

Mememes, Religion, and Realigion

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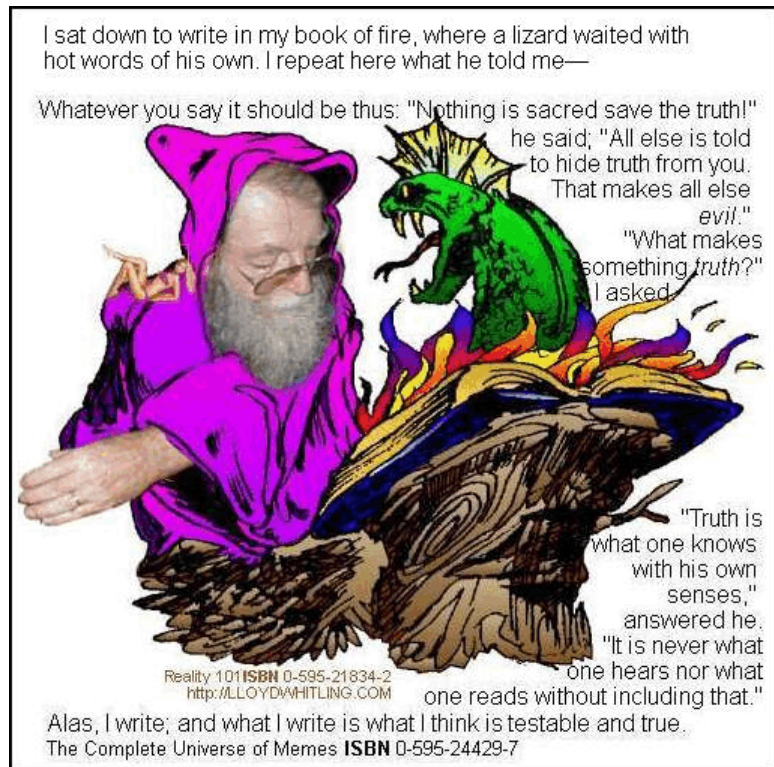
As a contagious idea that we pass from one person to another, a meme will replicate until the idea is widespread. An idea doesn't have to be true or false; it only needs to have the kind of hook that makes us catch it, and excite us enough to make us spread it to others, the replication process that causes it to be a meme. The idea of memes is, itself, a meme that helps us understand some aspects of human behaviour.

Mememes apparently evolved from our strong aptitude for imitation, which led to copying and spreading information, which helped us survive as an animal. Trouble began when we also copied ideas derived from speculation and fantasy, or errant guesses, that sounded like they ought to work but couldn't be proven either true or false.

Young people are especially apt to generate crazy mememes, the kind that are fun to pretend could be true. In later years we are more skeptical and cautious in the acceptance of new ideas but, by then, some of the things

we pretended as youths are carried with us to our graves. Many of them become mememes, when they begin to spread to others and infect their lives. Witness the city gangs, where youths' hatred for each other continues into their old ages, if they allow each other to live that long.

If ideas fit well together, they will combine into what Susan Blackmore has named 'memplexes' and become a part of the ¹human operating system used by people who become their *hosts*. Incompatible ideas more often are rejected, usually depending on prior beliefs with which they must combine. A successful meme is an idea that is more often accepted than rejected and, if that idea either benefits the host or does no harm, we would call it 'good'. Recipes for lasagna and pizza are



¹ [Reality 101 ISBN 0-595-21834-2](http://Reality101.com)

simple examples of good successful memes. Bad (malignant and/or parasitic) memes get the host into trouble (or killed). A really bad meme gets other people killed too. Extreme religious and political beliefs are examples of bad memes. Obviously we should promote good memes, and try to prevent bad memes from spreading. Easier said than done! A lot of ideas get to be called 'good' because we don't know enough to see that they are bad, most simply because we inherited them.

Every religion is a complex of memes (a "memplex"). A successful religion has hosts working to preserve and expand their population. Many people teach religion to their children, because if religion seemed to work for themselves, then it seems like it ought to work okay for their children too. Problems develop when incompatible religions collide. That most successful religions are very intolerant of other religions has caused all kinds of grief, and even led to war. No one would lose and maybe everyone would win if all religions could be compatible and good memplexes. If someone's religion causes problems with their neighbours, then maybe that religion is a bad memplex, and they need to find a better religion. Or, the neighbours need to.

What is religion? Besides filling our minds, what need does it satisfy? Maybe we need guidance for how to live?—or want to know why we are here? Or what comes after death? Our needs are as many as the number of religions. Could we possibly design a new religion that costs neither time nor money, and is compatible with modern realities? Maybe! How could we do that without it becoming just another fake or leading to fanaticism? To start, we can work from available evidence, and learn to be more persuasive by showing others why we think our new beliefs are true, and so should be adopted by them. After all, except for the part about evidence, that's what generally is done.

