

# Second Philosophy

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Title	Are Memes Real?
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## INTRODUCTION

Richard Dawkins coined the word meme in his book "The Selfish Gene" in 1976. In that book he discussed the idea that plants and animals exist for the benefit of their genes. Instead of being just a part of the system of an animal, the animal and all it does is in the service of its genes. In biology, if we ask the question "What benefits from evolution?" the question is clearly; genes.

What is evolution? It is an iterative process that involves three elements. There needs to be a replicator, a bit of variation in the replication, and a selection pressure that allows some replicants to reproduce more than others. It is clear that the future gets populated mostly by the descendants of the better replicants.

The Selfish Gene made the point that in biology the thing that replicates is the genes that produce the organism. The beneficiaries of biological evolution are genes; not individual plants or animals or even species. For instance, the male preying mantis gets its head eaten by the female during copulation. This doesn't stop the copulation, but the male dies. How could a set up like that possibly be in the interest of male mantises? But its easy for it to benefit his genes - they get passed on during the copulation, along with a bit of nutrition for the female to help her be successful in laying the fertilized eggs.

At the end of his book Dawkins speculated about whether there were other replicators, and as an illustration he proposed the idea of a "meme". A meme is an idea that is expressed by one brain and imitated by another. This is clearly replication. And in that replication there was variation since people don't pick up ideas perfectly from other people. And there is selection pressure because some variants are imitated more often than others.

Daniel Dennett in his book Consciousness Explained wrote about memes "infecting" brains. This got at the idea that our brains seem to pick up memes whether the memes are good for that brain or not. This is like how our bodies pick up germs or parasites whether they are good for the body or not. The reason that we get infections is because the parasites can infect us, not because it's good for us. This is a very creepy idea, but then, nature, when looked at squarely, is pretty creepy.

There are now many ways of thinking about memes. Memes are spoken of as if they were units of culture - which clearly they can be if we think that culture is a set of shared ideas. Memes can be thought of as the building blocks of minds if you think of minds as being machines that depend on structures of ideas.

If we take memes to be real they present an interesting ontological problem that is a challenge for physical reductionists. Can memes be reduced to physics - even in principle? Memes certainly need minds for their existence, but though minds (so far) depend on brains, is a mind a physical structure? And even if memes could be linked to actual physical structures, would we say that a meme is just that physical structure?

We run into a similar problem with words - a word can certainly have a physical manifestation, it can be written on a piece of paper. But is a word only that physical mark? How does a physical mark carry meaning? And how about the fact that a word can have many physical manifestations - it can be marks on paper, or sounds we hear, or patterns of bits on a disk. Yet all these manifestations carry the same meaning. And words have meanings that change significantly depending on the words it is associated with.

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For instance, the word "table" has at least a couple of meanings. Tables can be physical things upon which our computers rest or they may be organized words, as in tables of contents.

People can imitate each other. We are so used to this fact that we seldom stop to realize what a wonderful ability imitation is. It's a capacity that is relatively rare in nature. Susan Blackmore suggests that memes are based on our ability to imitate. So memes can be transmitted from one mind to another without words.

When boy A watches boy B mount his bike in a new way, boy A may try to imitate the new technique - this is one way memes are transmitted. Boy B infected boy A's mind with a new way of mounting a bike.

But memes are also transmitted by words. The words express a meaning and that meaning gets transmitted from one mind to another. But the receiver mind may then express the same idea using different words.

Genes are not usually isolated chemical words - they tend to work as co-operative groups. Simplistically - genes for blue eyes are often associated with genes for blond hair. Non-simplistically, our metabolism depends on a large suite of co-operating genes, and so do our eyes, etc. Memes seem to do this too - they tend to work in co-operative groups. The meme for a new way of mounting a bike depends on other memes about riding bikes, which depend on other memes about using machines. Memes tend to be parts of memplexes.

It would then seem that the ability of a meme to infect a mind depends in part on the other memes that already infect the mind. And the effect that a meme has on a mind would also depend on the memes that are already there.

