Rupert Sheldrake 2

Paul J. Rich, *George Mason University*
him a claim to having inherited Darwin's mantle, has provided a popular explanation with his manipulative genes, and John Maynard Smith has reassuringly suggested that game-theory is relevant to evolutionary biology. We evidently are ghosts in selfish machines.

This is partly the result of a situation where for many contemporary scholars, the quality of facts may create problems, but not the nature of them. When patterns change, the facts supposedly remain; the facts themselves are not regarded as changeable. Yet we are on notice that this is possibly not the case. Malinowski complained on more than one occasion about the chaos of facts, that they became evidence only when seen sub specie aeternitatis. Fieldwork for him was an effort to impose order on chaos, to take general laws and apply them. Sheldrake, on the other hand, has taken the chaos and tried to find a general law that they might suggest. Now, by appealing over the heads of his scientific contemporaries to a vast audience that has not known about attacks on mechanistic science but which knows that animals find their homes from long distances away, that they have forebodings of earthquakes and other disasters, and that they know when their owners are coming home, he has taken the battle into the trenches.

"Vitalism," he writes, "asserts that the phenomena of life cannot be fully understood in terms of physical laws derived only from the study of inanimate systems, but that an additional causal factor is at work in living organisms." Mechanistic explanation has not yet carried the day, and holism has not yet been vanquished. The great questions remain. Philosophy has work to do.

ENDNOTES

2 "First, a pattern comes into being insofar as mere flux takes on a determinate coordination, movements becoming no longer random, idiosyncratic, but lining up in replicating ways, lured or compelled by their environment to mimic predecessors and neighbors. Second, this coordinate accomplishment is a pattern that can be expressed without reference to the actualities upon which it rests... it serves to explain them, perhaps to predict them, to make sense of them. Hence patterns are the meanings of things, the sources of their importance, of their place and role and destiny within the ongoing course of time. And third, patterns perish when the habitual behaviors of the actualities manifesting them change: modulate, become variable, break down." George Allan, "The Process and Reality of an Educational Canon", Contemporary Philosophy, Vol. XII, No.9, May 1989, 6.