Rupert Sheldrake

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rupert_Sheldrake

Dr. Rupert Sheldrake, born 28th June 1942 is a British biologist and author. Perhaps drawing on the work of French philosopher Henri Bergson[2] to develop the theory of morphic resonance, which makes use of the older notion of morphogenetic fields, he has researched and written on topics such as animal and plant development and behaviour, telepathy, perception and metaphysics. He has a popular public following, particularly because his books are aimed at the lay reader, but some of his ideas are controversial and are considered by some scientists to be pseudoscientific. Others consider Sheldrake a genius and cite that much of his work is supported by simple experiment. In fact, Sheldrake stands out as an avid experimentalist with his constant encouragement to his readers to "try this experiment at home". Most of Sheldrake's experiments are easy to replicate and show statistically significant results.

Biography

Sheldrake was born and grew up in Newark-on-Trent, Nottinghamshire, and was educated at Newark Preparatory School, Ranby House School and Worksop College (as a Music Exhibitioner and Science Scholar) in the midlands of the United Kingdom. His father was a conservationist and independent councillor from 1955-70, a polymath and much sought after lecturer on numerous subjects including music, church architecture and materia medica.

Sheldrake studied biochemistry at the University of Cambridge, graduating with a double First Class honours degree. He held a fellowship and taught biology at Cambridge University (Clare College, where he also studied natural sciences as an undergraduate and doctoral student), he was a Frank Knox fellow at Harvard and a Research Fellow of the Royal Society. He later went to Hyderabad, India, where he made major contributions to crop physiology improving the yield of a staple Indian food crop, pigeonpea. For a year and a half lived in the ashram of Bede Griffiths. He now lives in Hampstead, London. His wife, Jill Purce, is a music therapist and singing teacher.

In September 2005, Sheldrake was appointed to the Perrott-Warwick Scholarship for psychical research and parapsychology, which is administered by Trinity College, Cambridge.

A New Science of Life

In 1981, Sheldrake trialed his hypothesis of formative causation in an article in New Scientist magazine. The piece was provocatively headlined: "Scientific proof that science has got it all wrong". An editorial introduction admitted that, to modern science, an idea such as Sheldrake's was "completely scatty", but justified its publication on the grounds that first, "Sheldrake is an excellent scientist; the proper, imaginative kind that in an earlier age discovered continents and mirrored the world in sonnets," and secondly, "the science in his ideas is good. ..This does not mean that it is right but that it is testable".

His best known book, A New Science of Life, was published a week after the New Scientist article. He put forward the hypothesis of formative causation (the theory of morphic resonance), which proposes that phenomena — particularly biological ones — become more probable the more often they occur, and therefore that biological growth and

behaviour become guided into patterns laid down by previous similar events. He suggests that this underlies many aspects of science, from evolution to laws of nature. Indeed, he writes that the laws of nature are better thought of as mutable habits that have evolved since the Big Bang.

Sheldrake's ideas were subjected to much discussion in journals and newspapers, and his book was reviewed in a variety of scientific and religious publications. Attitudes of mainstream scientists were generally negative. In September 1981, the scientific journal Nature carried an editorial by the journal's senior editor, John Maddox, entitled "A book for burning?". It reviewed and panned Rupert Sheldrake's then recently-published book. The editorial did not say the book ought to be burned (indeed, at one point it said the exact opposite), but it was highly critical of his work, as were subsequent reviews of his books in the magazine.

Despite the criticism of mainstream scientists, Sheldrake's ideas were lauded by scientists like Fritjof Capra and the mathematician Ralph Abraham, who were trying to invent a new scientific paradigm which would embody 20th Century discoveries like Godel's Incompleteness Theorem, and the strange world of quantum mechanics, which apparently cast doubt into the certainty and completeness of an 18th century Newtonian/Cartesian materialistic view of reality.

Later work

In more recent work, Sheldrake has developed his ideas further and also conducted experiments (documented in subsequent books) on phenomena like telepathy which he believes could be explained by morphic fields, since he believes that thoughts as mental forms (and more complex mental forms as skills, languages, sciences, that basically consist of organized thoughts as their subforms), similarly like organic forms, also have their morphic field(s).

For example, Sheldrake began working in the 1990s on the alleged telepathic powers of animals, which he thinks could be explained by morphic fields that encompass disparate individuals. Sheldrake has argued that certain animals (particularly dogs) can sense when their owners are coming home unexpectedly - a phenomenon widely reported by pet owners, and on which Sheldrake has conducted experiments.

In recent years he has also researched human telepathy; in these experiments, a subject must guess which of four people is about to telephone or send an email. According to the published results of these experiments, instead of being right 25% of the time (as expected by chance), the subject guesses the person correctly about 45% of the time.

Sheldrake has also researched the homing ability of dogs and pigeons, which again he believes could be related to morphic fields.

Popularization

Sheldrake's Seven Experiments That Could Change the World, published in 1994, encourages lay people to contribute to scientific research, and argues that scientific experiments similar to his own can be conducted on a shoestring budget.

Experiments of this kind designed by Sheldrake have included some conducted by BBC TV's popular science programme Tomorrow's World, plus investigations into the "sense of being stared at" involving thousands of schoolchildren in several countries.

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Rupert Sheldrake's own website is worth looking at ... http://www.sheldrake.org/homepage.html