

Ask A Genius 94 – Life and Death (9)
Scott Douglas Jacobsen and Rick Rosner
February 19, 2017

Footnotes in the interview & references after the interview.

This session edited for clarity and readability.

Scott: What if these fundamental premises of the arguments we’re making about the future are not taken on hand by anyone or are discounted? They can be posed by anyone, but they can be opposed by everyone.

Rick: There’s a tendency of the Golden Rule to win over time (Puka, n.d.; Robinson, 2016; The Christopher Newsletter, 2009). A major trend in history is for more and more people to be granted consideration as fully human. Where white guys, white landowners, the most privileged people granted themselves the most rights, but the trend is for other people to agitate for their rights and to say, “I am the same as you. We have the same bodies and brains. Skin color doesn’t matter. Gender doesn’t matter. Sexual orientation doesn’t matter. We are biologically the same. Even if we weren’t, we as thinking beings have the same consciousnesses. Even if they’re not, there’s some base deal. If you feel, if you process information, you deserve as much consideration as somebody who comes in a more familiar and social status filled package” (Rowen, 2017; Crews, 2007; Independence Hall Association of Philadelphia, 2016). So you have women fighting for rights (Imbornini, 2017; Office of the Historian, n.d.; ACLU, 2017; Eisenborg & Ruthsdotter, 1998; National Women’s History Museum, 2007). You have gay people fighting for rights (Infoplease, 2017). You have minority people fighting for rights (Yarbrough, n.d.; Thomson Reuters, 2017). More recently, the neurodiverse fighting for rights (Robison, 2013). As a general rule, it is an extension of the Golden Rule to encompass all forms of humanity, e.g. autistic people (Hiker, n.d.; jeffreylube241, 2007; Singer, 2011; Shea, n.d.; Neuhaus, 1999).¹

When people talk about neurodiverse people, they talk about the first push with autistic people, which was to see if you could get them to be non-autistic. Now, there’s a push among some members, the Aspergery people, of the autistic community to say, “We’re okay the way we are. We can do science. We can do all sorts of amazing stuff. Maybe, we’re socially awkward, but fuck you! We’re socially awkward and at home with the way we are” (ASPEN (asperger Autism

¹ *What is Neurodiversity?* (2014) states:

Neurodiversity is a concept where neurological differences are to be recognized and respected as any other human variation. These differences can include those labeled with Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyscalculia, Autistic Spectrum, Tourette Syndrome, and others.

For many autistic people, neurodiversity is viewed is a concept and social movement that advocates for viewing autism as a variation of human wiring, rather than a disease. As such, neurodiversity activists reject the idea that autism should be cured, advocating instead for celebrating autistic forms of communication and self-expression, and for promoting support systems that allow autistic people to live as autistic people.

Syracuse University. (2014). What is Neurodiversity?. Retrieved from <https://neurodiversitysymposium.wordpress.com/what-is-neurodiversity/>.

Spectrum Education Network, 2017).² It is like deaf people. Some deaf people get pissed when people get cochlear implants (Canadian Academy of Audiology, 2017). It is like saying, “F-you,” to the deaf lifestyle and the deaf community. I am probably saying this in an insensitive and inappropriate way, but that is the general feeling. People are fighting for the right to be accepted as they are rather than being conformed to some supposed biological norm.

S: Well, any species will create a norm.

R: Yes, but this is one more instance of the umbrella of the Golden Rule being extended over more and more types of people, and groups of people, and individuals. Similarly, information wins over time. The more sophisticated means of presenting and absorbing, and processing, information will tend to prevail against any kind of societal prohibitions. We really haven’t moved into the era of full-on freaking out over information processing because we haven’t had the capability to mess with our information processing abilities until now and into the near and mid-future. Though you can look at different forms of information causing people to freak out and say it’s kind of the end of the world, where visual media — where TV, radio, and such, are bemoaned because it means the end of the print media.

[Laughing]

² *What is Asperger Syndrome?* (2017) states:

Each person is different. An individual might have all or only some of the described behaviors to have a diagnosis of AS.

These behaviors include the following:

- *Marked impairment in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors such as: eye gaze, facial expression, body posture, and gestures to regulate social interaction.*
- *Extreme difficulty in developing age-appropriate peer relationships. (e.g. AS children may be more comfortable with adults than with other children).*
- *Inflexible adherence to routines and perseveration.*
- *Fascination with maps, globes, and routes.*
- *Superior rote memory.*
- *Preoccupation with a particular subject to the exclusion of all others. Amasses many related facts.*
- *Difficulty judging personal space, motor clumsiness.*
- *Sensitivity to the environment, loud noises, clothing and food textures, and odors.*
- *Speech and language skills impaired in the area of semantics, pragmatics, and prosody (volume, intonation, inflection, and rhythm).*
- *Difficulty understanding others’ feelings.*
- *Pedantic, formal style of speaking; often called “little professor,” verbose.*
- *Extreme difficulty reading and/or interpreting social cues.*
- *Socially and emotionally inappropriate responses.*
- *Literal interpretation of language; difficulty comprehending implied meanings.*
- *Extensive vocabulary. Reading commences at an early age (hyperlexia).*
- *Stereotyped or repetitive motor mannerisms.*
- *Difficulty with “give and take” of conversation.*

ASPEN (asperger Autism SPectrum Education Network. (2017). What Is Asperger Syndrome?. Retrieved from <http://aspennj.org/what-is-asperger-syndrome>.

