

BOOK REVIEWS

A NEW APPROACH TO PSI: RE-ENVISIONING PARANORMAL EXPERIENCE AS MEANINGFUL COINCIDENCE

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A NEW APPROACH TO SYNCHRONICITY: A RE-APPRAISAL OF JUNG'S ACAUSAL CONNECTING PRINCIPLE WITH A FOCUS ON PSI

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These two interrelated books by career parapsychologist Lance Storm bring out major dilemmas currently confronting psi research. Storm appears to believe that meta-analyses provide compelling evidence that parapsychological experiments produce replicable, convincing psi effects. At the same time, he also believes that the effects are weak, inadequately reliable, and justify a significant change in how researchers think about psi. These books present his ideas and rationale for revising the working assumptions and models for psi research. Ironically, some of his arguments are based on out-of-date, overly optimistic views about meta-analyses that may unnecessarily hinder acceptance of his ideas.

Storm's 'new approach to psi' is based on Carl Jung's ideas about synchronicity, but with a much greater emphasis on the role of archetypes than found in most previous writings about synchronicity and psi. Synchronicity is well-known to be a coincidence that has meaning to a person. Storm argues that the meaning in a synchronicity experience must be derived from or associated with archetypes. The archetypes are inherited forms or patterns in the human unconscious that are common to all people ('collective unconscious') and manifest in myths, stories, and human life in general.

A key point is that people do not directly control the activation of archetypes. "Archetypal forces are very powerful; they go beyond the parameters the psyche might like to set and cannot be controlled let alone successfully summoned entirely at will" (p. 44). If psi is actually synchronicity as Jung proposed, the usual assumption that psi is a controllable human ability is not correct. These initial ideas were very stimulating for me, but became less so as the ideas were adapted to conform to more conventional thinking about psi.

BOOK 1. A NEW APPROACH TO PSI

Chapter 1 describes J. B. Rhine's role in developing experimental parapsychology and the associated assumptions and concepts for psi research. Storm discusses the historical difficulties in establishing the different types or mechanisms of psi (clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis, etc.) and introduces synchronicity as a unifying alternative.

Chapter 2 discusses the Trickster archetype as having a prominent role in parapsychological research. The activated Trickster archetype is associated with disruptions, instability, reversals, and self-defeating actions, and may have a natural association with paranormal phenomena. Storm proposes that the Trickster manifests as inappropriate methods and conclusions about research, as well as in actual psi effects.

Notably, Storm proposes that concern about experimenter effects in psi research is not justified and is a manifestation of the Trickster influencing researchers to make erroneous interpretations. This is surprising given that experimenter differences have been a prominent, consistent observation since the first experiments in the 1930s and have been experimentally verified various times over the years. J. B. Rhine had no doubt that experimenters have differing abilities to obtain psi effects in experiments.

Storm argues that experimenter effects *within studies* designed to investigate experimenter differences are established, but *between-study* experimenter effects that pertain to a line of research are minor and can be basically ignored. Storm bases his argument on the claims in many meta-analyses that experimenter differences were not found, which Storm interprets as evidence that experimenter effects have little impact on psi research.

This appears to be a case of *excessive optimism about retrospective meta-analyses* (EORMA). Such optimism was common before the replication crisis in psychology that began about 2012. Meta-analyses were often considered as providing definitive evidence. However, the lessons from the replication crisis include that retrospective meta-analyses (a) are subject to bias from questionable research practices in the included studies, and (b) are a form of *post hoc* analyses with much flexibility for the analysts to make decisions that bias the outcome.

In a review of the replication crisis in psychology, Nelson et al. (2018) concluded: "Thus, meta-analysis does not solve the problems the field faces; it exacerbates them" (p. 528). More recently, Stanley et al. (2022) compared large pre-registered multicentre studies with previous meta-analyses in psychology (including Bem's studies of precognition) and concluded that meta-analyses with mostly underpowered studies "should be interpreted with great caution or discounted altogether" (p. 88). The fact that retrospective meta-analyses have not been effective at resolving scientific debates in psychology has been noted previously (Ferguson & Heene, 2012, p. 558). Psychology and parapsychology appear to be moving toward the recognition that statisticians working in

clinical trials expressed a decade before the replication crisis in psychology: “the importance of meta-analysis lies mainly in exploration, not confirmation. In settling therapeutic issues, a meta-analysis is a poor substitute for one large well-conducted trial” (Green et al., 2003, p. 231).

