

What if you experienced every human life in history?

Imagine that your life began roughly 300,000 years ago as one of the planet's first humans. At this time, you live in Africa near modern-day Morocco, and your life isn't too different from that of your hominid parents. You make crude tools, hunt, and gather food and materials, until, eventually, you perish. But this is only the beginning. Because after dying, you travel back in time to be reincarnated as the second human ever to live. While you don't remember your former life, your previous actions affect you nonetheless. And after dying once more, you return as the third person, then the fourth, the fifth, and so on living the lives of every single human that's ever walked the Earth.

Strung end to end, these lives last almost 4 trillion years. Since you only recall the life you're currently living, your psyche doesn't carry the entire weight of human history. However, each of your lifetimes still has a profound impact on your future selves. Sometimes your influence on the world is obvious, but these major historical figures only account for a tiny fraction of your experience. Instead, your existence consists mostly of ordinary lives, filled with everyday tasks like eating, laughing, working, and worrying. For approximately one-tenth of your 4 trillion years, you're a hunter-gatherer. For 60%, you're an agriculturalist, developing tools and techniques which you employ over roughly 800 billion years of working on farms. Across your lifetimes, you spend 1.5 billion years having sex and another 250 million years giving birth. In total, 20% of your existence is spent raising children, to whom you impart a variety of cultural values that influence the trajectory of generations. In some lives, you shatter those cultures through invasion and imperialism. In others, you suffer as your lands and loved ones are taken away. In over 1% of lives, you're afflicted with malaria or smallpox, while, in others, you treat these conditions—saving countless versions of yourself.

In humanity's early days, the average lifespan is fairly short. There are fewer lives to live, and your influence is usually limited to people physically near you. But as humans survive longer on average and Earth's population grows, you start to spend more time reliving the same action-packed years. A full third of your existence comes after 1200 CE, and a quarter of it takes place after 1750. At this point, technology and society start changing faster than ever. You invent steam engines, configure factories, and generate electricity, which power the daily machinery of all of your later lives. You live through revolutions in science, the deadliest wars in history, and dramatic environmental destruction. On average, each new life lasts longer, but the pace of your existence keeps accelerating. Conversations that previously took months to unfold now happen in minutes. Business ventures that you built over generations transform overnight. You enjoy luxuries you never could have sampled before, even in your past lives as kings and queens.

After living over 100 billion lives, you're finally reborn as the youngest person alive today. But despite living through 300,000 years of human history, your actions have more impact today than 99% of your past lives. High-speed air travel allows you to carry contagions and cures across an ocean in hours. And the internet makes your personal sphere of influence global, allowing you to collaborate with anyone, anywhere, without even leaving your home. In recent lives, you've invented tools to rewrite the genes of living organisms, permanently altering their future generations. And in this life, you might create even more technologies that make the world safer, kinder, and more equitable for countless future lives.

However, one careless invention could just as easily be catastrophic. Between nuclear weapons, lab leaks, climate change, and other existential threats, humanity's risk of inducing our own extinction has never been higher. In this fast-paced, interconnected world, it's frighteningly easy to undo all of humanity's progress, or potentially, cut short all your possible futures. There's no way to know what will happen next. But what's clear is that your potential is limitless.

So, how will you spend this life? And what can you do to work towards a better future for all your lives to come? If we make wise choices today, our grandchildren's grandchildren can have the opportunity to thrive knowing we did everything we could to give them a world full of justice, hope, and beauty.