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Rupert Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life: The Hypothesis of Formative Causation*. J. P. Tarcher, Inc. [Distributed by Houghton Mifflin Co.], 1981. Hardcover. 229 pages. \$12.95. Reviewed by James B. Jordan.

Christian Reconstruction in the area of the sciences has concentrated mainly upon refuting the theory of evolution by pointing out flaws and contradictions, and upon defending the evidences for a recent creation and a worldwide catastrophic flood. Except for a handful of theoretical works, primarily from the Cosmonomic Philosophy school of Amsterdam, little has been written to redirect the actual work of science on a Christian base. E. L. Hebdon Taylor's book, *Evolution and the Reformation of Biology* (Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1967) made an effort in this direction, though it is long out of print, and marred by an excessive use of the turgid terminology of the Cosmonomic Philosophy. Taylor pointed out that both atomistic mechanistic materialism and platonic vitalism fail to do justice to Christian presuppositions, and proposed that any Christian study of biology and the transmission of the characteristics of organisms must do justice both to the one and to the many, to the transmission both of particle data (through genes) and of holistic forms.

Dr. Sheldrake's book makes a tremendous contribution to the discussion of this matter. His "hypothesis of formative causation" proposes that the form, development, and behavior of living organisms are shaped and maintained by specific fields as yet unrecognized by any science. These "morphogenetic fields" are molded by the form and behavior of past organisms of the same species through direct connections across both space and time. He calls the process "morphic resonance." The hypothesis is empirically testable; Sheldrake gives some examples of experiments that indicate the validity of his thesis, and suggests others that might be conducted.

Sheldrake suggests that the morphogenetic field of an entity, whether of an atom, a crystal, a cell, or a human being, interacts mutually with the matter-energy within the field to produce the mature entity. A living cell, for instance, comes into being via the interaction of the morphogenetic field with the preprogrammed data carried by DNA in the physical components of the cell. For Sheldrake, this is neither a Platonic nor an Aristotelian construction, since the fields are not "ideals" but are part of the nature of the organism, and change through time with the racial history of the organism.

These fields respond to changes in the environment,

and also change when a sizable number of a particular entity learn some new thing. Thus, when a community of rats was trained to perform a certain task, in one actual experiment, rats in another part of the world were able to learn the same task much more rapidly.

Sheldrake argues that when a new organism comes into being, such as a new crystal developed in a laboratory, the initial morphogenetic field is not as sharply defined as it will later become after many generations; thus initially there may be a proliferation of similar forms, which will later stabilize into one normal form.

The book has to be read to be appreciated. Though this reviewer had only a basic course in biology in high school, he was able to follow the book with only moderate difficulty.

I should like to conclude this review by giving some of my own thoughts on the matter, and to suggest how Sheldrake's hypothesis might prove very valuable to the cause of Christian Reconstruction. First, it squares rather nicely with our Trinitarian presupposition of the equal ultimacy of the one and the many in God's creation, thus avoiding the exclusive preoccupation with atomism (genetic determinism) in biology. Justice is done both to parts and to wholes.

Second, it can be of real value in constructing plausible models for biological history. We know from Scripture that the earth is only about 6000 years old, and that the terrestrial environment underwent a cataclysmic change about 4350 years ago. If Sheldrake's view is correct, we do not need millions of years to account for the proliferation and development of life on earth. Rather, after the Flood, the shock of environmental change brought about many random changes in morphogenetic fields, and resulted in many species which did not survive. In a relatively rapid span of time, the fields stabilized, giving the present morphic units. Thus, for instance, fresh-water catfish could be descendants of salt-water fish that went through the Flood, but were changed due to environmental factors later on. [It is sometimes pointed out that fresh-water catfish could not have survived the salt-water Flood; the hypothesis of formative causation provides a reply.] In short, Sheldrake provides a framework on which a "rapid evolution model" might be constructed.

Third, if we assume that bodily parts, such as cells, are regulated by morphogenetic fields, then possibly such diseases as cancer can be explained by disturbances in those fields. Additionally, since humanity is both one and many in several senses, morphogenetic fields are social as well as individual in scope. Perhaps the proliferation of certain diseases is directly tied to the moral corruption of larger, social morphogenetic fields. This squares with what Scripture says about the relationship between societal righteousness and disease.

Fourth, Sheldrake points out that memory is likely more closely tied to fields than to the atomic particles in the brain, which are continually being replaced. Larger social fields would provide, thus, a kind of racial memory, and might help explain the worldwide pervasiveness of certain kinds of religious and dream symbolisms.

