

Memes and Memetics Futures

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AREA	SUBJECT	21 st CENTURY DIRECTIONS & FUTURES
• BACK-GROUND	• DEFINING THE ISSUES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memes are contagious ideas, all competing for a share of our mind in a kind of Darwinian selection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → As memes evolve, they become better and better at distracting and diverting us from whatever we'd really like to be doing with our lives → They are a kind of Drug of the Mind → Confused? Blame it on memes • What are Memes? Memes are the basic building blocks of our minds and culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → In the same way that genes are the basic building blocks of biological life → Dawkins has recently declared that he is "alarmed" that his readers have taken Memes at face value as a theory of culture • Memes are anticipatory (future) thought, strategies, contagions, thinkLets, viruses of the mind... • A 'thought' has meaning, like a letter in a word, only by virtue of its specific position within a context: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Therefore, there can be no general laws of combination and permutation
• FUTURES	• POSSIBILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The social self is a web of memes, transmitted by behavioral strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → The self is a network of context dependent strategies that evolve by variation, replication, and selection (Dennett 1991, 1998) → Herein lies the exciting potential of memetics, a potential that is being retarded by the metaphor of thought contagion • Taking memetics seriously; • Memetics will be what we define it to be in the future • Memetics as a research program is evaluated as other research programs are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Memetics was started about 14 years ago; Oxford zoologist Richard Dawkins is credited with first publication of the concept of meme in his 1976 book <i>The Selfish Gene</i>, but the concept was not widely accepted until the late 80s → If memetics is going to remain viable and progressive, its fundamental terms must be clarified in the process of generating and testing general views about it → Consider viewing memetics, not as an analog to genetics, but as a more general process -- a selection process (evolution) → Selection is a process in which (adaptive) environmental interaction results in replication being differential → Many of the objections to memetics result from an unreal view of genetics

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nor is memetic change "Lamarckian" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Lamarckian inheritance requires the inheritance of acquired characteristics → In memetics, memes are the analogs of genes → What do we call the inheritance of acquired memes? "Meme-marckian?"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FUTURES 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SOCIETAL IMPACTS & CONSEQUENCES 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The breakthrough in memetics is in extending Darwinian evolution to culture: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → There are several exciting conclusions from doing that → One of these is the ability to forecast that ideas will spread NOT because they are "good ideas", but because they contain a SmartMeme (such as danger, food,& sex) that push our evolutionary buttons and force us to pay attention to them • If memes control our thoughts and therefore our actions, what about free will? (aka Freedom of Influence) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → We continually understand more and more about how our bodies and minds work → We now know that trillions of organic nanomachines in the cells of our bodies work together to give us life → Neither that understanding, nor the new understanding of our minds that memetics will give us, should affect the philosophical question of free will (aka FIFTH Freedom)

RJB-Revised: 2010-Aug-14

References:

- http://jom-emit.cfpm.org/1999/vol3/marsden_p.html
- Dennett, D.C. (1995). *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*. New York: Simon and Shuster
- <http://www.memecentral.com/>
- <http://www.kli.ac.at/theorylab/Abstracts/H/HullIDL2000.html>
- <http://minnesotafuturist.pbworks.com/Anticipatory-Thinking-i4CQuest>
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