

The Evolution of Knowledge

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Statement:

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and to the best of the author's knowledge and belief contains no copy or paraphrase of material previously published or written by other persons except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Winfried Hoer

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Abstract

This thesis will argue that there exists a unit of cultural knowledge (the meme) that is analogous to the gene of biological evolution. Genetic knowledge has been gained through the interaction of ancestral organisms with their environments. Those organisms with inferior genetic knowledge have died out. Cultural knowledge has also been gained through the interaction of new ideas within minds. Inferior cultural knowledge has died out. Genes, through their phenotypes, evolve in a physical environment while memes, through their phenotype, thought, evolve in a mental environment. Both vary in their respective environments, and the differential survival of these variations represents a *single* process underlying gene and meme multiplication. Because the units of knowledge, genes and memes, operate in distinctively different environments, and so manifest themselves in different ways, there appear to some people to be two distinctive processes operating. One task of this thesis will be to establish logically this single process. I will show that memes are living units inhabiting a sea of minds in which they compete for survival just as organisms compete for survival in their physical environment. In using the "meme" I am not assuming any new physical forces, rather, the meme is a different way of seeing an old problem; cultural evolution. Through this view, contemporary problems can be seen in a new light, and in many cases, better explanations found for them.

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