

FROM THE HUNDREDTH MONKEY TO THE MORPHIC FIELDS FROM THE LEGEND TO THE SCIENTIFIC HYPOTHESIS

Printable version

Maybe you already know the 100th monkey phenomenon, this observation by scientists in Asia in the '50s, concerning the transmission of learning from a community of monkeys to other communities without any known means of communication between monkeys involved. If you don't know it, here's a version gleaned on the net:

<http://www.wowzone.com/monkey.htm>

This phenomenon is controversial, and here is more about it in order to support the phenomenon by removing its miraculous and legendary aspect.

Rupert Sheldrake, British biologist, introduced the morphic fields concept in his book "The presence of the past: morphic resonance and the habits of nature", published in 1988.

On its website, Rupert Sheldrake gives his version of the phenomenon of the hundredth monkey. Although he doesn't deny it, he admits that the text was repeated, amended and interpreted, and especially much exaggerated:

<http://www.sheldrake.org/Resources/faq/answers.html#monkey> . He provides partly his own version.

Sheldrake's theory on morphic fields corroborates in part the phenomenon of the hundredth monkey, bringing in addition a hypothetical explanation. The possible consequences of this theory on the effect that we have around us by the specific changes that we introduce into our lives at an individual level, may suggest that our responsibility, at an individual behavior's level, therefore the importance of what we do, may be fundamental in achieving change in mentalities and behaviors on a larger scale in the World, or at least, in the community or society in which we live.

While we usually think that our memory is located in our brain, that our genes are responsible for inherited traits and that our thoughts are only the consequence of chemical and electrical phenomena inside the brain, Sheldrake postulates that it is otherwise. He does not present his hypothesis as "the" truth, but he shows its coherence and suggests ways to study the phenomenon in order to support what he expresses.

According to him the laws of nature are not "universal" and "immutable". They have always been evolving, even the laws that relate to most basic physical and chemical phenomena.

Beyond the scientific-historical context that occupies much of the book, Rupert Sheldrake makes understand this phenomenon of evolution following the principle of the "chreod".

Imagine a sand plane slightly inclined. Put a little ball at the top of it, it will begin to roll by drawing a furrow in the sand during its descent. put a second ball on it. If the path meets the path traced by the first ball, it is very likely that it will also take it and expand it. Put a third ball on it, the probability of repetition of the phenomenon will be even greater. After the hundredth ball, it becomes downright improbable that it does not take the path carved out by all the balls that preceded it. However, it is not impossible that a new path would be traced by a ball, that have not taken the path already well dug, and that, over time, other balls would take this second path, broadening and deepening it, even making the second furrow more easily passable than the first, or even ending up with stopping the access to the first furrow.

According to Sheldrake, all phenomena of nature are functioning on the principle of the "chreod". This means that once a phenomenon emerged: the more it happens, the more likely it is happening again. And on a scale of time and repetitions in billions of years and billions of opportunities, some laws of nature appear to be immutable.

In this way we can speak of a form of memory of everything that happens in nature. Phenomena are reproducing the same way they have already occurred, because they have already occurred. And the

fact that they are reproducing further increases the likelihood they will recur in the same way. And that includes both atoms and molecules, cells, animals, humans, planets, stars and galaxies.

However, the chreod as explained above, is an image or metaphor of reality, but which can facilitate understanding.

According to Sheldrake, this memory, represented by the chreod is contained in the morphic fields. The morphic field is not material. At present it is not measurable. And it works a bit like the magnetic or gravitational fields. It therefore contains energy, but is not made of matter (atoms, electrons, etc.). This would be the field that contains the memory (represented by the chreod), and would allow any entity (from atomic particles to galaxies, through living beings) to develop upon the image of those who preceded it.

Rupert Sheldrake gives to this phenomenon of repetition which is a memory, the name of morphic resonance.

