Positioning the analysis:

Memetics as a methodological tool to close the ranks between social and traditional history.

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> *"Having reached the end of my poor sinner's life,... I prepare to leave on this parchment my testimony to all the wondrous and terrible events that I happened to observe in my youth, now repeating verbatim all I saw and heard, without venturing to seek a design, as if to leave all those who will come after (if the Antichrist has not come first) signs of signs, so that the prayer of deciphering may be exercised upon them"*[1]

This paper will look at the evolutionary nature of information replication and transfer, and the use of the new science of memetics as a methodological tool for historical analysis which will help to bridge the gap between traditional and sociological historical methods. Traditionally, modern scholars write histories using contemporary texts and analysing them through the window of hindsight, causality and comparison to surrounding texts; social historians use various methods of analysis to contextualize the information and plot or map the surrounding action, yet these largely treat the content of the text as being of primary importance, more often than not leaving unassessed the contemporary structure of information presentation and replication.

In 1976 evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, in his book *The Selfish Gene*, coined a new term for replicating units of cultural identity - the *meme*. A meme can be any unit of information that replicates itself, whether an idea, a phrase or a social theory. The mechanisms for analysis of reproduction are similar. Just as genes replicate themselves in a gene-pool, memes would replicate themselves in a meme pool (or the community of memes held by any individual, group or society)[2]. As a working definition for our purposes, we can turn to the work of Elan Moritz; "Memetic Science is the name of a new field that deals with the quantitative analysis of cultural transfer. The units of cultural transfer are entities called 'memes'. In a nutshell, memes are to cultural and mental constructs as genes are to biological organisms. Examples of memes are ideas, tunes, fashions, and virtually any cultural and behavioural unit that gets copied with a certain degree of fidelity."[3]

Memetic science is in its infancy, and is currently being used in many and varied academic and non-academic fields; such as the work of Richard Dawkins in the field of evolutionary biology, Daniel Dennett in his research on the philosophy of mind, others in the fields of social sciences such as Francis Heylighten, and a host of others in such diverse fields as artificial intelligence research, corporate strategy planning, psychology, sociology and cultural evolution. However, to the best of my knowledge memetics has not as yet been used extensively in the study of history. This is probably fairly easily explained. The science itself is, as I said, in its infancy. Therefore, a great deal of time and effort is currently being spent upon the method itself, seeking a more rigid analytical framework. Structural issues and many more are currently being fleshed

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[1] Eco, U, *The Name of the Rose*, Picador, 1984 p11
[2] Dawkins, R "The Selfish Gene" 1976 p206
[3] Moritz, E. "Memetic Science - a general introduction" 1990

out by memeticists, or interested academics, all over the globe. However, it cannot be denied that memetics does have something to offer us now, even in its youth, as an explanation of thought by analysing the structures by which 'successful' or popular ideas transmit themselves from brain to brain. The science offers us the ability to structurally assign properties to certain types of ideas, empirically defend this formula, and then assess what this 'idea', this meme, can be expected to do or more importantly not do. For the historian working with, at best, often shaky accounts of actual events, and more often than not simply working with accounts expressing various successful ideas of the day, this science may prove invaluable.

Memetics can be used by the historian of ideas (from either camp) to determine the nature of any historical information transfer structure by mapping, as it were, the way in which the data propagates and the structural information/belief issues comprising the 'meme pool' of the time being investigated, thereby adding colour to the historian's analysis and providing a fuller history. To provide scope for an explication of memetics as methodology, and as an academic discipline in its own right, I shall be looking specifically at the field of ancient religious history in the time of St Augustine.

Ancient religious history, more so than more modern or contemporary history, suffers in research from a dearth of texts (due largely to lesser technologies and lower literacy rates among the protagonists) leaving traditional historians often forced to lean towards 'best guess' extrapolations to complete a textual picture of the times. In cases where texts simply weren't written, and oral histories have been lost, historians are often faced with massive linear breaks in their analysis, and resort to economic or geographical considerations to fill in the blanks. This concentration on the content of texts and the actions of contemporary actors, and not the structural nature of the information replication itself, presents a problem in modern historiography that memetic analysis should be used to redress.