This is very much like an ecosystem. An ecosystem is a set of mutually dependant organisms that interact and co-evolve. Organisms that evolve in one ecosystem don't necessarily prosper in other ecosystems. But sometimes introducing a new organism can transform an ecosystem, as for example the way that Zebra Mussels are transforming the ecosystem of the Great Lakes.

Can we think of a mind as an ecosystem of memes? And if we do, how does this affect our understanding of what a meme is. We started thinking of memes as being similar to genes, and we end up thinking of memes as similar to organisms. But Dawkins' idea of organisms is that organisms aren't replicators, genes are. This leaves us perplexed. What is a meme?

## QUESTIONS:

1. What is your knee-jerk reaction - do you think memes are real?
2. When a meme gets re-expressed in different words, is it a new meme?
3. Is it useful to think of a mind as an ecosystem that has a brain as its environment?

## REFERENCE:

- The Selfish Gene – Richard Dawkins
- Consciousness Explained – Daniel Dennett
- Susan Blackmore – TED Talks: Memes and Temes: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQ\\_9-Qx5Hz4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQ_9-Qx5Hz4)

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## DISCUSSION:

**Simulat:** So let's start with question 1 - does anybody think that memes are real?

**Wichard:** Memes are real in the sense that they are constructions of thinking entities that have been shared (intersubjectively corroborated) and discussed as a possible explanation for how certain forms of knowledge are organized and used. I've usually encountered them in anthropological linguistics and the smallest units of cultural meaning and pragmatics where they are often contrasted with lexical semantics (word levels) and generative semantics (at sentence levels). So memes are for semantics and pragmatics what phones are to acoustics, what phonemes are to phonology, what morphemes are to morphology, and what grammatical structures such as case categories and relationship trees are to syntax. Memes are analytic tools for the understanding of behaviors and language in specific cultural setting; for instance how different politeness conventions of language are used in setting with various types of participants such as requesting salt at different dining events.

**WindWalker:** Yes... they are real... in the same sense that a thought or idea is real

**Shingles:** This all seems to suggest that the memes that is collections of thought behave in a manner quite independent of brains

**Simulat:** Yes Shingles - memes propagate because they can - not because they are necessarily wanted

**Reaser:** Memes seem to be a reorganisation of the mind in a way which is new, I do think they exist

**WindWalker:** but for a meme to be real is must extend beyond its originating source

**Terrifying:** I think the fact that we're talking about memes proves that they are real. The meme for memes is infecting us as we speak.

**Renald:** WindWalker, is that right? I thought that was required for a meme to be successful... but real?

**Oswy:** Could I ask why we need the concept of a meme when we have a perfectly serviceable concept called an idea?

**WindWalker:** until it replicates it is not really a meme...

**Renald:** hmm

**Simulat:** If a behaviour isn't copied Renald then maybe it's not a meme

**WindWalker:** I agree Sim.

**Renald:** That could be, Sim, WindWalker... it makes memes more like language structures than they are like genes.

**Shingles:** So, forgive my slowness here, how does this replication occur? Is it just inserting a copy of itself into a brain or is it converting the material that is already there, thoughts, into copies of itself, like a bacterium, Sim?

**WindWalker:** replication or incorporation would be essential to something being a meme

**Thomas:** Isn't the question here whether a non-material thing, though a thing in the world, can be real?

**Simulat:** Yes Renald - almost the only point of similarity between genes and memes is that they are both replicators that evolve

**Shingles:** forces are real, but not physically present themselves, Thomas

**Renald:** Thomas, that was certainly my reaction to the first question.

**WindWalker:** it has to be put into action to become part of the operation of the mind

**Simulat:** And ideas are real too - but aren't material

**WindWalker:** Ideas can exist without being put into action

**Andy:** Imitation is a part of learning new ideas and trying them out. I can't draw the distinction between memes and ideas and I don't think they're 'real' any more than anything else is 'real'. They're just patterns in the world that we ascribe words to.

**Wichard:** And the replication medium seems to be through culture rather than through physical aspects

**Shingles:** like blueprints are not buildings but still the design exists

**Renald:** Oswy, I think probably "meme" wins adherents who are interested in assigning it characteristics that perhaps "idea" would resist.

