

## SYNCHRONICITY AND CAUSALITY – TWO DIFFERENT PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO THE WORLD

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to compare two distinctive concepts of Eastern and Western philosophy: the concepts of synchronicity and causality.

The concept of causality stems from the basics of the Western kind of thinking, namely from the understanding of the world in terms of divided and separated entities.

The principle of synchronicity is connected with other premises, namely unity, interdependence of polarities, sense of dynamic patterns, vision of void.

In its concepts of yin-yang and wu-xing, as well in Taoism and even in Confucianism, Chinese philosophy expresses the vision of the world in terms of change, dynamics, and non-being.

The concept of causality, expressing the discrete aspect of the reality, can be combined with the concept of synchronicity, expressing the continuous aspect of reality. Neither aspect can be considered as better than the other. Causality and synchronicity are not contradictory but are dual perceptions of the same underlying reality.

**Key Words:** Synchronicity, causality, mutuality of polarities, dynamic patterns.

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The aim of this article is to compare two distinctive concepts of Eastern and Western philosophy: the concepts of synchronicity and causality.

Karl Yung explained synchronicity as “meaningful coincidence” of two or more events, processes and so on or as “significantly related patterns of chance” and called it “acausal connecting principle”, thus opposing it to the causal connecting principle.

The concept of causality stems from other main premises of the Western kind of thinking. Our idea is that the concept of causality is based on the understanding of the world in terms of divided and separated entities, which have their own nature and duration. Only when the world is viewed as consisting of different isolated entities – things, events, processes, phenomena, a question may arise as how one of them can cause or bring forth another.

Our aim here is not to present the concept of causality in details. We only want to point out that the concept of causality is inseparable from the concept of being and existence, from the concept of subject-object division and, finally, from the concept of mechanistically arranged universe. It is not surprising that since Aristotle, the Western kind of thinking had developed all these conceptions, because they are interconnected.

The concept of causality has always provoked the grounds of the Western kind of thinking. Therefore, it is the reconsideration of this concept that led Kant to make his revolution in philosophy. His turn in philosophy is not as much as the turn of Copernicus. His change of the perspective resembles more the turn in relativistic theory and quantum physics. In Western thinking he is the first one who articulated the question from the point of view of the observer and shows that causality is connected with our perception abilities.

This perspective has always been predominating in the Eastern kind of thinking. We may see it in the doctrines of anatman (non-essence) and pratitya samutpada (mutual arising) of Buddhism, but it is especially inherent to the Chinese kind of thinking. The concepts of non-essence and mutual arising are interconnected and they are the essential premises of a different kind of thinking. If there is no essence, no existence, no being, no entities, than the question of cause cannot arise. The idea of non-essence requires another principle of explanation. This is the principle of synchronicity.

The principle of synchronicity is connected with other premises that underlie this kind of vision. We might name some of them, keeping in mind that their list may be continued and that all of them are interconnected and are only different aspects of one and the same vision. It is the oneness of all aspects and peculiarities that is the main characteristic of this kind of vision.

Some of the interconnected aspects of this vision are: unity; interdependence of polarities, especially polarity of inner and outer, subject and object, observer and observed; sense of dynamic patterns instead of static entities, which is connected with the lack of inner essence; vision of void; etc.

All these peculiarities are features of the Chinese vision of the world.

The main idea of this kind of thinking is the idea of the dynamic unity of the universe and the mutuality of polarities.

This idea is in contrast with the Western idea of the universe as a sum or aggregate of relatively isolated and independent entities among which the relation is sought and is found as a relation of causality. In the Chinese kind of thinking there are no entities fixing relationships, but rather there are relationships fixing entities. These relations are spreading out in all directions and in all dimensions, constantly changing and transforming, forming in such a way different, non-durable fluid patterns of the exiting. This idea is essential to the Chinese kind of thinking.

The mutuality of processes and the dynamic character of the reality are well expressed in Taoism. We may see it in the concept of Tao itself. In Taoism, Tao is a sign for the unnamed reality which is beyond our perception abilities and the boundaries of our logical mind. It is the reality per se, as it is in itself.

*I don't know your name. I choose a sign and call you Tao* (Daodejing, 25)

The very sign which is chosen to mark this Reality points out to the idea of dynamics. It is a sign for path. It is path not as a distance to be overcome, but as a motion, or even as a potential for motion.

The very notion of “path” is different in the linear thinking of causality and in the holistic thinking of synchronicity. In Western philosophy the notion of “path” is a notion of passing from point A to point B, a notion of a distance or a connection between some different points, which is a consequence of or premise for causal kind of thinking. In contrast to this understanding, the “path” in Taoism refers to a pulsating motion of folding and unfolding, of peace and movement. We may see this idea in the character for Tao itself which combines the significations of both moving and staying.

While the causal kind of thinking is linear and unidirectional, the acausal kind of thinking is cyclic. The causal thinking sees the world in terms of

beginning and end. The acausal kind of thinking speaks of beginning and end too but they are seen in their mutually relative connection: every end is a beginning and vice versa. Everything is in mutual connection. The main idea here is the idea of rhythm, pulsation, the wavy character of the motion, where the new and the old are in constant unity and every process can be best understood through its opposite.

*Being and non-being produce each other.*

*Difficulty and ease bring about each other.*

*Long and short delimit each other.*

*High and low rest on each other.*

*Sound and voice harmonize each other.*

*Front and back follow each other.* (Daodejing, 2)

Therefore, the main movement of Tao is the movement towards itself, every starting is returning. According to Taoism, in order to achieve something one has to approach it contrariwise.