"Sheldrake shows through the pages that the inheritance of the genetic code is not sufficient to understand the structure and behavior of living beings: "While the mechanistic theory attributes the majority of hereditary phenomena to genetic inheritance inside the DNA, hypothesis of formative causality assumes that organisms also inherit the morphogenetic fields from previous organisms belonging to the same specie. This second type of inheritance comes through morphic resonance and not via the genes. Heredity therefore includes both the genetic inheritance and the morphic resonance from similar earlier forms". Excerpted and translated from "philosophie et spiritualité":

<http://sergecar.club.fr/cours/theorie8.htm>

"Thus, the seed of beech will take, during its development, the shape and genetic structures marked by characteristic habits of a beech. It is able to behave this way because it inherits its nature from earlier beeches, but this inheritance is not simply a matter of chemicals genes, it also depends on the growth and development habits transmission of countless beeches which existed in the past. " excerpted and translated from the site: forum de philosophie et d'ethnologie de la culture:

<http://www.avs-philosophie-ethnologie.org/texte.php?id=107> which this page is presently no more accessible.

As part of the evolution of an individual (for instance) he also speaks of morphic self-resonance. We tend to repeat our behaviors, according to those we already had.

And in this context, for instance, "we can also understand somatization of conscious and unconscious processes in the body. A deep inner suffering, that has been long carried end up making his mark in the organic structure. We bear the face of our passions and the trace of our past. "

Excerpted and translated from "philosophie et spiritualité":

<http://sergecar.club.fr/cours/theorie8.htm>

Rupert Sheldrake illustrates in many ways the concept of morphic fields. Let's represent each of us as a TV: the device corresponds to our body, and the content of television broadcasts is only the effect of electromagnetic waves on the device captured by it. By changing the device, it may be that we lose the opportunity to catch a show, or that we pick up another channel, but that does not mean that electromagnetic waves have disappeared from the area.

Similarly, our brain has access to the memory represented by the morphic fields corresponding to us. If there is an alteration of the brain, there is not necessarily alteration of the quality of memory. And if it were to be affected, often it is only temporary. It has never been possible to physically locate memory in the brain.

In the same kind of metaphor, Rupert Sheldrake refers repeatedly to the comparison between

- The human being : his brain, his mind, his body and his memory,

- And the computer: hardware and software.

If one considers the equipment (hardware) in parallel to the human body and his brain, one could compare the software or program to morphic fields. In this context, our genes do not contain any information related to our memory, but they are the ones that make use of the morphic field possible in order to choose appropriate behaviors. And when the hardware part vanishes it does not lead to the disappearance of the software. If a molecule is decomposed, a cell is destroyed, or a person dies, the morphic fields that correspond to them does not disappear.

To better understand the possible reality of morphic fields, Rupert Sheldrake also relates several stories and experiences. The most convincing story which he echoed in his book is that of blue tits drilling milk bottles (delivered in private houses in front of their door). Here is the description translated from the website "philosophie et spiritualité" <http://sergecar.club.fr/cours/theorie8.htm> (and partly from the book of Sheldrake).

"The case of blue tits is well documented and it highlights the spread, this time, spontaneous of a habit, that of the opening of milk bottles by birds. The phenomenon has been recorded for the first time in 1921 in Southampton (UK) and its spread has been followed from 1930 to 1947. Though we know that the blue tits do not move away more than a few kilometers from their nest. The spread of this behavior has yet significantly expanded and accelerated in time. In addition, in Sweden, Denmark and Holland, bottles of milk had disappeared during the war. They returned only in 1947, 1948. It's quite unlikely that blue tits having learned this habit have survived the duration of the war. All that we can say is that the acquired habit of some of the animals helps to facilitate the acquisition of the same habits of other animals of the same species and this even in the absence of any known physical means of connection."

Another story told by Sheldrake in his book is that of new crystals. In order to obtain a new chemical product in a laboratory, it often takes considerable time. Chemists working on it for months or even years. They then get a new product, a new crystallization. In Sheldrake's hypothesis, if it never existed previously it can not be formed by morphic resonance. Now it appears that the more one is able to carry out successfully and reproduce this crystallization, the more it is then easily obtained, which corresponds to the idea of the chreod. The higher the frequency of crystallization increases, the more the influence of morphic field is important for facilitating the next crystallization. Chemists have yet a whole folklore about this: they travel with the fruit of their efforts between laboratories around the world to facilitate the chemical reaction with the fragments they use as seeds for further crystallization. Others believe that "seeds travel through the atmosphere in the form of microscopic dust particles. If morphic resonance plays a role in this phenomenon, more the new substances are crystallized, more their crystallization becomes easy in the whole World, even in the absence of migratory chemists and of dust in the atmosphere."

