

**Ask A Genius 103 – More on Octopi<sup>1</sup>**  
**Scott Douglas Jacobsen & Rick Rosner**  
**February 28, 2017**

[Beginning of recorded material]

Rick Rosner: This book, *Other Minds: The Octopus, the Sea, and the Deep Origins of Consciousness* by Peter Godfrey-Smith, talks about sentience and consciousness, which, I guess, sentience is a not quite conscious level of ability to think and perceive – but not as high as other animals. You can divide things up like that. Then he talks about a researcher who thinks that at the very threshold of consciousness or sentience, you would perceive the world as almost nothing.

That would be perceive as white noise, which is a good, but not, great analogy because when somebody says, “White noise,” I think of looking at an old TV screen. An old TV from the 70s goes off and you only see snow, which implies a perceptual framework that is well-enough developed to perceive static or snow as static or snow, but that’s not what they’re saying. They’re saying that not only are you experiencing white noise.

Your perceptual framework is so non-existent that you can’t even perceive white noise as white noise. You perceive almost nothing. It is like a vague blur, except that it is not a vague blur within some framework that allows you to perceive something as vague. Your framework is not that big or that precise. Off tape, you talked about a system that is able to perceive a white pixel or a black pixel as a base level of perception.

That runs into the same problem as white noise. In that, when I picture a pixel, I picture a white square or a black square. And if your system is only able to perceive one of two state, those states are so blurry—it’s bootstrapped chaos. Not only are you perceiving almost nothing, but you can’t perceive anything beyond almost nothing because you don’t have the perceptual or cognitive equipment.

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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>.

There's only vagueness, but you don't know it's vagueness because that would imply more perception and cognition. So just lights are not even on—I mean, anyway, the book also talks about how—

You mentioned how in a really low-level perceptual system, say one that has cognitive capacity of 100 bits. How 85 of those bits might be administrative and only 5 or 10 would be the picture of the world that you have, that reminded me of something that is talked about in this octopi book, which is that octopi neural layout, structure, is much less centralized than ours. Almost all of our cognition takes place in our brains.

It takes less to run our bodies. It takes less cognition to run our bodies than an octopus because we have bones, which limits the range of configurations our limbs can take because everything is locked into place—planes of motion. We're solid and octopi almost entirely soft and mush. There's very little that gives them a definite, Erector Set, Tinker Toy—[Laughing] I am mentioning all of these toys that nobody knows anymore—Legos kind of structure.

The only bone or hard structure in octopi is a beak. They used to shellfish, but over time their shell got absorbed into their body. But anyway, according to this book, each of their limbs has kind of its own, not quite brain but, highly developed cognitive apparatus that does a lot of the positioning, maneuvering, of the arm somewhat independently of the octopus's brain because it takes so much more thinking or processing to move around an arm that can take any form, any shape.

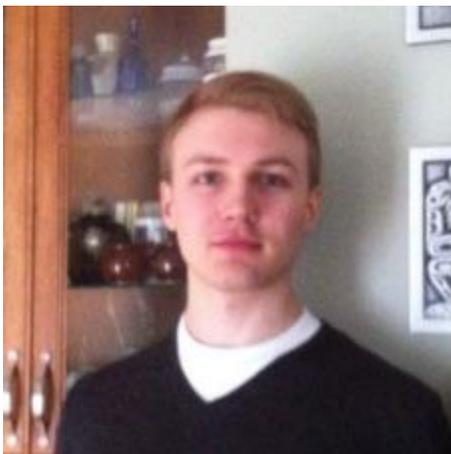
So the big boss in the octopus's brain is less aware of the minutiae of the arms and the arms can do all sorts of sophisticated stuff independently of big brain telling those arms specifically what to do.

[End of recorded material]

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