protestant, and I endeavour in a scientifically responsible manner to point out those empirically graspable facts which make the justification of Christian and, in particular, Catholic dogma at least plausible, and besides that are best suited to give the scientific mind an access to understanding.

(Jung, 1973, pp. 349-50)

Certain statements even point directly towards integration—at least if we bear in mind Jung's insistence that his psychology was scientific: 'I would surely be among the first to welcome an explicit attempt to integrate the findings of psychology into the ecclesiastical doctrine,' he wrote to Father White in 1945 (Jung, 1973, p. 385).

Jung was enabled to explore these possibilities by the phenomenological emphasis within his psychological theory.<sup>4</sup> Basing himself on his understanding of Kant's epistemology (see Voogd, 1984), Jung argued that things in themselves, whether material things or spiritual things, cannot be known other than as mediated to consciousness in the

form of psychic images. Our primary reality, he repeatedly stated, the only reality of which we can be immediately aware, is psychic reality (e.g., Jung, 1939/1954, par. 760; 1963, pp. 323-24). This notion provides a middle ground in which images stemming from the realm of matter (the traditional province of science) and images stemming from the realm of spirit (the traditional province of religion) can be treated even-handedly within the same field. The primary reality of these images, whatever their putative origin, is psychic.<sup>5</sup> The mere fact that they occur as psychic images guarantees them reality and importance and some basic affinity with one another. Particularly important for Jung is the implication that religious images no less than any other kind deserve to be taken seriously (Jung, 1938/1940, pars. 4-5).

Combined with the specific structures and processes postulated in his theory—the collective unconscious, archetypes, compensation, individuation, etc.—this psychological perspective provided Jung with a vantage point from which he could, reflexively, comment back on religion and science. For instance, he argues that ‘it is out of himself and out of his peculiar constitution that man has produced his sciences. They are *symptoms* of his psyche’ (Jung, 1930-31, par. 752). He remarks on the presence within both religion and science of guiding images and myths (Jung, 1919, par. 278; 1927, pars. 327; 1963, p. 313). Above all, he enjoyed pointing to the hidden presence of religious attitudes within science: he quotes with approval William James’s statement that ‘our scientific temper is devout’ (Jung, 1921, par. 528) and makes similar references of his own to the deification of matter (Jung, 1938/1954, par. 195), the asceticism of the scientist (Jung, 1939/1954, par. 786), and the way faith in science can act as a defence or compensation for superstitious impulses (Jung, 1916, par. 495; 1938/1940, par. 81). In general, the implication that both religious phenomena (including experiences, doctrines, and rituals) and scientific phenomena (including observations, theories, and practices) present themselves as psychic images enabled Jung to discuss any of these phenomena as relative, conditioned, susceptible to pragmatic and psychological evaluation, and both open to and often requiring change—all of this without making any judgement about the spiritual or material reality or truth that may underlie the phenomenal images.

## THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION AND SCIENCE ON SYNCHRONICITY

However, Jung also made a bolder attempt at rapprochement between religion and science in the form of his theory of synchronicity. This theory does not pivot so much on the notion of psychic reality. Indeed, as we shall see, it arguably represents an attempt by Jung to extricate his psychology from the charge of reductionism prompted by his emphasis on psychic reality.

The theory of synchronicity drew on both religious and scientific influences. The scientific influences are the more obvious, as Jung pushed these to the fore when presenting his theory. In the first place, there was Jung’s usual ‘empiricism’, that is to say, his accumulation of observational data. He refers to ‘the innumerable cases of meaningful coincidence that have been observed not only by me but by many others, and recorded in large collections’ (Jung, 1951b, par. 983). In the second place, there was Jung’s familiarity with recent discoveries in physics. Einstein was Jung’s dinner guest on several occasions between 1909 and 1912 and, says Jung, ‘It was Einstein who set me off