**Simulat:** Andy - are you identifying real with material?

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**Thomas:** Then- briefly- memes can be real, if the concept of a meme is meaningful- if memes can intersubjectively be shown to exist or not to.

**Oswy:** Renald I am sure that is true. As soon as we speak in terms of memes we are in the evolutionary mind set and we almost immediately assume there is something new to explain. I don't think that is correct.

**WindWalker:** until an idea extends beyond its originator it only ins an idea.. But an Idea can become a meme if it progresses from the mind of the originator into another mind where it evolves

**Shingles:** So, forgive my slowness here, how does this replication occur? Is it just inserting a copy of itself into a brain or is it converting the material that is already there, thoughts, into copies of itself, like a bacterium, Sim?

**Andy:** Yes, but even ideas could be argued to be emergent properties of the material

**Shingles:** similar to Locke perhaps, Andy?

**WindWalker:** but ideas are not what we are talking about

**Thomas:** Our understanding of a meme today is like a biologist's understanding of Mendel's work if the biologist knew no Darwinism.

**Oswy:** Windwalker an idea is a public assertion of some point it can be taken up or rejected. I don't see how the idea of a meme adds anything.

**Terrifying:** Memes might replicate in many ways: a catchy tune might replicate itself just because it's catchy. A religious belief might replicate itself because it scares us into believing that something bad will happen unless we believe it.

**Simulat:** The replication is the imitation of what one person does by another person Shingles

**Shingles:** but is that genesis or conversion, Terrifying?

**WindWalker:** I have many ideas I do not express... they are no less ideas

**Wichard:** Memes seem to contain complex behaviors that are represented as scripts, some verbal, some nonverbal.

**Andy:** I've not read Locke yet, what was he arguing?

**WindWalker:** but if I express an idea it MAY become a meme

**Terrifying:** beliefs might replicate themselves just because they're well supported and probably true. Is that meme replication too?

**Shingles:** that 2nd qualities, IE our ideas of the object are contained within that object, Andy

**WindWalker:** Terri, I would think so

**Simulat:** Me too Terrifying

**Oswy:** All, the 'idea idea' if I can put it that way does everything the meme idea puts forward. For meme is an extravagance put forward by those who wish to give an evolutionary slant to the issue of cultural progression.

**Thomas:** A meme could continue to be a meme even if all the minds that held it from its formation were all replaced with a completely different set of minds- even different kinds of minds.

**Terrifying:** So the Pythagorean Theorem is a meme, and one of its replication mechanisms is the proof.

**Thomas:** Yes.

**WindWalker:** I don't think so Oswy

**Simulat:** What if that slant actually explains cultural progression Oswy?

**Shingles:** yes, but what is the process of replication, does a meme posit in ENTIRELY new material into the mind in replicating itself, or is this process the meme converting the patterns of thought already present into the same pattern as exists in another mind, Terrifying & Sim?

**Renald:** Progression?

**WindWalker:** Shingles I think it is both

**Wichard:** No, Terr. I don't the Pythagorean Theorem is a meme. It's a proposition that's been thoroughly validated

**Renald:** Shingles, I'm no expert, but my impression is that it works on existing material.

**Terrifying:** Well, if two people can have the same thought, Shingles, or similar thoughts, that would be enough I think.

**Shingles:** How can it be both, Wind?

**WindWalker:** validation would not negate something being a meme

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**Simulat:** shingles - I don't know how memes are actually expressed by neurons

**Terrifying:** Wichard, I think it's both a thoroughly validated proposition, and a meme. There's no either or.

**Thomas:** Renald, new memes mutate the memes that are already there.

**Oswy:** Simulat it may give an explanation. But is it better than saying ideas are formulated debated added to and so progression is achieved?

**Reaser:** the Pythagoras theorem is a meme, as it was a different way of looking at the triangle proofs are a different thing

**WindWalker:** Shingles because both affect the mind and both are tried in the mind

**Shingles:** but if they are behaving and self-replicating things the process of what this replication is must be examined

**Shingles** smiles at Thomas

**Wichard:** Let me put out a candidate for a meme; in learning Japanese, one of the cultural things that's very hard for a non-Japanese is learning how and when to bow.

