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Stream B: Cultural Change and Evolutionary Theory

Title: The first memes

Abstract: Dennett joins a host of other theorists in explaining human uniqueness as the result of cultural evolution. On Dennett's view, memes are units of cultural information—anything from a dance to a phrase—and words are the most important memes of all. Once the meme of language had infected its hosts, cultural evolution exploded. If Cecilia Heyes' Cognitive Gadgets theory is correct, however, then some non-linguistic memes, such as imitation, predate language and are crucial for social learning. More space must be made in Dennett's account for these early embodied memes.

Bio: Lachlan is PhD candidate at the Australian National University. His work focuses on representations--both scientific and mental--and he hopes to one day be appointed to an off-world university.