thinking about a possible relativity of time as well as space, and their psychic conditionality. More than thirty years later,' he continues, 'this stimulus led to my relation with the physicist Professor W. Pauli and to my thesis of psychic synchronicity' (Jung, 1976, p. 109). Through discussions with Pauli, Jung deepened his understanding of such features of quantum physics as complementarity and acausality, both of which were to figure in Jung's presentation of synchronicity (Jung, 1947/1954, pars. 439-40; 1952b, pars. 818-20, 959, 963-67; Main, 1997, pp. 16-17, 122-30). In the third place, there was Jung's interest in the newly developed field of experimental parapsychology. He was particularly inspired by J. B. Rhine's experiments at Duke University which seemed to provide robust statistical evidence for the existence of extra-sensory perception and psychokinesis, in other words, for connections between events that did not depend on any known form of psychophysical causation and even seemed to transgress the barriers of time and space (Jung, 1952b, pars. 833-40; 1973, pp. 180-82, 190, 378-79, 493-95; Main, 1997, pp. 15-16, 103-11).

The religious influences on Jung's theory of synchronicity are less explicit—interestingly so. In his efforts to highlight the scientific evidence for his theory, Jung introduces the religious influences on it covertly in scientific, philosophical, or historical disguise. For example, one major influence is the Chinese divinatory system of the *I Ching*. This is deeply embedded in Chinese religious thought but Jung emphasises its 'experimental foundation', its 'experiment-with-the-whole' (Jung, 1952b, par. 865); in an earlier discussion he had referred to the *I Ching* as the 'standard text book' of Chinese science (Jung, 1930, par. 80). Again, instead of referring to the traditional religious concern with the post-mortem existence of the soul, Jung refers to out-of-body and near-death experiences as studied empirically by psychical researchers (Jung, 1952b, pars. 949-55). Where he might have discussed religious experiences of mystical unity, he refers to the philosophical Taoism of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu (Jung, 1952b, pars. 916-24). Where he might have discussed religious notions of Providence, he refers to philosophical notions of pre-established harmony in Leibniz (Jung, 1952b, pars. 937-39). In his major essay on synchronicity, discussion of the religious concept of continuous creation, very suggestive for Jung's theme, is relegated to a footnote on the penultimate page (Jung, 1952b, par. 967 n. 17). Jung mentions Christian religious thought as having influenced him not in terms of its doctrines and theology but primarily through providing historical instances of synchronicity encountered in the course of his research into symbols (Jung, 1951a; 1963, p. 210; Main, 1997, pp. 14-15). Other demonstrable religious influences go unmentioned: for example, Jung's personal religious experiences, which included spiritualistic encounters with otherworldly beings and mystical visions of unity (Jung, 1963, pp. 174-78, 270-77; Main, 1997, pp. 2-7, 60-61, 136-41).

This fore-grounding of the scientific credibility of his theory and downplaying its, nevertheless easily detectable, religious influences illustrate Jung's awareness that the route to intellectual respectability lay through science. Nevertheless, it is interesting that, in covertly introducing the religious influences, Jung sometimes implicitly demonstrated the extent to which he felt the religious and scientific categories could interact—and no longer simply on the basis of their shared grounding in psyche. For example, he implies that the concept of science should be broad enough to accommodate the kinds of 'experimental' observation involved in divination, and that the concerns of religion, such as the survival of the soul, should not be kept insulated from the investigative procedures

and insights of the sciences. Further, if we recall Jung's complaint that 'In science I missed the factor of meaning; and in religion, that of empiricism' (Jung, 1963, p. 79), we can sense the measure of integration he has achieved for himself with his theory of synchronicity. For in this theory Jung has championed precisely the factor of meaning; and he has done so on as solid a base of empiricism as he could manage.

## THE INFLUENCE OF SYNCHRONICITY ON RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Not only did Jung's understanding of religion and science influence his theory of synchronicity, his theory of synchronicity, once formulated, had implications back on his understanding of religion and science.