Introducing Realigion

The universe is a fascinating place full of variety. Our endless stream of ideas to explain it has even more variety. It's amazing how we learn that some explanations don't fit with the real world (they are not supported by any evidence that we can gather). Some of our ideas are just plain silly. But fortunately, we most often throw out the useless ideas, and hope we keep the ones that improve our understanding of this marvelous universe, that improve our lives, and that lead to more fascinating evidence and more neat theories to test.

The evolution of ideas mimics the evolution of life... Just as a soup of primeval organic chemicals came together billions of years ago to start the chain of life that evolved into intelligent human beings, now we humans are feverishly putting ideas together, testing them, and adding the best ones to our evolving knowledge of the universe. We have learned that all life is interconnected in complex ecologies, and that many of our initial ideas about exploiting the resources of the planet were foolish. We learn from our mistakes, and sometimes we even learn without making mistakes. Sometimes we even get to correct our mistakes, and life and the world get better and better, as we accumulate good ideas and sometimes abandon bad ones.

To where will lead the progressive evolution of life and ideas? Microscopic

single-celled life has already evolved into worldwide ecologies and intelligent humans with a complex planetary civilization. Evolution of life and civilization has not stopped, and shows no signs of slowing down. In fact, the drive for change now seems to be bred into both biology and human society. There is something of the explorer in all of us, because our ancestors who explored change of any kind came out ahead of those who did not. Evolution will continue, despite occasional empty-headed attempts to deny it.

The religious view arises when we speculate into the distant past and the far future. How did life originate?—and where will evolution take it? Will life and intelligence develop or spread throughout the universe? Will human civilization spread to the stars, perhaps merging with alien civilizations? What sort of collective intelligence and wisdom will result? If there really is a "god", might we someday say hello?—as His or Her peers? Does "god" evolve? The only way to find out, short of a divine answer to our queries, is to follow the evolutionary ladder, to keep asking questions and finding answers. Luckily, it just comes naturally to us, and as a side effect, life gets better and better—in spite of comments to the contrary made by people who have rejected realigion's memes.

This, then, is the basis for a **realistic religion**, called "**realigion**". It is all about observing and understanding the intricacies and implications of evolution in the past, present, and future. A beauty of realigion is that you don't have to do anything you disagree is right. Just believing is enough: You can be a spectator, and watch the fascinating universe evolve into incredible complexity and awesome intelligence. Or you can "worship" by taking an active role in discovery and exploitation of knowledge. With correct new memes we will get to where we are going even faster. The impatient among us will explore and force the evolutionary process, by finding good tricks that will take us to higher domains of knowledge and wisdom and existence. Computer automation and networking are two recent good tricks that accelerate the evolution of ideas. The scientific method is an older example, still supremely valuable, for it encourages inquiry to separate useful fact from worthless fiction.

Another beauty of the "evolving universe" of realigion is abundant evidence. You don't have to accept anyone's word or interpretations, because you can examine



the raw evidence yourself. And the evidence keeps evolving, keeping realigion from becoming boring. Other religions evolve too, in spite of their claims of 'immutable truth', which is even more evidence for realigion!

A common goal of all realigious people will be better understanding of the universe and all its inhabitants. Knowledge of truth, the way things really are, helps us to find and implement successful strategies for getting whatever it is that we each want. The more we understand how the universe does operate and can operate, the more efficiently we can use the resources available to us to enrich and extend our lives. A relevant good trick, a strategy that we have learned, is specialization: Each of us would thrive if we would focus our talents on what we do best, while trading in win-win fashion with others to distribute the wealth thereby created. Learning and discovering similar valuable good tricks is an enticing aspect of realigion, since any religion without benefit would be a waste of time.

Realigion is not inherently anti-God, but neither does its atheistic stance assume the existence of any god until such can be proven beyond reasonable doubt. It is really up to believers in god(s) to find credible evidence to persuade non-believers, if persuasion is important to the believers. Realigion counsels that we



must work to separate fact from fantasy, because known fact leads to predictable results whereas believed fantasy can lead to very bad mistakes. Fantasy has no bounds, it is a product of imagination unconstrained by the laws of the universe. Reality is plenty complicated enough to deal with; let's not make life more dangerous than it already is.

You Decide

This prototypical realigion memplex is offered as a modern alternative to traditional religions. Perhaps realigion will do some good by

displacing dangerous memes. Adopt realigion as is, or modify it for consistency with your other beliefs. Whatever you do, beware of bad memes and learn to recognize them according to the scientific method, the application of which we all ought to learn by heart. Never force an idea onto anyone, but instead seek to offer supporting evidence. Curiosity and critical thinking are our primary tools for understanding and exploiting reality.

