"Meme" in Relation to Time and Space

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Abstract

"Meme" is an idea spread by someone because he likes this idea. Analysing "meme" in relation to time and space helps us to find out if ideologies result from a determinism.

Keywords: Geo-Historical Determinism of Ideologies

Introduction

Someone who is seduced by an idea, often wants to share it, to disseminate it. Faced with this idea, people are more inclined to believe rather than trying to find out the truth; indeed adhesion to a belief does not require special effort, unlike the search for knowledge. Ignorance is subversive, not knowledge. This concept called "meme", can be studied in relation to history (time) and geography (space): does meme result from a geo-historical determinism or is it a stochastic phenomenon (from the Greek stokhastikos: conjectural)?

Definition of "meme"

We talk about meme as an idea spread by the one who believes that this idea is true. This concept was theorized in 1976 by the British biologist and ethologist Richard Dawkins born in 1941 [1].

A frequent drift of meme is observed when beliefs are imposed on others by those in power (political power, religious power, economic power, ecological power). They explain that it's for your own good: this is the case with hard political parties, violent unions, fundamentalist religious. There is another bias with those who benefit from an idea although they know intimately that it is a wrong idea.

Mimicri

Mimicri results from a passive attitude insofar as it is based on imitation of a behavior without constraint, except a possible socio-economic pressure. It describes a behaviour of imitating someone else or adopting the behavior of a group of people. It is motivated either by the desire not to be different from other people such as follow a fashion, or the desire for social affiliation, like teens who have their codes intended to distinguish them from adults. Clothing fashion, shaved head, tattoos, particular expressions of languages, result from mimicri. It appears as a soft social phenomenon. Mimicri exists in many species. Here are two examples:

- Young chimpanzees learn from adults by watching how to break nuts with stones. For those who did not learn when they were young, it's too late, they'll never be able to break nuts.

- Gulls are able to progress against the wind without flapping their wings: so far I did not find a technical explanation. Some young gulls imitate adults and end up doing it successfully; some don't try, and they'll never be able to do it.

Ideologies and their specific key ideas

The danger of ideologies lies in the fanatism they propagate. All ideology leads to ideas forcibly imposed. An ideology is based on prefabricated ideas developed by a few to be imposed on all. Each ideologist has the certainty of holding the truth, to the point that each ideologist condemns the others.

All ideologies obstruct the spread of knowledge; in addition, misconceptions do without proof. Indeed, knowledge is considered subversive, because it poses a threat to doctrine, therefore it's a menace to those in power. The more poor and uneducated the popular mass, the easier it is to master it. Poverty and ignorance go hand in hand, so people are ready to believe in promises of all kinds. Some examples chosen among a few ideas and ideologies allow one to put in light the real reasons with the help of their specific key ideas.

Far-left parties and far-right parties in democracies

The main key ideas are "the party", and "the dogma" that cannot be questioned. Their priority is enlistment of the masses. Given that extremist parties are minority, they currently use verbal violence, sometimes physical violence, more rarely riots.

Yellow vests ("gilets jaunes") in France during the late 2020's: a protest driven at runabouts by a minority of people who intended to make the law. It is an example of anti-democratic way of doing, that is comparable to soviets, although the yellow protest only lasted a few months. The fight of governments against covid or against the consequences of global warming leads to the Dawkins-like spread of countless untruths. The Washington Capitol invasion in 2021 is another impressive illustration of the Dawkins effect.

Religions

The most common key ideas are "God", "sin", "evil", "hell", "resurrection", "eternal life". They provide numerous specific illustrations of the concept of "meme": dogma cannot be discussed and people are willing to believe them; creationism is still taught despite the scientific evidence of the evolutionary theory. Every religion has the certainty of having the truth, so that children have no choice, they must adopt the creeds of their parents. Creeds and practices look specific to their respective country (space), although they can have significant variations depending on history (time). Three examples:

1. The Roman emperor Constantin (280-337) ended polytheism for the benefit of Christianism.

2. The Separation of Church and State in France occurred by the law of 1905.

3. In ancient Egypt, the religion lasted over 5000 years, with a short break during the reign of Akhenaton 1372-1354 BCE (Before Common Era) who replaced all Gods by one Sun God [2]; this decision of Akenaton is also an example of "meme".

Marxism and communism

The key ideas are "the party decides", "working masses", "capitalism is the enemy".

The purpose of propaganda and terror is to keep the people submissive. Rewriting history (time) is one of the propaganda techniques; for example: erasing previous executives from photos. Imprisonment and assassination are common methods of getting rid of political opponents. Paradoxically, the "iron curtain" was intended to prevent people leaving on the east side from escaping to the west (space) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: *A watchtower and the back part of the Brandenburg Gate on the East Berlin side of the Iron Curtain in 1970.*

The soviet regime eventually collapsed (time), but its remnants gave rise to Putinism, which consists in modifying the constitution in order to be reelected at will (time). This case is an aggravation of the Dawkins principle, because Poutine knows that his civil dictatorship is not legitimate. It leads to wonder if the spaces of the East would harbor a political determinism?

Every totalitarian bureaucracy claims that its people do not think like Westerners: "Our conception of democracy differs from that of western countries" Xi Jinping, president of Popular China, asserted in 2021. This statement hides behind a supposed geographical determinism (space).

The rooting of castroism

The key ideas of Castro's interminable speeches (time) were "the revolution", "the people", "the party". The people, kept in ignorance and underdevelopment, have still not succeeded in getting rid of castroism, and they keep trying to flee to the USA (space). It was later found (time) that Castro was immensely wealthy.

The spread of anti-semitism

The poster figure 2 is a typical illustration of the anti-Semitic dialectic (from the Greek dialectiqê: art of arguing): all the Jews are rich, they exploit French workers, their race is the enemy of ours. Here is the translation of the Willette's paroxysmal agenda: Legislative Elections of September 22, 1889... Ad. Willette - Antisemitic Candidate IXth Borough 2nd District - Voters. Jews are only great, because we are

Figure 2: Willette antisemitic candidate (poster c. 100 x 140 cm).

on our knees! Let's stand up! Fifty thousand of them alone benefit from hard and hopeless work of thirty million French people who have become their trembling slaves. It's not about religion, the Jew is of a different race and enemies of ours. Judaism is the enemy! By running for election, I give you the opportunity to protest with me against Jewish tyranny. Do it then, even if it would only be for the honor!

Nazism

The key ideas "purity of the race", "Jews", "war", were constants in speeches of Hitler and Gœbels who would use "all-out war" from February 1943. Another major leitmotiv was about the conquest of "vital space" at any price and about setting up a thousand year empire.

Islamim

Key ideas like "Allah", "in the name of God", "the islamic law", systematically punctuate everyday conversation. Islamists keep repeating that the only God is theirs. The islamists' goal is to islamize the whole world (space), by violence if necessary.

Conclusion

However, time and space are not phenomena [3], the two concepts have been of great help in analysing origins and propagation of some ideologies. Whatever their forms, ideologies are specifically localized in space, and limited in time, as they last more or less long; possibly in reason of traditions that are part of the Dawkins principle. Indeed, by referring to history, we observe that the "meme effect" is momentary (time). Religious ideologies last long and they seem to last longer than political ideologies.

Covid is at the origin of many more or less serious conflicts.

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