**Simulat:** I think so Oswy because it gets at the idea that there are features of our culture that aren't necessarily there because they are good for us

**Patrick:** Sim, your example of the boy adopting a new way of mounting a bike, implied that part of your operational definition of meme included voluntary infection from the originator...is that what you meant?

**Terrifying:** Shingles, there may be many factors that promote meme replication, not just one.

**WindWalker:** I think part of the confusion is that some may be trying to think of the meme as something new. It is not new... it is just a label giving to something that has been going on a long time

**Andy:** I would say not then, Shingles, although there is an underlying reality which is real / material, what we call objects are patterns within that material substrate. Therefore minds are emergent and ideas emerge from minds. Memes are just shared ideas I think.

**Oswy:** Simulat, good is a very normative thing to introduce you might need to give an example.

**Simulat:** No Patrick - not necessarily voluntary

**Renald:** Shingles, apparently the idea is that exposure to the meme in some representation or directly to the behavior of a carrier can cause one's own mind/brain/whatever to adopt the meme by modifying some part of itself to match. How far off am I?

**Thomas:** Shingles, that ideas replicate is nothing new. That there is some unit independent of mind replicating and being replicated- that is what's new here.

**Shingles:** but they're exclusive, inserting & converting, mutually exclusive processes, it cannot be both, Wind

**Oswy:** Sim you could also say we formulate ideas that turn out to be not good for us?

**Simulat:** Oswy - an example that is being talked about a lot these days is religion. Dennett deals with that in his book Breaking the Spell

**Thomas:** Shingles, they can be very close, inextricably intertwined.

**WindWalker:** shingles...if both enter the mind and cause affect and in some way are repeated and ejected to other minds...then both are meme's

**Renald:** Thomas... what would be inserted, in such a case?

**Simulat:** That is, it may be that religion doesn't exist among us because it is good for us, but it may be instead a highly evolved memplex that exists on its own right

**Wichard:** inserted is a strange verb to use. Are our sensory data streams inserted into our minds?

**Thomas:** Renald, a form of information

**Reaser:** resistance to religion to me is I think a meme

**Terrifying:** Yeah-- so propositions that say "Believe me and teach me to other people or you will burn in hell" are more likely to be remembered and transferred than beliefs that are more mild.

**Reaser:** it is spreading through society

**Renald:** I am a meme!

**Simulat:** Yes Reaser

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**Oswy:** Sim as you know that is a very controversial example. Dawkins says there is no meme for atheism other supporters of eh idea say there is. What do you think it seems to me if there is a meme for religion then there must be a meme for atheism. Are either of these good or bad for us?

**Shingles:** yes, when converting you make whatever you have converted the material into the new thing. But I make a different distinction. Is the meme new material thought or is it conversion of pre-existing material thought in the brain. Now either one or the other is happening, not both, Thomas

**Simulat:** Certainly your AV is Renald :-)

**Wichard:** Religions have a long history of reproducing themselves and producing behaviors that conform to their domination.

**Thomas:** TP- economics is being applied to genetics and memetics, only a finite number of spaces for memes exist. They compete for the space.

**Shingles:** so it is conversion then?

**Renald:** Funny... religion again.

**WindWalker:** Wichards...but much of that may not be because of meme's but because religion and laws are often interlinked causing many to accept religion based on fear

**Simulat:** I'm surprised that Dawkins says there is no meme for atheism Oswy - seems to me that there is, but also I'd guess that the memeplex of atheism isn't as large or highly evolved as the one for religion

**Wichard:** But religions are tied also with culture and the behaviors of vast numbers of participants.

**Terrifying:** I suppose possible memes must be infinite, Thomas. But since memes are actual thoughts we think, they must be finite in that sense.

**WindWalker:** atheism is as much a religion as any other

**Shingles:** no reason why it necessarily has to be though, Sim

**Andy:** Oswy, at the risk of changing the subject isn't atheism the absence of a meme? Or perhaps the religion meme failed to take hold but left parts of itself behind so that we can refer to it? If memes are like parasites do we have immune systems?

