The Purpose of Psychology

Lucky Gene
Or
Lucky Meme
The goal of any science is to search for understanding.

- $\Psi =$ natural science, social science, biological science, applied science, and even a nonscience.
- $\Psi =$ describe, understand, predict, and control behavior.
- More so, benefit humanity.
Socrates

• “Know thyself”

• Perhaps this is the greatest motivation for the existence of a field like Ψ
Occam’s razor

• Many times scientists have tried to explain human behavior
• Scientists take into account old info and combine it with new ideas.
• Like Occam’s razor they shave off the excess and add something new.
Darwin

• Very influential work in all areas of science

• Major foundation for explaining human behavior.
SKINNER

• “Selection by Consequence”

• Used evolution and natural selection as a key determinant in human behavior.
Imitation

• A great way to study behavior is through imitation.
• Example: how a child learns the same language as his/her parents
• Example: why Texans have accents
• Example: why we follow role models
• Not surprisingly, we unconsciously, imitate others all the time.
Susan Blackmore

The Meme Machine

• What is a meme?
  • Ideas, skills, habits, stories, inventions, etc.
  • http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meme
  • Just like our genes compete to get copied, so do memes.
Memetics

• New science (approx. 25 years in existence).
• Gaining attention as a powerful force in understanding human evolution.
• The foundation of a major theory of the evolution of the human mind.
Why do we imitate??

- Why do we shake hands?
- Why do we bury the dead?
- Why do we brush our teeth (or tooth depending where your from)?
- Why do we still study Socrates?

- Understanding why we imitate is the basis for understanding human behavior.
RELIGION

• The oldest and biggest meme

• Why do they exist?

• According to Blackmore, they must serve a useful purpose.
Why look at Religion?

- Religious overtones are found in many of psychology’s most prominent questions.
  - Nature vs. nurture
  - Objective vs. subjective
  - The Mind Body problem
Cont...

- Affect many aspects of life
- Therefore, we can study religion to see how memes influence human behavior
- May seem unorthodox, but there are lots of good meme examples to study.
In the beginning

All the great religions of the world started as small-scale cults, usually with a charismatic leader, and over time have spread to billions of people all over the planet.

Why did some survive and others simply die out?
Religion as a “Stopgap”

• Sir Edward Tyler and Max Muller viewed evolution as the development of increasing knowledge and saw religion as a “stopgap” for inadequate explanation of nature and man’s role in it.

• Example: Eclipses, Volcanoes, Tsunamis’
Religions Serve a Real Function

- Religious commitment may give people a sense of belonging
- Improves social integration in the elderly
- They incorporate useful rules for living, such as the dietary laws of Judaism or rules about cleanliness and hygiene (once protected people from disease)
Cont...

- Provide answers to age old questions (whether you believe them or not)
  - Why are we here?
  - **WHERE DO WE COME FROM?**
  - What happens when we die?

- **Why is there so much suffering in the world?**
Catholicism

- God is omnipotent and omniscient
- Jesus Christ is son of God and born of the virgin Mary here on earth
- Rose from the dead after crucifixion
- Able to hear our prayers
- Priests can absolve people of their sins after confession
- The Pope literally speaks the word of God
- When a priest administers mass, the bread and wine literally change into the flesh and blood of Christ.
Prayer

• Many claims for the efficacy of prayer in healing the sick – those with the strongest religious faith were less likely to recover from acute illness (King et al. 1994)

• War and the countless prayers in which both sides pray for God to help their side and kill the enemy.
Meme Tricks

- Raising Fear then reducing it
- The truth trick
- Beauty
- Altruism trick
Raising fear and reducing it

• The Catholic God is watching all the time and punish you if you disobey
• Some of the most terrible punishments
  – i.e. burn in hell forever
• But, if you turn to Christ you will be forgiven.
  – Repent your sins, raise your children Catholic, go regularly to mass, then, even if your unworthy and sinful, God will forgive you.
FAITH

- Faith in religion requires faith in the answers to the age old questions.
- God and Truth are synonymous (most religions).
- Reject faith then you reject truth
- Converting others mean giving the gift of truth
Meme Tricks

- Raising Fear then reducing it
- The truth trick
- Beauty
- Altruism trick
Beauty

- Beauty inspires the faithful and brings them closer to God.
- Some of the most beautiful buildings in the world have been constructed in the name of Buddha, Jesus Christ, or Mohammed.
- Alluring stories, stained glass, paintings, uplifting music, etc.
Altruism Trick

• Many believers are truly good people.
• They help their neighbor, give money to the poor, and live honest and moral lives.
• Who doesn’t want to be like this?
• Mother Teresa—her behavior effectively spread Catholic memes
Memes in Christianity

• Christianity does also indeed possess those features that are necessary for an idea to compete for survival effectively.
• Christianity is very good at replicating itself; the great commission, Jesus’ instruction to his followers, is to go and make disciples of all nations. Those who possess the Christian meme, who believe in the God of the Bible, therefore replicate Christianity as far as they are able to do so.
The Fitness of the Christian Meme

- Christianity is also very robust. The all too common emphasis of religion on faith to the exclusion of reason makes those that possess the Christian meme liable to reject evidence against it.
- Christianity has even been accused of being unfalsifiable, i.e. of being such that no evidence could possibly count against it.
- Those that possess the Christian meme are therefore unlikely to lose it.
The Memetic Critique of Religions

• None of this memetic critique of religions, of course, proves that Christianity or Catholicism are false; that is not what it attempts to do.

• Rather, what the memetic critique of religions attempts to do is demonstrate that even if Christianity or Catholicism were false, we would expect belief in it to be widespread.
Conclusion

• Imitation serves as a good example of how behaviors are passed on for a long time.
• Rarely, an individual becomes so distinguishingly different from those who raised them or those closest to them.
• Humans are intelligent creatures and at the same time very influential. –not a bad thing.
• Just as our existence depends on our genes imitating and reproducing, it also depends on the imitation of our ideas, beliefs, and behaviors.