Storm’s arguments about experimenter effects demonstrate the limitations of retrospective meta-analysis. The first case he quotes is Honorton’s (1985) comment from his meta-analysis of ganzfeld studies that “the significance of the overall effect is not dependent on one or two investigators” (p. 61). Storm appears to take this as evidence that experimenter effects did not occur. However, Robert Rosenthal (1986), a proponent of experimenter effects in psychology, evaluated Honorton’s meta-analysis and concluded that the investigators “differed significantly and importantly in the average magnitude of the effects they obtained” (p. 327). These types of discrepancies and easily misinterpreted claims that appear to be related to the analysts’ interests, expectations, and hopes are far too common with retrospective meta-analyses.

The claims about no experimenter effects cited by Storm are based on the experimenter as a moderating variable, which are correlational analyses that should be considered tentative or exploratory. Appropriately designed experiments are needed for more convincing evidence. However, Storm appears to reverse this well-established principle and to consider the correlational analyses in meta-analyses as providing as strong or stronger evidence than the studies specifically designed to investigate experimenter effects. Also, statistical power is a pivotal issue for conclusions that an effect did not occur. Storm’s arguments do not describe the power for the claims. With EORMA, the well-known limitations of *post hoc*, correlational, and underpowered analyses tend to be overlooked in meta-analyses.

The available evidence indicates that parapsychology is as much or more susceptible to bias in meta-analyses as other areas of science. A meta-analysis of studies related to Bem’s studies of precognition reported significant evidence for psi (Bem et al., 2016). However, four subsequent well-powered pre-registered confirmatory studies have all found no effects suggestive of psi for the planned analyses (Kekecs et al., 2023; Maier et al., 2020; Schlitz et al., 2021). These results are not consistent with EORMA expectations but could be consistent with the sceptical hypothesis that meta-analyses actually measure methodological bias, or with a Trickster-like factor that prevents reliable confirmations in psi research (Kennedy, 2024).

In theory, EORMA could be a manifestation of the Trickster archetype, consistent with Storm’s hypothesis that the Trickster can influence researchers to make mistakes. However, Storm’s discussion of mistakes by researchers presents no tangible evidence that the Trickster archetype actually has a role in the mistakes, just Storm’s speculations about why mistakes occur. He also does not discuss alternative explanations that may be more parsimonious and testable than the Trickster archetype. Other factors that may produce

persistent researcher mistakes include groupthink, resistance to change, and lack of knowledge about research biases (Ritchie, 2020).

Chapter 3 extends the discussion of the Trickster archetype to several topics, including false results for experiments, questionable research practices, magical ideas, and “fear of psi and fear of no psi.” In general, Storm presents and is respectful of the diverse perspectives about these topics to a degree that is unusual in parapsychological writings. The result is that many comments in this chapter are very thought-provoking. Examples include:

- “I suggest the one fear that stands out above all others (indeed, underpins them to some extent) is the fear of being wrong because so much of our self-image and even ontological make-up is tied up in being right” (p. 102).
- “Hope is a motivating force no doubt, but like intentions, we cannot consider it a *causa efficiens* primarily responsible for bringing about the [psi/synchronicity] effect. Jung seemingly moves the issue forward by preferring to speak, not of hope, but of the ‘archetype of the miracle’ or the archetype of ‘magic effect’” (p. 106, emphasis in original).
- “The best advice is to be wary of our expectations” (p. 107).
- “... the result [of the Trickster] can be increased consciousness *provided one is open to being wrong*” (p. 110, emphasis in original).

Chapter 4 summarizes several of the established theories about psi and how the theories are and are not consistent with synchronicity. The concept of meaningful coincidences with associated powerful archetypes that cannot be controlled becomes less clearly defined as it gets adapted to include intentional acausal meaningful coincidences and meaningful coincidences that are unintentional, unconscious, and unnoticed.

Chapter 4 concludes with recommendations for research—which is the most practically valuable section in the book. Storm advocates that researchers pay much more attention to archetypes and the meaning of the experiment for the participants. This includes the meaning of the targets, the meaning of the experimental task, the meaning of psi in general, why the participant volunteered for the experiment, and the potential for “transformation of personality leading to psychic wellbeing and wholeness” (p. 168).

This is an important, practical recommendation, whether or not psi is reframed as synchronicity and whether or not archetypes are thought to provide insights about human nature. Motivation has traditionally been assumed to be the guiding or driving factor for psi but has been treated at best superficially in research. Storm’s recommendations go directly to the heart of the motivations for participants.