**Wichard:** This has a norming effect that pushes out other explanations and possibly other memes.

**Reaser:** but the truly religious do not spread a view based on fear, that is the function of the so called legalistic

**Renald:** All... need a meme be a thought? Many of our behaviors, thought patterned and learned, are unconscious.

**Shingles:** yes, if it converts the thoughts into different patterns it Overwrites those old thoughts, Wichard

**Simulat:** Agreed Renald

**Wichard:** Could we be in the process of constructing an anti-religion meme through our activities in SL and through various discussions.

**WindWalker:** Reaser...it would depend on the religion

**Thomas:** TP- the number of "meme homes" is limited and if a meme falls out the forest of all minds, nobody can hear it anymore- it ceases to exist.

**Reaser:** no the individual

**Wichard:** So, Shingles, we need to develop an overwrite program of memes to deprogram the religious

**Oswy:** Well if you ant to use the term memes which I am resisting then I think you have to say that religion and atheism are both memes. Now Dennett wants to say religion is an infection and atheism isn't but I don't see how you derive goodness from the idea of memes as Simulat seemed to trying to do and other memeticists certainly do.

**WindWalker:** Interesting Thomas... but I agree

**Simulat:** Let's try the second question: When a meme gets re-expressed in different words, is it a new meme?

**Renald:** Yes, no, maybe.

**Wichard:** I don't see how memes would be word based.

**Andy:** no, ideas can be expressed in many ways, although different words may change / evolve it slightly

**Shingles:** perhaps the mind is limited in how much meme-space it has, but think that perhaps the memeplexes may develop to be more and more intricate in how the space is used, so yes there would be finite space, but infinite possibility of use of that space, (Mortality allowing) Thomas

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**Wichard:** They seem to be big clusters of behaviors and associated language

**WindWalker:** it would depend... perhaps it is just an evolution of it... still in the same family...but a new generation

**Marya:** Renald, you said "*need a meme be a thought? Many of our behaviors, thought patterned and learned, are unconscious*" - I agree that a meme need not be a thought

**Simulat:** Some could be Wichard - say a poem that gets often recited

**Wichard:** Or a pledge

**Terrifying:** Sure.

**Renald:** The whole question of what is separate or new is fraught with difficulty, even in such apparently straightforward matters as biological species. How much more so would it be for memes, which I'm not sure we can effectively observe directly?

**WindWalker:** or a rumor

**Terrifying:** Or an urban myth.

**Simulat:** Or chain letters - or those offers of cash from Nigeria that come in our email

**Thomas:** Simulat- that is would not change at least a little is practically impossible and for other memes- e.g., a subtlety in playing a musical instrument- it is meaningless.

**Wichard:** Yes and these examples seem to have some viral properties, at least metaphorically

**Shingles:** As they are ideology can we not think of them as having more purity or absolute quality than matter, Renald?

**Renald:** Marya yes... the question of what memes might be seems to me to need anchoring in their medium as much as their habitat. :-)

**WindWalker:** the medium of a meme as we speak of it here is the mind... in biology it would be a gene

**Renald:** No, Wind, the medium -- for transmission is what I meant -- is behavior and representation.

**Shingles:** which is why I keep insisting it is conversion not genesis, Wind

**Wichard:** I'm not sure, Wind. The medium might be culture which isn't present in a single mind but across many minds.

**WindWalker:** but that medium could be anything...sight...sound...

**Terrifying:** Dennett used the idea of a catchy tune as a meme. I liked that one.

**Simulat:** Some memes have self correcting mechanisms - for instance, the rhythm of a poem makes it easier to remember the words accurately

**WindWalker:** but that just be a means of conveyance Sim; the meme is the idea in the poem...or is it?

**Renald:** Not only, no.

**Shingles:** it's becoming a very loose term, now. Is it simply 'thought-pattern that replicates' that means 'meme'?

**Simulat:** and certainly lots of religions have dogmas that can't be strayed from and stay stable for a long time

**Terrifying:** I think that's all it is, Shingles.

**Reaser:** or maybe the idea of poems is the meme

**Renald:** Shingles, I would say pattern with behavioural consequences. :-)

**Shingles:** or brain-activity-pattern, yes Renald

**Sojourna:** Sim - quick questions - do memes replicate on a conscious or sub-conscious level? Learning a poem by remembering its rhythm seems to be a conscious and mental activity?