In determining an interpretation of events, it is often practised procedure for traditional historians to try and bleed their sources of the input of the author, to remove any personal, subjective comments in the interest of a Dragnet 'just the facts ma'am' objectivity. This history of 'heroes and monsters' is slowly being subsumed by social historical theory[4], such as that proposed by Roland Barthes in his essay on 'Historical Discourse'. Barthes argues that this practice of analysis is detrimental to the history itself. The historian, in writing, tries to remove his/her own persona form the work, to give the impression that we have before us nothing but statistical data. This attempt is seen by the structuralists as semantically impossible, given that not only must the historian interpret the data, but he/she must then write a history within the linguistic terms of his/her own contemporary society, their *langue*, and under the code-restrictions of their day.[5] Traditional historians try to argue that the referent is speaking for itself, ontologically privileging the historical fact above and beyond the signs which make it known[6].

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[4] See Jonathan Last's article "The nature of history" pp 142 - 157 in *Interpreting archaeology: finding meaning in the past*. Ian Hodden et al, Routledge, London 1995

[5] Barthes, R, "Historical Discourse", p149: "What really happens is that the author discards the human persona but replaces it with an 'objective' one; the authorial subject is as evident as ever, but it has become an objective subject. Structuralism: a Reader, ed M.Lane, Jonathan Cape, Thirty Bedford Square, London 1970, pp145 - 69.

[6] See Beard's reread of Beard in "Re-reading (Vestal) Virginity", ch 11 p171 in *Women in Antiquity*, eds R.Hawley and B Lerick 1995.

The sociological historians, however, approach the information in a radically different way. Structuralist history theories, such as those put forward by historians and social theorists such as Michel Foucault, stress that the analysis of historical texts, or our information packages, should look less toward the content of texts, and more toward the signification to be found concerning the wider society located therein, looking for ideological ciphers to extrapolate the world view surrounding them. As Foucault notes, the role of the 'new' history is not to interpret the document; instead it "organises the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers, elements, defines unities, describes relations"[7]. Both types of history have evolved towards each other, with traditional historians often using sociological method in their analysis[8], yet leaving the pragmatic 'traditional' assessment of replication mechanisms untouched.

In the case of historical research into St Augustine (354 - 430AD), for example, we see a prime example of this. In his lifetime, Augustine of Hippo was a prolific writer, seeking to promote a specific type of church and propagation of Christianity, namely one heavily steeped in the realities of the world around it, and one keen to acquire power and unity. This message, most clearly outlined textually in his work *De Doctrina Christiana (written in 397)*, centres around notions of education in Christian discourse and philosophical involvement with pagan writings and arguments as opposed to the discord among believers which arises when dealing with conflicting beliefs. "Nay, but let every good and true Christian understand that wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master; and while he recognises and acknowledges the truth, even in their religious literature, let him reject the figments of superstition... And even when in the course of an historical narrative former institutions of men are described, the history itself is not to be reckoned among human institutions; because things that are past and gone and cannot be undone are to be reckoned as belonging to the course of time, of which God is the author and governor."[9].

In this section I want to take a close look at St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, a lengthy dissertation often taken as a sort of training manual for priests, offering up information on how to deliver sermons, the substance of them and various guides as to the way in which a good Christian life should be led; that is to say a work on information transfer offerring advice on what information to transfer and how best this would be done. However, in this work, Augustine pieces together a large amount of dissident philosophy, engaging semiotics with philosophy, theology and history so as to arrive at an intellectual grounding for his religion and the way in which it operates. What is left is nothing short of an intellectual defence of the church, an instruction which teaches how to operate as a good Christian 'in the world', and even an extensive analysis of the nature of texts; how they should be read, and what they have to offer. Augustine's semiotic analysis offers up much to gel the distant holy

[7] Foucault, M *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, London: Tavistock 1972, 6-7

[8] For example see RA Markus, "Signs, Communication and Communities", where in his analysis of St Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* he stresses the need to use semiotic methodology, pp.97 - 108 in *De Doctrina Christiana : a classic of western culture* edited by Duane W.H. Arnold and Pamela Bright. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, c1995.

