

Evolution of Self-Consciousness. Pan-Homo Split and Anxiety Management

June 2023 ASSC 26 Poster (not presented)

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Abstract

Primatology tells that about seven million years ago a split began in primate evolution, a split that led to chimpanzee and human lineages (the pan-homo split).

During these millions of years our human lineage has developed performances that our chimpanzee cousins do not possess, like reflective self-consciousness and language.

We present here an evolutionary scenario that proposes a rationale for the pan-homo split. It is based on a pre-human anxiety that may have barred access to self-consciousness for the chimpanzee lineage.

The starting point of the scenario is the capability that had our pre-human ancestors for an elementary identification with conspecifics. We consider that the evolution of that capability has led to self-consciousness when identifications with conspecifics brought our ancestors to represent their own entity as existing, like conspecifics were represented.

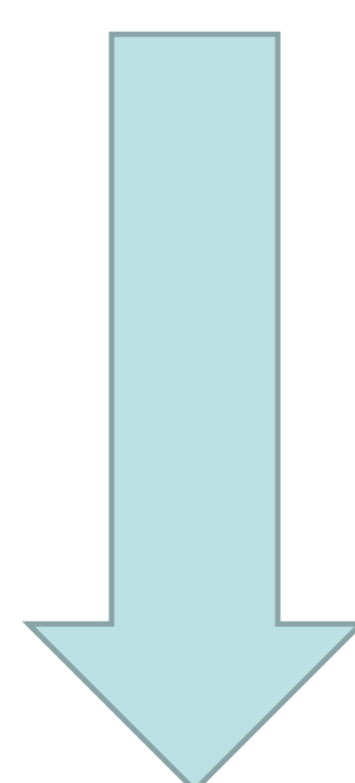
But the same identification process also took place with endangered and dying conspecifics. And this has produced a huge anxiety increase, source of important mental sufferings that our ancestors had to limit (ESPP 2021). Our hypothesis is that different modes of anxiety limitation have led to the pan-homo split. On one side the chimpanzee lineage would have limited an unbearable mental suffering by stopping the development of identifications with conspecifics, and by this also stopping a possible evolution toward self-consciousness. Such anxiety limitation process has led to today chimpanzees which possess a very limited consciousness of themselves. On the other side, our human lineage would have successfully developed anxiety limitation tools like caring, pleasure, anticipation, communication and imitation. With these tools accelerating the evolution of our lineage toward our human mind.

The proposed pan/homo split process complements an existing evolutionary scenario for self-consciousness that has positioned anxiety management as a key contributor to the build-up of our human minds (ASSC 25). Such overall perspective makes anxiety management a major source to many of our motivations and mental states, much more than assumed so far. Continuations are proposed for a better understanding about our modes of anxiety limitation (including evil behaviors), and also to introduce a possible evolutionary nature of phenomenal consciousness.

ESPP 2021 (Aug-Sept 2021) “Proposal for an evolutionary synergy linking anxiety management to self-consciousness” <https://philpapers.org/rec/MENPFA-5>

ASSC25 (July 2022): “Self-Consciousness, Anxiety Management and Foresight. An Evolutionary Approach” <https://philpapers.org/rec/MENSAM-2>

