

# The Conscious Soul, Cyclical Time, and the Phenomenon of Déjà Vu

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## Abstract

The experience of déjà vu—a momentary feeling that a current situation has already been lived—presents a unique phenomenon that challenges conventional understandings of time, memory, and consciousness. This paper investigates déjà vu as a cross-disciplinary subject through the lenses of Eastern and Western philosophies, neuroscience, metaphysics, and simulation theory. Eastern traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism conceptualize time as cyclical and consciousness as an enduring entity that traverses multiple lifetimes. Within these frameworks, déjà vu may be interpreted as a resurfacing of latent memories or *samskaras* from past incarnations. Western philosophical thought, from Stoic cosmology to Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence, similarly explores recurring patterns of time, offering existential and metaphysical interpretations of déjà vu. From a scientific standpoint, déjà vu is typically understood as a memory processing anomaly rooted in the medial temporal lobe. Models such as split perception, memory mismatch, and predictive coding explain déjà vu as a perceptual or mnemonic illusion. However, these theories often fall short of capturing the full phenomenological depth of the experience. Speculative models such as simulation theory, quantum temporal loops, and the Many-Worlds Interpretation provide alternative frameworks in which déjà vu is seen as a glitch in a simulated universe, a resonance with a parallel timeline, or a byproduct of recursive temporal structures. Synthesizing insights from diverse domains, this study suggests that déjà vu may be more than a cognitive quirk—it may offer a phenomenological clue into the non-linear nature of time and the continuity of consciousness. As interdisciplinary dialogue evolves, déjà vu remains a compelling gateway for exploring the deeper architecture of human experience.

# 1 Introduction

The phenomenon of *déjà vu*—a fleeting sense that one has already lived through a moment—has captivated human curiosity across cultures and eras. While modern science often attributes it to neural misfiring or memory anomalies, its recurrence in human experience invites deeper philosophical and metaphysical inquiry. Could *déjà vu* be more than a cognitive glitch? Might it be a trace of something far more profound—a signal of consciousness navigating a cyclical pattern of time?

This paper explores the intersection of *déjà vu* and the concept of cyclical time, particularly how these ideas are framed in philosophical traditions that view existence not as a linear progression, but as a repeating cycle. Eastern philosophies such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism offer richly developed notions of time and soul continuity across rebirths, wherein subtle memory imprints (*samskaras*) from past lives may explain the experience of *déjà vu* [1, 10]. In Western thought, echoes of cyclical time can be found in Stoicism, Platonic reincarnation myths, and Nietzsche’s existential framing of the *eternal return* [3, 12].

Furthermore, thinkers such as Mircea Eliade have examined the psychological and symbolic significance of time cycles in myth and religion, proposing that archaic societies viewed history not as linear but as a return to archetypal beginnings [5]. From this standpoint, *déjà vu* may serve as a phenomenological clue—an artifact of consciousness resonating with patterns it has already traversed.

In blending metaphysical traditions, philosophical analysis, and modern interpretations, this paper seeks to reframe *déjà vu* not merely as a neurological anomaly, but as a possible window into the structure of time and consciousness itself.

## 2 Cyclical Time in Philosophy

### 2.1 Eastern Conceptions

In Eastern philosophies, particularly within Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, time is perceived as cyclical rather than linear. This cyclical view is deeply embedded in cosmological and metaphysical thought, portraying the universe as undergoing infinite cycles of creation, preservation, and destruction.

**Hinduism:** The concept of *Kalachakra* (wheel of time) describes a grand cosmic cycle composed of four Yugas: Satya, Treta, Dvapara, and Kali. Each Yuga represents a moral and spiritual decline, and the cycle restarts after the end of Kali Yuga. The soul (*Atman*) undergoes *Samsara*, the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, influenced by *Karma* from past lives. *Déjà vu* is interpreted by some as a resurfacing of *Samskaras*—subconscious impressions or residues from previous incarnations [5].