[9] St Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, book II, translation from Select Library of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* chs 18 (28) and 28 (42) at URL: http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/augustine/ddc.html

trinity with the ever present church, while maintaining the inmost precepts of the religion, and a healthy understanding of the failings of the world about us. To this end Augustine provides us with an interesting linguistic analysis. He argues essentially that no knowledge can be gleaned by man outside his own body, because of the way in which information about things is transferred. ‘Signs’ require a link to the signified which words cannot supply, nor can any other form of sign. This intellectual linkage is not given apropos (as the analysis of the Stoic school would offer) nor is it an essential given from sense *data* (as the Epicurean sign theory would put forward) rather, Augustine's analysis leaves the only avenue to be some sort of 'divine intervention', or works of the interior teacher.

For our purposes, we shall be concentrating initially upon the treatment of language, and the philosophical placement of the Christian in the world that occurs in the *Prologue*, and early in book 1 of *De Doctrina Christiana*. It is here that Augustine discusses his theory of ‘things and signs’. Here Augustine seeks to answer, preemptively, the arguments against a church-based Christianity, as well as to promote this as the only acceptable way for a Christian to live. He seeks in the *Prologue* to justify a set of earthly rules, and modes of behaviour, on the premise that Christianity, though a religion essentially concerned with the hereafter, is heavily steeped in the realities of this world, and as such rules and regulations for both behaviour and worship should be discussed and implemented. Much is made in Augustinian doctrine of the necessary philosophical difference between ‘things’ and ‘signs’, and between the differring notions of ‘use’ and ‘enjoyment’. The position that Christianity relies heavily upon ‘use’ of this world, and a correct study of scripture is rather quickly argued by Augustine in the Prologue, on the premise that not only is learning a biological function of humanity, but that even the ascetic religious stalwarts, devoid of any overt philosophical instruction (those who found grace directly by the blessing of angels, such as the apostles, Antony, Moses and various others who have come into direct contact with the lord) were instructed, or at some stage chose to involve themselves with the church and other earthly institutions. (De Doctr Chr. *Prologue*, 7)

Further, and perhaps most interestingly (when confronted with the ascetic argument for a life distinctly outside the secular) Augustine argues that because we learn basic language (and other life skills) from others, say, our parents, we already accept the necessity of involvement in the world (De Doctr.. Chr... *Prologue*. 5). Indeed, just to be human, to walk about and communicate with others on any level, we rely almost entirely on the teaching of others, and to continue outside this constitutes a ‘hate’ of flesh. This argument, interestingly enough centred by example around the life of Antony (*Prologue*, 4), runs as follows. Antony was said to have simply heard the word of God and followed. Antony could not read, and did not arrive at Christ through teaching of that sort. However, even to have understood the word when he heard it, means that he must have understood the language it was said in. To have understood that language, he must have been taught it by others, either parents of others around him during his childhood. Therefore the teaching of others is vital to a Christian life, even for one who cannot read. And, by extension, at least some Christians who can read are vital to the religion, and those that can read and preach must read and preach the correct words, therefore we see Augustine suggesting early on in his methodological framework that the church as an institution of education and information transfer (including its absolute religious authority, guidance and theoretical knowledge) is vital for any relationship between man and God to begin and grow. Augustine’s argument for the importance of learning, reading and teaching highlights the need for the normal Christian laity, who presumably are not able to commit to memory the vast bulk of Christian literature, to have constant access to learned Christians and their teaching. We can see Augustine's cautious defence of scripture over memory, in his uneasy treatment of Antony, in which he hints that relying on memory alone is dodgy at best, and he certainly has few problems with any who would call it an outright falsehood as we see in the following passage (see the example of Antony in DDC, Prologue, sect 4 & 5). Although Augustine goes on to finish the *Prologue* with an explanation to the effect that this entire investigation has been to justify his own act of writing, as a bishop, as someone informed, and as someone who has something to offer which will bring readers closer to God, along the way he has laid the philosophical framework for a tradition of discourse which continues today, and which flies in the face of the religious style of such ascetics as Antony, who were elevated to God having never read a word. It is this area of discourse which is of particular interest to us. It is clear from the outset that Augustine, almost naturally, assumes that any form of useful (or indeed vital) knowledge comes from study, from teaching, from understanding and is tested by argument. What is important, however, is the integration of the acquisition of knowledge with action in the world, so as to ultimately move towards notions of 'love'. This is the purpose of the Christian doctrine. It is to train Christians in a lifestyle, towards a community, and within the world. It is not to train exegetes, or to provide a blue print for the 'correct' understanding of scripture; rather it was written to offer guidance as to the principles involved when approaching scripture, whether layman or priest.