Storm notes that the meaning and motivation for psi effects may be greater for experimenters than for participants but refers to the discussion in Chapter 2 without mentioning that psi experimenter effects appear to be logically inevitable with either the assumptions for synchronicity or for traditional psi experiments.

Chapter 5, the last chapter, is an introduction to the mysteries of quantum physics. Storm does not shelter the reader from the differing opinions and glaring uncertainties that underlie the debates about quantum physics. He notes that the developments in quantum physics appear to be moving away from the possibility that consciousness has a fundamental role, and therefore away from direct links with parapsychology. He ends the book with the suggestion that the philosophy of dual-aspect monism that underlies synchronicity may be useful in understanding quantum physics.

This book refers to the next book for many key discussions, including intentional synchronicity, efforts to apply psi, and dual-aspect monism.

BOOK 2. *A NEW APPROACH TO SYNCHRONICITY*

In general, this book appears to be more academically oriented than the first book, with more extensive, detailed discussions and references. Certain discussions overlap in the two books, but less than might be expected. The second book refers to the first book in many places.

Chapter 1 discusses various aspects, proposals, and differences of opinion about the definition of synchronicity. One conspicuous challenge is the requirement that synchronicity must have meaning derived from an activated archetype. Identifying archetypal meanings is complicated by the fact that the archetypes are “far too numerous to count” (p. 4) and the meaning of an experience can be highly subjective. Storm considers coincidences that inspire “an awakening or expansion of consciousness, a realization, and even a transformation” (p. 54) to be clearly synchronistic. Alternatively, if “no helpful, or useful, or meaningful solution or conclusion can be reached, it is best to regard the entire event as a meaningless chance grouping” (p. 54).

Chapter 2 discusses various ambiguities and inconsistencies in Jung’s speculations about the outer limits of synchronicity. The most notable topic with direct scientific implications is that synchronicity can be intentional as well as non-intentional. Unfortunate choices of words may be an issue here, given that intentional coincidence may be considered a contradiction in terms. However, synchronicity must be consistent with a degree of intentionality if it encompasses ESP experiments and divination as proposed by Jung and Storm. The topic is resolved by proposing that both synchronicity and psi cannot be directly controlled, but conditions can be created that facilitate the effect and make statistically based research possible. Storm again advocates greater attention to archetypes and meaning in planning research.

Chapter 3 describes Storm’s belief that synchronicity starts with “‘deep imagination’ (interfacing with archetypal processes)” (p. 151) and “archetypal resonance” (p. 168, emphasis in original) that connects an internal image and an external event. The topics discussed include the unconscious, creativity, memory, emotions, and psi.

Chapter 4 is a case study of the many instances of possible paranormal activity in the aftermath of the suicide of Bishop James Pike's son, and how those can be understood in the context of synchronicity. Storm's approach to synchronicity focuses on archetypal meanings rather than on paranormal causes.

Chapter 5 is the final chapter and discusses criticisms and challenges for the idea that psi effects are actually synchronicity. Notably, Storm recognizes that effects like levitation, materialization, metal bending, and life after death cannot be construed as coincidences or synchronicity. He argues that these types of effects currently lack convincing evidence or may be a different category of unexplained phenomena than psi/synchronicity. He also discusses a variety of other controversial claims and their possible relationships with synchronicity.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

The primary practical recommendation from these books is that parapsychological researchers should pay much greater attention to archetypes and meaning. Synchronicity and traditional views of psi have different metaphysical assumptions, but those appear to have little practical consequence for conducting research, other than the role of archetypes. If Storm's recommendation is to be implemented, more information is needed about the many archetypes and how they manifest, including the possibility that only certain archetypes are involved with synchronicity.

The usual assumption in experimental parapsychology that the factors limiting psi are psychological and internal to a person may be off the mark. If that assumption were true, we might expect that unambiguously useful control of psi would have been obtained by humans many millennia in the past. The experimental approach in parapsychology remains doubtful as long as researchers have little funding rather than virtually unlimited funding from profitable applications of psi. One or more factors with an important role in influencing or determining psi effects may be more appropriately considered as separate from and external to a person, and with its own agenda.

Storm's initial ideas about uncontrollable archetypes are probably significantly closer to the truth than the traditional assumptions in experimental parapsychology. The possibility of uncontrollable factors will likely be taken more seriously once EORMA no longer dominates parapsychology and a representative amount of research findings are available with post-replication-crisis methodology. In that new era, instances of predominantly non-intentional psi/synchronicity that inspire or contribute to personal growth and transformation may be recognized as the most productive area of research and as consistent with the original thinking about synchronicity.

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