

# God Is A Telomeme

Blithering Genius

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## 1 Telomeres

At the end of each DNA strand in your chromosomes, there is a sequence of base pairs that repeats over and over: TTAGGG. That sequence doesn't code for a protein, but it has an important function. It causes the strand to fold on itself, which prevents it from unraveling. That sequence is the telomere.

The concept of God has a similar function. It is not useful as a description of reality. It might appear to be simply memetic garbage, but it has an important function. It holds together a system of memes and prevents it from unraveling.

## 2 Religion

Religion is a way of propagating knowledge down the generations. It is a package that holds accumulated knowledge, especially values. The symbols and rituals of religion are merely packaging for values and traditions that have important functions.

Religion is an anchor for the values of an individual and the organizing principles of a society. It provides a foundation for thought and communication: an endpoint of reasoning and debate. It holds together and propagates a package of beliefs and behavior patterns that have worked well in the past.

Religion is part of deep culture. Deep culture gives us a shared conceptual framework that is necessary for thought, action and social interaction. You don't think in an unbounded space. You think inside a box. The walls of the box are tacit assumptions. The box is the conceptual framework

through which you make sense of your existence. Religion defines a box in which people can think, act and interact.

Deep culture is acquired at an early age, so it propagates mostly down lines of genetic descent, from parents to children. Memes, like genes, are selected for their ability to propagate themselves. Genes and memes evolve together and depend on each other. Because deep culture propagates from parents to children, it tends to promote reproduction. Religions that do not promote reproduction tend to die out. Religion is a cultural adaptation that helps people to survive and reproduce.

### **3 Fashions And Traditions**

Memes can propagate in different ways, and they are shaped by how they propagate.

Traditions are memes that mostly propagate from parents to children. They are absorbed by the child from the family and community. Because traditions propagate from parents to children, they tend to be adaptive, not maladaptive. The propagation of a tradition depends on the reproduction of their hosts.

Fashions are memes that mostly propagate between peers, after childhood. They can evolve to be maladaptive, because they don't depend on the host's reproduction. Some fashions are memetic parasites that use the host to propagate themselves, at the expense of the host's reproduction.

A religion typically begins as a fashion, but evolves into a tradition if it succeeds. Over time, it accumulates adaptive knowledge.

### **4 The Function of Religion**

Religion has a social function. It provides symbols and rituals that people use to synchronize their emotions. The synchronization of emotions is a way of coordinating behavior. Religion helps to create social coherence and group agency.

There is a difference between new and old religions, between fashions and traditions. Traditional religions tend to support the existing social order, because they are adapted to it. Fashionable new religions often propose a revolutionary transformation of the social order.

Most people need a religion of some kind. They need a box to frame thought, discourse and interaction. Without that frame, they become confused. They discover philosophical problems that they can't solve. Religion hides the biggest problems of human existence behind a curtain of comforting illusions. This allows people to focus on ordinary problems, within the frame provided by religion.

What is religion hiding? Our mortality. The brutality of nature. The indifference of the cosmos. The vast unknown that lies beyond our uncertain knowledge of reality. The abyss: that we have no objective foundation for truth and value.

It is not easy to deal with the human condition rationally and philosophically.

## 5 Conclusion

I am an atheist, but I don't think that religion can just be thrown away. Religion has important functions. You can't fix a flat tire by simply removing the tire. You have to replace it. Likewise, simply removing the idea of God doesn't give someone a functional worldview.

On the other hand, we can't solve the problems of the modern world by clinging to traditional religion. Intellectual and material progress has undermined traditional worldviews. Culture is rapidly changing. The religions of the past no longer provide us with a frame for thought, discourse and action. Instead, we have cultural chaos.

We need a new telomeme.