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...' (Jung, 1976, p. 217). On the same day he wrote to Michael Fordham of 'the impact of synchronicity upon the fanatical one-sidedness of scientific philosophy' (Jung, 1976, p. 216). 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 (Jung, 1952b, pars. 961-63). 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' (Jung, 1952b, par. 961)—that is, a judgement that takes into consideration psychological as well as physical factors (Jung, 1952b, par. 964). 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 (1987) and Victor Mansfield (1995), others working independently but aware of Jung's contribution and possibly influenced or inspired by it, for instance those of David Bohm (1980) and Rupert Sheldrake (1981).

Jung applied his theory of synchronicity to religious phenomena less systematically. He invokes it on several occasions when discussing the possibility of life after death, arguing that the transtemporal dimension indicated by synchronistic experiences provides for the possibility of a kind of 'existence outside time', which may therefore also be 'outside change' and possess 'relative eternity' (Jung, 1976, p. 561; see further Main, 1997, pp. 38, 142-57). He also invokes synchronicity both as a descriptive equivalent of religious miracles and as a theory for trying to understand them (Jung, 1976, pp. 21, 537, 540, 576; Main, 1997, pp. 38, 162-64). Again, the theory of synchronicity implicitly contributed to Jung's understanding of experiences of mystical unity (Jung, 1963, pp. 274-75; Main, 1997, pp. 37, 136-41). However, it remained for later writers, notably Robert Aziz (1990), to draw out the most important implication of the theory of synchronicity for Jung's understanding of religion. Jung's psychology of religion was often criticised by theologians for being a form of psychological

reductionism. Jung may have been well disposed towards religion, and he may have provided a strategy for taking religious phenomena seriously in the face of the reductive claims of materialistic science, but because his model emphasised the primacy of psychic reality and, on epistemological grounds, denied that anything non-psychic could be directly experienced, it seemed to many that he was in effect reducing religion to psychology. God as an objective external reality seemed to have been replaced by the image of God in a person's mind (see Aziz, 1990, pp. 46-49). In defence of Jung, Aziz directs attention to synchronistic events. Such events indicate that meanings experienced psychically can also non-projectively be experienced outwardly. In the example given at the beginning of this paper, the appearance and behaviour of the real scarab beetle demonstrated that the meaning expressing itself in the patient's dream of a scarab was not only internal and subjective but could also involve the external, natural world. Neither, then, is there any reason to suppose that the meaning expressed in a person's image of God is only internal and subjective. That meaning too could express itself outwardly, neither caused by nor projected from an individual psyche (see Aziz, 1990, pp. 179-80).<sup>6</sup>

In all of the above instances of the influence of synchronicity on Jung's understanding of religion and science, the underlying motive of promoting dialogue and integration is easily discernible. In uniting or bringing into closer relationship the inner psychic and outer material realms, Jung is establishing the basis for a corresponding rapprochement of at least some parts of the discourses of religion and science. Moreover, he is doing this in a manner that is less dependent on the notion of the primacy of psychic reality than was the case with his pre-synchronistic psychology of religion.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ANALYTICAL PSYCHOLOGY

As has already been hinted, the theory of synchronicity has some important theoretical implications for Jung's psychological model. Several of these further promote Jung's task of preserving religion in the face of science. Most importantly, synchronicity entails a broadening of the concept of the archetype, so that it can be seen as not just a psychic factor but a psychophysical one, or rather as 'grounded on an as yet unknown substrate possessing material and at the same time psychic qualities' (Jung, 1958a, par. 780). The phenomenon of synchronicity, Jung states, leads to the postulation of 'a unitary aspect of being' at the deepest level of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1954-55, par. 662). Against the background of such a theoretical notion, mystical experiences of unity of the kind Jung himself reported (Jung, 1963, pp. 270-77) become more intelligible.

