

# Mememes and the malign user illusion

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Many authors have suggested that the apparent unity of consciousness is an illusion. Parfit contrasts ego theorists with bundle theorists, who believe that underlying the apparent continuity of self is only a series or bundle of experiences. Dennett, having rejected the audience in the Cartesian Theatre, suggests the self is a benign user illusion. If we accept this, we must ask (1) How is the illusion constructed? (2) Why is it constructed, and (3) Is it really benign?

Possible answers include evolutionary, cognitive and social explanations. I shall argue that none of these is valid, for the illusion does not benefit either us or our genes, it benefits our mememes.

I shall explain the basic principles of memetics, pointing out sources of confusion over definitions and false analogies with genes, and stressing the importance of understanding mememes as replicators. I shall explain how and why mememes group together into co-adapted mememe complexes, one of which is the self. This mememplex is constructed by the mememes for their own propagation, not for our benefit. Indeed it is arguably the root of all human suffering. I conclude that both scientifically, and for living our lives, the illusion is malign.