Abstract: What I am proposing in this essay is that my most basic state of awareness is recurrent in human lives after my current life. Therefore, since I am the experience of this most basic state of awareness my experience of awareness will begin to exist in an unborn baby after my death, even if my awareness is terminated at the time of my death.

Recurrent Reincarnation

Imagine you’ve just come home from work. You sit down and relax, not in any elated or distressed state of mind. The state of awareness you are in—the emotional state you return to and have returned to all your life—can exist in a future life. That calm state is who you are from a point of view of awareness. It is the neutral state you return to after anger, sadness or excitement. I refer to this as calm awareness.

Even if my awareness is terminated at the time of my death I will contend here that it will begin to exist in an unborn baby after my death. Awareness here can be thought of as a canvas upon which thoughts and sensations are painted. By “recurrent” I mean that the awareness happens in a future life, beginning at the dawning of consciousness. That is, my experience of awareness is recurrent, therefore I am recurrent.

Don’t confuse awareness with an object. If I throw a basketball into a volcano it’s gone for good. I can make one just like it but I won’t have the same one ever again. This is the way it is with objects, but processes are different. I can play the same song again and again on the radio, because a song is a process. Calm awareness is also a patterned process in the brain. But it is probably not unique. Anger is the same kind of experience for everyone because it produces a universal response. Indeed, our ability to empathize with others indicates universality, even though the particulars may differ.  Your calm awareness—the awareness you return to after a heated moment—is probably something that is common to many other people. Who’s to say it can’t exist again?

Consider this: If someone hits me over the head I will see stars (as opposed to some other geometric form). But so would anyone else. It doesn't matter which human brain you have, everyone sees stars, because the process of getting hit over the head and the brain's way of processing that event is the same for everyone (more or less). No one reports seeing squares or circles instead of stars. If a bee stings me on the back of the hand then stings you on the back of the hand the only difference in perception would be in degree, not kind. The reaction to the bee sting is universal in kind but maybe not in degree. The point is that our underlying awareness is common, not unique. Humans are genetically very similar. But these sensations occur to awareness.

Since awareness is a process it can cease to exist then exist again. I can play a song ten times on ten different radios. The confusion comes in when people think of living beings as objects. But minds are patterned processes, not objects.  The two things have different ontologies.

I am a continuation of what I was a year ago. Likewise, I would not necessarily expect to have an absolutely identical calm awareness as the person I was in a previous life. All that would be needed is for certain key features to be the same. If I project a square of light onto a wall it could slowly turn into a circle. But the circle would be a coherent continuation of the square. However, reincarnation is seen here as a matter of recurrence, not continuation.

All my awareness arises out of my calm awareness. So, if a baby born today has calm awareness that is a recurrence of a baby from 1,000 years ago the baby born today is a reincarnation of the baby from 1,000 years ago.

About calm awareness, there are three and only three possibilities: 1.) it is unique to each person 2.) It is possessed by different groups (meaning each group possesses it’s own calm awareness ). 3.) It is common to everyone. The reason I strongly doubt the first option is that different emotions (anger, sadness, etc.) are the same types of experiences for everyone. Anger is one pattern of awareness, sadness another, etc. Also, people act like me when they are relaxing. This simply means that you can tell when someone is relaxing or tense. This could be analogous to a stare.  Each time I lapse into a stare it is the same state of awareness that I have experienced before.  Also, since I am only a recurrence of what I was in a previous life, I do not need to have identical calm awareness that that person had.  I’m not the same thing I was ten years ago, so I don’t have to be the same thing in the next life that I was in this life. So, since even option 1 could produce reincarnation, reincarnation very well may occur, because calm awareness is the part of me that feels emotion, and the higher faculties have their base in this awareness and follow from it.  If options 2 or 3 hold I am even more likely to reincarnate because there would be a stronger correlation between the calm awareness of this life and the previous life.

A possible counter to this argument is that the influence of genes on the human population would cause each individual to have unique and unreproducible calm awareness.  However, the gene pool for humans is very small, and certain traits, like brown eyes, are almost universal.

While it is true that each beaver dam is unique, the *method* of building beaver dams is universal.  It stands to reason that there is only one type of consciousness that produces beaver dams.  It has minuscule variations, but that consciousness is one process with many possible forms.

If I slip into a coma and wake with a different personality I am still the same person because I am a continuation of what I was before the coma.  Likewise, I could just as easily be the same person I was in a previous life even if I have a different personality, and even if awareness is terminated at death.  My thinking is that calm awareness is one coherent type of awareness since it serves a definite purpose, which is to sense the world in a broad way, to be receptive to changes both internally and externally so that any impulse which needs to arise can. But even if there is no self, my experience of life would be recurrent.

But by far the best objective evidence for calm awareness comes from evolution.  A hunter-gatherer would have to return to the same relatively flat emotional state so he could make tools, stalk prey and gather fruit. If he were distracted by his emotions constantly he would not be able to focus. Focus is only possible when one is undistracted.  In this way, calm awareness would *not* be like a snowflake, created by chance winds.  It has been carefully molded by natural selection to be consistent in each person.

I realize current science cannot verify whether someone has actually reincarnated, but with this mechanism in mind there may be a way of exploring the issue more deeply.  Much more work would need to be done.  Of all the billions of people who have lived before it is possible that someone who died before I was born had a calm awareness that was close enough to mine to be a match.  I can say nothing with certainty though.

Another way of looking at the problem is through the lens of what I call “most basic awareness.” Most basic awareness is the awareness to which all thoughts occur. As with calm awareness, three possibilities are present: It may be unique to each individual. It may consist in groups. It may be universal. As with calm awareness, the same caveats apply. If I say, “It occurs to me it’s Sunday” I mean the thought that it is Sunday occurs to my most basic awareness. I am not my thoughts anymore than I am the hair on my head.

Most basic awareness recurs in each generation after the time of my death. I am most basic awareness. It is the seed from which all my awareness arises. Therefore, since it will recur, I will recur. Therefore, reincarnation. The existence of most basic awareness is confirmed by the fact that Buddhist monks can enter a thoughtless state in which they are still aware.

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