For Augustine, knowledge is linked it directly to divine providence, that is to say it is given to humanity to understand via basic human functions, such as language use, writing and communication. This in turn means that as all knowledge is directly tied to God, the Christian must be wary of how this knowledge is gained and used. This is where the lifestyle instruction of Christian doctrine enters Augustinian methodology. Augustine here embarks upon what is an essentially semiotic task, investigating and laying down certain criteria for the operation of human understanding via language and thought. He does this by analysis of signs and signifiers, although for Augustine the signifier is reduced to 'things' like rocks, cattle, a road etc. In this system of sign making and recognition, which Augustine places a priori before knowledge can be gained, he makes it clear that the highest category of signs, those which are most potent are words: (ii, iii, 4). Thus it is clear that for Augustine, speech is merely a series of signs being conveyed to the ear, and writing, we shall see, is a similarly specific set of signs carried to the mind via the eyes. The church, in turn, is seen by Augustine as a place of reading, argument and meditation, therefore the most valuable path for the word of God is through education, instruction and learning. The good Christian must read, or at least gather with others to listen to readings, and the good Christian must 'heed the words of man', namely those well versed in the understanding of the sacred texts, the educated bishops. Thus the church is defended not as a social organisation set up to gather together for protection under the threat of persecution and share the word of God, but almost as an university, a linguistic database from which flows the only accessible word of God, with its arbiters and their earthly position (those educated enough to be ordained and to rule) to be obeyed and defended as direct channels from man to God. Interestingly enough for our purposes, Augustine goes on to investigate the strongest means of maintaining an idea, and the most reliable means of idea-replication to be found. It is for this, he argues, that we invented writing. This was to protect ideas (ie signs of mental states) from disappearing as the words evaporated (ii, iv, 5). Once these ideas were put down, a strong method for idea replication was created, and because of the naturally valuable nature of such a resource, all peoples tried to put forward their language as the dominant one (ibid), this arrogance and human discord is why understanding can be so fraught with intellectual danger, and why the true Christian scholar is forced to learn several languages.

It is important to note that although scripture was disseminated into various languages, this proved to be valuable in the longer term for the replication of the ideals, as Augustine notes, as it allowed peoples form all over the world to glimpse the ideas in the mind of their local priests, and by following Augustine's analysis of knowledge, glimpse the signs of what lies in the mind of God. (De Doctr. Chr. 2.6) by constantly reading more, translating and uncovering truths about God in all texts. In many ways it represents a specific and determined shift in the '*langue'* of the individual (Saussure) whereby information is to be actively sought and relayed throughout the Christian community, but the 'knowledge' of the pagan community is also to be ransacked - all the time being aware a priori that any and all information gained will inevitably point towards God, and an understanding that God is the only thing which is to be loved for its own sake.