Related to this, I would argue that Jung might have seen in synchronicity a means of firming up his notion of the transpersonal nature of the collective unconscious and archetypes. When arguing for this transpersonal viewpoint, Jung generally appealed to 'the repeated observation that, for instance, the myths and fairy tales of world literature contain definite motifs which crop up everywhere', and that 'We meet these same motifs in the fantasies, dreams, deliria, and delusions of individuals living today' (Jung, 1958b, par. 847). He tried to establish that in at least some cases the 'individuals living today' could not possibly have been exposed to any cultural expression of these motifs. Therefore, when the motifs emerged from the unconscious of such individuals, there could be no origin for them in their personal history; they demonstrated the existence of a

collective or transpersonal dimension to the unconscious. However, problematically for Jung, in all cases of the emergence of such motifs alternative explanations seem at least as plausible as the hypothesis of a collective unconscious. One alternative explanation is that the motifs do indeed arise independently in each individual but this is because all individuals, *in their personal lives*, are subject to the same basic range of typical experiences (see, e.g., Palmer, 1997, pp. 176-81). Another alternative explanation, this time denying the independent origin of the motifs, is cryptomnesia—the possibility that cultural expressions of the motifs may have been observed but then forgotten, or observed subliminally without ever having entered conscious awareness (see, e.g., Noll, 1994a, pp. 84-85). At this point, Jung could refer, as Aziz was to do in relation to religion, to synchronistic experiences. For in such experiences the same pattern of meaning expresses itself both in the psyche and, without any causal or projective relationship, in the external world. This alone, Jung could argue, is sufficient to demonstrate the transpersonal nature of the unconscious. Whether or not his patient had prior exposure to images of scarabs, and whether or not she could have acquired from her personal experience a disposition to produce symbols of rebirth, the synchronicity suggests that some factor larger than her personal psyche has been involved in the organisation of the events—a factor that encompasses the external world of nature in addition to her inner psychic world.

On a more practical level, the concept of synchronicity helps to valorise a certain class of numinous events that might otherwise go unnoticed, not least because of their evanescence, irrationality, and (more so than with dreams, for instance) irregular occurrence. In providing at least a tentative framework for understanding such experiences, the theory of synchronicity enables us to bring them into view, acknowledge them, and question them for any information they may hold, whether in clinical or cultural settings. This is all the more important since such experiences, even when recognised, are often taboo. Jung reports:

As a psychiatrist and psychotherapist I have often come up against the phenomena in question and could convince myself how much these inner experiences meant to my patients. In most cases they were things which people do not talk about for fear of exposing themselves to thoughtless ridicule. I was amazed to see how many people have had experiences of this kind and how carefully the secret was guarded.

(Jung, 1952b, par. 816)

At a deeper practical level, it has been argued recently by George Bright that synchronicity provides the theoretical basis for a kind of analytic attitude that is distinctively Jungian (Bright, 1997). Jung's notion of synchronicity implies that meaning exists objectively not only in the psyche but also in the physical world. 'In analysis,' Bright argues, 'the implication of this is that as well as the subjective meaning which analyst and patient *create*, there is also an underlying objective aspect of meaning which we therefore have to try to *find*' (Bright, 1997, p. 619). However, since 'this aspect of meaning is essentially unconscious, it can never be fully elucidated or comprehended' (Bright, 1997, p. 619). Therefore, 'both analyst and patient are ... restrained from attributing meaning to the analytic material as if the conscious meanings they find or

create were objectively or absolutely true' (Bright, 1997, p. 618). More particularly, we are presented with 'a way of connecting that tries not to do violence to the material through crude, potentially dissociative attribution of cause' (Bright, 1997, p. 614). This acknowledgement within the analytic setting of objective, transpsychic meaning that can never be exhaustively known and that invites an inquiring but respectful attitude towards it further promotes the alignment of Jung's psychology with the concerns of religion.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

