

**Self-Consciousness, Anxiety Management and Foresight. An Evolutionary Approach.**

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**Abstract**

The ability to anticipate events, to foresight, is an adaptive advantage. We humans use it all the time. Animals have a limited access to it. Positioning foresight in human evolution is a complex subject ([Suddendorf, 2013](#)). Why and how are humans, and not chimpanzees, performant in anticipating events? We propose here to address that question with an evolutionary scenario that links self-consciousness to anxiety management ([Menant, 2018](#)).

The scenario positions self-consciousness as “the capability to represent one’s own entity as existing in the environment, like conspecifics are represented as existing” (making “thinking about oneself” possible).

The scenario proposes that our pre-human ancestors were capable of some level of identifications with their conspecifics, and that its development has progressively brought our ancestors to represent themselves as existing in the environment like their conspecifics were represented, thus introducing self-consciousness.

The scenario also proposes that identifications with suffering conspecifics have been the source of an important anxiety that had to be limited for evolution to continue. Some of our ancestors have not been able to limit that new anxiety. Their mental pain became unbearable. Their evolution was almost stopped, thus initiating the pan-homo split.

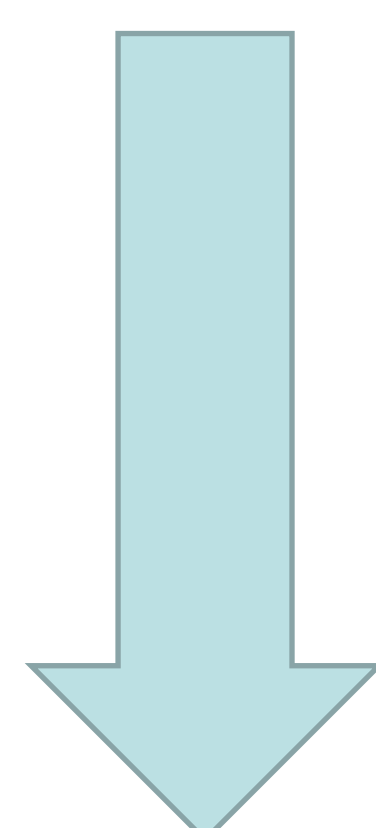
Developing an ability to anticipate events has been a key contributor to anxiety limitation by providing information about the sufferings to come, and consequently allowing to limit and avoid them. In addition to that role of foresight in human evolution it is worth noticing that the associated chaining of mental events brings to propose foresight as an entry point to the concept of causality in human evolution.

Regarding our chimpanzee cousins, the pan-homo split in the scenario positions them as not self-conscious, not capable of anticipation like humans are, and less anxious than humans.

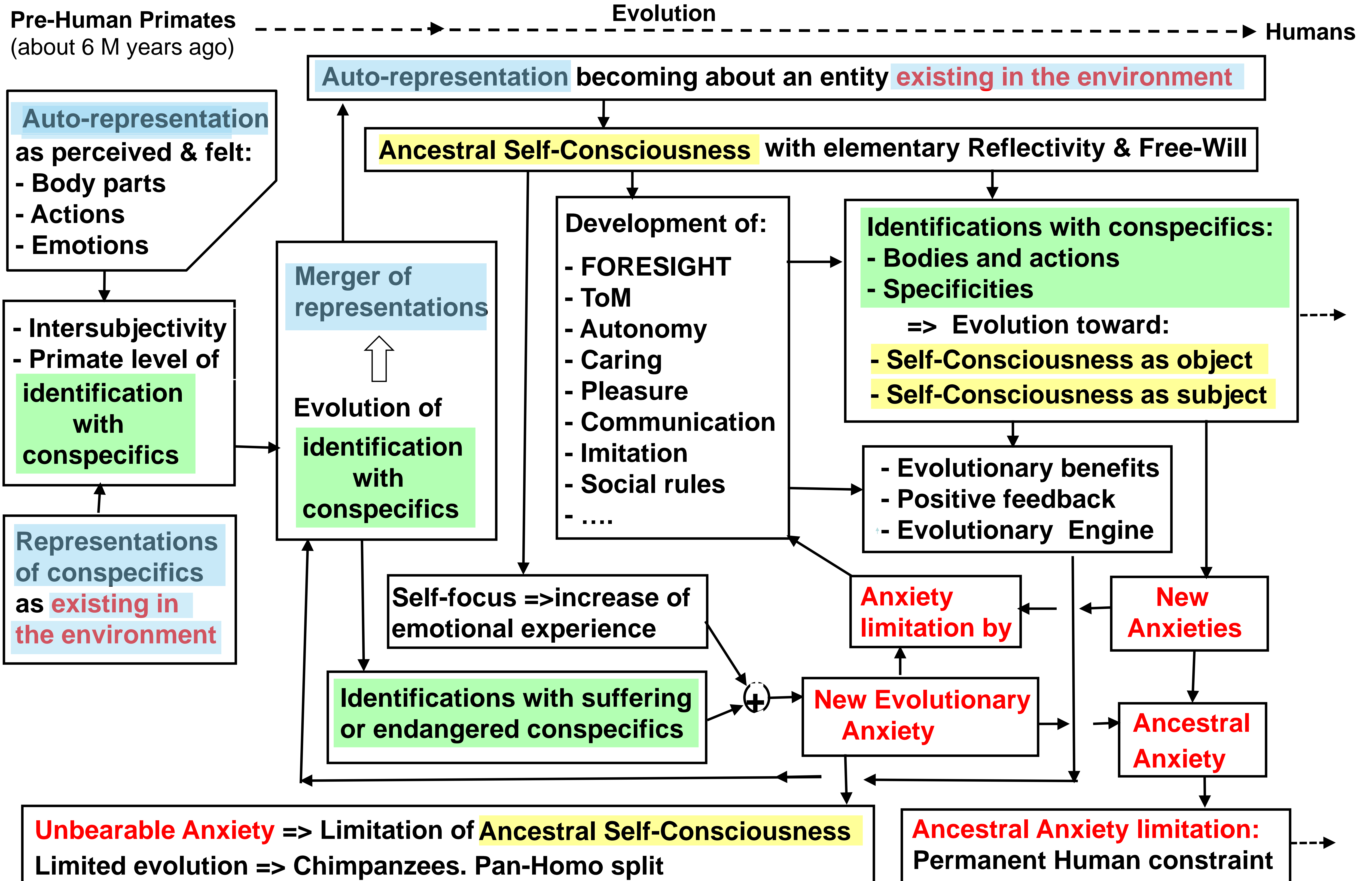
Continuations are proposed.

