

**Ask A Genius 101 – Life and Death (Part 16)<sup>1</sup>**  
**Scott Douglas Jacobsen & Rick Rosner**  
**February 26, 2017**

[Beginning of recorded material]

**Scott Jacobsen: We talked about the depressing aspects of life and death. Death in its rather bleak aspects as well as life in its gross aspects—sex, bodily functions. Another aspect that religion seems to have an upper hand on a lot of secular culture is reverence around life and death, e.g. the rituals, the pageantry, the music that arouses the “passions” for people, which, apart from the truth claims about things, do perform an important function for dealing with death, dealing with grief, death of others, and acceptance of one’s own finality at some point (Religious Movements, 2017).**

**Secular culture is only recently coming to terms with this, e.g. atheist churches. Let’s dig into this (Gibbons, n.d.).**

Rick Rosner: To start out, you have to attempt to separate the positives aspects of death from the rationalizations for death, which is probably really hard to do in the same way you can’t see a face as anything else other than a face. Your brain sees faces as faces—to see them as anything else is super tough. Death is so a part of our biological existence and culture. It is hard to separate what might be the positive aspects from things that make us feel better about death.

But with that being said, one thing is it puts a frame on your life. It’s got a beginning and an end. You can grade yourself on what you did within the frame. That seems like half-rationalization at least. Another aspect is it seems impossible to live for infinity time, for an infinite time. it’s unlikely. Anything short of infinite time equals some kind of death. It is unlikely that the universe itself will exist for an infinite amount of time.

There’s the information processing aspect of death. Heinlein talked about this (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2015a). Where if you live long enough with a finite brain, you’re going to run out of storage. You can only store so many years of experience. Unless, you can find more and more compact ways of storing information. But even so, you’re going to run into a limit. Your hoped-

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<sup>1</sup> 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>.

for infinite life is going to be finite because your brain can only hold a finite amount of information

To live for infinite time, your brain would have to be infinite big, or you would have to reconcile yourself—even though, you may be living forever. You may not be remembering forever. But it's not really a relevant discussion because we're so far from infinite time. We're so far from having lifespans that really deal with the storage capacity problem. A rationalization for being okay with death is that your body wears out.

That is more and more of a rationalization because we're on the verge of all sorts of techniques and technology that make much of your body as replaceable as a carburetor in a 1958 Chevy. A semi-rationalization is that instead of your body wearing out. Your worldview wears out. The things you believe anchor you to a particular era. Time moves on and you become obsolete—well, we all encounter aspects of that.

To some extent, we're all the grandma who can't figure out how to operate the DVR because things are changing pretty fast. The solution isn't to just die, or to keep up, or to put yourself in an informed enough position to know what to keep up with. A big argument, which will become more prevalent over the next century and a half, is that we just don't matter that much as humans or as individuals.

The same way it is hard to feel that much sympathy for an aphid, which is a tiny little almost invisible bug that sucks juices out of plants. If you killed an almost invisible bug, most people would not feel sympathy for that entity's loss of whatever brain space it had. Entities will come along who are merged people or are people plus AI, or AI constructs. Whatever comes after us, as those things dwarf us in terms of information processing and perceiving capacity, they'll become—easier isn't the right word, it'll make the feelings of one primitive human not matter that much.

The counter to that is some Golden Rule thing. We are humans. We know how it feels to be us, and to us it matters. Another argument is that once we really enter the thought-sharing economy or information world, or planet-spanning neural net glob of merged brains and AI. That if you can spit out enough of your thoughts into the world blob. That'll have the thinking processing capabilities of trillions of individual brains.

Once you add your flow of thoughts to that world blob for enough years, pretty much, you become a part of that. Your thoughts are integrated into it. You acquire a kind of immortality where you lose your individual body and brain may not be seen as tragic as it would be now. The world blob may act as a weird technical afterlife. And leading to some kind of fifth argument, which is death is an okay thing if it's not a for real death.

If we can replicate our consciousnesses beyond the body, then the death of the body is no big deal. Given the right conditions, nobody wants to end up—there's a Philip K. Dick from nearly 60 years ago called *UBIK*, which gives people technical afterlives (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2015b). But they're very constrained and filled with fear. Everybody is kind of plugged into a

not very good simulation of the world after a fatal accident that wipes out a rocket ship full of people.

But if you can move into either the real world or into a combination of the real world and cyber worlds with your replicated consciousness, and the cyber worlds aren't sucky, physical death might be fine and economical and it might be the right thing for the world. I assume that at some point in the next 200 years, when it becomes possible to live indefinitely and to remove consciousness from the biological body, the steady increase in human population will level out because there will be a number of less expensive ways to continue your consciousness.

In the same way, people in the next 50 years will each less and less naturally raised meat because of how much energy it takes to grow a cow. More and more people 150 years from now may choose to live non-biologically because it is cheaper both for the individual and for the planet.

[End of recorded material]

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Author(s)



Rick Rosner  
American Television Writer  
[RickRosner@Hotmail.Com](mailto:RickRosner@Hotmail.Com)  
Rick Rosner



Scott Douglas Jacobsen  
Editor-in-Chief, In-Sight Publishing  
[Scott.D.Jacobsen@Gmail.Com](mailto:Scott.D.Jacobsen@Gmail.Com)  
In-Sight Publishing

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