**Terrifying:** A poem is probably a cluster of memes, not a single meme.

**Marya:** Shingles, perhaps it is possible to say that 'a meme is a pattern that replicates' :)

**Reaser:** a group that poems exist within

**Thomas:** Sim, memes exist in a substrate of action or potential action- information storage.

**Shingles:** Eureka, Marya

**Shingles:** then yes, they do exist

**Simulat:** I'd guess that lots of memes are subconscious

**Thomas:** Marya, you're right.

**Wichard:** Marya, then does the meme need a medium?

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**Renald:** Shingles, not just brain activity. If a meme can be transmitted via a symbol or a sound recording... it's just a pattern that... what Marya said. :-)

**Reaser:** well memories are information storage, yet it is the interpretation that is the processing happening in the brain

**WindWalker:** isn't all of our learning processes meme's to some extent... a child learns from mimicking it's parents or sibling; isn't that meme's in action

**Shingles:** now we're into it. That sounds quite correct, Renald :)

**Reaser:** and the perceptual re organisation

**Marya:** Wichard, I think in some cases the meme 'is' the medium - but then I tend to look at it in a far wider sense than a meme simply being an idea - it self propagates

**Wichard:** But the child also learns through creatively trying things and getting feedback.

**Wichard:** Marya, that's starting to get close to McLuhan

**WindWalker:** true Wichard...so it would be part meme's and part experimentation and experience

**Marya:** Wichard, I have no idea who McLuhan is or what he said :]

**Andy:** Wichard - the child might be creating a potential meme through experimentation

**Thomas:** Shingles, this reminds me of the contents of Karl Popper's Third World - if all human minds were destroyed, but all the libraries remained. The content of those libraries has an existence though no one reads them over millennia.

**Renald:** McLuhan said the medium is the message, I think, but he meant something more specific by it.

**WindWalker:** Andy...only if he passed it on to another

**Shingles:** creation of new memes is certainly possible if the loss of old memes is

**Reaser:** yet the meme needs to spread through society and be adopted, to prove its success

**Wichard:** Marshall McLuhan was most important for talking about the complexity of technology as an extension of the human nervous system and coined the "global village" and "the medium is the message"

**Rosamoo:** what is the difference between an idea that self-propagates - a meme- and one that is otherwise promoted?

**Shingles:** perhaps not even consciously chosen to be adopted, Reaser

**Andy:** Wind - indeed, unless it replicates within the brain, informing other ideas of a new way of looking at things

**WindWalker:** but meme's could lie dormant... one written down could go centuries before being read and activated in a new mind

**Reaser:** well not consciously but adopted never the less

**Thomas:** Rosamoo, both are memes- your latter example might be "parasitic."

**Rosamoo:** Wind, if it is dormant it isn't a meme yet - right?

**Patrick:** In many stories the protagonist hears his/her friend say something unrelated to the puzzle being solved and the protagonist is able to solve the puzzle is that comment by the side-kick; a meme

**Shingles:** its survival of the fittest, but not with genes with memes. The fittest Memes thrive and the weakest die out, Reaser & all

**Renald:** Rosa, I'd say it's a difference of degree. To be successful, the behavior a meme must activate in its carrier must include behaviors which themselves promote the meme's adoption by others. The carrier may or may not be conscious of the promotive aspects of her own behavior.

**WindWalker:** it may have been Rosa... it might have been a part of a culture that died and then years later someone reads a text from that culture and the meme re-ignites in society

**Reaser:** no weak memes will survive by sympathy

**Simulat:** Rosamoo - it could have been a meme before going dormant and then be revived

**Andy:** shingles - like science, old theories get relegated whilst new ones become ascendant

**Oswy:** Shingles So religion is a god meme from that point of view curious?

**Thomas:** Shingles, "fitness" in this case might not mean in any sense anything that any of us would find preferable.

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**Terrifying:** I think Memes are Lamarckian-- acquired characteristics of ideas are passed on. It's not the same with gene fitness.