**Buddhism:** In Buddhist cosmology, time flows through endless cycles (*kalpas*), with entire universes emerging and dissolving cyclically. The doctrine of *rebirth* links consciousness across lives, suggesting that patterns of experience and perception may recur. While not framed in dualistic terms, the continuity of consciousness may result in familiar sensations akin to *déjà vu* [10].

**Jainism:** Jain philosophy outlines an eternal universe governed by *Utsarpini* (ascending

time cycle) and *Avasarpini* (descending time cycle), repeating endlessly. Each cycle comprises six epochs, and the soul (*Jiva*) evolves through these stages toward liberation (*Moksha*). Knowledge of past events, including possible déjà vu-like experiences, is preserved in subtle forms of memory carried across lives [11].

In all these traditions, the conscious soul is not bound to a single temporal thread but instead partakes in an ever-turning wheel of existence. This cyclical view of time creates fertile ground for interpreting déjà vu as more than a neurological quirk — perhaps a glimpse of our soul’s long, repetitive journey through cosmic time.

## 2.2 Western Echoes

In Western philosophical thought, cyclical conceptions of time have emerged in various contexts—from ancient cosmologies to modern existential philosophy. These frameworks often present time as a recurring loop of existence, fate, and history, laying the conceptual foundation for interpreting experiences such as déjà vu through the lens of time recurrence.

**Ancient Greece:** The Stoic philosophers proposed a doctrine known as *eternal recurrence* or *palingenesia*, where the cosmos undergoes periodic destruction (ekpyrosis) and rebirth in identical form. The entire universe and every event within it were believed to repeat infinitely, in an exact sequence, driven by divine rationality or *logos* [12].

**Pythagorean and Platonic Thought:** The Pythagoreans associated the transmigration of souls (*metempsychosis*) with cosmic cycles. Plato, in his dialogues such as the *Timaeus* and the *Myth of Er*, alluded to the cyclical nature of time and the soul’s passage through reincarnated lives, where memory fragments might resurface in new lifetimes [13].

**Nietzsche’s Eternal Return:** In the 19th century, Friedrich Nietzsche revived the notion of eternal recurrence in a radical existential form. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he posed the idea that every event in life will repeat in the exact same manner infinitely. Nietzsche’s framing of this concept was not metaphysical but moral—a challenge to embrace life fully as if it would recur eternally [3].

**Modern Reflections:** Contemporary thinkers such as Mircea Eliade also echoed these themes. In *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Eliade contrasted archaic cyclical views of time with the linear progression dominant in modern history, suggesting that cyclical time served psychological and spiritual needs of “reactualizing” the sacred [5].

Across these traditions, the notion of cyclical time serves not only cosmological explanations but also existential and psychological functions. It provides a philosophical context for experiences like déjà vu, where one feels caught in a moment already lived—perhaps a residue of time’s repeating rhythm.

## 3 Déjà Vu as a Phenomenological Clue

### 3.1 Metaphysical Interpretation

From a metaphysical standpoint, déjà vu may be interpreted not merely as a quirk of memory, but as a significant phenomenon pointing to the nature of time, consciousness, and the continuity of the soul. In traditions that espouse reincarnation or eternal recurrence, déjà

vu is often seen as the resurfacing of latent impressions—residual echoes of experiences from past lives or previous cycles of existence.

**Eastern Views:** In Hinduism and Buddhism, the mind carries *samskaras*—subconscious imprints from past lives that shape one’s thoughts, behaviors, and perceptions in the present. When an individual encounters a situation that resonates with these deep imprints, a sensation of familiarity may arise. Some mystics and yogic texts consider déjà vu a form of intuitive recall, where the soul momentarily reconnects with past incarnations [1, 10].

**Reincarnation and Memory:** Philosopher Ian Stevenson and other parapsychological researchers have documented cases where individuals, especially children, claim to recall specific details from past lives. In such frameworks, déjà vu may represent a milder and more fragmentary version of such recall—one that bypasses conscious memory yet still activates recognition on a subtle level [27].