Augustine moves on to further analyse this first step towards Christian wisdom by discussing the mechanics of understanding. It is here that we find much food for thought. Augustine seems to argue that the mind, when embracing the path towards Christian wisdom, is to be almost wiped clean, with an entirely new approach to learning about to begin. To this end, it is important that such a mind be initially filled with the 'basics', as it were, and in this case this means the canonical texts. These texts are then articulated by Augustine (ii, viii, 13) so that there can be little doubt as to which ones are acceptable in the early stages of education. These texts are assessed for worth in practice, however, by their appeal to the widest audience and their acceptance by the majority of churches. Initially, this may not sound so novel, as it would appear to simply point in the direction of an acceptable cannon for instruction (nothing particularly new in that given Greco-Roman educational systems). However, it is the ramifications of this analysis of text that we shall see point to a more complete semiotic theory, or in the very least a radical departure from earlier philosophical notions of sign-theory.

It is in de Doctr. Chr. that we are given a fuller analysis of sign-relation by Augustine, especially concerning words. We see the discussion of a completely different genus of signs, namely those signs that are not merely 'symptoms' of something signified - or natural products of the *res* in question (such as smoke is to fire) but symbols. 'Symbols' in this case are words, in that unlike other signs, they cannot do anything more than signify. These symbols, however, are only meaningful by convention. that is to say, once again, we need to be taught how to interpret these signs, and therefore that which is signified by any language is not necessarily an open, obvious and essential representation of the reality to be signified. It relies upon a 'coming together' or the speakers of that language, and its success is to be ruled by convention.

It is clear that Augustine moved beyond the earlier Greco-Roman analysis of signs and sign-theory in that he took the idea of *signum* well beyond the basic notion of 'inference' into the realm of linguistics. It is here that Augustine finds the richest source of sign theory, and it is from this realm that he chooses to teach. The argument which appears toward the end of book II De Doctr. Chr. that linguistic signs achieve their meaning by convention, without (as Markus rightly points out) discussing how this convention is achieved, or from what it may have grown, shows a healthy attitude towards the understanding of other languages, and furthermore a debunking of the power of the signs themselves in preference to that which they signify. We see in the example of the magician's text, and further is Augustine's discussion of the appropriate texts for the Christian canon to include, a strong sense that the actual words don't matter, so long as the correct things are being signified.

R.A. Markus turns later, in his work “Signs, Communication, and Communities in Augustine’s De Doctrina Christiana”, to a fuller understanding of the semiotic forces at play in Augustine’s work and here argues that Augustine is outlining a Christian path of *signum*-deciphering; that as living beings, we are consciously immersed in a world of signs, and that meaning (or God) can be discovered only by finding the *res* via the *signum*. In discussing meaning not linked to signs, Markus notes that :”We thwart this drive of our nature only at the cost of blocking off the process of learning and growth that living in the midst of this realm of limited and unstable things ought always to remain. A tendency to discover things to be signs (as the only true *res* is God) is central to Augustine’s understanding of what it is to be human, and doubly so to his idea of being Christian”. (p101).

The nature of language and information flow is central to Augustinian though as a glue which binds philosophy and action for the Christian, whether learning (De Doctr. Chr.) or teaching (De Mag). By placing God at the centre of the information flow, Augustine achieves several things. Firstly, he manages to explain a viable path to wisdom ‘in the world’, in that the Christian should use all about him to find God. Secondly, he offers up an explanation for ‘evil’ action, in that these are acts based on assumptions created by a false belief in a local ‘res’, ie things loved for their own sake which are not God, and finally, he cements a system of literary and linguistic analysis which drives directly into the heart of the pagan linguistic and rhetoric structures, opening their texts to the Christian like so much Egyptian gold.

Not only does Augustine stand outside the pagan hermeneutic, urging Christians to ‘take the field’, but he actively transforms the structure of pagan linguistic analysis through his specific, and in the opinion of many modern scholars, unique rhetorical talent. Kathy Eden, in her work “The Rhetorical tradition and Augustinian hermeneutics in De Doctrina Christiana” discusses what she sees as the active transformation by Augustine of the traditional mode of pagan rhetorical schooling. Previously, pagan rhetorical teaching was provided with two fundamentally different principles of interpretation, the legal (*interpretatio scripti*) and the stylistic (*interpretatio voluntas*). *Interpretatio scripti* concerns a dry analysis of the written word in itself, and the other an analysis of the author’s intention. Thus the reader was able to acquire a semantic meaning (of the words) as well as a dianoetic meaning, of the author’s intention. The translator reader may well misinterpret the former (as Augustine notes earlier in DDC when discussing the problems of translation) but under the Augustinian system, the reader will always be able to acquire a dianoetic meaning, in that clearly, like all signs, the author is pointing towards the ultimate res, that is God. In this schema, the promotion of *caritas*, or love for God in itself, is upheld.