*Contriving, you are defeated;*

*Grasping, you lose.* (Daodejing, 64)

This unity of opposites is the main idea of “I Ching”, “The Book of Changes”. “I Ching” presents the universe as a huge and multidimensional process of change and transformation. It is determined by the play of two opposite and complementary principles – yin and yang. But this determination is not the determination of causality, whether it will be thought as a linear range of connected events or as a deep meaning of the becoming. It is the determination of the growth and transformation of the universe as a whole and not as distinct parts within this whole. Yin and yang in their unity form the wholeness of being – Taiji. Neither of them cause or give rise to the other. They mutually form and determine each other.

This mutuality is one of the main differences to the concept of causality. Cause and effect also are mutually connected and we may call something a reason only when there is an effect. But their connection is not reciprocal. The two components do not have equal values. From the existence of an event that may become a reason does not necessarily follow the existence of its effect, whereas the existence of an effect necessarily sets as a prerequisite the existence of the reason. Concept of causality requires a range of events, where every succeeding is in connection of subordination to the preceding. There are connections of preceding and following. More or less these connections are linear and situated in time.

From the other side, yin and yang are of equal importance and value. As in the case of causality their differentiation is relative and in one aspect something may be seen as yin and in another – as yang, just as one event may be cause in one relation and effect in another. But the relationship of causality is much more fixed and stable, whereas the relativity is the main characteristic of relationship between yin and yang.

While causality deals with parts and with multiplicity in its diversity, the synchronicity pays attention to the unity of the multiplicity. In this way, every being or entity is not a single and separated part, but an aspect of a whole which has no other existence than in connections with the other aspects. In this mutuality everything may be seen through the other things, the essence of everything is not in itself but in its mutuality with others. So the idea of mutuality is connected to the idea of non-essence or the idea of void. Void here is not understood as nothingness but as dynamic undifferentiated wholeness.

If we consider the universe as consisting of parts or isolated entities, we may say that one thing gives rise to or cause the other, whereas from the perspective of oneness we speak of a process transforming to an other process.

The same idea we may see in the concept of wu-xing, which is incorrectly translated as concept of five elements. The point here is that these are not five elements but rather five ways in which the energy moves. Therefore, relations are not the relations of cause and effect as it would be if they were elements. We even cannot speak about relations if under this term we understand connection between different entities. We may rather speak about transmutation of one and the same energy. This transformation has its own logic, but it is not the causal logic. It is logic of harmony and balance of the whole, where – in order to keep the whole – neither polarity can be exaggerated at the expense of its opposite.

The concept of wu-xing reveals another aspect of principle of relationship which is different from causality. The five forms of energy movement are in two kinds of relationships: engendering and surmounting. In some extent they resemble the relation of causality, presenting it in two aspects – positive and negative. But no one of these forms is either a cause of or effect from another form. Rather, there is mutual dependence between them and special logic of their transformation. This transformation embraces the wholeness and totality of everything. In such a way it connects components which are isolated or very indirectly connected according to the principle

of causality. The constant transformation forms at every moment different patterns which may be read as they can be read in “I ching”.

The observer, reader, person, subject is not isolated from this totality. He or she is indivisible component of the whole. Therefore, the ritual activities, for example, played such an important role in the Chinese culture. Through the ritual, a conscious being adjusts itself to the dance of transformation which the Universe performs permanently. The ritual and the stories underlying it are not rigid forms. Rather than “seeking a definitive version of a traditional story, or providing the “correct” explanation”, Chinese culture even in Confucianism “tends to see many different versions or stories, each depending upon the season, the ceremony and the overall context”. We may speculate here about the connection between ritual activities and divination and about the patterns of existing which are formed.

However, our aim is to point out that mutuality in acausal vision means also mutuality of inner and outer. There are no boundaries between them as is within causal kind of thinking. Mutuality is simultaneously inner and outer determination. External events are indistinguishable from internal experiences. Whereas the causal thinking differentiates mind and body, matter and spirit, the vision of synchronicity sees them as “simply two sides to the one reality, two reflections in the one speculum, two modes of experience”. There is no gap between them. For this reason they may have meaning for us.

And we can read this meaning when, in accordance with Taoist prescriptions, we follow the watercourse way of Tao.

In this way Chinese philosophy represents the world as dynamic wholeness which transforms itself every minute in accordance to the logic of mutual adjusting and harmonizing, or we may say – the logic of synchronicity.

This logic is in contrast to the logic of common mind which sees the thing as differentiated and isolated beings. This logic serves us in our common life but it does not allow us to see the underlying truth of the oneness of the world. Therefore, in terms of Chinese sages we may call the logic of synchronicity “non-logic”.

Eastern kind of thinking expresses the vision of the world in terms of change, dynamics, movement and non-being, through the perspective of harmony and balance between inner and outer. It relates to what could be called a process view of the world. And this view is the basis for the vision of synchronicity.

Western kind of thinking is based on other premises. It shows the world from different perspective. We may say that both visions are opposites. But according to idea of mutuality of opposites, they must be seen from the perspective of complementation and mutuality rather than of contradiction and conflict. The first principle is developed by both the ancient Chinese thinking and the contemporary science. In this perspective, the concept of causality based on the idea of time and particles, expressing the discrete aspect of the reality can be combined with the concept of synchronicity, based on the idea of space and waves, expressing the continuous aspect of reality. Neither aspect can be considered as better than the other. Causality and synchronicity are not contradictory but are dual perceptions of the same underlying reality. They can be unified as, for instance, the concepts of particles and waves are combined in the theory of light. A real holistic vision of future philosophical consideration may combine the two approaches without neglecting either of them.

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