

Proposal for an evolutionary nature of self-consciousness linked to a human specific anxiety

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Poster Abstract

This presentation is about an evolutionary scenario for self-consciousness linked to a human specific anxiety. It is a continuation of other works ([2011 Book chapter](#), [2014 TSC Poster](#))

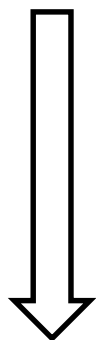
Aim: Present a scenario describing an evolutionary nature of self-consciousness that introduces a human specific anxiety which is active in our human lives.

Method: The scenario starts with our pre-human ancestors which were capable to manage representations and to partly identify with their conspecifics ([Olds 2006](#), [DeWaal 2008](#)). These identifications brought our ancestors to merge the representations of their conspecifics with the limited auto-representation of their own entity. The result was an auto-representation becoming about an entity existing in environment. This process is proposed as having progressively generated an ancestral form of self-consciousness as object and as subject. These identifications took place also with suffering conspecifics and have imposed to our ancestors a huge anxiety increase that had to be limited. Tools developed for that limitation (caring, collaboration, empathy, ToM, ...) have linked consciousness to anxiety management while also procuring evolutionary benefits. Human minds now contain an unconscious part of that ancestral anxiety that guides many of our mental states.

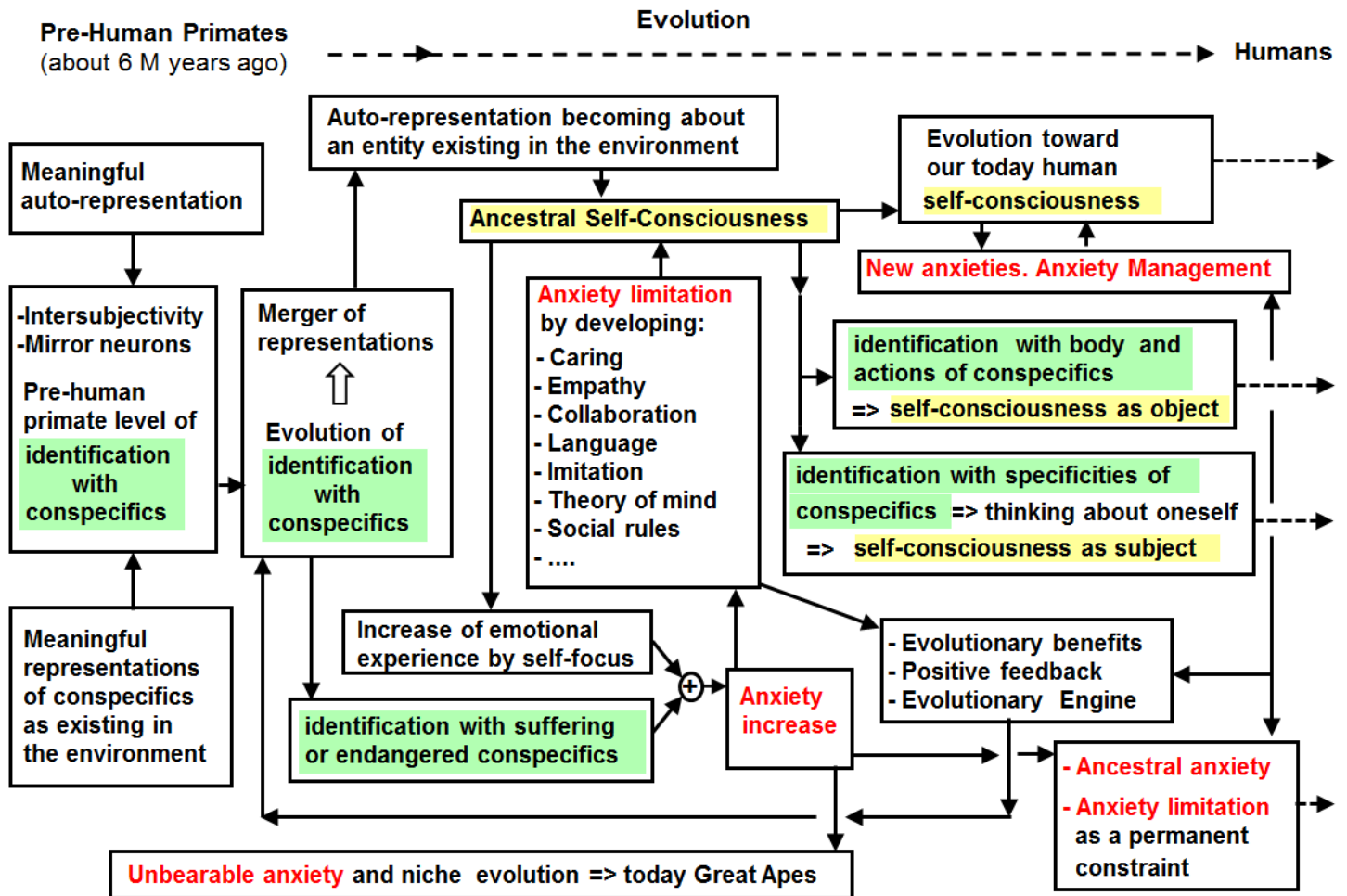
Result: An evolutionary scenario for self-consciousness is made available as linked to a specific anxiety management that characterizes human minds. Continuations are introduced, some related to mental health.

