

## Response to Commentary

### Response to the Commentary of Stephen Deiss

Gregory M. Nixon\*

Stephen R. Deiss is a research scientist for his own consulting firm, Applied Neurodynamics (neural networks systems engineering and consciousness studies) <http://www.appliedneuro.com/> who wrote one of the most intriguing chapters, in the recently published *Mind that Abides: Panpsychism in the New Millennium* (2009). In it he postulates that rudimentary memory is what transforms simple spasms of sensation into consciousness. This seems to have everything to do with learning and I was impressed with this equation of learning and mind. However, Deiss said nothing about those spasms of sensation in themselves. Were they felt? If so, is that not consciousness? If these sensations are not conscious experience, what are they, non-conscious experience?

I was honoured to receive this brief commentary from Deiss, especially since his ideas seemed to me to support the idea of non-conscious experience I expressed most strongly in my first essay. I noted this when I reviewed the above book for *JCS* (Nixon, 2009). The major difference in our thinking appears to be between bodily memory, which I consider mostly unconscious, and conscious remembering, a purely human activity. Deiss considers consciousness to appear when certain sensations that reference the environment are retained enough so that the organism learns to pursue or avoid whatever it is they indicate when they appear again. I regard conscious experience and thus conscious remembering to begin with symbolic interaction, but here I have to admit that Deiss may have a point. Not that I agree that consciousness (and, again, the only consciousness we humans know is self-consciousness) begins with such rudimentary S->R memory, but Deiss has pinpointed another major point of transformation in the naturalization of awareness. When entities began to learn from their own autonomic responses and automatically redirect their behaviour, something new had appeared on Earth. It may be that experience – as in relational sensations – that were external to each proto-entity up until this moment, now became internalized and the self-experiencing entity truly became an identifiable existent. I speculate that before learning, before internalization, sensations only occurred at the point of contact between two systems or proto-entities: this is what I mean by *relational experience*. But once the memory of such sensations was retained by the organism, the organism, for the first time, became a unified and self-contained entity and could henceforth respond in more complex ways. This is a very important step in the evolution of conscious experience from mere non-conscious sensations and I thank Deiss for pointing this out.

Deiss also expresses some misgivings about my suggestion that non-conscious or unconscious experience gives *psi* its medium. What I refer to are the many anecdotes

---

Correspondence: Gregory M. Nixon, University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, British Columbia, Canada  
Email: [doknyx@shaw.ca](mailto:doknyx@shaw.ca) Websty: <http://members.shaw.ca/doknyx>

but also the scientific research (see Radin, 1997) that shows psi phenomena do indeed take place but that they are not generally predictable or controllable. My suggestion is that most of these extra-sensory happenings take place at an unconscious level and affect us deeply in myriad ways of which we are not directly aware because we do not allow our unconscious knowledge to enter our conscious minds.

### References

- Deiss, S. R. (2008). Welcome to applied neurodynamics. Online: <http://www.appliedneuro.com/>
- Deiss, S. R. (2009). Universal correlates of consciousness. In D. Skrbina (ed.), *Mind that abides: Panpsychism in the new millennium* (pp. 137-158). Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Deis, S. R. (2010) Commentary on Nixon's From Panexperientialism to Individual Self Consciousness. *Journal of Consciousness Exploration & Research*. 1(3), 348-349.
- Nixon, G. M. (2009). Book Review: Skrbina's *Mind that abides: Panpsychism in the new millennium*. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 16 (9), 116-121.
- Radin, D. (1997). *The conscious universe: The scientific truth of psychic phenomena*: San Francisco: HarperCollins.