

Proposal for an evolutionary synergy linking self-consciousness to anxiety management

Representing oneself as an existing entity and having intense fears of unknown events are human specificities. Self-consciousness and high levels of anxiety are characteristics of our human minds. We propose that these two characteristics may have evolved in synergy, feeding each other to build up our human minds. We highlight that perspective by an evolutionary scenario for self-consciousness where anxiety management plays a key role. Such evolutionary background can introduce new relations between philosophy of mind and psychology.

The proposed evolutionary scenario starts at a time when our pre-human ancestors were capable to manage meaningful representations and were also able to partly identify with their conspecifics (<https://philpapers.org/rec/MENCOI>, <https://philpapers.org/rec/MENPFA-4>). These identifications brought our ancestors to merge the representations they had of their conspecifics with the limited representations they had of parts of themselves. Such merger has led our ancestors to progressively represent their own entity as existing in the environment, as their conspecifics were represented. We consider such process as having initiated an ancestral form of self-consciousness in the minds of our ancestors.

These identifications have also taken place with suffering or endangered conspecifics, thus creating specific new anxieties in the minds of our ancestors. These anxieties came in addition to the ones inherited from the animal world. These anxieties were important and produced significant psychological sufferings which had to be limited for evolution to continue. Tools developed for that limitation (caring, collaboration, communication, ToM, ...) have in parallel procured significant evolutionary benefits with positive feedbacks on identification. Overall, the proposed evolutionary process has interwoven the nature of self-consciousness with anxiety management and has created an evolutionary engine that has accelerated the evolution toward human self-consciousness. As a result, our human minds now contain specific human anxieties tightly interwoven with the evolutionary nature of self-consciousness. Such perspective brings to consider that many of our mental states and behaviors are unconsciously guided by these human specific anxieties, much more than assumed so far. Anxiety management then becomes a key unconscious source of many human feelings, motivations and interpersonal relationship. For instance, the role of Pascalian type diversions can be understood as keeping consciousness away from the psychological sufferings of too anxious mental states. Also, our human sexuality developed during human evolution can be looked at as a multidimensional escape and refuge from anxiety. Our anxiety management processes are critical to our mental health and psychological well-being. Their dis-functioning can be source of mental disorders and illnesses, and this can bring to consider unconscious avoidances of too anxious mental states as significant contributors to psychosis and to evil behavior (<https://philpapers.org/rec/MENSAH>).

These subjects need more developments. Possible continuations are introduced.

Keywords:

Evolution, self-consciousness, anxiety, motivation, psychological suffering, human mind, representations, meaning, conspecifics, mental state, mental disorders, evil behavior