**Shingles:** just if that's the condition of genes, and memes are their equivalent, then that condition applies just as appropriately to memes as it does genes, Andy

**Reaser:** but we like the weak and to eliminate them is abhorrent

**Simulat:** Reaser and Shingles - if a mind is like an ecosystem and if each mind is only receptive to certain memes then there could be memes that only get into a few minds

**Shingles:** but that seems to describe everyday life quite aptly, does it not, Thomas?

**Renald:** Reaser, our attitudes in that regard are themselves diverse.

**Oswy:** Well done Terrifying. That is a frequent criticism of meme theory ie that if it exists its Lamarckian a big problem for the Darwinians. It's why Dawkins is now neutral on the idea.

**Thomas:** TP, you may have found the spot where the analogy between memes and genes breaks down.

**WindWalker:** that is a good thought Sim

**WindWalker:** resistance to meme... selective meme evolution

**Simulat:** for instance - tattooing a swastika on your arm may not be a meme that spreads to most people, but it's very infective to some people

**Shingles:** ah ... so 'fittest for existence in this particular mind (eco-system) then, that works nicely, Sim

**Renald:** The whole business of memes seems MUCH more like language than genetics, to me. There are lots of similarities in all three cases, obviously. But not identities.

**WindWalker:** hmmm then meme's have a survival factor...survival of the fittest

**Renald:** Ah... the poor swastika...

**Marya:** or perhaps adaptability, Windwalker

**BlackRaven:** I agree Ren

**WindWalker:** yes

**Shingles:** it's a Swahili symbol turned backward

**Renald:** It's a universal symbol... done horrible damage.

**Wichard:** It's the Japanese character for temple

**Reaser:** well that is a maybe, but the meme expressed is somewhat unwholesome

**BlackRaven:** In a context Reaser

**Simulat:** Perhaps we could look at the third question:

**WindWalker:** a swastika is only lines it is how we apply meaning that affects us

**Wichard:** It depends on the culture

**Renald:** A meme associated with it, yes... more than unwholesome

**Simulat:** Is it useful to think of a mind as an ecosystem of memes that has a brain as its environment?

**Thomas:** Shingles, if I am in my car pondering Kant's Perpetual Peace and the car next to me has its boom box so loud I can only hear misogynist rap music, at least for a moment the music has "won."

**Shingles:** the Swahili equivalent simply signifies good fortune, but its mirrored Nazi twin has become an immensely powerful symbol (not judging that morally or whatever) but it has come to signify a very complex memeplex

**Renald:** Sim, I think that approach has some usefulness, yes.

**WindWalker:** I would say yes to that Sim

**Shingles:** not if your concentration is not broken however, Tom

**Andy:** Sim - yes, I like this definition. The chemical balance of the brain affects the thoughts of the individual and that affects the way memes are processed and expressed

**Renald:** hmm

**Marya:** Sim, how about the way in which a brain functions as being a sort of physical manifestation of the meme? Of multiple memes should I say...

**WindWalker:** an environment is a system in which something survives or grows... based on that definition the brain is an environment

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**Thomas:** True, Shingles, but the music was, at least for the moment, a fitter meme because I couldn't keep my concentration.

**Shingles:** yes, but 12 lines drawn in a certain way 2 dimensionally signifies cube in most cultures, Windwalker

**Shingles:** wherever there is culture that has a tradition for representing 3D objects on the 2D

**WindWalker:** yes Shingles... so?

**Simulat:** Marya - I have a glimmering of understanding of how memory is physically based, but I don't for how imitation is physically based

**BlackRaven:** But if you go back to the example of a meme existing in a book, to be 'discovered' at a later stage and reborn when read, then does a meme have to have a brain as its ecosystem?

