

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE

This zine is part of a series of footnote zines to the project “Memetic Engines of Anticapitalism.” Due to a whole lot of complications (mainly involving chronic illness) the version of this zine is at some stage of draft, not the polished and complete edition.

All of these zines will be available for free online and in perpetuity when they're finished, and updated regularly in the meantime.

If you want to follow up, the QR code on the front of this zine will take you straight to the most recent web page edition and an archive of each iteration that was separately published.

For more general updates and information on the whole project, this QR code will take you straight to memeticengines.com, where you can see the overview and any news about the works, sign up for the mailing list, or get in touch with me to ask clarifying questions.

ZINES IN THE SERIES:

Replicate, Mutate, Select
The Memetic Landscape
This Is Propaganda
Ethical Hypocrisy
Little Ideas in Memetics
Capital's Not Capitalism
What Are Pacta
Some other awful things that are inevitable under capitalism
The Third Derivative of Value
This Is George
Self-Destruct, LLC.

AND COMING SOON,

My Chronic Illness as a Case Study in the Shortcomings of Capitalism



MEMETICENGINES.COM

Note: Due to complications surrounding a chronic illness (see upcoming zine “My Chronic Illness as a Case Study in the Shortcomings of Capitalism”) the text of several of these zines, including this one, is incomplete. Where this is the case, I've done my best to make a pamphlet that gives the general idea. As these works are completed, you'll be able to find them online at memeticengines.com.

What are Pacta?

By T.X. Watson
version β 1

If memetics is an evolutionary system, it should be possible for complex entities to emerge from the informational material of memes in a manner analogous to organisms, from the informational material of genes.

Regrettably, the accepted term for an entity of this sort is “meme-complex,” or “memplex,” both of which are awful words. (Organisms aren’t called “geneplexes.”)

I don’t have a general word for memetic entities that are complicated enough to act as agents in the world, but I do have a specific term for one sort: Pacta (Pactum singular).

“Pactum” is short for “M. Corporis Pactum”: M. for Memetic, to distinguish it from biological taxonomy; Corporis meaning embodied; and Pactum meaning contract or agreement.¹

Like biological taxonomy, my effort at memetic taxonomy starts from describing the species in terms of physiology. The physiology of M. Corporis Pactum is as follows:

1. The core organizing principles, goals, values, and structure of the pactum are defined in an explicit, singular text. (Some examples of such a text include bylaws and constitutions.)
2. The pactum acts in the world through a large number of humans acting in a complex network of interrelated groups, no individual or group of which has full control over the behavior of the pactum.

Originally I planned on just using the word “corporation” for this, but that’s too narrow. This includes corporations, but importantly it also includes things like governments, organizations, political parties, and some religions. Pacta have a lot of categories for differentiating themselves, but they are still all the same kind of thing.

And since it’s needlessly confusing to take a word that already has an accepted meaning and define it to mean something else for the purposes of an argument, I just made up a new word instead.

¹ Originally I intended to just use the word “corporation” to describe Pacta, but it quickly became obvious that that would be confusing, since corporations are a subset of pacta, which describe a broader set of entities.

There’s a problem with taxonomizing ideas that biological taxonomists don’t have to deal with. The circumstances of replication for any given sequence of DNA is extremely specific, with only parts of its host taking part in the actual process. Further, the most complex replicators in the biological world rely for reproduction on multiple participants, all of whom have to have similar mechanics.

Because of this, organisms speciate.

Speciation (from ‘species’) is the process by which populations of an organism change due to their environments enough that they can no longer procreate with each other. Two populations of a single species thereby, over time, become two species.

The trouble is that ideas don’t speciate. That is to say: There’s no point at which two ideas can become so categorically different, unrelated, and alien to each other that no new thought can be made from combining them.

See zine: “Little Ideas in Memetics” for more detail on this idea.

That’s not to mention the fact that taxonomies themselves are ideas in the memetic landscape, so that a territory mapped in memetics is changed to a vastly greater degree than taxonomizing animals and plants can change them. Biology textbooks don’t procreate with bats and make blood-sucking book babies. But the ideas of textbooks and bats can procreate, and in fact just did.

And complex memetic entities can even drift in and out of identifiable categories. You might have already noticed that the thing I call a Pactum has a common infant form in the Small Business, an entity that often starts operating in the world before the foundational paperwork comes to exist and which is often under the complete control of an individual or small group of humans.

Understanding a memetic entity as having its own agency doesn’t mean we need to understand it as having a life cycle that looks like a biological life cycle.