

Ask A Genius 99 – Life and Death (Part 14)¹
Scott Douglas Jacobsen & Rick Rosner
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[Beginning of recorded material]

Scott Jacobsen: Society has many taboos around sex and sexual conduct, especially for the young and women (Sonny, 2012). These can be religiously based traditionally, but even in larger secular culture they develop their own strange mores (Ibid.). Let’s talk about that a bit.

Rick Rosner: Before we get to that, we have to talk about how as civilized beings we have large investments in denying the grossness of our bodily functions. For most of civilized human history, for most of the past 1,000 years, we’ve considered ourselves more exalted than animals and have tried to sequester our biological functions away from polite consideration and discourse.

Anything to do with our genital areas is awkward to talk about in public. The grossest thing we do in public is probably eat and we have a weird separation of focus between how good tastes and what is actually happening in our mouths. It is being mashed and mixed with spit and eventually turned to shit. 60 years ago, Philip K. Dick wrote a book called *Counter-Clock World* (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2016). It is like an entire *Benjamin Button* world.

Dead old people come alive, dig themselves out of their graves, and then age in reverse, and people go to the grocery store and buy different flavors of shit all wrapped up and then they jam it up their asses, and then 24 hours later it comes out of their mouths as food, which is taboo for people to let other people unchew the food and it turning into the food products. Those are wrapped up and disposed of.

The whole process from beginning to end is grossly biological. We have tried to avoid addressing it for most of our history with things changing only in the last—there have always been people who have violated the taboos by talking about gross stuff, but only in the past, in the TV era, say, the recent TV era. All biological functions have become fair game for jokes and

¹ Four format points for the session article:

1. Bold text following and including “Scott Jacobsen:” or “S:” is Scott & non-bold text following and including “Rick Rosner:” or “R:” is Rick.
2. Session article conducted, transcribed, edited, formatted, and published by Scott.
3. Footnotes & in-text citations in the interview & references after the interview.
4. This session article has been edited for clarity and readability.

For further information on the formatting guidelines incorporated into this document, please see the following documents:

1. American Psychological Association. (2010). Citation Guide: APA. Retrieved from <http://www.lib.sfu.ca/system/files/28281/APA6CitationGuideSFUv3.pdf>.
2. Humble, A. (n.d.). Guide to Transcribing. Retrieved from <http://www.msvu.ca/site/media/msvu/Transcription%20Guide.pdf>.

discussion, which is—the whole thing is—we live in a lot of forms of denial, and our denial of the gross biological nature of our daily lives is one of the biggest areas.

We think of ourselves as civilized, thinking, talking, creating beings. Yet we probably spend more of our time doing mandatory biological functions than we do doing the functions that we think make us human. Sleeping isn't gross, but it is a mandatory biological function, that takes up at least a mandatory 25% of our lives. That's 25% there. Then there's everything else that we do.

Eating doesn't take up that much time. Anyway, we—

S: Another bodily function is sex and birth.

R: Sex is the most perverse bodily function. For every other bodily function, our evolutionary imperative lines up with our individual imperative. By that I mean, every other bodily function we do is directly or indirectly related to continuing to live. We breathe to live. We eat to live. We drink to live. We pee and poop to live. They're either things that we have no choice about doing—peeing, pooping, sleeping—or they are things where we have a choice but they are done in the pursuit of continued life.

Because we're evolved creatures who have evolved to want to keep living in order to reproduce and create the next generations. So evolutionary forces have made us want to do 2 things: keep living and reproduce. And reproduction goes against the principles of wanting to keep living. In that, reproduction diverts resources from the individual that the individual could use for a better life, say. You're creating entire other people, who are going to drain your resources and put you at risk. And who will eventually make you obsolete.

S: From the gene view, it is an absolute necessity (RationalWiki, 2015). From the individual organism view, it can be wasteful. Is that what you're saying?

R: Yea, yea. We're imperfectly designed. We're not designed. We evolved. But the characteristics we evolved contain unavoidable contradictions. We want to keep living, but we have to make copies of ourselves through sex – which goes against our evolved drive to keep living. I would assume that's an unavoidable consequence.

Wherever life has evolved, I would assume there's that kind of contradiction because—we've talked about this a bit—evolution doesn't particularly care, care about anything. It is a force. But it is a force that doesn't place any premium...

[Break in the recording]

R: Anyway, There's little evolutionary force behind us not getting our feelings hurt because we're eventually all going to die.

S: Also, our emotions in reaction to the environment—environment broadly construed – kin, resources, and predators—are akin to bodily functions. Although, the emotions are a product of bodily, mental, functions.

R: Do you mean our innate, hardwired seeming reactions—like it seems we have an innate fear of snakes, bugs, and everyone thinks poop smells terrible, and dead people smell terrible?

S: It ties into it to a degree. However, instincts are important. Emotions are important. They are very deeply ingrained in this very ancient brain of ours.

R: We tend not to examine that stuff, question that stuff. We take the way we innately feel about things at face value and tend not to overly evaluate them. I've never smelled a rotting dead—I haven't smelled a corpse, say, but I know from what I've read that it's a smell that will make you puke, and it's a hard smell to get out of your nose. It's just the worst smell ever. There's nothing inherently offensive about the smell.

Some part of us is making a judgment about how horrible that smell is. That's hardwired in because corpses are, I assume it's hardwired in, a health hazard. You want to stay away from them. You want to bury them, get away from them.

S: Have you heard of the lancet fluke (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2008)?

R: Nope.

S: It is a parasite that gets into a stomach of a cow or a sheep, drives into the brain of an ant, hijacks it, makes the ant go to the high part of a blade of grass, clamp down on it at night...

R: ...where it'll get captured by a bird.

S: Not quite, possibly others, but not this one, it will clamp to a higher plateau—branch, leaf— and then be grazed by a cow back into a cow stomach to lay eggs and continue its lifecycle.

R: Nasty, there are probably dozens if not hundreds of brain hijacking parasites. I read about a threadworm that takes over grasshopper brains and makes them go down themselves, which facilitates part of the worm's lifecycle. There's toxoplasmosis, which makes mice and rats find cat urine sexually arousing, so that they get caught and infect the cat with the toxoplasmosis (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2013). They're all nasty. They're all the stuff of horror movies.

[End of recorded material]

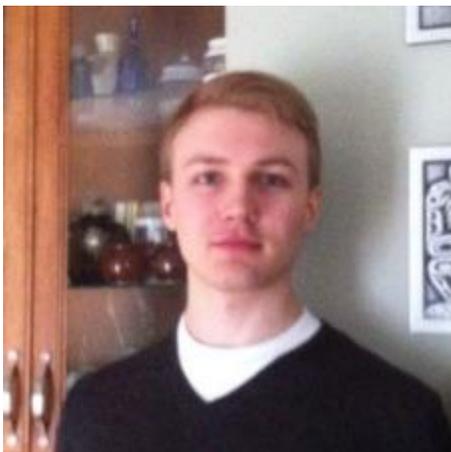
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