

Ask A Genius 90 – Life and Death (5)
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February 15, 2017

Footnotes in & after the interview, & bibliography after the interview.

This session edited for clarity and readability.

Scott: We have talked about medicine, technology, the devaluation of people, and the Golden Rule. Other aspects are legal, rites of passage, and so on. By the time people meet the rites of passage by 20-35, they're done (Alexander & Norbeck, 2009). Our average ages at death can range from about 50-90 dependent on the country (WHO, 2016; CIA, 2016; The World Bank, 2016; OECD, 2016).

Rick: One reason the rites of passage are done early on are because early on is when we have the most power to acquire comfortable positions in society. A comfortable position might be getting the best reproductive partner, the best spouse. Your powers of doing that are strongest in your 20s and 30s, when you're most reproductively fit.

Then you trade youth, or reproductive fitness, for wealth, ideally, and wisdom, ideally. So, you can still be quite valuable or still can have some reproductive leverage or spouse-getting leverage into your 40s and 50s. After that, unless you're in a special position, you lose that power. You lose value as an employee. The watershed moments in peoples' lives are associated with their years of greatest power.

Scott: Also, we have been talking about the frontier. The Europeans first discovering for themselves the West, excluding the Vikings, for instance (Hoffman et al, 2016; Pringle, 2012). As an analogy, this technical landscape as we move into the future will be that.

There's going to be Luddites (Conniff, 2011; Encyclopædia Britannica, 2004). There's going to be Luddites, not only technically but, medically, who will be found in pockets of the world doing what humans have always been doing.

Rick: Yes. People like to pick one person from history and say, "That person was the last person in history to understand all human knowledge."

Scott: Goethe?

Rick: I'm thinking Goethe, yea. In the sense that none of us are Goethe, and it's 200 years after him, we all are to some extent Luddites. None of us or some small fraction of 1% of us really try to stay abreast of the complete technical frontier.

Only the very earliest and most avid of adapters are fully non-Luddite. Everybody else is making compromises that fall short of full appreciation of and embrace of technology. We can't be bothered.

Scott: You're talking about two different things at the same time, though. The one side is technical know-how, just knowing things about the world. The other one is actual use of technology.

I typically understand Luddite as none use of both of those. So, the Goethe example is only relevant to technical know-how. People, in general, use toilets, use the Internet, use lights. So, most people aren't technology Luddites, but are technical Luddites.

Rick: If you took a list of the most widely used and the newest and hottest forms of social media, very few people would be a presence on the top 10 of all of those, or the top 20. People already pick and choose the technology, and the level of technology, that they want to embrace.

So, while there will be pockets of explicit Luddites, of determined Luddites, there will also be tides of technical embrace. Everybody is going to be muddling along like now, but worse – striking compromises between being hopelessly out of touch and out of date and being sucked into too much tech.

Those reasons can be traditional Luddite reasons or there are a bunch of modern reasons. It is a lot of new tech, which is clunky and doesn't work well – or if it doesn't work well it is a time suck and gets in the way of doing other things that we value.

So, there will be pockets of Luddites, but there will be every little community, family, and individual – each entity – will have its own index of receptivity to technology. Communities will form with like or complimentary indices, with indices that function well with each other.

If you look at a business community like that, you have a community of people with different technical indices with the older higher-ranking people having the lowest technical indices and then younger people, because they're better able or more willing to embrace tech, having higher indices and the highest indices being the IT people whose job it is know this stuff – and who move into these jobs because they like knowing what's going on.

Various indices coming together to form a community, an effective working community. Within families, the old people giving less of a crap about new tech and young people embracing new tech to at least be partially like the old people. So, you can draw a heat map across cities or across people – however you want to group them – that shows different levels of technical embrace.

Somebody who throws a javelin will work different muscles than a marathon runner. So, even people with the same indices of embracing tech will have different tech signatures, it's more than just Luddites is what I'm saying.

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