Augustine, in his work, drags previously deemed intellectually ‘underground’ Christian texts into the philosophical arena of pagan rhetoric, almost kicking and screaming. They are valuable texts, valuable sources of more ‘useful’ signs, but should be treated in a classical pagan way. They should be assessed according to both semantic meaning and author’s intent, however, as Eden notes “like most if not all of the rhetorical theorists of classical antiquity, Augustine upholds the voluntas of the author above his scriptum. This principle of interpretation is so central to the hermeneutics of *De Doctrina* that the interpreter, introduced a moment ago, who had misunderstood the signification of the text but grasped the author's intention, is nevertheless 'to be corrected and shown that it is more useful not to leave the road, lest the habit of deviating force him to take a cross-road or a perverse way'" (p50) In *De Doctrina Christiana* we see Augustine achieving many important things. In terms of Christian hermeneutics, we see a vibrant sign-theory or semiotic analysis come to the fore in which Christians are given a way of not only approaching their own work (in what is a text-based religion after all, but a way to approach with validity the work of their pagan counterparts. Further, in this semiotics we see a clear delineation of God as res, and a explication of all the signs around us. Importantly, Augustine does this by the adroit use of traditional pagan rhetorical tools.

Traditional historical analysis treats the text of the *De Doctrina* as the primary arena for research into the success and propogation of Augustine's semiotics, seeking objectivity in analysis by determining from the text the nature of the author's ideas on the structure of the church as an informational focal point for the changing nature of early church history. Structuralist approaches use the text to depart from it to the audience and divine the nature of the society around St Augustine, arriving at assumptions about education, and learning etc. Both methods come together well, yet neither addresses the mechanical reasons behind the replication of such a text. To achieve this, it is important to understand the 'possabilities' for replication of ideas in the time of Augustine, and then test whether the memes expressed in the works and sermons are to be considered memetically 'fit'. To argue that the text implies a radical departure from previous pagan hermeneutics means little if the text is memetically structred in such a way as to rpevent successful replication. No point identifying a brilliant idea if noone will ever get to hear it..

Memetic fitness criteria

The operation of memes usually works in concert with that of genes such that, as Henson notes, "The result was a double feedback cycle where memes for survival-enhancing behaviour and genes for mental hardware able to pass along memes were favoured (in the evolution of mankind). The combination is so successful that human beings and their complex cultures inhabit the largest ecological range on the planet (at least for animals of our size)."[10] Determination of the value of a meme, and therefore any possible predictions or analysis of its success rate, must be made from at least three distinct viewpoints, although all interact. Firstly, the meme must be analysed from the viewpoint of the genes the individual person carries, to assess whether or not it will come into direct conflict with them, pass largely unnoticed or embrace them fully; from that of the memes they are infected with, again to ensure that the meme need not directly compete with any other beliefs currently held, or that if it must it can easily over come them (for example the 'death of Santa Claus' in favour of an appreciation of parental kindness) and from the perspective of the conscious mind, shaped by both genes and memes, which may fight against memes which directly threaten life style or expectancy, or may go against previously adopted behaviour patterns (such as the meme for vegetarianism). When viewed from these perspective's, theory concerning the nature and life-expectancy of a meme can be espoused, especially useful for our purposes.

[10] Henson, K "Memes, Meta-memes and politics" p3

Memetic analysis proposes certain criteria for the survival and successful replication of an idea, any idea, without references to the empirical or theoretical 'truth' of the content. In this sense, memetics offers the researcher into the history of ideas an analytical tool for looking at text without fear of being subjectively swayed by the actual content of the texts being studied. The criteria by which memes are deemed fit or unfit in terms of their ability to replicate centre essentially, as noted by Dawkins[11], around their fecundity, copying fidelity and longevity. The analysis of these criteria provides a structural blueprint for the historian in that they allow a reassessment of texts in terms of the cultural structure, or meme pool, in which they are found to replicate.