**(Poster is available at <https://philpapers.org/rec/MENSAM-2>)**

**Poster**







#### EVOLUTIONARY SCENARIO (from pre-human primates to today humans):

- 1) Starts when our **non-self-conscious ancestors** were capable of: [1]
  - **Auto-Representations** made of perceived and felt body parts, actions and emotions.
  - **Representations of conspecifics** as global entities **existing in the environment**.
  - Evolution of primate **identification with conspecifics**.
- 2) Merger of **Auto-Representations** with **representations of conspecifics** perceived & felt as **existing in the environment**.
- 3) **Auto-Representation** progressively becoming about an entity perceived & felt as **existing in the environment**.  
=> Build up of an **Ancestral Self-Consciousness** with elementary Reflectivity and elementary Free-Will.
  - Development of FORESIGHT, ToM, Autonomy, Imitation, Communication (language), ...
  - => Evolutionary benefits with positive feedback and Evolutionary Engine.
- 4) Evolution of **Ancestral Self-Consciousness** toward **Self-Consciousness as Object and as Subject**.
- 5) **Identifications with suffering conspecifics** amplified by self focus =>
  - **New Evolutionary related Anxiety** with important mental sufferings that could have stopped human evolution.
  - **Need of Anxiety limitation tools** for evolution to continue up to us humans.
- 6) **Development of anxiety limitation tools:**
  - FORESIGHT as a key **anxiety limitation tool** (mental simulation allowing anticipation and avoidance of sufferings) [2].
  - Usage of evolutionary benefits, of positive feedback & of Evolutionary Engine. Development of **Self-Consciousness**.
- 7) Sufferings from **New Evolutionary Anxiety** may have been **unbearable** for some pre-human primates =>
  - Limitation of sufferings by stoping the development of **Ancestral Self-Consciousness**. Stop in evolutionary process.
  - Pan-Homo split leading to today Chimpanzee (limited FORESIGHT, limited ToM, less anxiety than in humans).
- 8) **Ancestral Anxiety limitation** as a permanent constraint => Human generation of many **anxiety related** meanings.

#### CONTINUATIONS:

- Understand the **modes of anxiety limitation** developed during our pre-human evolution. Identify positive/negative ones.
- Use **anxiety management as a thread** for some new understanding of our human motivations and mental disorders.

#### CONCLUSIONS:

- An **Evolutionary Scenario** has been presented linking the **nature of Self-Consciousness** to a **New Evolutionary Anxiety**. The performance of FORESIGHT plays a key role in the scenario.
- The scenario is based on the **development of identifications with conspecifics** which has led to an **Ancestral Self-Consciousness** and also to an **Ancestral Anxiety**, still active as guiding our today mental and physical behaviors.
- The scenario proposes that the new **Evolutionary Anxiety** may have been **unbearable** to some of our primate ancestors. Evolution toward **Self-Consciousness** had to be stopped to limit the **mental suffering**. => Pan-Homo split.

#### REFERENCES:

- [1] Menant, C. (2018). *Proposal for an evolutionary nature of Self-consciousness related to a human specific anxiety* (<https://philpapers.org/archive/MENPFA-4.pdf>)
- [2] Suddendorf, T. (2013) : *The Gap: The Science of What Separates Us From Other Animals*