Response to Brian Miller

To the Editor:

I thank Brian Miller for his response to my Letter to the Editor, “An Objective Correlate of Consciousness” (Purcell, 2006). Several problems are associated with the electromagnetic theory of consciousness.
First, just because some evidence indicates that consciousness is correlated with an electromagnetic field (EMF), one cannot conclude that it is identical with that field. Consciousness can travel through a Faraday cage, as the experiment by Karlis Osis and Donna McCormick (1980) showed. This phenomenon would not be the case if it were identical with an electromagnetic field. Second, the theory rests on the assumption that the brain produces the electromagnetic field. The case of Pam Reynolds may contradict that assumption: She reported an NDE while under a general anesthetic, with the blood drained from her body, no heartbeat, and presumably a flat electroencephalogram (EEG; Sabom, 1998).

I personally think that saying that consciousness is an epiphenomenon of brain activity is putting the cart before the horse. I, too, am a monist and believe that consciousness is ontologically primary and generates physical reality, including the brain, as a kind of epiphenomenon. Thus, our consciousness would be able to generate an electromagnetic field to interface with the EMF of our brains. This explanation would help to account for the electrical effects seen around near-death experiencers.

The actual relationship between one's consciousness and the purported electromagnetic field around it is not initially as important, however, as the suggestion that such an association might exist. If the correspondence exists, it would provide an objective correlate that could be used to identify one's consciousness and sense it when it was present, at least when the correlation is being sustained.

References


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