The fecundity of any meme, ie its ability to be understood, presents many interesting possibilities for the historian. *De Doctrina Christiana*, for example, has been treated by modern scholars largely in light of its similarity to modern semiotic theory. The text is being treated and analysed in terms of the effect such theories have had on modern intellectual discourse. However, by looking at the ability of contemporary sources to understand basic sign-theory, we see a smaller pool of possible replication. Such theories previously only existed in rhetorical schools of Greece and Rome, and held little sway over the general populous. To this end, we see St Augustine increasing the fecundity of the work by adding references and analyses that would easily be understood by a wider audience - music, the games, pagan epics and myths etc. Thus the historian is able to see, before analysing the content, that the meme of the work is a fit one for the surrounding meme pool and ought to do well.

The copying fidelity of any meme can also be measured a great degree of accuracy. Again, our example of *De Doctrina Christiana* would replicate well. It consists of short paragraphs, easily sent in letter form, or read out in sermons. It refers directly to, and quotes heavily from, Scriptures which were already circulated and can be written or spoken at academic or basic levels of intellectual understanding.

And finally, the longevity of the work shows the historian how likely the meme is to propagate, taking into account how long it will stay in the ‘memory’ of the meme-host (in our case texts and human minds). In *De Doctrina Christiana*, we see a work which although specific in its reference to biblical texts (already strong memes, and already shown to be long-lived) other contemporary references are kept at a minimum and metaphor is brought into play. In this way the work is able to achieve an intellectually ‘timeless’ quality, which enables it to persist and replicate long after references to local conditions have passed from memory.

Fitness criteria can easily be adjusted constantly according to information on the available means of replication. That is to say, for example, a meme in fourth century Europe would not necessarily be deemed unfit for its inability to transfer well on television. All that is required for an idea to be treated as a meme is that it should behave like one; ie that it should be highly successful in replicating itself within a given community. Further and more specific memetic conditions for replication fitness are contained in the handout of the work by Ron Hale-Evans[12]. These criteria, more specific in their inquiry, provide the historian a blueprint, as it were, for the strength of any meme in a given society, and a base from which to embark upon other methodologies of analysis. In terms of cultural evolution, therefore, the researcher is

[11] Dawkins, R *The Selfish Gene*, Paladin 1976 p208
[12] Ron Hale-Evans, Memetics: A Systems Metabiology, Version 950220 at URL <http://www.apocalypse.org/pub/u/rwhe/memetics.html>

able to generate a blueprint of the meme pool of the day by looking at means of information dispensation and replication and the mechanisms by which the more successful memes of the time propagate; historians of any period can usually pinpoint, with a fair degree of accuracy, such factors as influence the replication of ideas:

- languages spoken, and who understood them,
- state of literacy
- most common means of general populous communication
- technological means of the society
- interaction with other surrounding societies and ease of transfer between them

In the case of St Augustine we can see that in 4th century Europe oral histories delivered in terms of narrative, sermon and parable, philosophical debate, letter writing and book production were the key machinery for the replication of ideas concerning the early church. Memetic analysis of these mechanisms, determining who had access to them and how they were used, provides the historian with a clear view of possible successful memes in terms of structure.

What's in a meme – increased objectivity in historical analysis

Memes replicate without any overt responsibility for the nature of their content. For the historian this provides a clean arena for analysis; it cannot be argued that the meme of Christianity was passed on and replicated itself successfully in its chosen form because it was right, or because it was true, but merely because over the period of its birth and growth, the form in which the meme survived was the most successfully copied, more easily able to reach 'uninfected minds' (for reasons open to discussion) and more able to meld with the other beliefs stored in the mind of the follower. The structure of the information package was, and indeed still is, a memetically fit one.