If these ideas appeal to you, then please pass them on. If you can condense

these ideas into less space, or express them more clearly, please do so. We are working to make the universe a better place. Our work starts with good ideas, clearly communicated.

For much more about memes and alternative religions, visit:

[alt.memetics](http://www.lucifer.com/virus/alt.memetics/) <<http://www.lucifer.com/virus/alt.memetics/>>home page (<http://www.lucifer.com/virus/alt.memetics/>)
<<http://www.lucifer.com/virus/alt.memetics/>>

[The Church of Virus](http://maxwell.lucifer.com/virus/) (<http://maxwell.lucifer.com/virus/>)
<<http://maxwell.lucifer.com/virus/>>

You can also type a few keywords into any web search engine, to find a lot more.

Books related to Memes

Several books about the subject that has come to be known as memetics have been written during the past couple of decades. Here is a short list and links to a page on amazon.com where you can check them out and see you'd find them useful:

[The Selfish Gene](#)

by Richard Dawkins ISBN: 0-192-86092-5 The book that started memetics

[The Meme Machine](#)

by Susan J. Blackmore, Richard Dawkins ISBN: 0-198-50365-2

[Darwinizing Culture: Status of Memetics As a Science](#)

Robert Aunger ISBN: 0-192-63244-2

[The Electric Meme: A New Theory of How We Think](#)

by Robert Aunger ISBN: 0-743-20150-7

[The Complete Universe of Memes: Branches of Reality on the Reality Tree](#)

by Lloyd Harrison Whitling ISBN: 0-595-24429-7

[Guerrilla Creativity: Make Your Message Irresistible with the Power of Memes](#)

by Jay Conrad Levinson ISBN: 0-618-10468-2

[Memes of Translation: The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theory](#)

by Andrew Chesterman ISBN: 9-027-21625-8

[Cultural Software: A Theory of Ideology](#)

by J. M. Balkin ISBN: 0-300-07288-0

[Genes vs. memes: modes of integration for natural and cultural evolution in a holistic model \("Elpis"\)](#)

by Walter A. Koch ISBN: 3-883-39551-X

[The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design](#)

by Richard Dawkins ISBN: 0-393-31570-3

[Brainwashing, Mind Manipulation & Dangerous Memes: The Complete Self Defense Manual](#)

by Kevin Hogan ISBN: 0-963-50855-5

[Excursions to the Far Side of the Mind: A Book of Memes](#)

by Howard Rheingold ISBN: 0-688-09207-1

[Genes, Memes, and Human History: Darwinian Archaeology and Cultural Evolution](#)

by Stephen Shennan (**Hardcover** - March 2003) ISBN: 0-500-05118-6

[Thought Contagion: How Belief Spreads Through Society](#)

by Aaron Lynch (**Paperback** - January 1999) ISBN: 0-465-08467-2

[Virus of the Mind: The New Science of the Meme](#)

by Richard Brodie ISBN: 0-963-60011-7

[A Theory of Everything](#) by Ken Wilbur ISBN1-570-62855-6 (Colored memes?!!)

Follow-up

Like outmoded prior religions, realigion might spread more efficiently and benefit more people if organized participation can be developed, i.e., by church or temple or study group. The author is unaware of any existing ²realigion groups, but there is nothing to stop an enthusiast from trying to organize something. Whoever does the work gets the glory or satisfaction or money, or whatever other benefits might accrue, such as knowing you are doing something to improve our world.

A possible strategy towards organized realigion could be the development of a "Sunday School" curriculum, consisting of a collection of independent one-hour lectures (sermons?) given by volunteer enthusiasts on various topics, supported by informational and coaching materials distributed through the Internet. Topics could range widely, from the basics of evolutionary theory, to the sophisticated good tricks discovered by man or nature to take life to new heights. An objective might be the imparting of accumulated general knowledge to wider audiences, who would benefit (and so be motivated to attend) by the knowledge so gained, and which the outmoded religions prevent.

Maybe realigion is already slowly spreading under other names, such as Discovery TV. Does anyone want to try speeding it up with Realigion TV?

A related to-do item for developing an organized realigion would be preparation of a Bible or Koran equivalent reference book. Such works have been theorized as being of significant worth to the success of religious memplexes. The Complete Universe of Memes has now been written ([ISBN 0-595-24429-7](#)). Does anyone want to discuss it? Look for links on [HTTP://LLOYDWHITLING.COM](http://LLOYDWHITLING.COM).to send eMails or let yourself be known.

First drafted in 1990 by Peter Ruhe; then updated a few times since then, most recently on 22-Dec-2001.

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Many thanks to all the smart and curious critical thinkers out there who share ideas!

End.

² Check how to recognize members of a group called Syners by following the instructions given in [The Complete Universe of Memes ISBN 0-595-24429-7](#)