

Response to Commentary

Response to the Commentary of Steven M. Rosen

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I was very pleased to read the perspicacious commentary of Steven Rosen, even if he did take me to task for spending much time on a *mere matter of semantics* in “From Panexperientialism to Conscious Experience”. For me, however, semantics, the meaning we apply to words, matters. In the essay I suggest that we change our common usage to better illustrate the way non-human animals and perhaps even plants experience their world. To refer to such plants and at least non-mammalian animals as *conscious* – implying “*in the same way we are conscious*” – just does not seem right to me. Though I’ve been accused of anthropocentrism for avowing that only humans are conscious of their somatic experiencing, it seems to me that to assume our specialized form of conscious experience is the same form of experience in other animals and/or plants is the worst sort of anthropomorphism. It’s not the words “experience” or “consciousness” that matter, however, it’s the central idea that we humans have brought about some sort of major change in the way reality is experienced or transformed, and that way is a self-contextualized conscious way. It’s fine with me to refer to humans as being the only self-conscious animal and accepting that other animals are merely conscious but without a sense of inner self-identity – as long as we recognize (as the phenomenologists and existentialists do) that *all human consciousness is self-consciousness*. Even when we think we are dealing directly with the world (and not thinking of ourselves), both that world and the self doing the dealing are filtered through the frame of selfhood.

Dr. Rosen states: “I see no reason why the internalized sensations he refers to could not be considered rudimentary forms of consciousness, rather than as purely non-conscious experience.” Well, they can be considered such, in fact if experience leads to more complex experience and finally to conscious experience, such momentary sensations are indeed “rudimentary forms of consciousness”. But I emphasize that such experience is best considered non-conscious because it is not aware of itself and has no conceivable means of becoming aware of itself. What we humans call consciousness is, in reality, always self-consciousness, so we only make things more confusing when we refer to the consciousness of, say, a nematode or a cell, which almost certainly has no sense of subjectivity of which to be aware. Our world is an experienced world and our actions are experienced actions: When we become aware of such experiencing, the experience achieves a conscious quality. This seems to me more logic than a mere matter of semantics. Certainly experience is a continuum, but there is a huge tipping point once we have crossed the symbolic threshold and experience can twist back and apperceive itself.

When Dr. Rosen turns to my speculations about void consciousness or, as I put it, awareness-in-itself, I am left pleasantly breathless from reading that he has put forth very similar, almost

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identical propositions in his two books. If we disagree in a minor way on the semantics of things, I am overwhelmed to realize that we certainly do share similar concepts (that are perhaps more *non-concepts*) about the ultimate source and probable end of all our striving. This is an area I will certainly have to look into in greater detail, and Dr. Rosen's books seem an ideal place to begin.

References

- Nixon, G. M. (2010) From panexperientialism to individual self consciousness: The continuum of experience. *Journal of Consciousness Exploration & Research*. 1(3): 216-233.
- Rosen, S. M. (2010) Comment on Gregory Nixon's "From Panexperientialism to Individual Self Consciousness". *Journal of Consciousness Exploration & Research*. 1(3): 381-382.