Finally (and one could go on and on), the hypothesis of morphogenetic fields strongly reinforces the Biblical conception of the covenant, which embraces both communal

and liturgical discipline, and extends the blessings and curses of the fathers down to the third and fourth generations. It strikes against modern "Baptistic" notions of the irreverence of liturgy and the atomization of lines of generations. The structures of discipline that we institute in our churches go a long way toward breaking the hold that the "world system" can have on us, and will be passed on as strength to our children.

Sheldrake, of course, does not go into this kind of thing, though it is interesting that he wrote his book while living in a Christian ashram in South India, dedicates it to Dom Bede Griffiths of the Order of St. Benedict, and gives thanks to a group with which he has been associated, called the Epiphany Philosophers, "a group of scientists and philosophers engaged in the exploration of areas between science, philosophy and religion" (p.9).

Must reading for thinking Christians, especially those working in the area of natural science.

Al Ries and Jack Trout, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*. McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1981. Hardcover. xii + 246 pages. Indexed. \$14.95. Reviewed by Michael R. Gilstrap.

During the course of a single year the average human mind is bombarded with over 200,000 advertising messages. Each year \$50 billion is spent on advertising in the United States. The per-capita consumption of advertising in America today is about \$200 a year. Our society has become overcommunicated. When you consider that advertising is only the tip of the iceberg, it is no wonder that all of us have developed sophisticated filters to blot out all but a small portion of this mass amount of advertising.

The advertising world has had to deal with this super-saturation. They have developed ways to "short-circuit" our filtering systems. Two men pioneering a new advertising concept are Al Ries and Jack Trout, the authors of the book before us. The technique they have devised is tailed "positioning." During the 1960s, the advertising business was marked by an "anything goes" philosophy. According to Ries and Trout, "the sixties were a marketing orgy." The thinking was that with enough money, and enough bright people, any marketing program could work. They were wrong. The wreckage is still washing up onto the beach. Do you remember DuPont's Corfam, Gablinger's beer, the Convair 880, Vote toothpaste, or Handy Andy cleaner? New products with some of the biggest names (and largest budgets) behind them — which never made it. Their marketing plans were developed in the same old, traditional ways — ways which have no hope of being successful in today's overcommunicated society.

Ries and Trout sat back and asked themselves, "What must we do to sell our client's products effectively? How can we get our client's products a hearing in a marketplace where the noise-level is already unbearably high?" In answer to their question, these men have devised a simple method that has proven successful time and time again. While many advertisers take a shot-gun approach to communication, Ries and Trout have based their strategy on the concept that communication can only take place at the

right time and under the right circumstances. The competition for the mind of the consumer is fierce. If you want to be successful in marketing a product, whether you are marketing a brand of toothpaste, a new book, or even a local church, you must first get into a person's mind—you must get his attention. Your message may be the greatest thing since sliced bread (it may even concern the salvation of the world), but if you can't get an individual's attention, your message is lost.

The easiest way to get into a person's mind is to get there first. You know this to be true. Who was the first man to fly across the Atlantic? Charles Lindbergh, right? Who was the second?

What is the name of the first man to walk on the moon? Neil Armstrong, of course. What is the name of the second?

What is the name of the highest mountain in the world? Mount Everest. What is the name of the second highest mountain in the world?

Each of us ranks products in his mind. What do you think of when you read of the camera company? Kodak. The copier company? Xerox. The rent-a-car company? Hertz. The electric company? General Electric. These companies have positions in the market place. Strong positions. Positions that help them when they introduce a new product. Positions that get them the attention of the public.

But what do you do if you are number two or number three or even number two hundred and three? This book tells you that and much more. *Positioning* describes how to position yourself as a leader or as a follower. How to reposition the competition. Ways to avoid the "no-name" trap. Ries and Trout also examine in-depth six positioning strategies and show you how to put theory into practice. They then end their book with six steps that you can use to get started in positioning, and some helpful hints that will enable you to be successful in playing the positioning game.

Now, the question that you are probably asking yourself is, "Why is this review of an advertising book included in *The Geneva Review*?" The answer is simple. This concept works equally well whether you are trying to position a company, a product, or a church. If you are interested in making your church a vital force in your community, then you need to read this book. This book will force you to ask yourself, "What is the position of my church, or the ministry of my church in this town or city? Do we even have a position, or are we just part of that indistinguishable mass of religious organizations in the Yellow Pages?" If you then find that you don't have much of a position in the minds of the citizens of your community, *Positioning* will give you concrete suggestions as to how you can establish one.

If a conservative businessman and his family move to your community, and they go to the Chamber of Commerce and ask, "Would you please direct us to a conservative, Bible-believing, anti-abortion, pro-Christian Schools, anti-humanistic church?", which church in your town would they recommend? If they wouldn't recommend yours, then you need to read this book. If they would recommend your church, then you need to read this book anyway, and learn how to capitalize on your already good position.

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