POSTER



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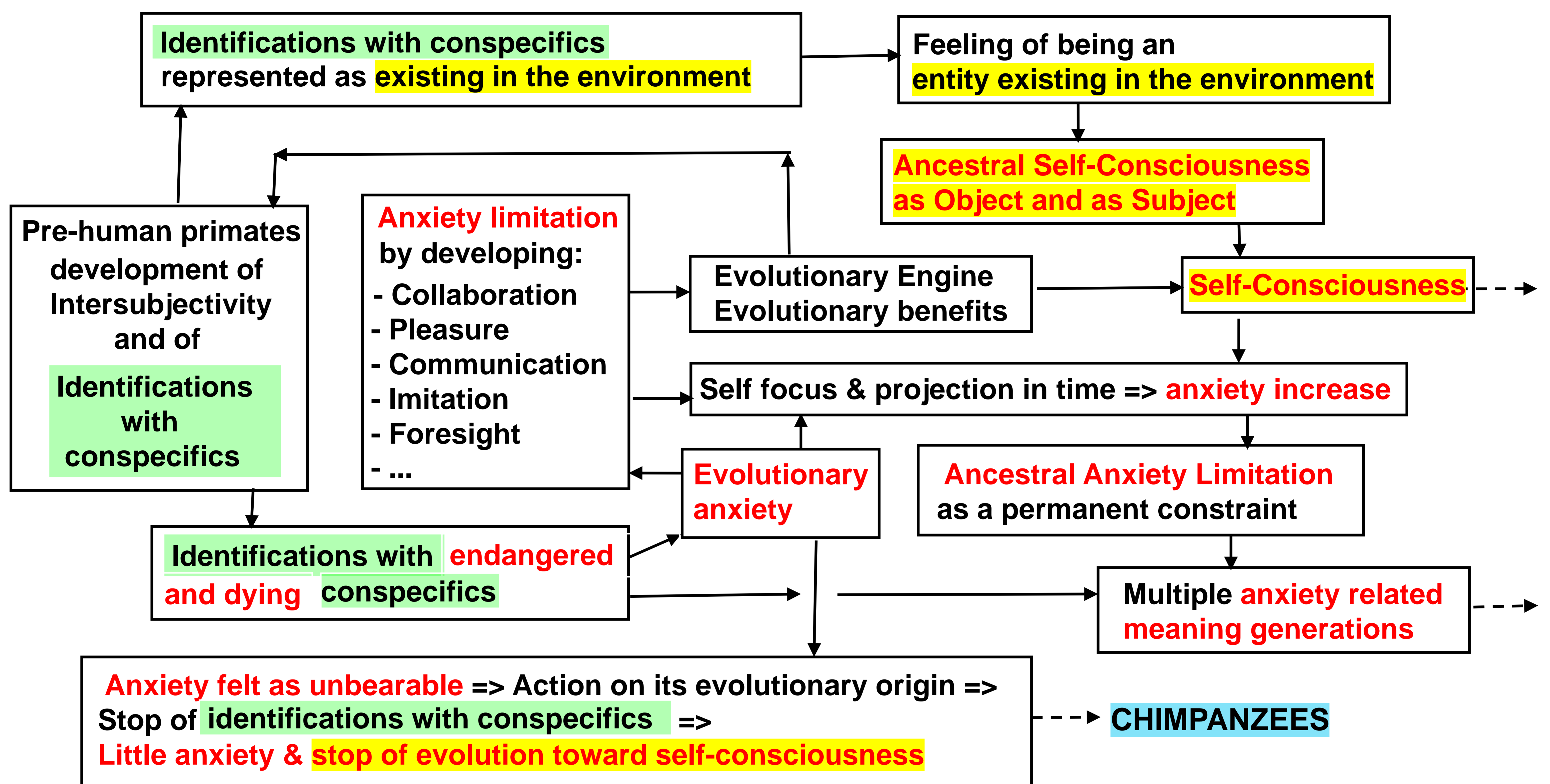
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CHIMPANZEES & HUMANS

Common Ancestor
(about 7 M years ago)

Evolution

HUMANS



EVOLUTIONARY SCENARIO

1) Identifications with conspecifics represented as existing in environment [I]

=> Pre-human primates represent their own entity as existing in environment

=> Ancestral Self Consciousness as object and as subject

2) Identifications with endangered and dying conspecifics [II]

=> Pre-human primates represent their own entity as suffering or as endangered.

=> Creation of an evolutionary anxiety => mental suffering to be reduced.

3) Two different modes of evolutionary anxiety reduction:

a) Development of anxiety limitation tools (collaboration, caring, pleasure, communication, imitation, foresight, ..) [II, III].

=> Anxiety limitation & evolutionary benefits => Evolutionary engine toward Self-Consciousness => HUMANS.

b) Stop of identifications with conspecifics

=> Stopped source of anxiety and stopped evolution toward Self-Consciousness => CHIMPANZEES.

4) Conclusion:

- PAN-HOMO Split may have come from different modes of anxiety management during primate evolution.
- Self-Consciousness came in evolution with anxiety management as a key component of our human minds [II] .

5) Continuations:

- Position intersubjectivity, identifications with conspecifics and anxiety in pre-human primate evolution.
- Understand content of ancestral anxiety and of anxiety related meaning generations in humans [II, III].
- Understand our evolutionary sourced modes of anxiety limitation (including evil behavior) [II, III].
- Consider feeling of being an existing entity => Reflectivity => Entry point to Phenomenal Consciousness.

References

[I] C. Menant (2012) *Computation on information, meaning and representations* <https://philpapers.org/rec/MENCOI>

[II] C. Menant (2018) *Proposal for an evolutionary nature of self-consciousness linked to a human specific anxiety.* <https://philpapers.org/rec/MENPFA-4>

[III] C. Menant (2018) *Self-consciousness and human evil. Proposal for an evolutionary approach.* <https://philpapers.org/rec/MENSAH>