

In-Sight Publishing
Ask A Genius 117 – Natural Creatures from Natural Processes¹
Scott Douglas Jacobsen & Rick Rosner
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[Beginning of recorded material]

Rick Rosner: Even though, we're natural creatures arising from natural processes. Nobody wants to live in a wasteland where the average lifespan is 40 years. So via evolution, each person is invested in himself or herself from what we've learned about ourselves in our lives about our continued existence. We get to decide whether we continue to live. We can assume the same about other people. There's your Golden Rule.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Also, you don't need consciousness for the valuation of persistence. Macromolecules—

RR: Some people could argue consciousness is an emergent thing that is a ride along.

SDJ: Oh no, I would argue something else. Macromolecules like DNA persist over long periods of time through minor variations and self-replication. Same with species. They value persistence for the survival of the species. So in a way, the Golden Rule is implied by survival, in a loose way. So it almost becomes a tautology.

RR: Yea. For the last three minutes of this talk, at least, we've been reasoning sloppily.

SDJ: [Laughing]

RR: But that doesn't mean there's nothing there.

SDJ: There is a there there.

RR: Yea, a world of plants and unconscious microbes and mostly brainless bugs is valuable for its order. In some ways, you could argue, though—this is stuff we haven't worked out entirely,

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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>.

but we can wrap up by saying it is possible to build ethical systems even in worlds that, and beings that, arise via evolution without some overseer or director, or divine power, driving things.

SDJ: What does this mean for most people, speaking globally, who interpret—

RR: Most people just want to live their lives from moment-to-moment. Most people—regardless of whether people have some metaphysical or religious framework to help structure their beliefs, to help give them beliefs. Regardless of whether they have that or flavor of that they have, or whether they don't have that, they specifically try to move away from that. The way some aggressively atheistic people do. People still want to live.

And life as lived is more about experienced moments. What's happening around you from moment-to-moment, what you think about that stuff, and the pleasure and pain you get from each of your experiences, contextual experiences, experiences within the context of what's going on right now, and what you think about it, and what it makes you remember rather than - "contextual experiences" is a bad term.

SDJ: Can I bring it down to earth?

RR: Sensory experience plus thought as opposed to everything filtered through some overarching religious or metaphysical framework. And yea, bring it down to earth.

SDJ: You mentioned "metaphysical" or "religious" twice.

RR: Yea.

SDJ: For me, I see that as half-truth or third-truth because—but true for most people. So metaphysical or religious frameworks for interpretation of the world come from religious texts, for instance in the Abrahamic traditions at least half of the planet. If you take the metaphysical-religious standpoints, the religious, by implication, tends to imply a metaphysical framework, but progressive, humanists, even atheists, agnostics, freethinkers, brights—whatever the myriad terms you want to take on it—make reference, including feminists, to human rights, children's rights, or, in the case of feminists of others, women's rights.

These aren't in the world. They are how people relate to the world, or relate to the world based on documentation, which is typically international such as the UN Charter. So these themselves are metaphysical. So I would extend the statement "metaphysical or religious" to "metaphysical, religious, secular, or otherwise."

RR: Well, yea, I agree with you. Even atheists are embracing a quasi-religious belief system, no matter how much you try to tap dance away from it. You believe in something. And not believing in something aggressively, or even half-assedly believing in something is a stance in belief space and belief world. You have beliefs. However hard you try not to have beliefs.

SDJ: But a consistency exists among them, like the Golden Rule in most religious traditions, even in semi-/demi-/hemi-cults like Scientology or more modern religions such as Mormonism or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. You find the Golden Rule—Confucianism, and so on. You also find in the Hippocratic Oath: “do no harm.” Between “do no harm” and “do as you would be done by,” you have two general principles that can help provide a firm foundation for a shifting higher-order landscape of ethics.

The small world of ethics.

RR: Across every ethical system, there’s the idea that “just don’t wreck stuff.”

SDJ: You have stated this as “respect complexity.”

RR: Yea. That there’s good in the existence of the world and in our existence and wrecking it for no reason, wrecking those things for no reason, is bad. You don’t need a religious framework to argue it. You can argue it—I don’t know. You can argue it from a scientific sense of wonder and awe. That still seems like 1980s science TV specials. I’d rather argue it from the point of view of information.

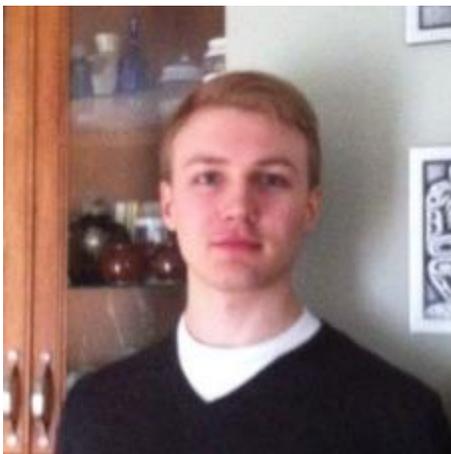
That we’re made of information. The universe is made of information, and the way we live, which is across time. How could you live otherwise? That information and the order that supports it is a good thing, and shouldn’t be effed with unnecessarily. You might have to blow up the bridge to stop the Nazis from coming across the bridge, but that’s in the service of a higher good.

[End of recorded material]

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