

“Self-consciousness and human evil. Proposal for an evolutionary approach”

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Abstract

Theories have been formulated to address the problem of evil.

[<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concept-evil>]. We look here at a possible origin of human evil in pre-human times by using an evolutionary scenario for self-consciousness based on identifications with conspecifics

[<https://philpapers.org/rec/MENPFA-3>]. The key point is that these identifications have also taken place with suffering or endangered conspecifics, thus creating in the minds of our ancestors a huge anxiety increase, a mental pain unbearable if not limited. To limit it our ancestors could have reduced the sufferings and dangers, or reduced the identification, or limited the conspecificity. Reducing the sufferings and dangers was straightforward as it also brought in evolutionary advantages (collaboration, imitation, communication, ToM, ...), with some pleasant feeling coming with the reduction of anxiety. But the two other possibilities may have produced very different outcomes. Reducing the identifications and limiting the conspecificity did reduce the mental pain and correspondingly produce some pleasure. But it has also lowered the emotional attachment to conspecifics as well as the care given to them. Conspecifics were then left alone with their sufferings. And as the process led to less mental pain, our ancestor were naturally led to associate some pleasure to the sufferings of conspecifics.

All this may have introduced in the mind of our ancestors the possibility to reduce anxiety and mental pains by accepting and valorizing the sufferings of others, thus making evil deeds a potential source of pleasure. We propose these mechanisms as possible sources of psychology of evil in human evolution. These mechanisms now belong to our human nature where evil projects can become a means for limiting the unconscious anxiety present in our human minds. Such positioning of self-consciousness and human evil under a common evolutionary nature is new and needs more developments. Continuations are proposed.