

Essay

Evolution & Modifications of the Mind

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ABSTRACT

One life in different bodies would have a similar range of awareness in each body. As the need for different aspects of awareness became necessary for survival, some would be selected for that aspect through evolution with the necessary restructuring of the neural networks following. The mind is always vigilant, assessing every moment against the inputs present. We call that thought when the outcome or decision is made known through our awareness. More generally, we just say we are conscious.

Key Words: thinking process, public life, state of mind, still mind, valid decision.

From the time single-celled creatures appeared on earth it can be assumed that these entities had some interaction with their immediate environment. These interactions involved the identifying of material and sources of energy to sustain life. Given that reproduction was achieved by cell division, it can also be assumed that the intelligence gained from experience was able to accumulate in this growing life form to become an informational asset which contributed to the survival of that form. I am not going to make any assumptions about the role of DNA in this model because I am not sufficiently familiar with this aspect of life.

What I can say is that the life experience of a species will have some input into the DNA of that life form, and depending on where it is placed on the time scale, it will carry many of the survival strategies of its ancestors as part of its informational assets. In the case of the human form these assets can indeed be influenced by its DNA. More importantly, though, the greatest human asset is the human brain.

Dolphins, elephants and humans all exhibit self-awareness, and have similar structures in the brain which are related to higher cognitive functions such as planning a strategy. So for me the question about consciousness is not so much one of what is the physical source of consciousness but one of seeing that what we call consciousness is the natural evolution of the process of interacting with one's environment.

An ability or attribute of a species evolves to meet a need arising from a change in the environment in which that species lives. Thus the informational asset of an amoeba is sufficient for that particular animal. When humans branched from the primate line they possessed at that time the informational assets of primates as their starting point. Over time they would have had to adapt to life on the open savannah, and those who adapted successfully survived.

Part of what adapted in the neo-human was an awareness of the new threats, of new skills such as standing upright, being aware of a wide field of vision and the different varieties of food. All of this would require more to remember and this need, together with a changing diet from fruit to

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meat would have increased the need for a greater memory and hence, a greater brain size. If it was the case that their environment required better communication within their group to cope with the emerging threats, it would provide the evolution of speech to communicate a greater range of messages to describe what was being given in an alarm situation.

I am not at all surprised that we have a huge array of information at our beck and call within the brain, and that a particular item can appear in our awareness as a thought or image. I would assert that what we call consciousness is this information being displayed in our awareness as a thought, emotion or image, and its origin can be from direct sensory input, from memory or from imagination. We can test this assertion by simply holding a thought or word in mind and noticing what follows.

All of this is achieved by having all of our experience, be that from memory, from the more primitive responses of survival or simply from our imagination, all immediately available in our awareness. What selects from this smorgasbord of information is the context in which we perceive the information. The context is a function of our modifications of the mind, and is what I have referred to in an earlier paper as the decision process which is an unconscious one. In essence, what we call consciousness is both servant and master, although the master is, in most cases, the puppeteer.

When the first living cell/entity divided, it became two versions of the original cell from the same living organism. Thus, life was then present in two separate living cells. I suggest that the attributes of each would be the same, such as the ability to interact with the environment and each other.

As the form evolved each subsequent division would produce identical attributes, together with the potential for different experiences if they moved away from the common location. This could provide the impetus to evolve into different species, e.g., moving on to sexual reproduction, and for convenience just for mammals.

The sperm and ovum must be alive for conception to succeed. Therefore, my conjecture of a continuation of life in different individuals is still valid. Like the individual mushroom being part of a subterranean network of a single fungus, a child can be thought of as separate body of a combination of two individual lives (parents). And much of the attributes within that combination become a slightly different set of attributes from those of each parent.

If we call these attributes information, or more specifically, the way in which information is managed, this model explains what is currently called epigenetics. I am suggesting that with each generation, beginning with an ancestor primate, the circumstance of moving on to the savannah would be the scene for successful variations to survive, and each successful attribute would be present in the progeny through the shared life. I am saying that the one life in different bodies would have a similar range of awareness in each body.

As the need for different aspects of awareness became necessary for survival some would be selected for that aspect through evolution. I am saying that what we now call consciousness is such an aspect of awareness, with the necessary restructuring of the neural networks following.

In the current evolutionary stage, human is the result of evolution, and I suggest that most of our conscious information comes from a combination of memory and sensory input being mediated in the brain through the same process I have earlier mentioned as the decision process [1].

I believe this process is the same as what is described in Yoga and Buddhism as the modifications of the mind. The mind is always vigilant, and assessing every moment against the inputs present; we call that thought when the outcome or decision is made known through our awareness. More generally, we just say we are conscious.

It is entirely probable that with the evolution of the homo form giving rise to a greater amount of information being available to the mind through experience, memory and the immediate moment, there would arise the need to separate the total into what was immediately relevant and what was to be held in reserve to accessed through related context.

Thus there would be the mind as we know it in a general sense, operating in the conscious foreground, and memory and other potential information (as in the modifications of the mind and memory) in the background. The shuffling of information back and forth in response to a question or context is what we call thought. I am not completely sure of just how Samapatti fits into this model, except to say that if there is just one life within many bodies then is must surely be one possibility.

Some years ago the late David Bohm wrote “Wholeness and the Implicate Order”, in which he said that the greatest difficulty we humans face is the misconception of separateness. My notion of one life in many bodies suggests that we are indeed interconnected, and it may just be the case that in the Samadhi state, a prerequisite for Samapatti, we can reconnect to that one life.

I have always though that the one downfall of my model was the lack of the position of the observer, as we find in Samadhi when the mind itself has been brought under control (empty mind). But from recent conversations with Dr Meera Chakravorty I realise that this model I have offered falls fairly neatly into what the ancient Hindu thinkers said all of those thousands of years ago about consciousness. They said that the first cause of everything is Purusha, which is Pure Consciousness. This is reflected on to matter and this reflected consciousness is termed purusha (with the small p). So I can confidently say that purusha is that detached observer, the awareness remaining after the mind has become empty, hence its modifications have ceased to operate. It is in this state that one can truly make a clear decision.

Reference

1. Alan J. Oliver (2014), On the Process of Thinking in Public Life: A Conversation in the Interest of Democracy. JCER 5(4): pp. 428-433.