A meme that successfully replicates itself is not necessarily *good* or *right*, rather it merely operates more effectively within the cultural climate it finds itself. We see then that St Augustine's meme of Christianity was able to replicate itself more frequently, among more minds and across more generations while maintaining a high degree of copying fidelity than the other religious memes competing with Christianity at the time. One meme supplanted the other for the predominant mind-space, yet both 'survived'. Memetics is a useful method for the historian seeking to paint a picture of a contemporary meme-pool in concert with more traditional assessments of ancient European culture, which as often as not take into account at a paramount level; such things as the local geography, ideological voids left with the passing of the strength of the Roman Empire, military issues concerning the 'friendship' of the Church with the emperor, the nature of the religion in a historical sense, perceived religious voids and other such issues. In other words, historians of the period can use memetics to look at the replication of two complementary and competing ideas of Christianity, not merely at paganism and Christianity. Further, memetic methodology can be used to more effectively asses the effect of the actions of the individuals who hold and replicate these ideas upon the replication and mutation of that idea throughout the meme pool. Normal methods of historical inquiry, whether social or traditional, are inadequate in this field, as they concentrate too heavily upon the actions of the 'agents', and not enough upon the structure and force of the ideas themselves.

This brings us to an interesting criticism of memetic method, namely the nature and relevance of truth claims. Memetic historical methodology involves investigating what can be referred to as the mechanisms for a 'successful idea', and yet in the case of religion it happens to be an idea (or more correctly a complex series of ideas) which is packed to the rafters with truth statements. It may therefore be argued that since this particular idea (or indeed any other successful meme) most aptly succeeds in the human cultural sphere, it lends itself to notions of truth. This, however, is not a function of the science. All we are researching here is the strength (replicating ability/attractiveness/copying fidelity) of an idea, and how one meme can supplant another in the minds of believers, an area which in no way suggests that in our case Augustine was 'right', and orthodox pagan religions 'wrong', but does imply that Augustine's ideas were memetically strong in their phrasing and reproduction, giving them a far better chance of replication in the society of the time.

Memetic theory in history is a methodology for the assessment of the replication possibilities of ideas, not their 'truth'. We could just as easily use memetics to assess the 'flat earth theory' (still alive today in some ever decreasing circles) without ever mentioning the 'truth' of its claims. The only 'truth' claimed by the science is a mechanical one. That is, the prevalence and success of certain ideas to reach more people can be traced to certain memetic structural imperatives, and the growth of such ideas more accurately charted. Most methods of analysis when charting or explaining the growth and history of ideas have relied upon their perceived effect upon the 'readership', and their historical relationship to what has gone before. Memetic theory, however, provides a more objective standpoint for historical analysis. The local conditions and memepool of the historian or social theorist impact less upon the analysis of the memes researched, as they are being treated only in respect to other memes of the day, and not in comparison to successful or current ideas and theories. In our case, when St Augustine attributes final and initial action to God, concerns about theology and issues surrounding its acceptance need not come into play in any overt way, the only issue is that at the time such religious memes were common place, and replicated in the given society extremely well. With memetic methodology we can look at the replication of an idea in itself, then go on to attribute this idea with certain proactive 'abilities', or avenues for replication and spread. This more fully explained and researched 'idea' will then be submitted to regular methods of analysis, but from all sides. The language will come under scrutiny, also the subject matter, the changes in audience, the perspective of the writer, the perceived world-view of the laity and the goal of the work. This, I believe, will give us a new direction to ponder in terms of historical research and analysis by locating the analysis of the historian more fully in the area of the research, and avoid the gap between two directions of analysis by pointing both into a melange of information transfer set within a rigid and predetermined intellectual melee . It is not enough anymore to say that an idea succeeds or fails in a past community based on modern assumptions and intellectual mores. Rather, a fuller understanding of the replicating possabilities of the period being studied will lend a greater understanding of whether the idea was successful in its own right, in its own time. Use of this methodology places the historian directly in the arena of idea replication, rather than allowing any research or analysis to happen from the relatively 'safe' position of the modern.

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