Excerpt and translated from the french version of the book by Rupert Sheldrake.

Similarly, Rupert Sheldrake cites the fish shoals. The speed of responsiveness (in the presence of a predator, for instance) to change direction, or to disband the shoal is too big to make possible communication between fish. The existence of a unique morphic field that is used by each fish from the shoal, makes this phenomenon understandable. Fish respond "as one entity." Ditto for the birds flocks.

Rupert Sheldrake also makes the link with the collective unconscious so dear to Jung. Like fish shoals, human beings have access not only to morphic fields that are personal, but he has access to the fields of groups, of society and of his species. Fields are working as nesting table, fitting into each other. Each of us inherit of collective memory containing the characteristics of our ancestors, our social group, and our species. This will influence our evolution and behavior. "All human beings draw upon a collective memory, that they in their turn, help to shape."

Excerpt and translated from the site: forum de philosophie et d'ethnologie de la culture

<http://www.av-s-philo-ethno.org/texte.php?id=107> from which this page is presently no more accessible.

"On one hand 'we have our own memories because we are more similar to ourselves in the past than anyone else, we are subject to a highly specific auto-resonance from our previous attitudes.' But because here the theory deliberately abandon the concept of separation, there is also a collective memory. 'We are also similar to members of our family, to members of social groups we belong to, to individuals who have the same language and same culture as us, and to some extent, to all human beings, past and present.' We are influenced by mental schemes of others, which form a matrix of collective thinking that is activated through morphic resonance."

Excerpted and translated from "philosophie et spiritualité ":

<http://sergecar.club.fr/cours/theorie8.htm>

We also tend to evolve according to the morphic fields of the generations that preceded us. Heredity as

such, is not only "genetic", but we carry with us the habits of our parents, grandparents, etc.

Sheldrake, since the book has been published, has pursued his research, and also offers through its website: <http://www.sheldrake.org/homepage.html> (see : experiments online) to participate in experiments in order to bring water to the mill of his theory. After writing his books, he has also received thousands of testimonials that can support his case and help to advance in its research.

The reception of his theory in the scientific world had to face to the most orthodox ones of course, who seem to be less majority than in the past. It may take a little time for it to be more openly approved, while the public is not doing choosy and supports him from all sides.

Mental attitudes are changing around us, and this becomes especially noticeable presently. And if we are conscious of individual responsibility that we have in these changes, it is likely that our changes, beyond the consequences of our behavior, are also potentially bringing changes around us, without us having nothing to do more than change, evolve, open our minds. Because once the learning is taught by a sufficient number of individuals, it is spreading rapidly throughout the population. This may motivate them to learn and try to evolve more and more, for oneself of course, to assume our responsibility not to participate in disaster, but also and perhaps more importantly, to be a factor of more rapid change on a larger scale .

Text written by Claire De Brabander

You can read more about the theory of the morphic fields or other additional assumptions, stories and experiences made or reported by Rupert Sheldrake on the following sites:

Rupert Sheldrake's website:
<http://www.sheldrake.org>

page of Rupert Sheldrake site on the Morphic Fields:
http://www.sheldrake.org/Articles&Papers/papers/morphic/morphic_intro.html

an interview in french with Rupert Sheldrake directed by Patrice Van Eersel for the magazine "Nouvelles clés":
http://www.nouvellescles.com/article.php3?id_article=806

and two sites from which excerpts are given in this text:
The site of the "forum de philosophie et d'ethnologie de la culture"
<http://www.avs-philosophie-ethnologie.org/texte.php?id=107> from which this page is presently no more accessible.

The site "philosophie et spiritualité"
<http://sergecar.club.fr/cours/theorie8.htm>

mention droits d'auteur

mention traduction