R: But it doesn't really. People freaking out over different genres. Rap music, people freak out over rap music because of the subject matter, but besides that people are probably, to some extent, also disturbed about the way it's presenting - without realizing what they're freaking out about - information in a ratatat form – super-fast – without melody in some cases or really rudimentary melody and the cadence and the words being the most important thing. But people will call it “thug music” or “not even music,” but, to some extent, rap is a disquieting presentation of more concentrated and varied information being presented musically.

S: I can see where you're coming from, and I agree with most of it. Two points, one is general biological and the other is a specific instance of proper resistance to that, to neurodiversity and the Golden Rule. To the first point, the biological one, in any species, we get lots of diversity. So we'll have various types of functionality and dysfunctionality, and lack of ability or having ability. The range along the IQ scale as well as having hearing versus not having hearing. Another one, though, in terms of neurodiversity, whether it's Asperger's and other conditions. I think that the Golden Rule implies the capacity for the Golden Rule. If an individual does not have the innate capacity for it, then they will not necessarily be able to have it. Common examples are sociopaths or psychopaths (Weller, 2014; Grohol, 2016; Mallett, 2015). People who don't have empathy (MacLachlan, 2007). That's a reasonable resistance.

R: You don't see people arguing for psychopaths. There's no psychopath organization arguing that psychopaths belong to the neurodiverse family.

[Laughing]

S: Right, it's hard for the anti-social to become social, form groups, and advocate.

R: There was a guy who used to have a radio show called Phil Hendrie, who would have fake guests on (Hendrie, 2017).

[Laughing]

S: Okay.

R: People with issues. He had an issues-based talk radio program. He would have guests on. Guests would have a gripe about neighbourhood issues. Over the first half of the show, first 20 minutes of the show, you would find out that the guests' issues turned out to be monstrous. The rest of the show [Laughing] would be people who were fooled by the fake guests calling into the radio show. [Laughing]

[Laughing]

R: It was a fantastic radio program. He's really good. Somebody who represents psychopath rights. That would be a great fake organization. Somebody who says, “We were born this way. We deserve the right to do horrible things in society because that's just the way we are.”

[Laughing]

[Laughing]

R: But yea, the Golden Rule does imply the ability to feel.

S: Not only feel, but feel what others feel, it is empathy, not just feeling.

R: To feel something, I would say towards the edge—towards the newest edge, even feeling different ways as long as you have feels those feels should be respected as long as they don't impinge on other people. That includes embracing animals and what they feel, and including some Aspergery people who have feelings for patterns in nature as opposed to human interaction (PETA, 2017; Wise, 2016; Friends of Animals, 2017). Those feelings, because they are felt in the brain with the same power and immediacy as other feelings, deserve the same consideration.

S: Right, I think of Mandelbrot (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2014). I think of Gould (The Glenn Gould Foundation, 2015). Both people had issues as far as I recall. Mandelbrot, it was patterns in nature. Gould, it was point-counterpoint with Bach (Smith, n.d.). Both could do things few others could. I absolutely agree with you on that point with those two examples that come to mind, who made great contributions.

R: This is slightly off the deal, but there's this story, on NPR, that's been on a zillion times about the autistic kid who learned how to communicate with people via Disney movies (Suskind, 2014).

S: Get outta here.

[Laughing]

R: This kid loses his verbal abilities to a great extent. He is freaking out about the world the way some autistic people do. There's just a lot of sensory information and it bugs them. It's too much. The thing that keeps this kid soothed is sitting this down in front of a bunch of Disney movies. That seems to keep him satisfied, even though he's quiet and divorced from the world. At one point, the kid is 9 or 10 and the brother is celebrating a birthday. The autistic kid who is non-verbal walks into the room and says something crazily sophisticated. [Laughing] I'm mangling the story. But the kid says, 'It's like Peter Pan. You don't want the other son to grow up.' He says this crazily sophisticated thing in the context of a Disney kind of framework and the family finds out. They have Disney time in the basement. The dad impersonates Disney characters and is able to talk to the kid by being Disney characters.

[Laughing]

[Laughing]

R: The kid has an entire model of the world via Disney. The real story is better than I told it and makes more sense.

S: But there are people like that. Kim Peek was the basis for *Rain Man* (Wisconsin Medical Society, 2017). He had this incredible memory. This incredible associative gift, but he lacked a corpus callosum. But the brain matter that was made of that was present, and I think they did a special on him, and the corpus callosum looked like a hand grenade had blown it up. It was connected from one thing to the other to the other. In a neurodiverse culture, one that accepts that. It could be of great benefit.

R: For the past 100 years, we've had the nerd stereotype. The dweeby-awkward sciencey guy, and girl. That is probably somewhat rooted in neurodiversity and is more accepted now than in the 60 and 70s. As I've said, being a nerd in the 60s and 70s was brutal, I'm not saying now it is a picnic, but there are more resources available, well for anybody. Nobody is no longer isolated in their school and family anymore as long as they have access to the internet and reasonable ability to search for stuff.

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