**Eternal Return and Soul Resonance:** In systems that propose cyclical or looped time—such as Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence or Stoic cosmology—déjà vu may be interpreted as the soul’s resonance with an event it has experienced in an identical previous cycle. Here, déjà vu serves as a metaphysical echo: a brief alignment of present awareness with a previously lived moment in the cycle of time [3, 12].

**Symbolic Consciousness:** The symbolic school of metaphysics, influenced by thinkers like Mircea Eliade, views phenomena like déjà vu as moments of “reactualization”—when the profane breaks into the sacred, and cyclical time makes itself felt within linear perception [5]. Such moments are said to restore archetypal memory and elevate awareness beyond material constraints.

Thus, under metaphysical scrutiny, déjà vu transcends cognitive explanation and becomes a clue—an ontological signal—that human consciousness may not be bounded by linear time but instead travels through deep, recursive structures of cosmic memory.

## 3.2 Scientific Interpretations

From a scientific perspective, déjà vu is predominantly viewed as a neurocognitive anomaly—a momentary malfunction in memory processing that results in a false sense of familiarity. Rather than indicating metaphysical continuity, scientific models frame déjà vu as a perceptual or memory-related illusion occurring within the brain’s complex cognitive architecture.

**Temporal Lobe Activity:** Numerous neurological studies have linked déjà vu to activity in the medial temporal lobe, particularly the hippocampus and parahippocampal regions. These areas are crucial for memory encoding and retrieval. Electrical stimulation of these regions during neurosurgical procedures has been shown to induce déjà vu-like experiences, suggesting a physiological basis [15].

**Split Perception Theory:** This theory proposes that déjà vu results from a brief delay between two successive perceptions of the same stimulus. When the brain processes the second input, it registers it as familiar because the first input was already processed unconsciously. This creates a misperception of prior experience [?].

**Dual Processing and Memory Mismatch:** Cognitive models suggest that déjà vu may arise when implicit memory (unconscious familiarity) is activated in the absence of explicit memory (conscious recollection). This mismatch between the two systems creates

a false sense of recognition. Neuropsychologists argue that déjà vu is essentially a conflict between familiarity and novelty detection systems [16].

**Related Clinical Conditions:** Déjà vu is also studied in the context of epilepsy—particularly temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE)—where patients report frequent, intense déjà vu episodes as a precursor to seizures. While this association is not present in the general population, it provides insight into the neurological origins of the phenomenon [17].

While these scientific models offer plausible mechanisms for déjà vu, they remain incomplete. Many accounts of déjà vu involve complex, emotionally charged situations that challenge reductionist explanations, leaving open the question of whether current scientific paradigms fully capture the richness of the experience.

## 4 Consciousness and Time Recurrence

The intersection of consciousness and the recurrence of time opens a metaphysical inquiry into the nature of human awareness and its potential continuity across temporal cycles. Philosophical and spiritual traditions alike have pondered whether consciousness is bound to a single linear lifetime or if it moves fluidly through repeating patterns of time.

**Consciousness Beyond the Brain:** Some metaphysical perspectives argue that consciousness is not merely an emergent property of the brain but a fundamental, non-local entity. This view aligns with panpsychism and idealism, which posit that consciousness may exist independently of material form. If consciousness is indeed non-local, it could traverse time cycles and carry over impressions from previous iterations, including déjà vu experiences [18, 19].

**Vedic and Yogic Traditions:** In Vedic philosophy, consciousness (*chit*) is considered eternal and distinct from the body. Through reincarnation and the doctrine of *karma*, it is believed that the soul accumulates experiences that subtly shape future lifetimes. Yogic insights from deep meditation are said to unlock memories from past incarnations, suggesting that time recurrence is not only cyclical but experientially accessible [20].

**Eternal Return and Cognitive Echoes:** Nietzsche’s concept of the eternal return provides a Western philosophical model where consciousness re-encounters identical events in an infinite loop. Although Nietzsche emphasized this as a moral test rather than a metaphysical reality, others interpret it as a framework for understanding recurring experiences at the cognitive level [3, 5].