For almost as long as they have existed, the various forms of depth psychology have provoked controversy concerning their status in relation to religion and science. Freud, of course, thought of psychoanalysis as a science and used it as an instrument for unmasking religion as infantile, neurotic, obsessive, and illusory (Freud, 1912-13, 1927, 1939). Jung, too, though emphasising the primacy of psychic reality, liked to present analytical psychology as a science. However, he used it as an instrument for restoring to religion its dignity, meaning, vitality, and reality (Jung, 1928-54). Critics and revisionists of both psychoanalysis and analytical psychology, indeed of depth psychology in general, have argued that these bodies of thought are not science but something else—negatively, pseudo-science, more positively, hermeneutics (Bateman and Holmes, 1995, pp. 20-22). Therefore, it could be argued, neither psychoanalytic attacks on nor analytical psychological defences of religion can claim the support of science. Some have even charged that psychoanalysis and analytical psychology are themselves quasi-religions (e.g., Webster, 1996; Noll, 1994b, 1997).<sup>7</sup>

From the preceding discussion, I think we can see that for Jung the notions of religion, of science, of the relationship between religion and science, and of analytical psychology are neither simple nor static. For example, if we look at Jung's understanding of religion and science and their interactions before and after he developed his mature psychological theory, we find that this understanding changed in significant ways. It then changed further under the impact of his theory of synchronicity—as indeed did important concepts within his psychological theory itself. I do not think we should view this negatively as a sign of Jung's inconsistency, or problematically as a sign of the mercurial nature of Jung's intellect, but rather positively as a sign of the ability of depth psychology, and of specific theories within it, to exert a transformative influence back on our conceptions of religion and science as well as of depth psychology itself. Historians have by now amply demonstrated the extent to which our notions of 'religion' and 'science' have shifted over time and have been continually contested and negotiated, while the interactions between these contested notions have been correspondingly varied and complex (Brooke, 1991; Brooke and Cantor, 1998). Nor does it seem that notions of 'psychoanalysis' and 'analytical psychology' are any more clear-cut and stable (Bateman and Holmes, 1995, pp. 16-20; Samuels, 1985, 1998). It follows that there is unlikely to be any straightforward relationship of depth psychology to either religion or science. All three concepts or fields are mutable and capable of standing in various dynamic relationships to one another. Religion and science can be as much challenged by the perspectives and insights of depth psychology as depth psychology, throughout its short history, has been challenged by the perspectives and insights of religion and science.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I have discussed elsewhere Jung's reasons for including the requirement of simultaneity, his recognition of some of the problems to which it leads, and his attempts to resolve these problems (Main, 1997, pp. 20-24). Jung offered an even more elaborate definition of synchronicity in order to cover events that fit the definition I have described except that these events either cannot at the time be known to be simultaneous (as, for example, with apparently clairvoyant visions) or are not simultaneous at all (as, for example, with apparently precognitive dreams) (Jung, 1955, pp. 144-45). He offers non-clinical examples of both these kinds of synchronicities. His example involving events whose simultaneity could not be known at the time is the following incident that had also fascinated Kant. It concerns the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg's well-attested vision of the great fire in Stockholm in 1759. Swedenborg was at a party in Gothenburg about 200 miles from Stockholm when the vision occurred. He told his companions at six o'clock in the evening that the fire had started, then described its course over the next two hours, exclaiming in relief at eight o'clock that it had at last been extinguished, just three doors from his own house. All these details were confirmed when messengers arrived in Gothenburg from Stockholm over the next few days (Jung, 1952b, pars. 912, 915). Jung's example involving events that are not simultaneous at all concerns a student friend of his whose father had promised him a trip to Spain if he passed his final examinations satisfactorily. The friend then had a dream of seeing various things in a Spanish city: a particular square, a Gothic Cathedral, and, around a certain corner, a carriage drawn by two cream-coloured horses. Shortly afterwards, having successfully passed his examinations, he actually visited Spain for the first time and encountered all the details from his dream in reality (Jung, 1951b, par. 973).

