Comments on Sheldrake

Jan-Willem Romeijn
Faculty of Philosophy
University of Groningen
Wim Kayzer ontmoet Oliver Sacks, Stephen Jay Gould, Stephen Toulmin, Daniel C. Dennett, Rupert Sheldrake en Freeman Dyson

EEN SCHITTEREND ONGELUK
Science
Also science
Science too
Science again
And indeed...
Science: a disparate bunch
Materialism
What is really there?
And how to talk about it?
Mind and brain
The extended mind

Language is the first broad area of human cognitive capacity for which we are beginning to obtain a description which is not exaggeratedly conventional. If we go back to the work of contemporary functionalist linguists, a very solid description of at least some human languages is to the present day being generated. Some features of these languages appear to be universal. Where such features turn out to be “universal in principle” – not just contingent as some general properties of biocultural utility or simplicity that would apply to arbitrary systems that serve the functions of language – they may shed some light on the structure of mind. While it is extremely difficult to say in what extent the structure so illuminated will turn out to be a universal structure of language, as opposed to a universal feature of innate grammar (naming strings), the very fact that this diversity can take place is testimony to the richness and complexity of the descriptive material that linguistics is beginning to provide, and also testimony to the depth of the analysis, insofar as the features that seem to be candidates for “universal” features of language are in no sense merely functional or phenotypological features of language, but are at the level of deep structure.

The most serious drawback to all of this analysis, so far as a philosopher is concerned, is that it does not concern the meaning of words. Analysis of the deep structure of linguistic form given in an indefinitely precise description of the system of natural language that we have ever had before. But the description of language associated with the word “meaning” is, in spite of the usual strictures of logic, at risk.

In this way, I want to explore why this should be so. In my opinion, the contribution to this area we may have been unable to be found the phrase

*For a discussion of this question, see “The ‘Statistical Hypothesis’ and Explanatory Models in Linguistics,” Syntax, 1987/1: 13-23.*
Causality
Equilibria and causal loops

Psychiatric disorders

Lake ecology
Unfinished science
Minimal metaphysics
The lure of the exotic