

# *Memes*

Jacqueline Goldman

OS24



When we communicate with someone else, we transmit and form, in our minds, what we believe to be original ideas and theories. However, those ideas are actually being passed along from the person and/or situation that you have encountered. Each of those ideas has a mind of their own, therefore what we think is not a result of our own creativity but it is the evolutionary flow of memes as they wash through our bodies. A meme is a cultural item that spreads from person to person and is transmitted somewhat like genes, but through repetition. Memes are a unit of social information. They are ideas and beliefs that are transferred from one person or group of people to another. They are the social and cultural form of our genes; considering they also self replicate, mutate, and respond to selective pressures as well as spreading through the behaviors that they generate in their hosts.

The word meme comes from the ancient Greek word “mimema”, which means, “something imitated. The term meme was coined only thirty-five years ago, in 1976, by the English biologist Richard Dawkins in order to explain the spread of ideas and cultural phenomena. Richard Dawkins introduced the concept that all animals, including human beings, “are robots serving as life support for the genes that control us”. But the author Robert Aunger argues that if “fashions in sports, books, clothes, ideas, [and] politics come and go and give our lives meaning, [then] how can we be gene robots?” And since our bodies are gene robots, then our minds must be meme robots; therefore leaving the memes in control. Memes are thought trains that allow us to have any slight understanding of the society around us. They can leap from brain, to brain, to brain, and so on and so forth. These memes process a distinct pattern of electrical charges in a node within our brains that reproduce a thousand times faster than bacterium; so as you are furthering your ability to understand the way in which we live, as human beings, the memes are reproducing, replicating, and mutating faster than anything else within you.

Memes travel from brain to brain through different forms of communication and we communicate with each other in four main ways; non-verbal, visual, oral, and written communication. A majority of the way we communicate is not verbal and consists of non-word messages. Non-verbal communication consists mainly of our body language, gesture, posture, facial expressions, the way we make eye contact, and our appearance choices such as clothing, hairstyles, architecture, symbols, and voice tonality. These are key aspects of the way in which we communicate with others because it influences and creates the meaning that the other person receives. Another way that we communicate is visually; through two dimensional images, signs, typography, drawings, graphic design, illustration, colors, electronic resources, videos, and television. The third category of communication is oral through spoken verbal communication. This form of communication relies on words, visual aids, and nonverbal elements that shape the meaning absorbed by the other person. Body language and tone of voice play a key part during oral communication. The final category of communication is written. Written communication is a form that has evolved drastically over the years beginning with pictographs carved in rock, to paper, papyrus, clay, and wax, and now, ultimately, to controlled electronic waves and signals that allow us to communicate with nearly anyone almost instantaneously.

Anthony Robbins, a self-help author, says, “The way we communicate with others and with ourselves ultimately determines the quality of our lives”. We communicate with people in order to connect, control, express, teach, compliment, insult, and experience. We communicate in order to relate, establish, maintain, and adjust relationships. We communicate so that we can share what is on our minds and what is in our hearts. We communicate so that we can be. However, Richard Dawkins discovered that each idea has a mind of its own.

In chapter eleven of Richard Dawkins book titled “The Selfish Gene”, he informs us that imitation is how memes can replicate and that some memes are more successful at breeding than others. The spread of each meme depends on how accepted it is within the community it is trying to be planted in. However, memes are being passed to you in an altered form considering their transmission is subject to continuous mutation and blending. Every time an idea is heard, it is likely to change as it is passed on because each person twists the ideas, changes the emphasis, and blends them with their previous ideas and ideas of others. However, every person has their own way of interpreting the things they hear so the different ways in which people represent the theories and ideas are essentially not part of the actual meme. Each meme works continuously to compete for the attention of the human brain whether it is through radio or television air time, how big their billboard is, or how much space they take up in a newspaper or magazine.

In Dawkins’ book he dictates that “we were built as gene machines, created to pass on our genes. But that aspect of us will be forgotten in three generations.... Our genes may be immortal but the collection of genes that is any one of us is bound to crumble away...” So since our genes are practically cut in half through each generation that supersedes us we need something else to leave our mark on the earth. So according to Dawkins, “if you contribute to the world’s culture, if you have a good idea, compose a tune, invent a sparking plug, or write a poem, it may live on, intact, long after your genes have dissolved in the common pool”. So any social aspect you can create and pass on to those around you will spark and generate ideas throughout society for eternity.

In a world where we are constantly questioning and wondering about the things around us, memes can finally give us a viable understanding of our society. They are thought chains, parasites in control of our brains. We believe that we function off of originality; which is defined by dictionary.com as “the ability to think or express oneself in an independent and individual manner”. However, memes essentially take away our concept of originality because they are controlling every thought we have and the way in which we process every idea that is produced in our surrounding societies. Memes are how we know everything, really. Its how we think, how we function, and how we respond. Our bodies are controlled by the genes that we are composed of but our minds are controlled by memes, essentially controlling our bodies and the genes as well.