Response to Commentary

Response to the Commentary of Syamala Hari

Gregory M. Nixon*

I am not clear on all of the points mentioned in this commentary (Hari, 2010), but allow me to respond to the idea of computer consciousness. I have previously stated somewhere that having a living body ties us in with all other living bodies and living material in general. I contain DNA and genetic codes that have evolved through my ancestors and, before them, from prehuman life forms and the earliest cellular structures. The body that I am is a microcosmic focus of all life on a particular genetic pathway. The inborn experience that comes with being a living physical body is part of my life (make me, in turn, a part of all life) and is further the foundation of the culturally reflected consciousness that makes intersubjectivity and self-identity possible. At the bodily level, experiential interactions take place without my learned self-identity reflecting upon them, so *experience without consciousness certainly does take place*. We do, however, learn to become conscious of our own experiencing. Needless to say, our culturally-constructed conscious experience also infects unconscious somatic experience in itself, so consciousness does not just ride like a boat upon a sea of unconscious experience. It interacts with it in a circle of mutual creativity. Our minds are part of the future evolution of our bodies and of living nature itself.

Computers, interacting with human minds, have advanced so quickly they can now do thoughtlike processing at a much faster rate with much larger chunks of data than any human or group of humans could ever manage on their own. Without doubt, much of our own conscious thinking and feeling is computational, acting and reacting in a linear cause and effect series, sometimes in parallel, sometimes not. In short, a powerful computer program can do everything a mind can do but better. Does that mean it is conscious, as in conscious of its own processing? I think the best answer is *not yet*. Complex multi-parallel processing can in principle allow computers to "observe" their own processing and even respond to it and change it. In that sense, consciousness has been attained. But this is not *conscious experience*. This is *conscious processing* since the computation is reflective only of further computation. So, to respond to Syamala's question, I would say that advanced computer programs will become conscious but *it is consciousness without experience*. A consciousness not built on the base of experience is disconnected from the evolutionary history of life on this planet and exists without an instinctual teleology or carnal memories. It is a disembodied, heartless, parallel system of increasingly powerful computations whose only purpose has been programmed into them by human programmers with much less powerful computing programs in their heads. A human living only in a world of endless, tireless thoughts would be called insane. In computers to come, this may be called consciousness.

Correspondence: Gregory M. Nixon, University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, British Columbia, Canada
Email: doknyx@shaw.ca Websty: http://members.shaw.ca/doknyx

References

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