Conclusion: The proposed evolutionary scenario presents self-consciousness and a specific human anxiety as sharing a same evolutionary nature. This new source of anxiety needs more investigations.

POSTER



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- 1) **Self-consciousness** is the ability to think about one's own entity represented as existing in the environment, like others are represented (Menant 2011).
- 2) Our pre-human ancestors were capable of some level of **identification with their conspecifics**, like are today great apes (DeWaal 2008, Olds 2006).
- 3) **Evolution of that identification** has generated in the mind of our ancestors an **ancestral version of self-consciousness**, with elements of self-focus dramatizing emotional experiences.
- 4) **Identifications with suffering or endangered conspecifics** have produced a **huge anxiety increase** that had to be limited.
- 5) Our pre-human ancestors have **limited that anxiety** by developing performances that also brought in evolutionary benefits (caring, collaboration, communication, social rules, ...).
- 6) These performances have produced **new anxieties**, partly limited, with new evolutionary advantages (dynamic process).
- 7) It is proposed that **human self-consciousness** shares with a **human specific anxiety** a common evolutionary history based on **identification with conspecifics** and on **anxiety management** (Menant 2014a, 2014b).
- 8) Such evolutionary nature of **self-consciousness** links some human characteristics to **anxiety management processes**:
 - **Anxiety limitation** as a permanent and key human constraint => permanent generation of **anxiety related meanings**.
 - Pascalian type diversions (for good or for evil) to keep consciousness away from **too anxious mental states**.
 - Human sexuality developed during human evolution as a multidimensional **escape and refuge from anxiety**.
- 9) These **anxiety management processes** are critical to our human mental health and psychological well-being. Their dis-functioning can be sources of mental disorders and illnesses.
- 10) The evolutionary scenario linking **self-consciousness** to **anxiety management** can be used for other developments:
 - Use the proposed **phylogenetic scenario** as a frame for **ontogenetic approaches**.
 - Look for **neurologic markers** linking **human specific anxieties** to **self-consciousness**.
 - Analyze evolutionary relations between **self-consciousness** and **phenomenal consciousness**.
 - See how **meaningful information/representations** can be positioned in **artificial intelligence** (Menant 2013).
 - Introduce an **ancestral anxiety** in human **phylogenesis**, as an active element of today human **ontogenesis**.
 - Consider avoidances of **anxious mental states** as key contributors to psychosis.
 - Explain some human wicked behaviors as **modes of anxiety management** (Menant 2018).
 - Use the evolutionary scenario to define **conscious mental states vs unconscious ones**.
 - Position **anxiety management** linked to **self-consciousness** at the core of human mind.
 - Investigate possible applications of the scenario to **primatology, psychology/psychiatry** and **ethics**.