**Simulat:** but I have no doubt that imitation is a function of the brain

**Thomas:** BlackRaven, Popper's point is "no."

**Shingles:** So 8 lines drawn in a certain way signifies genocide in most European cultures. Hence the meaning is cued by the symbol, not our own positing onto the Swastika in each encounter of it, WindWalker

**Andy:** BlackRaven - interesting point, but the book is meaningless without a brain to process it

**WindWalker:** Blackraven...no... But in the sense we are discussing memes it would...

**Simulat:** The book might be part of transmits the meme BlackRaven - but it needs to get into a mind to do anything

**Renald:** BlackRaven, good point. If memes are only memes when successful, the ecosystem in question cannot be limited to one person's mind/brain/whatever, but to the whole range over which a meme might transmit itself. That includes representation, not just behavior.

**WindWalker:** obviously the idea in a book could be replicated in many books as a quote... but as we are using the term meme it would have to be read by someone to become a meme again

**Shingles:** it is still a meme, but a dormant meme; like a virus

**Renald:** That seems a very picky distinction.

**Thomas:** Simulat and Blackraven, the meme in the library of a dead civilization is like the genetic information in frozen sperm- it exists, but would not manifest significantly until thawed and put in a viable egg.

**Andy:** shingles - you make libraries sound really fearful places!

**Simulat:** the same meme might have many modes of transmission - ie, via books, or by videos, or by songs or by speech

**WindWalker:** yes it could be a past meme and dead...but it could also reactivate if someone read it and adopted and spread it

**Shingles:** yes, but life is an infection of the globe if you think about it one way, Andy, so I wouldn't worry

**Renald:** Let's not over-geneticize the metaphor.

**Marya:** Is there any reason why we are not seeing the book as a meme? Is it not considered a meme unless it is actively replicating?

**Shingles:** I suggested that it still is when inactive, Marya

**Thomas:** Renald, isn't memeticism a great metaphor for genetics? I think so.

**WindWalker:** does a book exist if it is not read... or is it merely a collection of paper

**Renald:** Thomas, in what sense? Why does genetics need a metaphor?

**Simulat:** Marya - I'd guess that a book might also be a replicator that depends on memes the way that memes depend on genes

**WindWalker:** pages

**Reaser:** a book can contain many memes, memes are kind of like a software thing in the brain

**Shingles:** excellent question, Windwalker

**WindWalker:** sorry to leave you all... but I have a luncheon engagement... blessings

**Thomas:** Ren, it doesn't. But memeticism is an observation that ideas are like genes, they replicate and compete, etc.

**Renald:** Ah, Thomas, in that case, I would say that memetics is using genetics as a metaphor, not the other way around.

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**Sojourna:** Thomas - by saying they compete it sort of implies agency - but it seems genes and memes are passive and that we are the agents?

**Shingles:** I suggest that a book when not read is a meme in a state of indeterminate hibernation

**Thomas:** Ren, that's what I mean.

**Reaser:** the brain seems to be able to contain many contradictory ideas running in parallel, I don't think the competition thing is totally valid

**Marya:** I agree with that Shingles

**Renald:** And "book" is a very powerful meme, Marya. We wouldn't still be printing at nearly the same rate; otherwise, we'd have gone all electronic long ago :-)

**Simulat:** I'd say more that metaphors are memes than that memes are metaphors :-)

**Renald:** Thomas, ok. :-)

**Marya:** Sure Renald :)

**Renald:** Sim, my point was that the genetic aspect of the meme idea is a bit metaphorical... and shouldn't be stretched.

**Reaser:** I would think the idea of the metaphor is the meme, the metaphors themselves merely examples

**Simulat:** We've been going for about an hour now and so I say that our official time is up - thanks everybody, and no need to stop

**Shingles:** That's a cause I'll fight teeth and knuckle, to keep physical books being printed

**Thomas:** Competition does not imply agency. If there are five letters, and a letter needs a letter slot to not be destroyed and there are only four slots one of the letters will cease to exist.

**Renald:** Shingles, as I said... a very powerful meme, that one.

**Shingles:** it must remain as a Hard Copy. The alternative is hideous, Renald

**Simulat:** Renald - the point is that memes and genes are both replicators - so they are similar in that way

**Marya:** Agree with that Thomas, competition does not imply agency

**Sojourna:** Thomas - yes, makes sense.

**Renald:** Shingles, no worries... I'm a carrier myself. I'm just aware that I'm a carrier. :-)

