

Consciousness of oneself as object and as subject. Proposal for an evolutionary approach.

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We humans experience ourselves as objects and as subjects. The distinction initiated by Kant between consciousness of oneself as object and consciousness of oneself as subject was a strict one. The rigidity of that distinction has been challenged by philosophers from the continental and the analytic traditions [1]. From another perspective, researches about animal self-awareness are widening the horizon of studies relative to the nature of self-consciousness [2].

These various perspectives introduce the interest about addressing consciousness of oneself as object and as subject in an evolutionary background. We propose here to follow that path by using an existing scenario about the evolutionary nature of self-consciousness based on evolutions of representations and of inter-subjectivity [3, 4]. The scenario presents an evolutionary approach that can introduce self-consciousness as an acting body and self-consciousness as a thinking and feeling entity. These two aspects of self-consciousness are then compared to consciousness of oneself as object and as subject.

The scenario proposes that an evolution of inter-subjectivity brought our pre-human ancestors to reach the capability of identifying with their conspecifics. This process coupled with an evolution of representations led our ancestors to build up representations of themselves as entities existing in the environment, like the conspecifics they identified with were represented. As conspecifics were perceived as existing and acting in the environment, identifying with them led to an elementary version of self-consciousness as an acting body, close to self-consciousness as object. Also, as different conspecifics could display very different behaviors like dominant or submitted, it was not possible to identify with them spontaneously. Knowing and understanding one's own identity as perceived by other members of the group was necessary for a pertinent identification with conspecifics. Such need to think about one's own characteristics and identity introduced self-consciousness as a thinking and feeling entity, close to an elementary version of self-consciousness as subject. In addition, the mental states of the thinking and feeling subject monitoring the actions of the body object address the common evolutionary source for consciousness of oneself as object and as subject.

We present here that evolutionary approach to consciousness of oneself as object and as subject with the corresponding phylogenetic outcomes relative to the mind-body problem. Continuations are proposed.

References:

[1] Beatrice Longuenesse. Self-consciousness and consciousness of one's own body: Variations on a Kantian theme. *Philosophical Topics* 34 (1/2):283-309 (2006).

[2] Mark Bekoff. Consciousness and Self in Animals: Some Reflections. *Zygon®*. Volume 38, Issue 2, pages 229 -245, June 2003.

[3] Christophe Menant, Evolution and Mirror Neurons. An Introduction to the Nature of Self-Consciousness. TSC 2005, <http://cogprints.org/4533/>.

[4] Christophe Menant, Evolutionary Advantages of Inter-subjectivity and Self-Consciousness through Improvements of Action Programs. TSC 2010, <http://cogprints.org/6831/>

Key words:

self-consciousness, subject, object, evolution, inter-subjectivity, representations, identification with conspecifics.