**Modern Theories:** In contemporary physics, theories such as the block universe (from the theory of relativity) and quantum eternalism suggest that all points in time may coexist. Under such models, consciousness might not move linearly but instead “access” different slices of time. This view opens speculative possibilities for how déjà vu and similar phenomena could reflect temporal overlaps or access to pre-encoded timelines [21].

In sum, whether interpreted through spiritual doctrine or speculative physics, the recurrence of time combined with a persistent consciousness provides a compelling lens through which déjà vu may be understood not as an error, but as a glimpse into a deeper reality.

## 5 Simulation and Time Loop Hypotheses

Another line of interpretation concerning déjà vu involves simulation theory and time loop hypotheses—concepts that propose our experienced reality may be either artificially constructed or subject to non-linear temporal dynamics. These frameworks blend metaphysics with theoretical physics and computer science, providing speculative yet intellectually provocative accounts of why phenomena like déjà vu might occur.

**Simulation Theory:** Popularized by philosopher Nick Bostrom, simulation theory posits that our universe could be a sophisticated digital simulation created by a posthuman civilization. Within this view, déjà vu might be interpreted as a “glitch in the matrix,” a momentary inconsistency or repetition in the program’s execution [22]. Such experiences could result from system errors, memory overlaps, or updates within the simulation structure.

**Temporal Loops in Physics and Fiction:** In speculative physics, concepts such as closed timelike curves (CTCs) and time loops suggest that certain configurations of space-time could allow for recurrent or recursive temporal sequences. These are frequently explored in science fiction but also in theoretical models of general relativity and quantum mechanics [23,24]. Within these frameworks, déjà vu could result from the mind temporarily accessing a previously “looped” segment of temporal reality.

**Quantum Indeterminacy and Many-Worlds:** Interpretations of quantum mechanics, particularly the Many-Worlds Interpretation (MWI), propose that all possible outcomes of quantum events actually occur in branching parallel universes. Déjà vu might, under this interpretation, be an overlap or brief perceptual synchronization with a near-identical version of reality in an alternate timeline [25].

**Neurocomputational Speculations:** If the brain functions like a quantum or computational system, then internal “looping” of memory traces, neural network reactivation, or recursive simulations within the mind could simulate the experience of having lived a moment before. This model aligns partially with predictive coding theories of perception, where the brain constantly compares sensory input to predicted templates [26].

Though empirical support for these theories remains speculative or limited, they provide fascinating avenues for thinking about déjà vu not simply as a brain malfunction but as a potential indicator of more complex structures of reality and consciousness.

## 6 Conclusion

The phenomenon of déjà vu, while often dismissed as a mere neurological anomaly, reveals itself as a rich site for interdisciplinary inquiry when examined through philosophical, metaphysical, and scientific lenses. Across Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, the concept of time as a cyclical, recurring structure offers a compelling metaphysical context for déjà vu. From the Hindu doctrine of *samsara* to Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence, such traditions suggest that déjà vu could be a r...

Scientific perspectives, rooted in neurobiology and cognitive psychology, provide more mechanistic explanations. Theories based on memory mismatch, temporal lobe activation, and predictive coding point to déjà vu as a perceptual or mnemonic error. Yet, these explanations, while informative, often fall short of fully accounting for the subjective depth

and emotional intensity that déjà vu sometimes entails.

Speculative frameworks like simulation theory and time loop hypotheses expand the horizon further, inviting questions about the nature of consciousness and reality itself. Whether as a glitch in a digital universe, a glimpse into a parallel timeline, or a reverberation from a soul's previous incarnation, déjà vu may be much more than a fleeting error—it may be a portal into the structure of existence.

The enduring mystery of déjà vu thus lies in its ambiguity: simultaneously mundane and profound, it challenges our assumptions about memory, time, and selfhood. As science and philosophy continue to converge, future explorations of déjà vu may bring us closer to understanding not just a curious sensation, but the very fabric of human consciousness.

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