

In-Sight Publishing
Ask A Genius 138 – Coming Online¹
Scott Douglas Jacobsen & Rick Rosner
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[Beginning of recorded material]

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: They zapped her brain and she went out with a blank stare into space, then they did it again and she came online. They could do this...

[Fingers snapping by Scott Jacobsen]

...in a snap. Then they had, I remember the number, 171 cases of veterans of war, combat veterans, that came out with, I guess, damage of varying degrees to this. So big sample size, relevant damage, to the relevant parts of the brain, and they found that the level of damage and the level of problems of their consciousness was associated with the level of damage to their claustrum. So there.

Rick Rosner: That reminds me of some kinds of anesthesia don't block pain as much as the memory of pain. I've had 2 colonoscopies. They give you this stuff, and I don't think – I forget if you're out or not—I guess you're out. Regardless of whether you're out or not, you don't remember the colonoscopy. I think you're awake-ish, and they can talk to you. But you lose the memory when they try to talk to you.

So obviously, there's stuff that can knock out memory of what's going on. So if the claustrum is a consciousness facilitator, that doesn't necessarily make it the seat of consciousness. It being a consciousness helper. I think it would be easy to become confused about what it signifies.

SDJ: It seems like a relay. If you zap it, and it's off, I guess, you lose the memory because when she woke up she had no memory of being out. So it seems to be a relay of relationships with being online, being conscious, and recording – or not recording.

¹ Four format points for the session article:

1. Bold text following “Scott Douglas Jacobsen:” or “SDJ:” is Scott Douglas Jacobsen & non-bold text following “Rick Rosner:” or “RR:” is Rick Rosner.
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>.

RR: Yea, a lot of stuff goes offline when you're asleep. You can be thinking about physical movement and most of the time that doesn't cause you to have physical movement. Everyone has the deal where a signal gets through and you jerk your leg. Sometimes it wakes you up. Sometimes, you talk in your sleep. But mostly that's shut down because it's convenient or helpful for the brain to not having everything online.

But because there's something controlling something online doesn't mean that's the seat of consciousness. It just means that it has the ability to regulate everything it needs to do to be fully conscious. It's the cop who says whether you can put on your show rather than the group of players in the show, possibly. Though it may not just be the cop. It might be the time keeper. The guy on the Roman ship who beats the drum that keeps everyone rowing to a rhythm.

So we could talk about how it might work or what it might suppress to make you not conscious because the idea that consciousness is just cross-chatter among all of the different subsystems in the brain, then the idea that one gatekeeper can shut down all of the chatter seems overly ambitious for just one part of the brain.

SDJ: I agree with that, but I think in the context of legacy – a legacy of which you're alive and processing in some manner matters only if the lights are on, if you're conscious. I am trying to tie that back into what we were talking about for about 20 minutes. That was one big thing that I was thinking about, talking about legacy again. Sorry [Laughing].

RR: Well, one thing that will happen in the future as information processing entities become more sophisticated and powerful is that the quality of human consciousness will appear relatively trivial. So the way we can look at a dog and what a dog wants and think, "Okay, you're a dog and want three things mostly, and are dumb and confused by most things in your life as a dog." Then you can look at a guinea pig and get more frustrated along those lines.

Because guinea pigs are cute and can be affectionate. They mostly want food and to nest, and rabbits are slightly cuddly. I guess they'll come to you because they associate you with food. Then you can get to iguanas. I have never had one. They just don't seem to be balls of fire to any great extent. They want stuff, but they don't appear to be the highest wattage things in the world.

SDJ: Some of these animals are more genetically complicated than us. So relative, within their...

RR: ...but their brains aren't, their behaviors aren't...

SDJ: ...but in their species frame, they might seem more individuated in the same way we do. So what you're saying is what the AIs or future people will see our internal-to-species bell curve will not really seem like one at all.

RR: Yea, I mean you can have genius animals, but a genius rabbit is still a rabbit. Octopuses, I think Gwyneth Paltrow doesn't even eat them anymore.

[End of recorded material]

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