<sup>2</sup> Jung does not explicitly discuss synchronicity in relation to compensation and individuation. However, the implicit relevance of these concepts is obvious if one considers his overall psychological model (see, e.g., Jung, 1945/1948, where he discusses compensation, individuation, and archetypes in relation to dreams). The connection to synchronicity has been made by Aziz (1990), Kelly (1993), and Mansfield (1995).

<sup>3</sup> To be sure, actual positions on the issue were subtler and more varied than these titles suggest, and there was a notable counter-trend that presented religion and science as fundamentally consistent with and supportive of each other. For example, Freud, when he was a student, came close to losing his lack of faith, so impressed was he by the persuasive arguments of the philosopher Franz Brentano, an ex-priest who 'believed in God and respected Darwin at the same time' (Gay, 1988, p. 29). The dominant rhetoric, however, was of titanic conflict.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the pressure on Jung of his commitment to both the religious and the scientific viewpoints undoubtedly contributed to the development of this theory, inasmuch as one of his requirements of a satisfactory psychological theory would have been its compatibility with both of these commitments.

<sup>5</sup> 'Concerning spirit (pneuma) I want to say that spirit and matter are a pair of opposite concepts which designate only the bipolar aspect of observation in time and space. Of their substance we know nothing. Spirit is just as ideal as matter. They are mere postulates of reason. Therefore I speak of psychic contents that are labelled "pneumatic" and others "material"' (Jung, 1973, p. 421).

<sup>6</sup> For an exploration of synchronicity in relation to a range of traditional religious concepts, see Main (1996), especially pp. 196-272.

<sup>7</sup> Contra these charges in relation to analytical psychology, see Segal (1999a, 1999b), Shamdasani (1999), and Storr (1999).

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"Religion is the antithesis of science; science is competent to illuminate all the deep questions of existence, and does so in a manner that makes full use of, and respects the human intellect. I see neither need nor sign of any future reconciliation." Review of Chet Raymo's *Skeptics and True Believers* (2005). Although science and religion have long been in collision, it is fashionable (and politically correct) to portray this ongoing battle as a mutual accommodation, but in reality, religion is doing most of the accommodating, as the gaps in understanding that nourish God grow ever smaller. For many seeking religious consolation, the advance of science has forced a retreat to the easy fix of New Age nostrums; but in *Skeptics and True Believers*, Chet Raymo shows that there is a better way. The main aim of this paper is to undertake a comparative scientific analysis of religions on the basis of the well-known theoretical foundation developed by Jean Piaget. The special feature of his approach is its logical and mathematical underpinnings. We use them to resolve disputes among religious systems. In this case we are obliged to refer to that level of reality which can be disclosed to us only by means of corresponding logical and mathematical tools. Such an apparatus and its accompanying map of reality is a necessary component in the study of what is at essence an evolutionary biological and social process, which is what we are namely dealing with in terms of the analytic study of religions.

† (en) Roderick Main, « Religion, Science, and Synchronicity », *Harvest: Journal for Jungian Studies*, 2000, p. V. 46, no. 2 pp. 89-107. (lire en ligne).

† Jung, "La synchronicit , principe de relations acausales", p. 27.

† La synchronicit  selon Jung, <http://www.alliancespirite.org/dossier-4.html>.

† Jean Moisset, *La loi des s ries dans notre vie et les jeux de hasard*, *JMG  ditions*, 2000.

† Jung, *Dream Analysis*, p. 44-45.

† Deirdre Bair, *Jung. Une biographie*, Flammarion, p. 559, 1155. Religion, Science, and Synchronicity. Dr Roderick Main Lecturer in Psychoanalytic Studies. University of Essex, UK. The theory of synchronicity drew on both religious and scientific influences. The scientific influences are the more obvious, as Jung pushed these to the fore when presenting his theory. In the first place, there was Jung's usual "empiricism", that is to say, his accumulation of observational data.